

2.3 PROCESSES OF (SELF)IDENTIFICATION

Sonja Kmec and Rachel Reckinger

If the recent publication of two handbooks (Wetherell/Mohanty 2010; Elliott 2011) may serve as indicator, identity studies are in the process of establishing themselves as a field of cross-disciplinary investigation. Early critics of such studies objected to the very notion of ‘identity’, mainly due to the semantic reference to sameness (being identical to oneself or, in the case of collective identity, to someone else) and its function of domination and exclusion of ‘others’ as well as the implicit refusal of the contingency and the heterogeneity of an individual’s self-conception. However, the concept of identity has since been revised, taking onboard such criticism (Renn/Straub 2002: 12). Most identity theorists nowadays understand identity as an ongoing, always provisional and open-ended yet ambivalent process of self-definition – as the term *Identitätsarbeit* (Keupp *et al.* 2006) suggests – shaped by social (inter)actions and mediated through discourse and knowledge:

“The person, that is, the concrete individual, whom the I understands itself to be [or to have become] is cast always anew, in a process that is never closed, never free of the intervention and – as the case may be – confirmation by others and finally mediated through public language, is linked to identity, not directly to that which is identical with the I [...]”⁴⁹ (Renn/Straub 2002: 11).

The focus is thus on “the gap between the I who has a relation with something and the I who functions as the something in that relation”⁵⁰ (*ibid.*: 10–11). The investigation of this “gap” can only be understood with reference to the theoretical framework of post-structuralism, which will be sketched out below. In a second step we will seek to render the notion of identity operational for empirical studies, before presenting the concrete approaches to identity and space constructions within border regions that will be developed subsequently in the chapters 3, 4 and 5.

49 | Personal translation of: “Die Person, aufgefasst als das konkrete Individuum, als das sich das Ich immer wieder neu, nicht abschliessbar und niemals frei von der Intervention und gegebenenfalls von der Bestätigung durch andere, schliesslich im Medium der öffentlichen Sprache ‘versteht’, ist auf Identität bezogen, nicht unmittelbar auf sich als das mit dem Ich Identische [...].”

50 | Personal translation of: “[...] Abstand zwischen dem Ich, das zu etwas ein Verhältnis unterhält, und dem Ich, das in diesem Verhältnis als das Etwas fungiert.”

2.3.1 Post-Structuralist Stances on ‘Identity’

To actually close the ‘gap’ between, on the one hand, what a person is (or has become) and, on the other hand, how this is expressed meaningfully by individuals who are always dependent in their expectations and scopes of potentials on social recognition (Abels 2006; Krappmann 2005; Rosa 2007) is deemed impossible by poststructuralist thinkers, drawing among others on Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan. This impossibility is, however, not entirely negative; it opens up creative spaces to partially (re)cast oneself in different relational contexts, within limits of social resources.

In a highly influential lecture given at the John Hopkins University in 1966, Derrida not only reinforces Ferdinand de Saussure’s claim that the sign (the relation between signifier and signified) is arbitrary, but suggests that any communication is built on a foundation of sand due to the arbitrariness or “free-play” of the system (Han 2011: 87). The ‘philosophy of presence’ or realism, which Derrida considers a metaphysical remnant of Platonism, has also been challenged by the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and his students. Lacan opposes the idea of the Platonic psyche or soul to Descartes’ *cogito ergo sum*. In his 1949 essay on the Mirror Stage, he argues that a person’s identity is never unitary and total, but fragmented. When a child recognizes itself for the first time in a mirror, it is a *misrecognition*, built only on an image, an ideal ‘I’, an “armor of an alienating identity that will mark his entire mental development with its rigid structure” (cited by Han 2011: 88). Lacan argues for the social nature of the formation of the ego, whose centre remains void.

