

Chapter 1

Introduction: The Myth of Individualization and the Dream of Individualism

Introduction

‘However plausible, and at first sight convincing it is to see an autonomous, self-directing, self-realizing individual emerging from the ashes of scarcity, religious belief, tradition, and authority, the diagnosis of individualization is empirically untenable’, Mark Elchardus (2009: 152) concludes about the theory of individualization brought forward by sociologists like Zygmunt Bauman (1995, 1997, 2001a), Anthony Giddens (1991) and Ulrich Beck (1992, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). If individualization would really have occurred, he maintains, strong relationships between ‘standard sociological characteristics’ (idem: 150) or ‘standard sociological variables (such as class, level of education, gender)’ (idem: 148) and how people think, feel and act would clearly be the last thing one would expect to find. With this argument Elchardus echoes Paul de Beer, who brings in similar evidence to demonstrate that what people think, feel and do is still strongly related to ‘their objective characteristics’ (2007: 394).

But how could it be otherwise? Sociologically speaking, such a notion of individualization is not at all ‘plausible, and at first sight convincing’, but is in fact absurd since it suggests that the discipline’s distinctive approach to social life—based on the notion that people are inevitably socially shaped—can and needs to be treated as a testable hypothesis. Because of this, the question of whether or not ‘individuals’ are still socially shaped, produced and controlled is too general and non-sociological and hence needs to be replaced by the more feasible question of whether, why and how modes of social control are undergoing a process of transformation. We have, however, major doubts about whether a theory based on the notion that individualization is an inherently non-cultural process, as Elchardus and De Beer proclaim, can provide much of an answer to this question.

Even though it remains perfectly obscure why De Beer chooses to include religiosity as one of his ‘objective’ independent variables, while treating people’s moral and political values as ‘subjective’ dependent ones (idem: 394), the theory of individualization critiqued by him and Elchardus is informed by a distinction between ‘objective’ independent and ‘subjective’ dependent variables. This assumes that culture is basically irrelevant and non-consequential—that it is merely a ‘reflection’, ‘consequence’ or ‘outcome’ of a ‘more fundamental’ and ‘more real’ ‘underlying’ social reality. Such a positivist account of culture as causally insignificant, Jeffrey Alexander (2003: 13) explains, assumes that:

explanatory power lies in the study of the “hard” variables of social structure, such that structured sets of meanings become superstructures and ideologies driven by these more “real” and tangible social forces’, whereby culture ‘becomes defined as a “soft”, not really independent variable: it is more or less confined to participating in the reproduction of social relations.

To demonstrate how difficult it nonetheless is to dispel the specter of culture from a sociological theory of individualization, we start with an interrogation of the ambiguities of De Beer’s (2007) and Elchardus’s (2009) treatments of individualization and individualism. We then outline our own cultural-sociological theory that gives individualism, this modern cultural ideal *par excellence*, its full due as central to the process of individualization. Analogous to the late Bryan Wilson’s (1982: 149) conceptualization of secularization as ‘that process by which religious institutions, actions, and consciousness, lose their social significance’, we hence define individualization as ‘that process by which a moral notion of individualism increases in social significance.’ In doing so, we conceive of individualism as central to a (post)modern worldview that operates not unlike its religious counterparts in providing the world with meaning and informing the social actions of those who accept it (for example, Campbell 2007, Chaves 1994, Weber 1963 [1922]).

The Myth of Individualization and the Dream of Individualism

Individualization without Individualism?

De Beer’s (2007) and Elchardus’s (2009) notion that individualization can be understood as an inherently non-cultural process is not only remarkable for its sociologically naïve assumption that it is actually conceivable that selves are *not* socially shaped, so that this needs to be empirically studied, but even more so because the ambiguities in their own critiques confirm how difficult it actually is to dispel the cultural specter of individualism from a theory of individualization. Indeed, at a closer and more critical look, their accounts contain the seeds of a sociologically richer treatment of individualization that opens it up as a cultural-sociological problem.

For a start, De Beer (2007: 390) explains that the Netherlands constitutes an ideal case for the study of individualization because of ‘social and cultural trends over the last 25 years that (...) are most aptly characterized by the term “individualization”’ and also, referring to Ronald Inglehart’s work about ‘postmaterialist values’ and ‘postmodernization’, which both ‘clearly centre on the individual’, because this country ‘moreover [*sic*] stands out as one of the most progressive and liberal countries.’ Whereas the word ‘moreover’ suggests that these ‘cultural trends’ are somehow unrelated to and different from the non-cultural conception of individualization De Beer sets out to critique, he simultaneously

asserts the exact opposite when he claims that the Netherlands is an ideal case study because of its marked progressive and liberal emphasis on liberty, cultural tolerance, postmaterialism, etcetera, which makes it one of the most individualized countries of the world.

Having thus effectively defined individualization in two competing ways, De Beer subsequently leaves his readers puzzled when he proclaims that ‘one must, of course, first define individualization’ (idem: 390), stating as a matter of fact that ‘*individualization should clearly be distinguished from individualism*’ (idem: 391, our emphasis). Given the immediately preceding argument about the Netherlands as an ideal case, it remains unclear why this is ‘clear’ and his explanation that ‘individualism is *commonly* understood as a personal attitude or preference’ (idem: 391, our emphasis) fails to convince for its absence of literature references and its failure to critique such a naïve and non-sociological conception of individualism. Indeed, towards the end of his article De Beer no longer asserts confidently that moral individualism has ‘clearly’ nothing to do with individualization, but more modestly acknowledges that his own analysis ‘does not shed any light on *this interpretation of individualization which I prefer to call individualism*’ (idem: 406, our emphasis). Needless to say, this leaves him caught between two competing notions of individualization, which urges him to defend the thesis that the Netherlands is highly individualized (the cultural basis for its selection), yet is not really individualized (going by the relationships between variables he has found). The principal conclusion to draw from De Beer’s article, then, is that despite his desire to dispel individualism, conceived as a cultural emphasis on individual liberty and cultural tolerance, from the theory of individualization, the awareness that it has in fact everything to do with it looms so large that it even informs his case selection.

A similar ambiguity can be found in Elchardus’s article (2009), which in its opening pages also insists on a distinction between ‘individualization’ and ‘individualism’—‘a property of the choices people make’ and ‘a discourse or a vocabulary of motives’, respectively (idem: 147)—, to enable him to effortlessly bash the resulting (‘plausible, and at first sight convincing’) sociologically naïve straw man to death. Having rejected the non-sociological notion that individual selves may be decreasingly shaped by social forces, Elchardus then proceeds to outline a more sociologically informed theory of individualization, central to which is the notion that the latter does not entail a disappearance of social control, but rather a transition to a new mode of social control: ‘This new mode of control is centered around the self. It is, literally, self-control, not in the 19th century meaning of self-restraint, but in the sense of control of the self through the self ... , using among other things individualism as a vocabulary of motives, socially constructed as an individual that views itself as a choosing agent’ (idem: 153). So there we are again: at second thought, Elchardus, much like De Beer, abandons his positivist notion that what people do is not culturally informed, so that cultural discourse is made causally irrelevant and comes in only as a legitimation of what they have already done. At the same time Elchardus recognizes that a

good sociological theory of individualization must be a theory of social control, according to which people are increasingly socialized and stimulated to think of themselves as individuals, so that a cultural notion of individualism needs to be central to it after all.

