

FORMS OF INDIVIDUALITY AND LITERACY
IN THE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN PERIODS

UTRECHT STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL LITERACY

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IN THE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN
PERIODS

Edited by

Franz-Josef Arlinghaus



BREPOLS

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Preface

Franz-Josef ARLINGHAUS

The aim of the contributions collected in this volume is to discuss a sociological concept of ‘individuality’, inspired by system theory, and analyse it through the investigation of different medieval and early modern sources. The volume is based on papers given at a conference in Bielefeld in 2009, and I have a vivid memory of the inspiring discussions that took place then.

I thank the Gerda Henkel Foundation (Düsseldorf), which made the conference possible, and the University of Bielefeld, which co-financed the event. My thanks go to the administration of the Department of History of the University of Bielefeld, in particular to Ralf Möller, who provided all kinds of practical support during the conference.

Michael Hohlstein, now at Konstanz, and Hiram Kümper, now at Mannheim, read all articles and carefully spotted failed wordings or inconsistencies. The translators Anthony Alcock (Kassel) and Marco Wittwar (Morsbach) patiently worked their way through the contributions of the German-speaking authors and discussed ambiguous passages with them.

My special gratitude goes to the editor of the *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy* series, Marco Mostert (Utrecht), who accepted the volume for publication in the series, read all articles, and adjusted them so that they conformed with the series’ format.

The best one can hope for from collected volume is that the authors contribute in one way or another to the discussion of the central theme.

I am very grateful to all contributors for taking on the suggested theoretical concept – whether they found it convincing or not.

Conceptualising Pre-Modern and Modern Individuality: Some Theoretical Considerations*

FRANZ-JOSEF ARLINGHAUS

*Si je ne vaux pas mieux,
au moins je suis autre*
Jean-Jacques Rousseau

I wan'na be like you
The Monkey Song

Abstract

The paper distinguishes two types of individuality: in the pre-modern era, people conceptualised their individuality by constructing themselves a place in *society*. The suggestion made here differs from older research that sees pre-modern individuality bound to *groups*. In the modern era, in contrast, people place their selves outside or next to society. In this respect, pre-

* I would like to thank the PhD-students, research assistants and assistant professors at Bielefeld University who discussed an earlier version of this text during a seminar. Such discussion is the best an author can hope for; in this case it led to considerable rewriting. I would also like to thank Mirko Wittwar who revised my English and, if not otherwise indicated, translated the German quotations.

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Forms of Individuality and Literacy in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods, ed. F.-J. ARLINGHAUS, *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy*, 31 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), pp. 1-45.

modern ‘inclusion individuality’ and modern ‘exclusion individuality’ differ strongly from each other.

These different forms of individuality are closely linked to the different structures of modern and pre-modern society. In this respect, asking why concepts of individuality have changed amounts to asking why society has changed – and this question is still unanswered, of course. However, bringing individuality and society so closely together questions concepts that see individuality as being a (timelessly) given or want to connect it to changes in mentality based on, for instance, certain features prominent in Christianity.

The advantages in conceptualising individuality in this way may be seen in the possibility to historicise the phenomenon and mark differences without describing pre-modern individuality as being deficient. Placing the self within the frame of pre-modern *society* does not, of course, prevent the single person reflecting about him / herself and developing a strong self-consciousness. In this respect, the paper does not see a difference in ‘self-reflection’ and ‘self-consciousness’ in modern and pre-modern times *in general*, but *in the way* people do so (which can be attributed to the different societal frame these reflections are linked to).

To make the proposed shift from ‘bound to groups’ to ‘inclusion individuality’ more clear, I would like to mention two points: 1) pre-modern autobiographical texts show that their authors place themselves in society through putting themselves in parallel with other deliberately and consciously chosen persons; and 2) pre-modern authors built their self-consciousness strongly on ‘being better than others’ or on an over-fulfilment of norms, while modern authors emphasise ‘being different from others’. The comparative ‘better’ (in contrast to ‘different’) marks a self-conscious individuality that is built on (self-defined) links to society.

The two types of individuality just described have a long tradition in sociological research, dating back at least to Georg Simmel and having been enriched with a new theoretical frame by Niklas Luhmann. They are, however, still somewhat alien to historical research. In this respect, the article and the volume as a whole are also an attempt to work in an interdisciplinary way and make sociological theory fruitful for pre-modern historical research.

1. Thietmar of Merseburg's Self-Description

Woe is me, a wretch joined in fraternity with so many *noble men* (*proceres*), but with an existence so dissimilar to their worthy manner of life. ... Moreover, my intentions are good. But they have produced little because I have not troubled myself to devote sufficient force to them. I always accuse myself, but not freed myself of guilt as I ought to have. Therefore, I require correction in all things because I have not directed myself to him who is praiseworthy above all. *Now see, o reader, what a fine nobleman I am!* You will see a tiny little man whose jaw and left side of the face are deformed by an ulcer which erupted there and continues to swell. The nose, broken in childhood, gives me a laughable appearance. Of all of that I would regret nothing, if only my inner character were bright. Now, I am a wretch, too prone to anger and resistant to virtue, envious, derisive towards others though myself worthy of derision, granting forgiveness to none though obligated to do so. I am a glutton and a hypocrite, greedy and disparaging. And, to conclude these well-deserved reproaches, I can say that I am much worse than one can possibly say or estimate in any way. It would be permissible for anyone not only to mutter but to openly announce that I am a sinner, and it would be appropriate for me to humbly ask for fraternal correction ...¹