A decentered formulation of selfhood may also be found in Paul Ricoeur’s work *Oneself as Another* (1992 [1990]), which distinguishes within ‘identity’ two major strands of significances, namely the notion of “selfhood” (corresponding to ipseity, from Latin *ipse*, self) and that of “sameness” (corresponding to identity, from Latin *idem*, same, identical): “identity in the sense of ipse implies no assertion concerning some unchanging core of the personality” (ibid.: 2). Ricoeur’s reflection provides a common touchstone for the research unit IPSE (Identités. Politiques, Sociétés, Espaces) at the University of Luxembourg and has allowed for a fruitful interdisciplinary cooperation in the context of a first common project, *IDENT – Socio-Cultural Identities and Identity Policies in Luxembourg*, uniting researchers from the various disciplines represented in IPSE (Reckinger/Schulz/Wille 2011: 7-9). Regarding our common understanding of the concept of identity in this follow-up research project, we continue to subscribe to the view of a “consistent but contingent”⁵¹ (Straub 2004: 287) dynamic structure of ‘selfhood’. The reasons for this are that this view puts more emphasis on change and subjectivity (see Reckinger/Wille 2011: 20). It also reflects our skepticism towards classical understandings of identity as ‘sameness’, which have – according to Reckwitz

51 | Personal translation of: “[...] stimmig[e] aber kontingent[e] Struktur.”

(2001: 25) – “a universalistic and competence-theoretical orientation and center on the problem of the relationship between the individual and social constraints as well as on the problem of temporal constancy.”⁵²

Ricoeur’s hermeneutics emphasize the embeddedness of personal identity in narrative identity, that is, in signs, symbols and texts (1992 [1990]: 140-148). Life and narrative are seen as intrinsically linked, in a fundamentally ambivalent way, seeing as always provisional identities are the ongoing results of never-ending social interactions, making identifications move in loops, “as a shifting and contextual phenomenon” (Butler 2006 [1990]: 14).

The case studies in our current book draw – inevitably – on a very heterogeneous set of authors and references, but it was important to have a basic common understanding of how we envisage ‘identity’. This understanding takes on board Judith Butler’s analysis of identity as performative and enacted, rejecting the notion that there is a core or ‘real’ identity a person could hold on to or strive to achieve (Butler 2008a). Butler also expounds Derrida’s neologism *différance*, that is, the constant process of differing (*en diffégrant*), which allows for a more nuanced observation than the static notion of *différence* (Derrida 1982b [1978]: 3): differences, for instance between men and women or between homosexual and heterosexual, are naturalized in order to enforce hegemonies. Gender, Butler writes, “is a kind of imitation for which there is no original.” Drawing on Michel Foucault’s studies about power relations and “regimes of truth” or truth-generating apparatuses of society, Butler concludes that “identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalising categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression” (Butler 2008b: 121). As a consequence, the notion of social or group identity is also called into question. For instance, if there is no ontological ‘woman’ the reality of ‘us, women’ as a category also needs to be reconsidered. In that sense, the canonical distinction between personal and collective identity no longer applies. We do not regard the notion of collective identity as determined by objective group affiliation (as for example Halpern 2009 or Ruano-Borbolan 1998 do), but rather view the collective as an inescapable – though possibly playful or subversive – reference to moral norms, resources and repertoires of knowledge.

On an empirical level, it is thus important to consistently explore the manner in which every single action, which can be regarded as an identity project, can be understood as influenced by this layer referring to ‘us’ (“*Wir-Schicht*”, Elias 1986). In this we follow research traditions which centre primarily, on a theoretical level, on “the balance between individual demands and social expectations”⁵³ (Abels

52 | Personal translation of: “[...] universalistisch und kompetenztheoretisch orientiert und auf das Problem des Verhältnisses zwischen Individuum und sozialen Zwängen sowie das Problem der temporalen Konstanz zentriert.”

53 | Personal translation of: “[...] Balance zwischen individuellen Ansprüchen und sozialen Erwartungen.”