Similarly, Atkinson (2007: 536) critiques the notion that the class constraints of the past have somehow made way for free, reflexive and unconstrained lifestyle choices within the context of an ongoing process of self-construction, pointing out that such a theory misses an awareness of 'the role of resources and processes of inscription by privileged others in producing self-identity.' The major problem with this type of individualization theory, Atkinson (idem: 542) echoes arguments made by Bellah et al. (1985), is that it cannot explain 'why, exactly, ... different individuals and groups choose different lifestyles', commenting on Giddens that 'it is hard to see how lifestyle choices, including the decision to change lifestyle altogether, could be made *without being guided by the orientations furnished by the lifestyle already adopted*. Either the self must somehow, in a way left unexplained by Giddens, be able to transcend the orientations of its lifestyle in order to choose or else lifestyle choices are not as "free" as he would like to make out' (his emphasis).

Individualism as a Middle-Class Moral Ideal

The strain of individualization theory brought forward by Bauman, Giddens and Beck, Atkinson furthermore points out, moreover 'resonates only with the experiences of the middle classes' (idem: 536), informed as it is by middle-class longings for personal agency that are inappropriately generalized to Western populations as a whole. And indeed, as any number of studies conducted since the 1950s has demonstrated, he could hardly be more correct. It is, after all, the middle class that embraces 'tolerance towards non-conformity' (for example, Nunn et al. 1978, Stouffer 1955) and 'self-direction' rather than 'conformity' as a parental value (Kohn 1977 [1969], Kohn and Schooler 1983, Kohn and Slomczynski 1990). This goes particularly for the 'new' middle class with its 'postmaterialist' value orientation that puts individual freedom and democracy above 'materialist' needs of security and social order (Inglehart 1977, 1990, 1997). To be more precise, the moral type of individualism that these notions capture is not so much embraced by 'the middle class' or 'the affluent' in an economic sense, as these and other 'Marxist-lite' theories have suggested since Lipset (1959) launched his theory of 'working-class authoritarianism' half a century ago. It is instead typical of those with a high level of education, particularly with degrees in non-economic, non-technical, and non-administrative fields—by the well educated conceived as a socio-cultural rather than a socio-economic category, in short (Houtman 2003).

Indeed, the fact that this moral type of individualism is intimately tied up with education does as much to demonstrate that the social shaping of selves is not over and done with, as it does to point out that a sociological theory of individualization worth its salt needs to place the social processes at its center through which this

individualism is constructed, transmitted, appropriated and acted upon. This, however, is not what De Beer, Elchardus and Atkinson do. Whereas they correctly identify the notion of a disappearance of the social shaping of the self as a modern myth, they hesitate to take individualism's role in shaping contemporary social life very seriously, suggesting instead—however ambiguously and inconsistently, as we have seen—that 'individualization has nothing to do with individualism.' In this book, we aim to overcome this ambiguity by adopting an explicitly Weberian cultural-sociological understanding of individualization, central to which is the increased social significance of individualism.

The dual aim of this opening chapter is to develop this theoretical argument and to put some first empirical flesh on its bones so as to set the stage for the remainder of the book. We demonstrate that Max Weber's classical cultural sociology already hinted in the direction of such a theory of individualization, although he was unfortunately hesitant to draw out the full implications of his theory of the disenchantment of the world. Critically confronting the latter with Durkheim's struggle with the problem of individualism over the course of his career, however, reveals that he should have done so. The thesis that we propose in this chapter, in short, is that carefully fleshing out and comparing Weber's and Durkheim's analyses of modern cultural discontents and their corollaries, yields a powerful cultural-sociological theory of individualization that is empirically supported by changes that have particularly unfolded since the counter culture of the 1960s.

Modernity and Cultural Disenchantment

Max Weber and the Disenchantment of the World

Weber's narrative of the gradual disappearance of the metaphysical 'Hinterwelt' that once provided the Western world with solid meaning continues to evoke debate and arouse the intellectual imagination. This process of disenchantment took off, Weber argued, with the emergence of Judaic anti-magical monotheism in ancient times and was pushed a decisive step further forward when the Protestant Reformation unleashed its attack on Catholic magic and superstition in the sixteenth century. The latter's further expulsion from the modern world has since been firmly supported by modern intellectualism's imperative of pursuing truth and nothing but truth, significantly contributing to a world increasingly devoid of meaning—a world in which 'processes ... simply "are" and "happen" but no longer signify anything' (Weber 1978 [1921]: 506).

Modern science, because of its anti-metaphysical and empirical orientation, cannot help but further the disenchantment of the world. Potent though it is, it cannot provide answers to what are ultimately the most significant questions faced by mankind—the meaning of life, the purpose of the world, and the life plans to pursue or refrain from: 'Only a prophet or a savior can give the answers' (Weber 1948 [1919]: 153). As an essentially 'irreligious power' (idem: 142), all

science can do is rob the world of its remaining mysteries by laying bare causal chains: '[T]he disenchantment of the world ... means that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation', as Weber summarized his position in the probably most cited passage of his essay 'Science as a Vocation' (idem: 139). Once technologically instrumentalized, such causal chains yield a superior and quintessentially modern mode of controlling nature that further marginalizes magical practices: '[O]ne need no longer have recourse to magical means to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed. Technical means and calculations perform the service' (idem: 139). Technology liberates human beings from circumstances their ancestors simply had to bear and is meanwhile even deployed to improve and optimize their own bodies and minds (for example, Fukuyama 2002).

Although the variety of uses to which technology can be put is virtually infinite—ranging from curing diseases, increasing profits or countering global warming to exterminating ethnic or religious others—, science can only remain silent about the ends worth pursuing. It can only provide means to *given* ends, because it is unauthorized in the domain of moral values: '... it [cannot] be proved that the existence of the world which these sciences describe is worth while, that it has any "meaning", or that it makes sense to live in such a world' (Weber 1948 [1919]: 144). Although Weber acknowledged that, much to his horror, there are 'big children in the natural sciences' (idem: 142) who believe they can bestow 'objective' meaning upon the world, he firmly rejected such a position himself. Science, he insisted, simply cannot decide between competing value claims.

More than that: science can only further disenchantment by progressively destroying the metaphysical foundations on which mutually conflicting religious doctrines and political ideologies rely. Science hence inevitably creates and aggravates modern problems of meaning. The fate of modern man, Weber held, is to face this stern reality as it is, without illusions—to heroically bear the modern fate of meaninglessness without taking refuge in utopian dreams or promises of religious salvation, because there simply is no way back. Although he took great efforts to take this imperative seriously in his own life as a man of science, the struggle with his 'inner demons' that resulted in a mental breakdown in the period 1897-1902 demonstrates how difficult a task this actually was (Radkau 2009).

Does Disenchantment Spark Reenchantment?

There is much to commend Weber's analysis of the progressive dissolution of solidly grounded meaning in the modern world. Perhaps more than anything else, the emergence of postmodernism since the 1960s confirms Weber's position. Contemporary culture, as postmodern thinkers have argued, has after all lost much of its metaphysical foundation now that most people no longer believe that they live in 'natural' or 'solidly grounded' social worlds, but instead inhabit a world ruled by insidiously rhizoming simulations that entail a virtual disappearance of

‘real’ or ‘authentic’ reality (Baudrillard 1993 [1976], Houtman 2008), a world in which depth has been superseded by surface (Jameson 1991) and in which even science’s authority to legislate truth has progressively dissolved (Bauman 1987, Rorty 1980). Hardly surprising, the Christian churches, these guardians of religious metaphysics in the West, have also lost much of their former appeal in this cultural climate (for example, Brown 2001, Houtman and Mascini 2002, Norris and Inglehart 2004). The progressive disenchantment of the world, predicted by Weber a century ago, seems a mere truism.