¹ Thietmar, *Chronicon*, IV, 75, ed. Thietmar von Merseburg, *Chronik*, ed. and trans. W. TRILLMICH (Darmstadt, 2002: *Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters* 9), pp. 190 ff.: “*Heu me misero, qui tot tantisque immerito sum coniunctus in fraternitate, sed longe dissimilis existo in condigna conversacione! Ego in peccatis iam pene mortuus, ut spero, vivam in lucido conspectu Dei eorundem meritis refocilatus; quia, etsi in hoc seculo parum boni operatus sum, tamen defunctorum semper memor sum. Voluntas mea interdum bona est; sed quia eidem vires aptas suggerere non studeo, parum prodest. Semper me accuso, sed sicut debui reatum non solvo; sumque ideo in omnibus corrigibilis, quia me non converto ad eum, qui est super omnia laudabilis. Agnosce, lector, procerem, et videbis in me parvum homuntionem, maxilla deformem leva et latere eodem, quia hinc olim erupit semper turgescens fistula. Nasus in puericia fractus ridiculum de me facit. Idque totum nil questus essem, si interius aliquid splendescerem. Nunc sum miser, nimis iracundus et ad meliora inflexibilis, invidus, subsannans alios ipse deridendus, nulli pro debito parcens, glutto et simulator, avarus ac detractor et, ut haec convicia merito illata concludam, peior sum, quam possit dici vel ullatenus estimari. Unicuique sit fas non solum muttire, quin potius in aperto, quia peccator sum, dicere, et post correptionem fraternam congruit suppliciter orare*”. I follow the edition of Werner Trillmich rather than the older edition of Holzmann, *Die Chronik des Bischofs Thietmar von Merseburg und ihre Korveier Überarbeitung*, ed. R. HOLZMANN, (Berlin, 1935: *MGH Scriptores rerum Germanicarum: Nova Series* 9). For criticism of Holzmann's edition see S. PATZOLD, “Nachtrag”, in: *Thietmar von Merseburg, Chronik*, ed. W. TRILLMICH (Darmstadt, 2011: *Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters* 9), pp. XXXII-XLVIII, at p. XXXVI. The translation, except the italics, follows *Ottonian Germany: The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg*, trans. D.A. WARNER (Manchester, 2001), p. 203.

In his Chronicle, Bishop Thietmar of Merseburg († 1118) every now and then talks about himself. In the passage just cited he describes his body and character and compares it with his contemporaries. It would be naive, of course, to read these lines as an authentic portrait of Thietmar's self-esteem and inner feelings, but, on the other hand, we would fall short if we just throw them away as one of these typical medieval self-humiliations that could be read as showing oneself off as the perfect, that is: humble monk.² It is not astonishing that Guibert of Nogent and Otloh of St. Emmeram, for instance, portray themselves in a similar way.³ All this seems to be part of a typical *humiliatio* / *exaltatio* game that monks, bishops, kings and emperors played in similar ways.⁴ Our bishop was well aware of the fact that his contemporaries could interpret this self-humiliating description as self-adulation. Another part of his chronicle reads like this: "Externally, I appeared good but I violated my inner being with the worst thoughts. Born of an impure seed, I wallowed in filth like a stinking sow", and – that is important – he comments: "Someone may say: 'You have praised yourself badly'. To that one I respond: this is true, and I do not know anyone worse than myself".⁵ Elsewhere, again addressing his reader, Thietmar stated that he showed more of his bad side than many others ("*Ego conscius*

² H.-W. GOETZ, "Die Chronik Thietmars von Merseburg als Ego-Dokument: Ein Bischof mit gespaltenem Selbstverständnis", in: *Ego Trouble: Authors and their Identities in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. R. CORRADINI et al. (Vienna, 2010: *Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften: Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Denkschriften 385 – Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters* 15), pp. 259-270, at p. 265 (with further literature on Thietmar).

³ See GOETZ, "Die Chronik", p. 269. The newborn Guibert of Nogent is described by himself in his *Monodiae* 1, 3, "like an aborted foetus"; see the edition of E.-R. LABANDE (Ed.), Guibert de Nogent, *Autobiographie*, ed. and trans. E.-R. LABANDE (Paris, 1981: *Les classiques de l'histoire de France au Moyen Age* 34), p. 18. Guibert's ugliness is discussed by F.-J. ARLINGHAUS, "In and out, then and now: The confident self and his relation to society in pre-modern and modern times", in: *Autobiographical Writing and Concepts of Personhood*, ed. S. CHURCH et al. = *The Medieval History Journal* 18.2 (in print).

⁴ G. ALTHOFF, "Humiliatio – Exaltatio: Theorie und Praxis eines herrscherlichen Handlungsmusters", in: *Text und Kontext: Fallstudien und theoretische Begründungen einer kulturwissenschaftlichen Mediävistik*, ed. J.-D. MÜLLER et al. (Munich, 2007: *Schriften des historischen Kollegs: Kolloquien* 64), pp. 39-51, points out that, based on Luke 14: 11, "*Omnis qui se exultat, humiliabitur, et qui se humiliat, exaltabitur*", (self-) humiliation was a kind of prerequisite for exaltation, especially during tenth- through twelfth centuries.

⁵ Thietmar, *Chronicon*, I, 20, ed. TRILLMICH, pp. 23 f.: "*Extrinsecus apparui bonus, interiora violans pessimis cogitationibus; de immundo semine conceptus, volutabar in luto ut immunda sus. Dicat aliquis: male laudasti te! Cui respondeo verum hoc esse, quod deteriolem me nescio*"; trans. WARNER, p. 82. See GOETZ, "Thietmar", p. 265.

mihi multo credibilia tibi quam alius indico)⁶. This almost seems to anticipate Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who holds that the *Confessions* inform about himself with an openness unknown until then.⁷

Indeed, like many other authors even before the eleventh century,⁸ Thietmar is using topics and stereotypes when describing his self, but he has this in common with many authors from all epochs, even modern ones. That an author reflects on this and on how such a self-description might be read by his contemporaries is not that common and shows the high degree of Thietmar's self-awareness. He drew on topoi, but even this is reflected in the text – and linked to his self-description. In terms of reflection and – despite, or maybe better: because of his humiliation – self-esteem, the eleventh-century bishop appears to be quite modern. *Nihil novum sub sole?*