2006: 254; see Krappmann 2005) and do not limit themselves to the functional (manifold) affiliations (Goffman 1959; Lahire 1998) that have multiplied in late modernity (see Reckinger/Wille 2011: 16-17).

Most of the following case studies address these questions in the here and now, Luxembourg and the border region in the 2010s, but this book also includes historical studies that raise identity issues. Subjects in Gallo-Roman or medieval times also reflected on their (perceived) position, their social standing and their allegiances. ‘Reflexivity’ may thus not be the most appropriate expression to characterize the specific late modern self-awareness, as Anthony Giddens (1991) proposes. He claims that the anxieties triggered by the disintegration of old communal ties encourage self-awareness. On the one hand, this ‘disembedding’ increased the felt need to stabilize self-identity; on the other hand it gives people a greater choice over what kind of self they want to be and in what kind of relationships they want to be (Chaffee 2011: 103-104). However, as Reckwitz has pointed out, there is a risk of exaggerating the “permanent changeability of identities” in drafting “the image of a hyper-flexible subject permanently changing its identities [...], which seems disconnected from everyday practices”⁵⁴ (Reckwitz 2001: 34-35). Despite this pluralization of possibilities of identity constructions, their scope is limited by the quantity and quality of social interactions as well as economic and everyday-cultural resources – and therefore by structural capitals of social inequality (Bourdieu 1972). This social limitation has a concrete impact on identity constitution through processes of “recognizing oneself, being recognized and acknowledged”⁵⁵ (Greverus 1995: 219). “Identity constructions thus are ambivalent: due to eroding dependencies on predefined paths there is, on the one hand, an *obligation to make a choice*, which still holds the possibility of either success or failure, and, on the other hand, there is the *freedom of choice* which still is socio-culturally moulded”⁵⁶ (see Reckinger/Wille 2011: 15).

Ulrich Beck, who has further developed the concept of “reflexive modernity” (Beck/Giddens/Lash 1994), argues that the old categories such as nation-state, family and class have become “zombie categories” (Beck/Beck-Gernsheim 2001: 203). They are still around, but have lost the meaning they once had. Beck is more pessimistic than Giddens about human agency, being limited by corporate capitalism, the flexibilization of the job market and the internalization of social norms. Whilst for Beck freedom of choice remains possible (through informed

54 | Personal translation of: [Risiko einer] “Dramatisierung der permanenten Veränderbarkeit von Identitäten”, [d.h. das] “Bild eines hyperflexiblen, seine Identitäten austauschenden Subjekts [...], das den Boden der Alltagspraktiken zu verlassen scheint.”

55 | Personal translation of: “Sich Erkennen, Erkannt- und Anerkanntwerden.”

56 | Personal translation of: “Somit beinhalten Identitätskonstruktionen eine doppelte Ambivalenz: wegen erodierender vorgefertigten Pfadabhängigkeiten gibt es einerseits einen *Zwang zur Wahl*, die dennoch Gelingen oder Scheitern birgt, und andererseits die *Freiheit der Wahl*, die dennoch sozio-kulturell überformt ist.”

public participation and empowerment), Foucault considers freedom of choice a distinct modern fact that is *intrinsically* part of the technology of power. Nowadays, he argues, sheer physical force is no longer necessary to sway control, as subjects have accepted their social roles and ‘identities’ via ever more pervasive forms of government and self-government (see below). The degree to which this may have been different in premodern times is open to discussion. But the features of social contingency and thus changeability of identities seem to be universally valid. “The ‘working out’ of identities on the part of the subjects should be seen as a performance of continuity and on no account as something substantially adherent to their selves” (Reckinger/Schulz/Wille 2011: 293).

2.3.2 Rendering ‘Identity’ Empirically Operational

Having thus decentered selfhood and unhinged it from an ontological definition, how can we examine identity at all? The notion comprises different psychological and sociological actions, which first need to be disentangled. We will briefly present the terminology proposed by Rogers Brubaker (2001), Martina Avanza and Gilles Laferté (2005) as well as Peter Weichhart (1990) when dealing with identity and examine whether they may be compatible.