Or is it? Interestingly enough, the cultural climate in Weber’s own intellectual circles in the German city of Heidelberg at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century already suggested otherwise. There and then, many a philosopher, psychologist, and artist took refuge in utopian experiments, alternative religions, and esoteric movements, such as Rudolf Steiner’s anthroposophy and the philosophy of life of Henri Bergson and the like. Even Weber’s own brother Alfred, the cultural sociologist, attempted to convert him to the latter. And during the Spring of 1913 and 1914, Weber paid visits to Monte Verita in Ascona in the Alps, where his contemporaries indulged in free sexuality and alternative forms of religion. There is hence no doubt that Weber was acutely aware of these attempts by many of his fellow-intellectuals to re-enchant a progressively disenchanted world by infusing it with new meaning (Radkau 2009).

Weber himself nonetheless adopted a rationalist stance and firmly dismissed spiritual tendencies such as these as ‘weakness not to be able to countenance the stern seriousness of our fateful times’ (1948 [1919]: 149)—and more bluntly: ‘this is plain humbug or self-deception’ and one should ‘bear the fate of the times like a man’ (idem: 154-5). Remarkably and unfortunately, this aversion seems to have withheld him from a detailed and systematic analysis of these tendencies, particularly so because the latter are in the end fully consistent with his own cultural sociology. The latter after all postulates that there is a universal human need to give meaning to an essentially meaningless world and hence conceives of culture as ‘the endowment of a finite segment of the meaningless infinity of events in the world with meaning and significance from the standpoint of human beings’ (Schroeder, quoted by Campbell 2007: 11).

This point of departure of Weber’s cultural sociology implies that loss of plausibility of cultural and religious worldviews—due to disenchantment or otherwise—inevitably sparks processes of ‘cultural rationalization’, aimed at cultural reconstruction to safeguard the reassuring notion that the world is a meaningful place rather than a chaotic, meaningless and nihilistic void without any inherent purpose or direction (Weber 1963 [1922], see also Campbell 2007). Following a Weberian cultural-sociological logic, then, the destruction of a metaphysical ‘Hinterwelt’ does not simply aggravate problems of meaning, but does also spark attempts at re-enchantment to replace the worn, implausible and obsolete myths of the past by ones that are better adapted to the modern world and less susceptible to disenchantment and loss of plausibility.

A New Era of Individualism?

Constructing such a new cultural myth to sustain morality in modern societies was the principal ambition of Weber's French contemporary Emile Durkheim, who hence embarked on an intellectual project that contradicted Weber's. Whereas for Weber, science can only destroy the notion that the world has a solid meaning, it is for Durkheim the only means left to firmly ground morality. For him, it provides a tool to distinguish between what is 'normal' and what is 'abnormal' ('pathological') and hence points out directions for social reform, amelioration and progress. Watts Miller (1996: 1) hence correctly characterizes Durkheim's work as a 'search for a passage from "is" to "ought"', or a 'route from science to ethics.' He recalls in this context Georges Gurvitch's notion that Durkheim is the sociological equivalent of Columbus: whereas Columbus sought a new route to the east and discovered America, Durkheim sought a secular and scientific route to ethics and discovered sociology.

Individualism in Durkheim's Early Sociology

'In a word', Durkheim expressed this ambition in the final sentences of his first book, *The Division of Labor in Society* (1964 [1893]: 340), 'our very first duty at present is to create for ourselves a morality.' Likewise, in his methodological treatise *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1964 [1895]: 60-61) he underscores that the scientific method is actually capable of informing rationally-based judgments about what is 'good' and what is 'bad', what is 'normal' and 'abnormal': 'A phenomenon can ... persist throughout the entire range of a species although no longer adapted to the requirements of the situation. It is then normal only in appearance. Its universality is now an illusion, since its persistence, due only to the blind force of habit, can no longer be accepted as an index of a close connection with the general conditions of its collective existence.'

According to Durkheim's first book, moral norms rooted in shared cultural myths of a religious nature, could only constitute the basis for social cohesion in premodern societies, while this 'mechanical' type of solidarity erodes as modernity unfolds due to the expansion of the division of labor. This argument constitutes a direct attack on Auguste Comte's claim that modern societies, just like traditional ones, need collective religious myths to underpin morality and safeguard social cohesion: 'In his *Division of Labor* ... Durkheim was not gropingly moving toward an appreciation of shared moral norms; he was, in fact, moving away from Comte's emphasis on their significance in modern society' (Gouldner 1958: xiii). Rather than being based on cultural similarities between people, Durkheim proposed that in modern industrial societies solidarity comes instead from economic and functional differences between people: differences in capacities and occupational activities, as crystallized in the industrial division of labor. It is indeed awareness of the mutual dependence entailed by the latter that

lies at the basis of the social cohesion of modern industrial societies: 'mechanical' solidarity gives way to 'organic' solidarity (Durkheim 1964 [1893]).

In his disagreement with Comte, Saint-Simon's sociology constitutes Durkheim's most important source of intellectual inspiration. Since in the end both industrial classes have an interest in the preservation and expansion of industrialism, Durkheim echoes Saint-Simon, this is exactly what serves as the basis for the social cohesion of modern society (Fenton 1984: 16). Durkheim's appropriation of Saint-Simon's sociology is hence drastically different from Marx's, who was deeply influenced by it too, most notably during his stay in Paris in the 1840s (Coser 1977: 56-62). The principal difference is how the two imagine the relationship between labor and capital, understood as inherently interdependent and cooperative by Durkheim and as essentially antagonistic by Marx. Whereas Durkheim consequently views exploitation, labor conflicts and class struggle as 'abnormal' excrescence, that can and should be avoided by a more 'rational' type of industrial organization, Marx sees them as 'normal' and 'inevitable' side effects of capitalism. This is Durkheim's line of thought when under the title 'Some Notes on Occupational Groups' he advocates cooperation between labor and capital in the famous foreword to the second edition of *The Division of Labor in Society* (1964 [1893]: 1-38), with the aim of nourishing awareness of mutual dependence so as to further industrial peace and reinforce organic solidarity.

This foreword hence reveals that for Durkheim organic solidarity is in fact so 'normal' that it does not even need to exist in the real world to qualify for this status, exposing one of Durkheim's typical movements from 'is' to 'ought.' In terms of Max Weber's theory of knowledge (1949 [1922]), this is a metaphysically informed value judgment, more or less skillfully disguised as an 'empirical fact'. Marx's strikingly different account is also informed by a pretension of having knowledge of a 'real' reality beyond culture that can authoritatively inform moral evaluations of what is 'normal' and 'abnormal', 'good' and 'bad'. For Marx, after all, workers who feel they have the same interests as capitalist entrepreneurs have a 'false' class consciousness: they do not simply hold 'different' moral and political values, but they are wrong, mistaken and do not understand what the world is 'really' like. Only those who have a 'true' class consciousness, and hence like Marx himself 'know' that modern industrialism is 'really' or 'essentially' about labor's exploitation by capital, and who translate this 'knowledge' into political action against capitalism, display a 'rational' understanding of what the world is 'really' like.

The fact that Durkheim and Marx follow the same positivist logic, yet nonetheless arrive at incompatible moral evaluations of what is 'normal' and 'abnormal', 'good' and 'bad', does much to demonstrate how deeply problematical this logic actually is. It is informed by nineteenth-century Enlightenment rationalism and its quest to not simply dethrone a 'false', 'superstitious' and 'traditional' religiously-informed morality, but to simultaneously replace it by a superior and scientifically-informed one (Seidman 1994: 19-53)—precisely the ambition unmasked by Weber as futile and intellectually dishonest. The only way to evade this positivist logic is by giving

culture its full due, that is, refusing to reduce it to a 'less-than-real' reality, that as such only obscures a 'more real' and 'more fundamental' non-cultural social reality, assumed to reside 'behind' or 'underneath' it.