2. Pre-Modern Individuality and Teleology

'Individuality', together with 'freedom' and 'rationality', is one of the central categories of modern society, which uses it to claim distinctiveness and superiority against former epochs and to other cultures different from 'the West'.⁹ The identity of modernity, its 'self-confidence', derives in large part from these attempts at delimitation. Seen in this light, a great part of historical research on the subject of individuality has largely provided confirmation of the value-laden self-assurance of our epoch. Indeed, especially sociological

⁶ Thietmar, *Chronicon*, VIII, 12, ed. TRILLMICH, p. 452. My paraphrase again relies on the translation of Werner Trillmich ("*Ich zeige mich dir in meinem Schuldbewußtsein viel wahrhaftiger als ein anderer das kann*"; Thietmar, *Chronicon*, p. 453) and, Hans-Werner Goetz ("*Ich zeige mich dir bewusst viel wahrhaftiger als jeder andere*"; GOETZ, "Thietmar", p. 269), as David A. Warner seems too far away from "*Ego ... tibi ... indico*", when he translates "Being well aware of my own character, I can give you a more credible report than anyone else" (*Ottoman Germany*, p. 369).

⁷ "*Je forme une entreprise qui n'eut jamais d'exemple ... Je veux montrer à mes semblables un homme dans doute la vérité de la nature; et cet homme, ce sera moi*" (J.-J. ROUSSEAU, *Oeuvres complètes*, I, *Les Confessions – Autres Textes Autobiographiques*, ed. B. GAGNEBIN *et al.*, 11 (Paris, 1969: *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade* 11<check>), p. 5).

⁸ Many examples in: *Ego Trouble*, the aim of the volume seeming to be to push the 'discovery of the individual', located by Morris in the eleventh century, further back. See C. MORRIS, *The Discovery of the Individual 1050-1200* (New York, 1987).

⁹ For a transcultural perspective see: *Selbstzeugnis und Person – Transkulturelle Perspektiven: Der Tagungsband der Abschlussstagung der Forschergruppe*, ed. C. ULBRICH *et al.* (Vienna, Cologne, and Weimar, 2012: *Selbstzeugnisse der Neuzeit* 20).

publications from around 1900 as well as from around 2000 can be read that way. On the other hand, it is fair to say that the same criticism is true for those historians and medievalists who are sure to find an almost ‘modern’ individuality in the twelfth century or even at earlier stages.¹⁰ They not only argue against a still popular picture of the ‘dark’ Middle Ages. Providing modern individuality with a history of a thousand years or more – does that not suggest that ‘our’ form of being is, and – more or less – has always been the way to be? And does this ‘almost’ and ‘more or less’, so often to be found in texts comparing modern and pre-modern individuality, not have a strong teleological bias? There is, no doubt, a difference between these two narratives – the one that links self-consciousness to modern individuality alone, and the one that argues that people (almost) always have been like we are. Nevertheless, both do provide ‘us’ with a feel-good story that, in one way or the other, legitimises our way of life.

What has been said about the teleological aspects of self-consciousness and individuality may also be true for some other aspects – the relationship of person and group, for instance – discussed with respect to our topic. If all these narratives, in one way or the other, may be read as legitimising present-day attitudes towards the self, it has to be underlined, however, that this does not tell us anything about whether these suggestions or assumptions are right or wrong in the first place. Sure, it puts a ‘handle with care’-stamp on these narratives, but this type of criticism does not tell us which content would possibly fit the sources and to the phenomenon itself better. After all, it seems almost impossible to avoid any traces of teleology when dealing with the relationship of pre-modern and modern times. What one might indeed strive for is keeping teleology at a greater distance and challenging a ready-made self-assurance of present-day society when implementing a narrative. Two things may help with doing so: first, ordering and defining what is understood by ‘individuality’ and, secondly, the use of a theoretical framework.¹¹ Both, one may hope, will bring

¹⁰ See the interesting contributions collected in *Ego Trouble*.

¹¹ Rudolf Stichweh points out to the function of (sociological) theory when dealing with historical phenomena (in his case: early modern universities). R. STICHWEH, *Der frühmoderne Staat und die europäische Universität: Zur Interaktion von Politik und Erziehungssystem im Prozeß ihrer Ausdifferenzierung (16.-18. Jahrhundert)* (Frankfurt am Main, 1991), p. 12: “Soziologische Theorie wird hier als ein Mittel verstanden, durch eine möglichst strenge Orientierung an funktionaler Analyse und funktionalen Vergleich frühmoderner Gesellschaftszustände moderne Wertbindungen und präsentistische Perspektivenverzerrungen zu kontrollieren. Gerade die Ahistorizität systematischer und theoretischer Begriffe hat in dieser Sicht den Vorteil, daß sie vom Gegenstand hinreichend distanziert, um nicht implizite Urteile hinsichtlich der Modernität vs. Korruptheit frühmoderner Universitätszustände in die Analyse zu übernehmen” (“Here, sociological

about a certain estrangement to a topic which is – much stronger than in pre-modern times¹² – so excessively loaded with emotions and ideologies (‘self-made man’, autonomous individual, freedom etc.) which otherwise are hard to control.

3. Defining Individuality

Defining individuality as a subject of historical research, it seems, is closely linked to how this subject is located in history as such. Two types of approaches and concepts may be distinguished.

3.1 ‘Individuality’ as Being a Given

‘Discovering’ individuality suggests that - at least implicitly – the phenomenon is a given that only has to be detected. The “common veil” that, according to Jacob Burckhardt, covered human consciousness before the Renaissance, is a metaphor that highlights this: individuality was already there, and it was the circumstances – in Burckhardt’s case “faith” but also only being “conscious of [oneself] only as a member of a race, ... family or corporation – only through some general category” – which obviated its appearance. Consequently, it was in “the political circumstances of Italy” that man recognised him / herself as a “spiritual individual”. The main difference between a family- or corporation-

theory is understood as a means for controlling, by the strictest possible orientation at the functional analysis and functional comparison of early modern states of society, modern value orientations and presentist distortions of the perspective. From this point of view, precisely the a-historic nature of systematic and theoretical concepts has the advantage of providing sufficient distance from the topic to prevent us from adopting implicit judgements concerning the modernity vs. corruption of early modern universal states for our analysis”).