Rogers Brubaker (2001) distinguishes between three different phenomena: first, the identification of certain categories of people by social actors or discourses; secondly, self-identification (cognitive self-representation), which he considers to be relational and changeable over time; thirdly a feeling of groupness (akin to Max Weber’s *Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl*), which is derived by the individual from alleged shared category and connectedness.

Martina Avanza and Gilles Laferté (2005: 146-147) reformulate Brubaker’s model and propose to focus on the interactions between the following social processes: identification in the sense of categorization (*attribution catégorielle*) or external labelling; discursive production of a social image of a certain collectivity, for instance historical, geographical, artistic or literary representations of ‘us’ and ‘them’; active individual self-identification with a group, shaped by socialization and individual choices.

Drawing on Carl Friedrich Graumann (1983), Peter Weichhart (1990) offers a very similar triad: individuals define physical objects or spatial structures in a certain way (identification of); individuals are being associated with certain groups and opposed to other groups (men/women, northerners/southerners), endowed with positive or fraught with negative character traits (being identified by); individuals identify themselves with an object or a certain place (identification with). The latter is, according to Weichhart, often referred to as spatial identity.

When comparing the typologies established by Brubaker, Avanza and Laferté as well as Weichhart, it appears that they complement each other and may be condensed to two different strands of identity analysis: attribution and appropriation, seeing as the analysis of feelings or attributions of group belongings can be classified into

either of those two larger dimensions. Indeed, on the one hand, the distinction Avanza/Laferté (2005) as well as Weichhart (1990) make between the labelling of people and the cognitive characterization of objects may both be considered as attribution, since Brubaker (2001) makes no difference between who or what is being discursively produced. On the other hand, Brubaker's second and third type of identity (self-identification and feeling of group belonging) refer to the individual appropriation of social images. The proposed triads thus overlap and cover in fact only two very distinct notions of identity: identification *by/of* (or: attribution) and identification *with* (or: appropriation) – as proposed in our previous study *Doing Identity in Luxembourg. Subjective Appropriations – Institutional Attributions – Socio-Cultural Milieus* (IPSE 2011a and 2011b):

“To sum up, we have, in order to stress the relational nature of identity patterns, directed our attention to the intricate interplay between the different forms of internal self-understanding and self-relationship and external influences, or, in other words, on the interplay between *bottom up* ‘identifications with’ and *top down* ‘identifications of’ (Hark 1999). The circulating identity projects and options – analysed here in the form of representations and negotiations – are intrinsically dialogical and political. There is a negotiation of ‘power struggles over the meaning, status and value of life-styles, characteristics, activities and behaviors’ (Rosa 2007: 52)” (Reckinger/Schulz/Wille 2011: 21).

2.3.3 On the Concept of Identity in this Volume

As the above discussion has shown, the concept of identity can be subdivided in two major components that reflect its complexity and polyphony: first *attributions* (*identification by*) by normative institutions (of any kind) that possess a certain power to name and define (*identification of*), and second, the *appropriation* (*identification with*) by recipients (of any kind). The mutual interaction of both components ensues in processes of more or less implicit constraints as well as through processes of internalization.

In order to describe this dialectic in more detail, we draw on Foucault's concept of governmentality that seeks to systematically reveal the links between technologies of power (constraints) and technologies of self (internalizations). The contributions in this volume address this context in different ways. While the studies in chapter 3 focus on the analysis of power relationships, chapter 5 is primarily concerned with the aspect of relationships of the self, and especially with forms of subjectivation. Chapter 4 comprises studies that chiefly focus on apparatuses of interstitiality, which in particular reveal the complexity and the processuality of identity constructions.