Individualism in Late-Durkheimian Sociology

This reductionist treatment of culture disappears in Durkheim's more mature work, however, which marks a change in precisely the direction he initially did not want to go. He came to recognize the role of religious myths in grounding morality and securing social cohesion and came to understand religion as an inevitable feature of all human societies, be they 'primitive' or modern (Seigel 1987). Because religion constitutes the sacralization of a society's most cherished values, he came to argue, modernity cannot mean the end of religion, but can only entail its transformation. This analysis, brought forward in his last book, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1965 [1912]) could hence not differ more from the one presented in his first book, which offered nothing less than an attack on this very notion.

The difference between the early and the late Durkheim is particularly visible in his treatment of individualism. Although there are multiple references to 'individualism' and 'the cult of individualism' in *The Division of Labor in Society*, all of these are dismissive and 'decidedly negative' (Chandler 1984: 571). This is because although Durkheim was keenly aware of individualism's presence and influence, acknowledging that in modern society 'the individual becomes the object of a sort of religion', he then still understood it as the antithesis of morality, underscoring that 'it is not to society that [the cult of individualism] attaches us; it is to ourselves', so that 'it does not constitute a true social link' (Durkheim 1964 [1893]: 172).

He abandoned this antithetical understanding of the relationship between individualism and morality during the Dreyfus affair that shook France in 1898. In his essay 'Individualism and the Intellectuals' (Durkheim 1973 [1898]), he responded to the anti-Dreyfusards' charge that the liberal individualism of the intellectuals paved the way for anarchy, disorder, and anti-social egoism. Quite to the contrary, Durkheim argued, because one needs to make a sharp distinction between two different types of individualism. On the one hand, there is the 'utilitarian' type of individualism that he, just like in *The Division of Labor*, associates with 'the strict utilitarianism and the utilitarian egoism of Spencer and the economists' (idem: 44) and characterizes as an 'egoistic cult of the self' (idem: 45) and as 'morally impoverished' (idem: 44). On the other hand, however, there is a 'moral' type of individualism, 'the individualism of Kant and Rousseau, of the idealists—the one [of] the Declaration of the Rights of Man' (idem: 45), in which '[the] human person ... is considered sacred in the ritual sense of the word' (idem: 46).

In his article, Durkheim now defended this moral type of individualism as 'the only system of beliefs which can ensure ... moral unity ...', thus spectacularly

reversing his initial position to now even claim that it is ‘a simple truism’ (*sic*) that ‘religion alone can produce ... moral unity’ (idem: 50)—exactly the position that *The Division of Labor* set out to attack. This is because this moral type of individualism does not value that which separates people from one another, but rather sacralizes their shared humanity. It ‘springs not from egoism but from sympathy for all that is human’ (idem: 48) and holds that ‘[t]he rights of the individual are above those of the state’ (idem: 46) and that ‘[t]he dignity of the individual [comes] ... from the higher source ... [of partaking] in humanity’ (idem: 48). ‘[T]his religion of humanity ... is the only one possible’, Durkheim now argued, because under conditions of modernity people have ‘nothing in common except humanity’ (idem: 51), which serves to give this ‘religion of humanity’ the status of a ‘religion in which man is at once the worshipper and the God’ (idem: 46). In stark contrast to *The Division of Labor in Society*, in short, in his later work Durkheim came to construe individualism as the religion of modernity *par excellence*, that is, as providing moral cohesion to modern societies.

Indeed, in his last book *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim conceives of religion as a major source of solidarity and cohesion in any type of society, ‘primitive’ and ‘modern’ alike, defining religion as ‘a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single community ... all those who adhere to them’ (1965 [1912]: 44). Whereas he prefers to call this community a ‘church’ to convey ‘the notion that religion must be an eminently collective thing’ (idem: 44), it seems preferable to retain the latter notion without evoking the ‘church’ concept with its narrow Christian connotations. Of particular interest is his brief discussion of speculations among his contemporaries about ‘whether a day will not come when the only cult will be the one that each person freely practices in his innermost self’ (idem: 43), a cult that as such ‘would consist entirely of interior and subjective states and be freely constructed by each of us’ (idem: 44). Equally aware of these aspirations as his German counterpart Weber, Durkheim likewise dismisses them as sociologically naïve and socially infirm, sticking to his strictly sociological conception of religion and commenting that ‘if that radical individualism has remained in the state of unrealized theoretical aspiration up to now, that is because it is unrealizable in fact’ (idem: 427).

And indeed, these desires should not be confused with Durkheim’s ‘religion of humanity’, because the former sacralize the particularities of people’s personal emotional inner worlds, while the latter sacralizes what people have in common, that is, their shared humanity. This reveals how much the humanistic universalism of ‘Individualism and the Intellectuals’ is informed by an Enlightenment rationalism that forges a close link between intellectual rationalism and moral individualism, with the two presupposing and reinforcing one another. Without a hint of irony, Durkheim writes about the ‘dogma of autonomy of reason’ and the ‘doctrine of free inquiry’ (1973 [1898]: 49) as undergirding the religion of humanity and he calls upon his readers to ‘make use of our liberties to seek out [from ‘is’] what we must do ... [to ‘ought’]’ (idem: 56).

Individualism and Subjectivism since World War II

When half a century and two world wars later counter-cultural protests started voicefully expressing modernity's cultural discontents, it became abundantly clear that Durkheim had been only half right when he proclaimed moral individualism as modernity's new religion. He was right in acknowledging its role as a major moral resource, but clearly wrong in believing that this basically negatively defined type of liberty (in the sense of Berlin's (1969) 'freedom from') sufficed to endow modern life with new meaning and purpose. The counter culture proved that it did not and further stimulated the subjective turn Durkheim and Weber already witnessed in their own days and dismissed as 'weak' and 'socially infirm'. The subjectivism of the counter culture added a less negatively defined notion of individual liberty to solve the problem of 'freedom for what?', neglected by Durkheim's individualism-cum-rationalism. It does so by encouraging people to seek self-development and personal growth, and to be true to themselves by taking their intuitions, experiences and emotions seriously.

The Counter Culture and the Dream of Individualism

Enter the Counter Culture

The counter culture of the 1960s was informed by modernity's cultural discontents that took shape as 'a deepening condition of "homelessness"' or a 'metaphysical loss of "home"' (Berger et al. 1973: 82) and that sparked attempts at cultural reconstruction to overcome this alienation. The counter culture was hence not so much an attempt at political revolution by middle-class youth that eventually failed, that disappeared as sudden as it appeared, and that is now over and done with, but it was rather an acceleration in an ongoing process of cultural transformation that has meanwhile changed Western societies virtually beyond recognition (Campbell 2007: 234-9, Marwick 1998: 13-15). This is why British historian Arthur Marwick prefers to refer to the counter culture as a 'cultural' rather than a 'counter-cultural' revolution, emphasizing that it 'did not *confront* [mainstream] society but *permeated* and *transformed* it' (idem: 13, his emphasis).