¹² See P. VON MOOS, “Vom Inklusionsindividuum zum Exklusionsindividuum: Persönliche Identität in Mittelalter und Moderne”, in: *Processi di inclusione ed esclusione: Identità ed Emarginazione – Prozesse der Inklusion und Exklusion: Identität und Ausgrenzung = Annali di sociologia – Soziologisches Jahrbuch* 16 (2002-2003), pp. 253-265, at p. 254: “Schon die elementare Frage, was ein Individuum von der Gesellschaft und anderen Individuen unterscheidet und wie dieser Unterschied fremd- und selbstreferentiell beschrieben wird, ist unter dem Aspekt der Relevanz eine moderne, keine mittelalterliche Frage” (“Already the fundamental question of what makes an individual different from society or other individuals and how this difference is described by way of self-reference or reference to others is – under the aspect of relevance – a modern question, not a medieval one”).

bound person and an individual, in Burckhardt's view, is a culture that already distinguished the Greek from the barbarian, the Arab from "other Asians" who "knew themselves only as members of a race".¹³

Burckhardt's text is now over 150 years old. Nevertheless: it points to general assumptions about individuality prominent even today. Much research still identifies, explicitly or implicitly, the combination of given individuality and circumstances as that which allows or does not allow man to recognise himself. What is more: the yardstick to measure this is whether or how strong a personal self-concept relies on certain groups and 'traditional' (often meaning: 'religious') ways of thinking.¹⁴ In this way, becoming an individual is regularly seen as an act of liberation.¹⁵ Those studies that implicitly or explicitly presume that individuality is and has (again: more or less) always been a given, not by accident try to prove that during 'their' favourite epoch (the early modern or the high medieval periods are two prominent candidates) individuality could already be detected. Within this approach, finding someone who lived in opposition to the norms and values of his / her time, or who lived on the margins of society, seemed to be a good way to prove this.¹⁶ On the other hand, identifying obstacles that presumably prevented people from living their lives – often the Church and state authorities – helped to explain why in a given period individuality was not as prominent as it is today.

The problem here is not so much 'how to become an individual' as 'being able to live her or (mostly) his individuality' despite pressure from society – which, as is presumed, was bigger in pre-modern times. Putting aside the ideological implications, this approach, in my view, has three deficits. First, the definition of what individuality really is does not become very clear. Secondly,

¹³ J. BURCKHARDT, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (Harmondsworth, 1990: *Penguin Classics*), p. 98.

¹⁴ See, among others, R. VAN DÜLMEN, *Die Entdeckung des Individuums 1500-1800* (Frankfurt am Main, 1997), rightly criticised by M. SCHEUTZ *et al.*, "Individualisierungsprozesse in der Frühen Neuzeit? Anmerkungen zu einem Konzept", *Wiener Zeitschrift zur Geschichte der Neuzeit* 1.2 (2001), pp. 38-59.

¹⁵ R. VAN DÜLMEN, "Einleitung", in: *Entdeckung des Ichs: Die Geschichte der Individualisierung vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. R. VAN DÜLMEN, (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna, 2001), pp. 1-7, at p. 5: "Die Befreiung von der Tradition ist ein Akt der Selbstfindung" ("Liberation from the bondage of tradition is an act of finding oneself"). *Tradition* here refer first of all to religion.

¹⁶ See, e.g., T. BOIADJIEV, "Die Marginalisierung als *principium individuationis* des mittelalterlichen Menschen – am Beispiel Abaelards", in: *Individuum und Individualität im Mittelalter*, ed. J.A. AERTSEN *et al.* (Berlin, 1996: *Miscellanea medievalea* 24), pp. 111-123, drawing on Abelard.

society is seen as something that is opposed to individuality, almost as its enemy, while even within the frame of this approach it could be argued that it is the process of societal pressure and the desire to be ‘free’ that brings about individuality. And thirdly, it would seem somewhat strange if, while most other basic human experiences – love, childhood, attitudes to death etc. – must be, in the end, seen first of all as societal and cultural phenomena that do change over time, this should not be true for individuality.

3.2 Learning How to Be an Individual

Many studies place much more emphasis on changing basic intellectual and mental attitudes over time, on the development of ideas and concepts as the origin of individuality in history. While at least some of these studies would not deny that a nucleus of ‘individuality’ is something inherent in man, emphasis is laid on specific historical conditions and processes that brought the phenomenon to the fore. The main questions asked here are what has made self-consciousness and – as a prerequisite – introspection a prominent concept in history. By asking these questions, this approach at the same time identifies those main elements of ‘individuality’ it considers to be important.

Whereas for some historians secularisation as a movement away from traditional forms of thinking is essential for unfolding individual personalities, especially medievalists, without questioning this in general, underline two aspects of the Christian religion as vital for the development of individuality: the implementation of confession, and the idea that everyone will be individually judged by God. At first sight it seems plausible that both phenomena, so deeply rooted in western religious thought, paved the way to a culture of introspection and self-reflection that, in the long run and combined with other developments, led to self-consciousness and individuality. It must have had effects on the strong ties with families, guilds and other social groups, this approach suggests, which were so important in pre-modern society.¹⁷

Given the importance of the two aspects mentioned, it seems worthwhile to discuss them separately.

¹⁷ P. DINZELBACHER, “Das erzwungene Individuum: Sündenbewußtsein und Pflichtbeichte”, in: *Entdeckung des Ichs*, pp. 41-60 (but see *infra*, n. 19); K.H. OHLIG, “Christentum – Kirche – Individuum”, *ibid.*, pp. 11-40, at pp.14 f.; M. WAGNER-EGELHAAF, *Autobiographie* (Stuttgart and Weimar, 2005), p. 134.