The concept of governmentality has gained a certain currency in recent social science research. It is a malleable and broadly defined praxeological concept that shows very divergent issues to be linked with each other, thus sharpening our

awareness for the constructedness of political, social and (everyday-)cultural evidences. The neologism of *gouvernementalité* coined by Foucault is usually understood to imply a combination of the terms *gouverner* and *mentalité*, i.e. a 'government mentality'. However, we prefer Lars Gertenbach's reading of the term, since

"the term is derived from the French 'gouvernemental' - concerning the government - a translation as 'the way of governing' seems more appropriate. Furthermore, the nominalization of 'gouvernemental' to 'gouvernementalité' makes it possible to use the term as an opposing concept to 'souveraineté' and put it as a third form of power next to sovereignty and discipline"⁵⁷ (Gertenbach, 2012: 112; see Sennelart, 2006: 564).

This opposition holds primarily for the historiographic use of the concept and is of particular relevance for the contributions in chapter 3. For its microanalytical use by contrast, as in chapter 5, it is essential that the governmental way of governing "finds its specific expression in influencing the agency of subjects and in the shaping of particular forms of subjectivity"⁵⁸ (Gertenbach 2012: 112).

These interlinked aspects of government are emphasized by Foucault's recipients in different degrees, depending on their own line of research, either macropolitically or with focus on everyday-cultural power structures. Foucault himself however always conceived these two aspects together. He was particularly concerned with the "field of relations of forces", in which "the art of government is deployed" (Foucault 2007 [2004]: 312). In the series of lectures *Security, Territory, Population* he emphasizes that it would be productive to see the state as a "way of doing things" instead of as a "transcendent reality" (ibid.: 358). He adds:

"We can see that there is not a sort of break between the level of micro-power and the level of macro-power, and that talking about one does not exclude talking about the other. In actual fact, an analysis in terms of micro-powers comes back without any difficulty to the analysis of problems like those of government and the state" (Foucault 2007 [2004]: 358).

Governmentality, explains Gertenbach, is an "execution of power through and via freedom. It is a form of power that does not operate directly and imperiously, but

57 | Personal translation of: "Da sich der Begriff vom französischen 'gouvernemental' - die Regierung betreffend - herleitet, ist er eher als 'Art und Weise des Regierens' zu übersetzen. Darüber hinaus ermöglicht die Substantivierung von 'gouvernemental' zu 'gouvernementalité', den Begriff als Gegenkonzept zu 'souveraineté' zu verwenden und als dritten Typus der Macht neben Souveränität und Disziplin zu setzen."

58 | Personal translation of: "[...] spezifischen Ausdruck [...] im Einwirken auf den Handlungsbereich der Subjekte und in der Formung und Gestaltung bestimmter Formen von Subjektivität."

rather indirectly and mediatingly, not via rigidly fixed norms, but via probabilities”⁵⁹ (Gertenbach 2012: 114). In the same way that Bourdieu’s concept of habitus does not assume precise *contents* of action, but rather a broad, albeit not arbitrary, *latitude* for action, which is in particular shaped by social-structural and class-specific differences (see Bourdieu 1980), these probabilities can be recognized in the context of governmentality most clearly if analysis “systematically begins at the microphysics of power”⁶⁰ (Füller/Marquardt 2009: 97), in order to understand its scope(s) and functioning(s). For power “exists only when it is put into action even if [...] it is integrated into a disparate field of possibilities brought to bear upon permanent structures” (Foucault 1983: 219). Thus power structures or relationships are best examined by looking at practices and revealing “the positivity of their interlinkage, their arrangement and their relationships” – not so much by retracing a “historical development or chronology”⁶¹ (Füller/Marquardt 2009: 97).

Thomas Lemke (2008: 261) sums up the concept of governmentality by emphasizing that “forms of political government draw on techniques of ‘self governing’.”⁶² But this one-sided representation lacks the reciprocal movement which is characterized more succinctly with the following quote by Foucault:

“[One] has to take into account the interaction between those two types of techniques – techniques of domination but also techniques of the self. [One] has to take into account the points where the technologies of domination of individuals over one another have recourse to processes by which the individual acts upon himself. And conversely, [one] has to take into account the points where the techniques of the self are integrated into structures of coercion or domination” (Foucault, 1993: 203f.).