Critiquing 'the System'

Central to the counter culture was a deep disgust of rationalized modern institutions with their elaborate division of labor and hierarchical power structures that demand people to conform to narrowly and technically defined roles. Playing such roles was understood as alienating and being reduced to a mere functionally defined cog in a rationalized machine. Max Weber had already suggested that these discontents were responsible for the spiritual and

experiential longings among his academic peers and students in Germany in the first decades of the twentieth century, noting that ‘What is hard for modern man ... is to measure up to *workaday* existence’, and adding that ‘[the] ubiquitous chase for experience stems from this weakness’ (1948 [1919]: 149, his emphasis). In the 1960s, for reasons we cannot go into here, these cultural discontents became central to a full-fledged cultural critique of modernity’s increasingly rationalized institutional orders (see Campbell 2007: 184-249). This shows that, much like Weber already suggested in his own days, these institutions’ relentless quest for rationalization, efficiency and effectiveness undermined their cultural meaningfulness and moral legitimacy. A positive identification with these ‘abstract’, alienating and unduly restrictive institutions and with the technically defined roles they consisted of had become increasingly difficult (Zijderveld 1970).

State bureaucracies, capitalist corporations, universities and research institutes alike came to be understood as standing in the way of what people could actually be: free, creative and autonomous individuals, aiming to live their lives to the fullest. In this cultural climate, informed by a marked individualism that insisted on the primacy of individual liberty and personal authenticity, ‘the system’ and those in charge of it were demonized as obstructing the latter. The source that reflects this best is Theodore Roszak’s (1969) book *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition*, itself a counter-cultural pamphlet as much as a social-scientific study. It serves to underscore that counter-cultural protest was not simply directed against vestiges of moral traditionalism, conformity and obedience like the Christian churches (Brown 2001), but just as much against bulwarks of Enlightenment rationalism like the bureaucratic orders of the state, the corporate world, and the knowledge industry. Daniel Bell (1976: 143) has even gone so far as to maintain that ‘though [the counter culture] appeared in the guise of an attack on the “technocratic society” [its ideology] was an attack on reason itself.’

Roszak’s portrayal of ‘the system’—itself, tellingly, one of the most widely used concepts within the counter culture—as a brute, dehumanizing agent did of course not stand alone. Jean-Paul Sartre and others reshaped Marxism into existentialism, critiquing the ‘thingification’ (*chosification*) of human beings by science and technology as a major threat to human freedom. The Frankfurt School, and particularly Erich Fromm, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse and Theodor Adorno, added a sizable dose of Freud to Marxism, thus replacing the ‘old Marx’ (the one of the ‘economic laws of capitalist development’ and the ‘inevitable’ socialist revolution) by the ‘young Marx’ (the one who critiqued capitalism for its alienating tendencies, that is, its dehumanizing reduction of workers to mere cogs in the machine).

In the hands of the Frankfurters, faith in an inevitable socialist revolution gave way to the ambition to liberate the self from psychologically harmful, externally imposed limits, indoctrinations and illusions. It goes without saying, the Frankfurters basically maintained, that capitalist corporations and the state

have a vested interest in making people believe that they are actually free and happy inhabitants of a tolerant and democratic society, but whoever is willing to take the effort of looking more carefully and more critically, will quickly discover that what is masked as 'real' tolerance is in fact mere 'repressive' tolerance and that even people's deepest and most cherished personal dreams, needs and desires have been molded and manipulated (Marcuse 1964). Horkheimer and Adorno's (2002 [1944]) influential critique of the culture industries, charged with keeping people in a shiftless, complacent and uncritical state of half sleep so as to veil the harsh realities of the real world and seduce them to believe that their profound alienation is in fact a state of satisfaction and happiness, constitutes a major case in point. The climate of system paranoia back then made theories such as these immensely enticing, credible and popular, which shows how much a marked individualism, insisting on the primacy of individual liberty and personal authenticity, was indeed central to the counter culture.

Escaping 'the System'

The religious domain witnessed much the same cultural discontents and turbulence. Churches and church authorities were critiqued for straitjacketing believers in religious orthodoxy; for refusing to provide room for doubt and critical discussion about Christian doctrines and traditional teachings about sexuality, women's roles, homosexuality, marriage and the family; and for refusing to take personal spiritual experience very seriously (Brown 2001). These discontents sparked a veritable exodus from the churches that has in less than five decades transformed Christianity into a minority position in the formerly Protestant countries of northwestern Europe (Houtman and Mascini 2002). With their 'New Theology', Protestant theologians like Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Tillich attempted to make Christianity less vulnerable to the newly emerged cultural climate, but could only do so by reinterpreting the Bible as containing neither 'literal truths' nor 'God's word' and by instead emphasizing the vital importance of the self and its experiences. Tillich, for instance, 'urged people to look for God in the "depths" of their life, in the very "source" of their being, and to recognize God in their most ultimate concerns' (Campbell 2007: 273).

Outside the Christian churches, counter-cultural critiques of 'the system' sparked a spiritual turn to the deeper layers of one's own consciousness, allegedly not infested by the outer world and as such providing 'real' freedom, 'real' liberty and 'real' meaning (Zijderveld 1970). This 'turn within' sparked interest in non-Western religions like Hinduism and Buddhism, and of course much more so in their meditation practices than in their doctrines, theologies and sacred texts (Campbell 2007). The New Age movement, which advocated such a 'turn within' and promised an imminent Age of Aquarius that would bring an end to alienation, became an attractive option in this climate. It is informed by the notion that people have basically not one, but two selves: a 'mundane', 'conventional' or 'socialized' self that is demonized as the 'false'

or 'unreal' product of society and its institutions, and a contrasting 'higher', 'deeper', 'true' or 'authentic' self that is sacralized as basically unpolluted by society and its institutions and hence conceived as 'who one is by nature.' The principal goal in life according to the deeply romantic strain of religion that New Age is, is to disconnect from the former self and connect to the latter by means of a range of available psychological and spiritual therapies and meditational practices. It understands this as embarking on an essentially infinite journey of personal spiritual growth that coincides with a gradual overcoming of the state of alienation one is kept in by society and its institutions (Heelas 1996a). Wouter Hanegraaff (2002: 259), an international academic expert in this field (Hanegraaff 1996), is hence correct to underscore that 'New Age spirituality is strictly focused on the individual and his/her personal development', adding that 'this individualism functions as an in-built defense mechanism against social organization and institutionalization', thus explaining New Age's appeal within the boundaries of the anti-institutional counter culture.

Psychological and spiritual therapies and meditation were, however, not the only ways of escaping modernity and its alienations. Firstly, the experiential 'road within' was also followed with the help of hallucinogenic drugs like LSD, mescaline and magic mushrooms. Indeed, his advocacy of LSD owed Timothy Leary, whose 'turn on, tune in, drop out' would become the creed of the counter culture, his reputation as a psychedelic guru. Secondly, and much like nineteenth-century romanticism (think of Rousseau's 'noble savage'), the counter culture sparked a fascination for cultures seen as untouched by modern civilization. This led to the establishment of small tribe-like communities in pastoral or natural environments, away from modernity's urban centers, where those concerned hoped to be able to live a life in harmony with nature and like-minded others. Examples are Arcosanti in the United States (founded in 1970) and Findhorn in Scotland (founded in 1972), but one can of course also think of temporary events and festivals like Woodstock (1969). A third case in point, finally, was the hippies' enthusiastic embracement of romantic fiction, fairy tales and fantasy novels about pristine civilizations in imaginary pasts. The best illustration is Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* with its mythical world Middle Earth, inhabited by hobbits, elves and wizards. When it was released as a paperback in 1965 it was embraced as 'immediately familiar, upon first reading, with an apparently imaginary place and/or time' (Curry 2004: 118) and it was 'absolutely the favorite book of every hippie' (Hinckle, quoted in Ellwood 1994: 201).