Confession

As is well known, the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 made annual ‘individual’ confession to the local priest obligatory. As an institutionalised and even forced form of self-reflection, it seems a good candidate to enhance and develop individuality.¹⁸

Convincing as this may seem at first sight, recent studies profoundly question that confession paved the way to ‘individuality’. First of all: in pre-modern times, reflecting on sins was primarily oriented towards a system of norms connected with a catalogue of punishments, at the God-given order of the world, leaving hardly any space for personalised values or attitudes.¹⁹ In this respect, confession does not lead to reflections on the inner self. Rather, these reflections were concerned with relating the deeds and intentions of a given person to the frame of collective standards and principles, explained and enforced by Church and other authorities.²⁰ The search for a conscience uncou-

¹⁸ Sometimes even parallels between confession and modern psychoanalysis are drawn (and are convincing to a certain extent). Cf., e.g., A. HAHN, “Zur Soziologie der Beichte und anderer institutionalisierter Bekenntnisse: Selbstthematisierung und Zivilisationsprozeß”, *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 34 (1982), pp. 407-434, at p. 413: “So wie der Analysand auf der Couch des Psychotherapeuten im psychoanalytischen Strukturmodell eine Matrix für seine individuelle Triebbiographie findet, so fand der mittelalterliche Kaufmann, Handwerker, Gelehrte, Priester oder Adelige in der Kasuistik der Summen und Manuale, Beichtspiegel usw. einen Raster für die Beurteilung seiner Sünden” (“Just like the analysand on the psychiatrist’s couch finds, by the psycho-analytical structural model, a matrix for the individual biography of his drives, just so, through the casuistics of sums and manuals, confession manuals etc. the medieval merchant, craftsman, scholar, priest or nobleman found a raster for judging his sins”). But Alois Hahn is also aware of the limits of this institution and underlines that ‘confession’ by itself is far from bringing about modern individuality.

¹⁹ DINZELBACHER, “Das erzwungene Individuum”, p. 59, suggests that confession most of the time resembles a kind of “exam at school, where the believer was questioned [by the priest] like a child and thus infantilised” (“Da die Prüfung [=Beichte] im Prinzip nicht anders abließ als sein Examen in der Schule, wurde der Gläubige, der sich wie ein Kind abfragen lassen mußte, künstlich infantilisiert ...”). D.W. SABEAN, “Production of the self during the age of confessionality”, *Central European History* 29.1 (1997), pp. 1-18, underlines the aspect of power.

²⁰ E. SCHLOTHEUBER, “Norm und Innerlichkeit: Zur problematischen Suche nach den Anfängen der Individualität”, *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 31 (2004), pp. 329-357, at pp. 350 and 356-357: “Aber diese Selbstvergewisserung und Reflexion bezog sich nicht auf eine persönliche Wertung oder die subjektive Einschätzung eigener Erlebnisse im heutigen Sinne, sondern war auf die gottgegebene Ordnung ausgerichtet, so wie sie sich durch die Tradition legitimiert im Laufe der Zeit bewährt hatte. ... Die sich in weiteren Kreisen ausbildende Fähigkeit zur Selbstreflexion führte somit keinesfalls zwangsläufig zu einer Innerlichkeit, die als abgeschlossen gedacht nur dem eigenen ‘Ich’ zugänglich war, sondern sie eröffnete eine zweite Ebene der Reali-

pled from collective ideas of sin and punishment, and shaped by a more self-directed, individual judgement of what could be good and bad, would probably lead us to late seventeenth century.²¹ Whether this could be seen as the result of a very long process that started during the high Middle Ages is at least doubtful. Rather, we should consider new powerful theological and philosophical concepts which, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, opened up a space for ethical reflection apart from religious authorities.²² It was presumably Immanuel Kant who marked the turning point. For him, conscience draws on a self-obliged awareness of responsibility (*“Das Gewissen ist ein Bewußtsein, das für sich selbst Pflicht ist”*),²³ thus opening up the way – whether this was intentional or not – to individualised forms of morality. It can be left open here whether a centuries-long practice of ‘traditional’ confession led to this

tät, die als eine allgemein gültige und prinzipiell offen zugängliche verstanden wurde. Diese theologisch ausgedeutete Ebene konnte so als eine kollektiv nutzbare gedacht werden, als ein offen zugänglicher Raum, den sich bestimmte soziale Gruppen gemeinsam erschließen konnten, ein Raum, der Sinn und Ziel des eigenen Handelns innerhalb der gottgesetzten Ordnung vermittelte (“But this self-assurance and reflection did not refer to any individual judgement on one’s own experiences in the modern sense but was according to the God-given order as, over the times, it had proven its worth and been legitimated by tradition. ... Thus, the capability of self-reflection as it developed in wider circles did not necessarily lead to a kind of inwardness which, imagined as being closed off, was exclusively open to the individual ‘I’, but it opened up a second level of reality which was considered generally valid and basically accessible. Thus, this theologically interpreted level could be imagined as being collectively utilisable, as a freely accessible space certain social groups might open up for themselves, a space communicating the meaning and objective of one’s own actions within the God-given order”).

²¹ Confession in a protestant, especially Calvinist context (where public confession is common), is directed towards clearing the group from a member that committed a sin; H. SCHILLING, “Kirchenzucht im frühneuzeitlichen Europa in interkonfessionell vergleichender Perspektive – eine Zwischenbilanz”, in: *Kirchenzucht und Sozialdisziplinierung im frühneuzeitlichen Europa*, ed. H. SCHILLING, (Berlin, 1994: *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung, Beiheft 16*), pp. 11-40, comparing Calvinist, Lutheran and Catholic forms of confession and their effects on self-discipline. See also H.D. KITTSTEINER, *Die Entstehung des modernen Gewissens* (Frankfurt am Main, 1991).