What makes governmentality conceptually interesting as a principle of government is that it expressly does not suppress subjectivity but relies on its ‘(self)-production’ or “on the invention and promotion of technologies of the self that can be linked to governmental goals”⁶³ (Bröckling/Krasmann/Lemke 2000: 29). By implication, this means that Foucault does not advocate the “substitution of the political with the personal”, but “a different form of politics and the design of new technologies

59 | Personal translation of: “[...] eine Machtausübung über und durch Freiheit. Es ist eine Form der Macht, die nicht direkt und befehlend wirkt, sondern indirekt und vermittelnd, nicht über strikt festgesetzte Normen, sondern über Wahrscheinlichkeiten.”

60 | Personal translation of: “[...] konsequent an der Mikrophysik der Macht ansetzen.”

61 | Personal translation of: [indem] “die Positivität ihrer Verkettung untereinander, ihre Anordnung und ihre Beziehungen [...]” [aufgedeckt werden – jedoch weniger dadurch, dass eine] “historische Entwicklung oder Abfolge nachvollzogen wird.”

62 | Personal translation of: “[...] Formen politischer Regierung auf Techniken des ‘Sich-Selbst-Regierens’ rekurren.”

63 | Personal translation of: “[...] auf die Erfindung und Förderung von Selbsttechnologien, die an Regierungsziele gekoppelt werden können.”

of self”, with whose help “political goals can be realized in a considerably more ‘effective’ way via individual ‘self-realizations’”⁶⁴ (ibid.: 30) than through explicit-legal limitations of individual freedom.

All in all, this broad understanding of social, cultural and political performativities provides a suitable bracket for conceptually underpinning the chapters in this volume and emphasizing their coherence despite the considerable variety of subject matters addressed in the individual case studies: chapter 5 examines technologies of self; chapter 3 deals with technologies of government; in addition, a further chapter (4) is concerned with apparatuses that are marked by interstices, fuzzy zones and blurrings of these effects. In this way the ongoing constitutive processes of identity construction – attributions (*identification by/of*) and appropriations (*identification with*) – can be presented with a clearer structure in terms of concepts and empirics in their dialectic with spatial constructions in border spaces.

2.4 METHODOLOGY AND SITUATIVE INTERDISCIPLINARITY

Christian Wille

The investigation of constructions of space and identity in this volume focuses on social practices and on specific sub-aspects linked to them (e.g. bodies, artefacts, spatial networks of relationships, logics of power, attributions of signification with their specific differentiations and situatedness). If we take practices as the point of departure of our considerations, this raises the question of how these can be investigated in terms of research practice. In this context, Reckwitz (2008: 195) points out that the presence of the researchers *in situ* is only possible to a limited extent. Even though *current practices* are directly accessible via the present and perceivable materiality of bodies and artefacts, interpretations of meaning through visual and auditive perception remain concealed. These need to be deduced indirectly, “i.e. one has to draw conclusions about the implied schemata from explicit statements, actions, ways of dealing with things etc.”⁶⁵ (ibid.: 196). Here, the qualitative interview seems to be a suitable method for revealing verbally formulated interpretations of meaning. In the case of *past practices* the issue of direct access to practices becomes more acute: the materiality of the bodies and

64 | Personal translation of: [die] “Ersetzung des Politischen durch das Persönliche” [plädiert, sondern für] “eine andere Form von Politik und den Entwurf neuer Selbsttechnologien”, [mit Hilfe derer] “politische Ziele [sich] wesentlich ‘ökonomischer’ mittels individueller ‘Selbstverwirklichung’ realisieren lassen.”

65 | Personal translation of: “[...] das heißt, aus expliziten Äußerungen, Handlungen, Umgangsweisen mit Dingen usw. muss auf die impliziten Schemata rückgeschlossen werden.”