Just as much as counter-cultural critiques of 'the system', in short, its romantic desires of finding refuge in less alienating inner, exotic, natural and fantasy worlds were informed by markedly individualist longings for personal authenticity and 'real' liberty. Meanwhile, almost half a century later, these ideals have far from withered away. They have rather transformed mainstream Western society virtually beyond recognition and can now no longer be dismissed as 'deviant' critiques from society's 'margins' (for example, Furedi 2003). They have become the dominant culture.

Individualism from Counter Culture to Mainstream

The individualism that was so voicefully expressed by the counter culture has meanwhile developed into the cultural logic that governs the very domains and institutions that were still critiqued as alienating only half a century ago (Houtman 2008). Authoritarian and bureaucratic management regimes, stifling churches and religious orthodoxy, the mass consumerism of the culture industries, and last but not least politics that refused to take cultural demands for individual liberty seriously, have all transformed in ways informed by the thrust of the counter-cultural critique.

Breaking Free from Systems and Roles

When the counter culture raged against bureaucratic conformism, against authoritarian management regimes and against the creative dullness of the corporate world, it basically echoed and amplified critical voices already heard in the 1950s. Back then, critical books about industrial organization, work and management, informed by concerns that were very similar to the ones the hippies would come to embrace later on, were already remarkably well received. The best known examples, which have meanwhile all attained a classical status in management studies and the sociology of organizations, are Elton Mayo's *Hawthorne and the Western Electric Company: The Social Problems of an Industrial Civilisation* (1949), C. Wright Mills' *White Collar* (1951), William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956) and Douglas McGregor's *The Human Side of Enterprise* (1960).

The counter culture's rootedness in the preceding decade shows that a replacement of Henry Ford's Fordism and Frederick Taylor's 'scientific management' (Braverman 1974) was already incipient by the time the hippies started repeating and amplifying these critiques in the 1960s. Since then, a 'new spirit of capitalism' (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005) has emerged—a spirit that boasts job autonomy, self-management, and personal creativity and as such poses a major break with the massively bureaucratic organizational forms of the past. Management bestsellers like *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (Covey 1989) and *In Search of Excellence* (Peters and Waterman 1982) are saturated with notions of 'flexibility', 'autonomy', 'creativity', 'innovation', 'excellence', 'activity', and 'readiness for change', alongside 'client-orientation', 'people first', and 'human resources', all tapping into notions of freedom, self-transcendence and overcoming alienation. 'Instead of predicating work upon the premise of sacrificing the integrity of the whole person', Costea et al. (2007: 250) rightly point out, concepts such as these 'draw around work the discursive contours of liberating the entire "self", releasing it from the erstwhile shackles of "Taylorism"/"Fordism" or the "Protestant ethic".' Due to this transformation, '[work] becomes a stage for self-expression' and 'the site of control is ... displaced to a significant extent from external authority to inner attributes of the subject who is urged to self-manage'

(idem: 253). This basically comes down to ‘substituting *self-control* for *control*’ (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005: 191, their emphasis).

Desires to break away from structures and formalized roles remain neither limited to the corporate world of capitalism, nor to management more generally. Politicians are also increasingly expected to adopt more personalized styles, further adding to an already marked ‘personalization’ of politics (for example, Mughan 2000, Wattenberg 1991). They increasingly try to maintain a critical distance from their formal political roles by showing the public who they ‘really’ are—that is, who they are as ‘private’, ‘non-role-playing’ persons. Supported by skilful campaign teams, public relations officers and spin doctors, they stage their authenticity in carefully directed media appearances, not hesitating to throw in their spouses, babies or personal hobbies if that appears helpful.

A few examples from our own country suffice. Christian-Democratic party leader Wim van de Camp built his campaign for the European elections of June 2009 around his personal hobby of motorcycle racing, and even went so far as to launch it clad in a motor suit. In the period preceding the national elections of June 2010, Job Cohen (back then mayor of Amsterdam, now leader of the Labor Party), acted as a guest editor for Dutch women’s magazine *Margriet* and was as such featured on its cover. He avidly used the opportunity to treat the magazine’s readers (mostly middle-aged women) on, among other things, a look inside his official residence, an interview with his wife and his favorite bicycle tour through Amsterdam. At roughly the same time, minister of agriculture Gerda Verburg (Christian Democrats) managed to get her own personal glossy *Gerda* published, in which she eagerly displayed her life in the countryside and shared some of her favorite recipes.

From Churched Religion to Personal Spirituality

Rather than a transition from Christian religion to a moral individualism-cum-rationalism as advocated by Durkheim at the beginning of the twentieth century, a massive subjective shift towards spirituality has taken place since the 1960s (Houtman and Aupers 2007, Houtman and Mascini 2002). In the opening pages of their book *The Spiritual Revolution*, Paul Heelas, Linda Woodhead and their colleagues summarize this transition as follows:

in the West those forms of religion that tell their followers to live their lives in conformity with external principles to the neglect of the cultivation of their unique subjective-lives will be in decline. Many churches and chapels are likely to fall into this category. By contrast, those forms of spirituality in the West that help people to live in accordance with the deepest, sacred dimensions of their own unique lives can be expected to be growing. (2005: 7)

Although this increasingly popular type of spirituality is historically rooted in New Age and its utopian promises of an imminent Age of Aquarius, the latter

notion with its socially critical implications, and indeed the label 'New Age' itself, has lost most its former appeal. Nothing would be more mistaken than to conclude from this that the associated type of spirituality has meanwhile disappeared, too, however. Rather to the contrary: it is more accurate to conclude from this that New Age, with its characteristic rejection of restrictive religious traditions, institutions and doctrines, and its emphasis on the primacy of subjective-life and personal experience, has become full part of the Western cultural mainstream. This has particularly occurred from the 1980s onwards, when it was lovingly and massively embraced in the media and popular culture (think of Shirley MacLaine in the 1980s, James Redfield and his *The Celestine Prophecy* in the 1990s, Oprah Winfrey, Dr. Phil, etcetera).

This growing popularity of New Age from the 1980s onwards sparked an awareness among its advocates, or at least a fear, that it was on the way of becoming an established religious tradition just like any other and this motivated a tension with its ethic of self-spirituality. According to the latter, being a member of an established religious tradition with its own heritage, canonical texts, routines and doctrines, and (perhaps worst of all) herd of dedicated followers, after all, comes alarmingly close to the New Age rendition of the Christian notion of 'sinfulness.' This dynamics explains why the term 'New Age' lost currency and why New Agers have turned towards more indeterminate labels like 'spirituality' ('Are you a New Ager?'; 'No, I am not; I am very interested in spirituality, though!');

[B]y the beginning of the 1990s, more and more people attracted to alternative spirituality began to distance themselves from the label New Age During the 1980s it was still possible to investigate the New Age movement ... simply by questioning people who identified themselves as involved in New Age; during the 1990s, participants have increasingly refused to identify themselves as such, preferring vague and non-committal terms such as 'spirituality'. (Hanegraaff 2002: 253, see also Heelas 1996a: 17)

The demise of the label 'New Age' does hence not indicate that longings for a personal spirituality have disappeared, but rather proves the opposite. Heelas et al. (2005) have even suggested that a 'spiritual revolution' may be underway, consisting of a major transition from 'religion' to 'spirituality', and Campbell (2007: 41) even goes so far as to observe 'a fundamental revolution in Western civilization, one that can be compared in significance to the Renaissance, the Reformation, or the Enlightenment.'

'Think Different!': Rebellious Consumers

Counter-cultural discontents about mass consumerism, understood as driven by narrow-minded conformism and jealousy of the size of the tail fins of the neighbor's car ('keeping up with the Joneses'), and the banal emptiness of the products of the culture industries were already expressed in the 1950s, too (Slater 1997: 11-

12). This critique has most influentially left its traces in David Riesman's book *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), allegedly the most sold sociology book ever. When the counter culture critiqued and ridiculed the conformity of mass consumerism, marketing concepts were already changing in ways consistent with it.