²² KITTSTEINER, *Die Entstehung des modernen Gewissens*, p. 156: *“Hinter dieser ganzen Entwicklung zwischen Reformation und Aufklärung steht immer nur eine einzige Frage: kann dem Gewissen eine innere, verpflichtende Kraft zugeschrieben werden, so daß es autonom auf sich selbst begründet ist, oder ist es immer auf reale und imaginäre Strafgewalten bezogen, auf die lohnende und strafende Obrigkeit, und auf Gott und Teufel? Die beiden imaginären Strafinstanzen Gewitter und Hölle verschwinden aus dem Diskurs der normsetzenden Schichten in etwa parallelen Entwicklungsschüben; die Autonomisierung des Gewissens entsteht unter diesem Aspekt als ein Nebeneffekt, weil die vormaligen Straforte von ihm abfallen. Aber woher soll es dann sein verpflichtende Kraft nehmen?”*.

²³ Quoted after KITTSTEINER, *ibid.*

fundamental change in the relation between self-consciousness and confession, or whether this change must be attributed to other developments, for instance new forms of societal differentiation in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that demanded, as a consequence, a new relation between person and society, as suggested by our theoretical frame.

The Last Judgement

In the Last Judgement, it seems, the Christian religion possessed a prominent place where the individual person would be made responsible for the deeds and misdeeds performed during his or her lifetime. In pre-modern times, as is well known, the idea of the final judgement was very much present in everyday life, and it did indeed affect the attitudes and activities of noblemen, city dwellers and peasants alike. Paintings and reliefs of the Archangel Michael with the Book of Life and a pair of scales are but obvious illustrations of the importance of this aspect of Christianity for every-day life.

At a closer look, the overall concept of the two judgements – the one directly after death and the Last Judgement at the end of time – is not, at least not only, that of a single soul being confronted with his / her deeds in life. Indeed, the verdict of both judgements is strongly influenced by a variety of different backers and supporters. Leaving aside the saints, the fate of the dead is closely linked to the actions of groups – be it the monks of a certain cloister, guilds or relatives – that would pray for him or her or organise other kinds of assistance.²⁴ What is more: the deceased is not only, as is well known, imagined as being present in this world, he / she is usually conceptualised as being present during group activities (during Mass or depicted on paintings on public display,²⁵ which were not only found in churches, for instance). The *ars moriendi* of the fifteenth century – one of the first was written by Jean Gerson in 1408 – which prepared for the first judgement right after death, point out that the dying in the very hour of their death urgently needed assistance from experi-

²⁴ A. ANGENENDT, *Geschichte der Religiosität im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt, 2000), pp. 659 ff. It is difficult to follow O.G. OEXLE, “Memoria als Kultur”, in: *Memoria als Kultur*, ed. O.G. OEXLE, (Göttingen, 1995: *Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte* 121), pp. 9-78, at pp. 38 ff. (esp. p. 48), who describes in detail the importance of memory for pre-modern societies as a cultural and group phenomenon, but then argues that it helped to shape individuality.

²⁵ Many examples are given by OEXLE, “Memoria als Kultur”, pp. 43 ff.

enced persons – better not relatives or close friends –, who would help them not to fall into the deadly sin of despair and withstand the temptations of demons and devils.²⁶ While being held responsible by God for the things you have done during your lifetime may lead to reflection, the practices of pre-modern Christian religion were not at all conducive to leaving people alone with their thoughts. The practices mainly provided norms to pave the ways in which this reflection should be performed, and the person's fate after death relied heavily on the assistance of different groups that would support him / her in one way or the other. Maybe this is not an accident, because Christianity, after all, is a religion that centered on congregation and community, as even Martin Luther's theology underlines.²⁷ As Peter van Moos puts it, Christianity places more emphasis on 'de-individualisation' than individualisation.²⁸

To sum up. So far, in search for a definition of the 'individual' or 'individuality', we have followed the traditional lines of research and discussed the concepts that underlie these approaches. A high degree of introspection, self-consciousness and – combined with this – a distance to groups, be they families or other social entities, are at the heart of these definitions. Being different or unique may be seen as a result of self-reflection and of the way a person establishes a distance between him / her and the people around, looking for his / her own way of living and his / her own, 'individual', attitude to the world. Whether it was the political circumstances of Renaissance Italy that helped to

²⁶ A. REINIS, *Reforming the Art of Dying: The ars moriendi in the German Reformation (1519-1528)* (Aldershot, 2007: *St. Andrews Studies in Reformation History*), pp. 17 ff.; F. BAYARD, *L'art du bien mourir au XV^e siècle: Étude sur les arts du bien mourir au bas moyen âge à la lumière d'un ars moriendi allemand du XV^e siècle* (Paris, 2000).

²⁷ T. KAUFMANN, *Martin Luther* (Munich, 2006), p. 101: "Gerade der Apostel der persönlichen Glaubensgewißheit, für den in 'meinem', im je eigenen Glauben der Dreh- und Angelpunkt des Gottesverhältnisses und der Heilsgewißheit bestand, betonte den Gemeinschaftsbezug der christlichen Existenz wie kaum je ein Theologe vor ihm. Denn das Evangelium selbst stiftet Gemeinschaft und bedarf der Gemeinschaft" ("Precisely Luther, the apostle of individual certainty of faith, for whom 'my own', each individual faith was pivotal for the relation to God and certainty of salvation, emphasised more than almost any other theologian how much Christian existence was related to the community. For the Gospel itself creates community and requires commonness"). It is worth recalling Matthew 18: 19: "Furthermore, I tell all of you with certainty that if two of you agree on earth about anything you request, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven, because where two or three have come together in my name, I am there among them".

²⁸ VON MOOS, "Inklusionsindividuum", p. 257, discussing Gal. 2: 20 and 4: 1-7, summarises: "Dem Anspruch nach tritt in der christlichen Botschaft das entindividualisierende Potential stärker hervor als das individualisierende" ("The message of Christianity at least claims to emphasise much more the de-individualising than the individualising potential").

disengage the self, seen as a given, from group ties and superstition, or whether special elements within the Christian religion decisively shaped a new mentality of introspection – both proclaim a kind of ‘development’ of individuality, starting from the fifteenth or twelfth centuries respectively, to the present, often without discussing how much at the presumed starting point ‘individuality’ differed from its present-day forms. Nevertheless, it is interesting to look at certain aspects of Christian religion which, in this context, seem to have fostered introspection, and with it: individuality. However, a closer look at the everyday practices of religion questions these concepts, because they show strong influence of institutions and norms on the way people reflect on themselves, and link the fate of the single person to his or her relationship to groups and institutions such as, for instance, monasteries.