Marketing gradually gave way to branding, associating products with young, hip, cool, adventurous and non-conformist images and lifestyles. Corporations started challenging consumers to assert their self-dependence and personal authenticity by setting themselves apart from the dull gray masses. A 'hip consumerism driven by disgust with mass society itself' emerged, which 'promises to deliver the consumer from the dreary nightmare of square consumerism', resulting in a 'perpetual motion machine in which disgust with the falseness, shoddiness, and everyday oppressions of consumer society [is] enlisted to drive the ever-accelerating wheels of consumption' (Frank 1998: 31-2). Contemporary consumer culture has come to breathe the rebelliousness and non-conformism of the 1960s' counter culture, in short, even to the extent that 'the critique of mass society has been one of the most powerful forces driving consumerism for the past forty years' (Heath and Potter 2004: 98).

The iconic status attained by Che Guevara's portrait with military beret and wild mane is a major case in point. It is today no longer merely featured on posters and T-shirts, but on an immense collection of knickknacks, ranging from calendars, wallets and cigarette lighters to wristwatches, suspenders, and coffee mugs. A symbol of counter-cultural protest against capitalism and imperialism half a century ago, Che has now become the icon of a consumer culture driven by individualism, non-conformity and rebelliousness. And it is not difficult to find other examples of advertisements and commercials appealing to such dreams. Apple Macintosh, and particularly its award-winning 1984 commercial directed by Ridley Scott—known from movies like *Alien* (1979), *Blade Runner* (1982), *Thelma & Louise* (1991), *Gladiator* (2000) and *Robin Hood* (2010)—is of course an outstanding example.¹ The commercial presents Apple as a brand for rebellious individualists who have the moral stamina to withstand the dull grayness and slavish conformity of those who willingly and knowingly defer to the whims, caprices and impulses of those who happen to be in power. Apple's well-known *Think Different* campaign boasts a similar message and leaves just as little to the imagination.

One could of course counter that Apple, particularly through its charismatic front man Steve Jobs, is atypical in that it is more directly rooted in the counter culture than most other companies, but this would neglect the many other examples that are available. There is, for instance, Ikea's 'Design your own life' and even sound and reliable German BMW is nowadays flirting explicitly with a rebellious

¹ The commercial can be found on Youtube: <http://nl.youtube.com/watch?v=OYecfV3ubP8> [accessed February 24, 2011].

and non-conformist image in its campaign *Company of Ideas*.² Jack Pitney, Vice President Marketing BMW, USA, explains: ‘We are eager to unveil this smart and original campaign that communicates BMW’s culture of creativity so thoroughly. BMW has carved out a unique niche in the industry by placing a premium on constant innovation and inspiration and this campaign will reveal the company behind The Ultimate Driving Machine.’ ‘Was anything truly extraordinary ever achieved by compromise?’, the campaign’s printed ads ask rhetorically, to immediately give the obvious answer in an even larger font: ‘In a word, no.’ Roy Spence, president of advertising agency GSD&M (Austin, Texas), recounts that ‘BMW’s performance is legendary, but how they get there is an important part of the story as well. They get there through passion and inspiration—they aren’t hindered by idea-killing bureaucracy.’

Also in our own country, the Netherlands, advertising slogans boasting ideals of personal authenticity galore: ‘Always yourself’ (HEMA department store); ‘Being purely yourself for a moment with the refined blends of Pickwick’ (Pickwick tea); ‘The best you can become is yourself’ (Content temporary employment agency); ‘Ample room to be yourself’ (Landal GreenParks holiday resorts); ‘Be yourself—There are already so many others’ (7Up); and ‘Stay yourself until the end’ (Monuta funeral insurances). Contemporary marketing and consumer culture, we conclude, is permeated by articulations of an individualist and non-conformist ethic that is drawn upon to endow commodities with auras of personal rebelliousness and to associate them with cultural ideals of personal authenticity. The counter-cultural spirit of individualism has not disappeared, but now fuels the engines of consumerism.

The Rise of Cultural Politics: Political Conflicts about Individual Liberty

The counter-cultural quest for individual liberty also sparked a new type of cultural politics in which old-style distributive class issues have become overshadowed by cultural desires for expanding individual liberty, overcoming alienation and furthering democratic participation. New-leftist parties emerged besides the established parties on the left and the notion that particularly well-educated voters feel attracted to the former, because they embrace individual liberty more enthusiastically than the less educated do, became a theoretical mainstay in the study of politics (Houtman 2003).

This increased political salience of cultural issues pertaining to individualism has sparked a gradual decline, and in some instances even a reversal, of the familiar pattern of a leftist-voting working class and a rightist-voting middle class that old-school class theories of politics have since the nineteenth century accepted as virtually ‘natural’. Indeed, book titles such as *The Death of Class* (Pakulski and

² See, for example, http://goliath.ecnext.com/coms2/gi_0199-5507576/BMW-Unveils-New-Advertising-Campaign.html and <http://danwarne.com/why-sony-cant-compete-against-apple-or-why-you-should-always-say-no-to-compromise/> [accessed February 24, 2011].

Waters 1996), *The Breakdown of Class Politics* (Clark and Lipset 2001) and *The End of Class Politics?* (Evans 1999) underscore the continuing prominence of these theories until the present day and this theoretical blindfold has caused many a student of politics to misunderstand the cultural dynamics that underlies the fading of the once allegedly 'natural' pattern (see in particular Nieuwbeerta's research: 1995, 1996, 2001, Nieuwbeerta and De Graaf 1999). For it has meanwhile become clear that the past half century has not so much been witnessing a decline in class politics, but rather a massive proliferation of cultural politics, central to which are cultural conflicts between educational categories, revolving around cultural issues pertaining to individual liberty (Achterberg 2006a, 2006b, Achterberg and Houtman 2006, Houtman 2001, 2003, Houtman et al. 2008a). To theoretically grasp the dynamics of conflict in contemporary cultural politics one hence needs to give the moral individualism that was so powerfully articulated in the 1960s counter culture its due, and particularly needs to recognize its increased politicization from the 1980s onwards.

Until the 1980s the new moral individualism remained by and large uncontested and hence constituted the dominant political discourse. The political culture of this period was hence consistent with the work of Inglehart (1977, 1997), who has characterized it in terms of a marked shift away from the old 'materialist' value priorities of the old economically-oriented socialist left to the new 'postmaterialist' priorities of a new and markedly culturally-oriented left that instead emphasizes personal liberty, individual freedom and self-expression. This is of course not to deny that even in the heydays of the 1960s there were pockets of rightist-authoritarian resistance and critique, driven by desires of curbing the new moral individualism and re-establishing social order (Ransford 1972). Conflict and polarization even occurred among university students, who more than any other group carried the spirit of cultural and political protest, pointing out that the new emancipatory cultural politics of the left has never been unanimously embraced in even these circles (Klatch 1999, Lyons 1996).

Nonetheless, dissident voices remained discursively marginal until the 1980s. From that decade onwards, however, a new-rightist backlash gained political strength all over Western Europe and new-rightist and populist political parties won considerable shares of the vote (Ignazi 1992, 2003, Veugelers 2000). In this decade, new-leftist politics in effect got its new-rightist counterpart, with the new-rightist parties, much like their new-leftist predecessors, emphasizing cultural issues (in their case curbing immigration and fighting crime in particular) rather than the economic and distributive issues of the good-old politics of class. From the 1980s onwards, Western European politics hence no longer merely boasts two lefts, but two rights, too.

Despite minor new-rightist electoral successes in the 1980s, the breakthrough of new-rightist politics occurred much later in the Netherlands than elsewhere in Western Europe. It only took off in 2001, when the late Pim Fortuyn started successfully attacking new-leftist moral-political taboos about immigration and multiculturalism. His landslide victory in the national elections of 2002 marked

the breakthrough of new-rightist populism in the Netherlands and his ghost haunts Dutch politics until the present day. Geert Wilders's Freedom Party is nowadays most successful electorally in articulating new-rightist populism, making it Fortuyn's LPF's principal heir.

The interesting thing about this new Dutch populism is that it is rooted in the individualist longings of the counter-cultural 1960s in various ways. Much like in most other Western European countries, it is of course first of all a political reaction to and hence rejection of the latter, conceiving of problems relating to mass immigration, crime and unsafety as direct outgrowths of the overly tolerant new-leftist politics of the baby-boom generation (Mascini and Houtman 2011). Whoever listens carefully to what new-rightist politicians like Fortuyn and Wilders actually have to say, can not fail to miss that their discourse is also informed by the counter culture in a much more direct way, however, even to the extent of constituting a veritable 'counter culture 2.0'. For one thing, there is the populist aversion to a state seen as illegitimately catering to unproductive bureaucratic and political elites, who are more interested in their own salaries, their own careers and their own (to put it in Geert Wilders's terms) 'leftist hobbies' (like cultural, artistic and multicultural projects) than in making serious efforts to solve the problems hard-working and law abiding citizens face on an everyday basis. Despite the new populism's new-rightist political leanings, these complaints are not unlike the counter-cultural discontents about a bureaucratic state that is unresponsive to what the people really want.

The freedom-loving spirit of the counter culture can be heard even more loudly and clearly in populism's ruthless critiques of Muslims and Islam. These critiques are directly informed by an embracement of freedom of speech and women's and gay rights: 'In fact, if they are unwilling to become just as progressive and tolerant as we Dutch are, these Muslim immigrants ought to leave our country: they should give their own and our women more freedom and respect, they should stay away from our gays, and they should leave our freedom of speech alone.' Now that in heavily secularized Dutch society the moral principle of individual liberty has become virtually universally accepted, this type of exclusionary populist rhetoric has proven difficult to counter for progressive political parties.

Paradoxes of Individualization: Outline of the Book

Since the counter culture of the 1960s, in short, ideals of individual liberty, personal authenticity and tolerance have come to permeate the core institutions of modern, Western countries. This informs two paradoxes that will be addressed in this book. The first paradox is that this process of individualization entails a new, yet often unacknowledged, form of social control. Even though individuals now relentlessly aim to act out their originality, uniqueness, and personal authenticity, and almost obsessively insist on remaining true to themselves, they paradoxically do so in social environments that expect and demand them to do precisely that. Ideals of

individual liberty, personal authenticity and tolerance have in short become social facts in the classical sense of Emile Durkheim (1964 [1895]).

Chapter 2 demonstrates that the ‘agony of choice’ that contemporary theorists of individualization attribute to consumers’ need to continuously make selections from wide ranges of available options does in fact hardly exist. As we will see, consumers make their decisions virtually without effort and even understand them as enjoyable and meaningful opportunities to display their personal authenticity and uniqueness. Ironically, however, this effortlessness stems from the fact that their ideals of personal authenticity are firmly rooted in a pre-given cultural habitus that enables them to evade agony of choice by dismissing most of the options available to them as ‘unacceptable for people like me’ in the first place.

Chapter 3 further probes the social shaping of individualism by means of a study of New Age spirituality, typically portrayed in the scholarly literature as radically privatized with individuals freely and actively constructing and reconstructing strictly personal packages of meaning. This image is not so much false, but one-sided and incomplete, because it neglects that these practices of individual *bricolage* stem from a doctrine of self-spirituality that is itself collectively embraced and basically uncontested in the spiritual milieu. According to this doctrine, people *must* in fact be true to themselves and follow their personal spiritual paths. Participants are socialized in this doctrine through spiritual books and therapies and it has even come to play a significant role in the world of work, demonstrating that New Age spirituality is decidedly less privatized than it is typically taken to be.

Chapter 4 pushes the social construction of individual liberty a step further by demonstrating how the computer game industry actively engineers, produces, markets and sells it. The freedom celebrated by gamers in their enchanting yet commodified virtual worlds is pre-scripted, encoded and engineered by game designers and the industry actively markets it as enabling self-expression. As such, the freedom enjoyed in computer games constitutes a carefully crafted ideology that veils the economic interests of the game industry and helps retaining players in the game of modern capitalism.

Chapter 5 then analyzes how ideals of individualism and cultural tolerance paradoxically spark social exclusion of those who refuse to accept these ideals as morally binding. It does so by means of a case study of *Stormfront*, an online discussion forum for right-wing extremists, who prove to experience stigmatization and social exclusion by the liberal-individualist Dutch mainstream. Simultaneously, however, this right-wing extremism constitutes the most extreme and radical tip of a much larger iceberg of moral and political discontents about allegedly ‘excessive’ individualism and cultural tolerance. As such, this case study also serves to introduce the second paradox of individualization addressed in this book: precisely due to their increased social significance in the last half century, cultural ideals of individual liberty and cultural tolerance have become increasingly morally and politically contested.

Chapter 6 addresses religious contestations about individualism. It does so by means of a study of the struggles and dilemmas encountered in religious and spiritual

appropriations of the Internet through web design. Web designers who identify with New Age spirituality embrace the decentralized, open and individualized new medium as an almost natural habitat for sharing spiritual wisdom and connecting with like-minded others. Particularly Catholic web designers, however, encounter major difficulties that stem from conflicts and disagreements about the legitimacy of Church authorities imposing limits on web content, linking policies, etcetera.

Chapter 7 then demonstrates the role of cultural conflict in contemporary Dutch politics. It does so by means of an analysis of survey data collected briefly after the historical national elections of May 2002 that brought Pim Fortuyn his landslide victory. Choosing between the old-leftist Labor Party and the old-rightist Conservative Party proves to constitute 'class voting', with a vulnerable economic position leading to leftist voting informed by desires for economic redistribution. Choosing between Fortuyn's new-rightist Populist Party and the new-leftist Greens, however, entails 'cultural voting', with a lack of cultural capital leading to rightist voting due to an authoritarian emphasis on maintenance of social order instead of a libertarian one on individual liberty.

Chapter 8 addresses cultural conflict in contemporary Dutch society by studying how secularization affects cultural tolerance. Whereas according to one theory the process increases general levels of ethnic tolerance, another maintains that it rather decreases the latter. We demonstrate that both theories are too crude and too general, because the former applies to the higher educated and the latter to the lower educated. Secularization does hence not unequivocally lead to either a more or a less tolerant general cultural climate, but affects different educational groups differently and hence increases cultural polarization and conflict about ethnic (in) tolerance between them.

Chapter 9, finally, addresses intolerance of Islam, one of the most hotly debated issues in Dutch politics in recent years. We demonstrate that this phenomenon is more complex than the good-old explanations in terms of ethnocentric prejudice among the lower educated suggest. We do in fact find evidence of a newly emerged cultural conflict between the lower and the higher educated about the meaning of secular ideals of individual liberty. The lower educated prove to essentialize these ideals to critique religious orthodoxy and reject Muslims and Islam, whereas the higher educated do not do so and hence relativize these same ideals. The post-Christian ideals of individual liberty that have become widespread in the Netherlands since the 1960s are hence nowadays used by the lower educated as a basis for social exclusion.