So far, the criticism of the two concepts that describe pre-modern individuality, or better: that describe the origins of modern individuality in pre-modern times, have primarily questioned the causes and impulses that brought about individualism. Individuality, as it has been described up to this point, conceptualises the modern individual as being autonomous, rational and almost independent of a society he – it is mostly ‘he’ – lives in. Developed around 1800, with much ideological bias – consider the debate on individual entrepreneurship versus the state-directed economy during the Cold War – it became somewhat prominent in popular culture during the twentieth century. Frank Sinatra’s “I did it my way” links it to success, and it takes a monkey like King Louis of Walt Disney’s *Jungle Book* to sing a song like “I wan’na be like you”. Nevertheless, sociological concepts of ‘individuality’ as they have been developed during the previous decades tell a different story.

4. *Some Remarks about Present-Day Autobiographies*

“Since the early days of his youth ...”.²⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, with reference to Jean-Paul Sartre, mentions this all too common phrase to show how in biographies and autobiographies events are placed in a chronological order to provide the lives of their protagonists with aims, with sense and direction. In essence, by such stories people endow their lives with a logic and a thread, building relations of causes and effects between events that, at a closer look, hardly ever

²⁹ P. BOURDIEU, “L’illusion biographique”, *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 62-63 (1986), pp. 69-72, at p. 69: “depuis son plus jeune âge”.

were linked causally.³⁰ What is more: the stories people tell about their lives are strongly influenced by official and institutionalised models (like the passport, the curriculum vitae, and official biographies),³¹ and this influence also contaminates the more confidential, private ways of self-reflection. The ideas Pierre Bourdieu presented in his short article match recent empirical findings. Andreas Reckwitz, for instance, analysed how during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries an ever-changing social context altered the way in which people described their ‘selves’.³² The self – or, to be more cautious – the texts that try to portrait the inner self and personal individuality, change from decade to decade and are strongly formatted by the *zeitgeist* or the ever-changing social environment.

In fact, the pathos and emphasis with which Jean-Jacques Rousseau and others describe their ‘self’ appear somewhat strange when seen in this light. Some authors of autobiographies from the second half of the twentieth century seemed to be aware of the fact that autobiographies provide their authors and readers with an all too coherent narrative – and draw their consequences. Roland Barthes, for instance, organised his autobiographical text mostly like a dictionary, in alphabetical order.³³ Elias Canetti’s autobiography is interpreted as “a project of auctorial self-creation” (“*ein Projekt auktorialer Selbsterschaffung*”),³⁴ meaning that Canetti conceptualises his autobiography not as *docu*

³⁰ BOURDIEU, “L’illusion biographique”, *ibid.*: “On est sans doute en droit de supposer que le récit autobiographique s’inspire toujours, au moins pour une part, du souci de donner sens, de rendre raison, de dégager une logique à la fois rétrospective et prospective, une consistance et une constance, en établissant des relations intelligibles, comme celle de l’effet à la cause efficiente ou finale, entre les états successifs, ainsi constitués en étapes d’un développement nécessaire”;

P. BOURDIEU, *La distinction: Critique sociale du jugement* (Paris, 1979), p. 69<check>.

³¹ BOURDIEU, *La distinction*, p. 70: “Le monde social, qui tend à identifier la normalité avec l’identité entendue comme constance de soi-même d’un être responsable, c’est-à-dire prévisible ou, au moins, intelligible, à la manière d’une histoire bien construite (par opposition à l’histoire contée par un idiot), dispose de toutes sortes d’institutions de totalisation et d’unification du moi”.

³² A. RECKWITZ, *Das hybride Subjekt: Eine Theorie der Subjektkulturen von der bürgerlichen Moderne zur Postmoderne* (Weilerswist, 2006).

³³ R. BARTHES, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (Paris, 1995: *Écrivains de toujours*); WAGNER-EGELHAAF, *Autobiographie*, pp. 202 f.

³⁴ WAGNER-EGELHAAF, *Autobiographie*, p. 204: “Ist im Augenspiel [one of three of Canetti’s autobiographical writings] die Rede davon, dass die Literatur in Mittel sei, Menschen durch Worte am Leben zu erhalten, sie gleichsam durch Worte zu erschaffen, so lässt sich diese auch in anderen Schriften Canettis verkündete Programmatik des Schreibens gegen den Tod in allererster Linie als ein Projekt auktorialer Selbsterschaffung lesen, als ein Projekt, dessen Bruchstellen im Lichte der vom autobiographischen Erzähler selbst geschmähten psychoanalytischen Les-

mentation of an inner self but as a *means to create it*. He thus leaves open what kind of ‘self’ might exist outside the text and what it would look like, and seems to put Bourdieu’s ideas into practice. No wonder that, unlike Rousseau and his followers, at the beginning of the twenty-first century the search for an authentic, inner self is no longer on the agenda of many present-day autobiographical texts. Rather, authors are consciously using even fictional means as a tool to test the possibilities and boundaries of narrating their selves.³⁵

Admittedly, concepts of the self as well as the modern genre of the autobiography are getting more and more diverse. Admittedly, libraries and bookshops still provide us with many Rousseau-style texts – and how could it be different, given the dominant ideologies mentioned above that support this kind of self-description. On the other hand, even widespread media like film and TV-series are populated with figures that constantly struggle to bring about a coherent self, and constantly fail to do so. Fiction as a tool of coming to grips with the ‘reality’ of the constructed self³⁶ – this is more than another game in the playground of literature. Categories like ‘discovery of the inner self’ or ‘authenticity’ turn out to be almost alien to this type of autobiography.

But what, then, is left of the individual? Getting back to Bourdieu, a person’s name seems to be the only feature of importance that hardly varies when its bearer changes over time or switches between different social roles. However, this feature, Bourdieu himself observes, lacks a solid content. The name refers to an individual that, after all, turns out to be but a bundle of heterogeneous, ever-changing biological and social properties.³⁷ That during the late

art zutage treten”.

³⁵ M. WAGNER-EGELHAAF, “Zum Stand und zu den Perspektiven der Autobiographieforschung in der Literaturwissenschaft”, *Bios* 23.2 (2010), pp. 188-200, at p. 197: “*Fiktionale Mittel ... dienen in der literarischen Autobiographie dazu, Grenzen und Möglichkeiten von Selbstentwürfen auszuloten*” (“With the literary autobiography, fictional means ... serve for sounding out the limits and possibilities of concepts of the self”).

³⁶ The technical term is ‘autofiction’. WAGNER-EGELHAAF, “Zum Stand und zu den Perspektiven der Autobiographieforschung”, *ibid.*: “*‘Autofiktion’ ist nicht der unvermeidliche Einsatz des Fiktionalen in der Selbstbeschreibung, sondern der willentliche und wissentliche, der ganz bewusst eingesetzte und ausgestellte Einsatz der Fiktion, insofern als sie dazu da ist, die ‘Wirklichkeit’ des autobiographischen Ichs zu konstituieren*” (“‘Autofiction’ is not the unavoidable use of the fictional for self-description but the purposeful and conscious, deliberate use of fiction, insofar as it has the function of constituting the ‘reality’ of the autobiographical ‘I’”).

³⁷ BOURDIEU, “L’illusion biographique”, pp. 70 f.: “*Ainsi s’explique que le nom propre ne puisse pas décrire des propriétés et qu’il ne véhicule aucune information sur ce qu’il nomme : du fait que ce qu’il désigne n’est jamais qu’une rhapsodie composite et disparate de propriétés biologiques et sociales en changement constant, toutes les descriptions seraient valables seule-*

Middle Ages we find a more ‘flexible’ use of names shall only be mentioned in passing here.³⁸

5. Linking Structures of Society and Forms of Individuality

All this does not mean that there is no such thing as the ‘individual’. “What we need are metaphors and stories”, Caroline Walker Bynum states, “that will help us imagine a world in which we really change yet really remain the same thing”.³⁹ We as individuals and we as a society – to expand on Caroline Walker Bynum’s phrase – are obviously in need of an ‘institution’ like the self or the individual. What is needed is an ‘address’,⁴⁰ a point to refer to that matches the requirements of society and person alike. And it does not seem to be far fetched to assume that all societies at all times were in need of such an ‘address’ or such an ‘institution’; and it is not far fetched either that there are – and that is the main point of this paper – different ways of designing such an address, according to the different historical epochs.⁴¹

But is ‘address’ not too abstract a term to get a hold on a complex phenomenon such as ‘individuality’? How does this fit with the above-mentioned thesis that ‘introspection’ and ‘liberation from group ties’ are pivotal for defining individuality? Certainly, introspection and self-reflection do play an important role here. But they do so not as a tool or a torchlight to find an inner self. Rather, they are means to work on the narratives that would create and shape an institution called individuality.⁴²

ment dans les limites d’un stade ou d’un espace. Autrement dit, il ne peut attester l’identité de la personnalité, comme individualité socialement constituée, qu’au prix d’une formidable abstraction”.

³⁸ See the contribution of C. ROLKER, “Me, myself and my name: Naming and identity in the late Middle Ages”, in this volume.

³⁹ C.W. BYNUM, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York, 2001), p. 188.

⁴⁰ ‘Addressability’ is a term used by P. FUCHS, “Adressabilität als Grundbegriff der soziologischen Systemtheorie”, *Soziale Systeme* 3.1 (1997), pp. 57-80, meaning that communication needs to establish social ‘addresses’ as points of reference for communication (which is also true for communicating with oneself). The way in which these addresses are established varies according to different forms of society.

⁴¹ See the previous footnote.

⁴² See C. ULBRICH *et al.*, “Selbstzeugnis und Person: Transkulturelle Perspektiven”, in: *Selbstzeugnis und Person – Transkulturelle Perspektiven*, ed. C. ULBRICH *et al.* (Vienna, Cologne, and Weimar, 2012: *Selbstzeugnisse der Neuzeit* 20), pp. 1-19, at p. 3, who suggest to use the expression ‘self-narratives’ instead of ‘autobiography’ and ‘ego-documents’, because ‘self-narra-

Liberation from group ties needs, in the light of what has just been said, differentiated reasoning. Certainly, even in modern times you find people who build their identity strongly on their nationality or their religious belief.⁴³ But even the individuality of those would, according to Bourdieu, Beck,⁴⁴ Reckwitz, and others, be strongly influenced by different aspects of modern society. Andreas Reckwitz, for instance, observes specific (and changing) codes and practices of individuality in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A certain person is ‘individual’ only insofar as she or he makes (more or less consciously, quite often accidentally) use of leeway in composing these practices.⁴⁵

Does that mean that any distinction between modern and pre-modern ‘individuality’ is obsolete as well? A suggestion made by Ulrich Beck points in the direction of the argument I try to develop here:

The individual is indeed removed from traditional commitments and support relationships, but exchanges them for the constraints of existence in the labor market and as a consumer, with the standardisations and controls they contain. The place of *traditional* ties and social forms (social class, nuclear family) is taken by *secondary* agencies and institutions, which stamp the biography of the individual and make that person dependent upon fashions, social policy, economic cycles and markets, contrary to the image of individual control which establishes itself in consciousness”.⁴⁶

Beck obviously has the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in mind, but it would not be unfair to expand ‘traditional ties’ to earlier centuries and to families, guilds, cloisters and other groups so prominent during the Middle Ages and the early modern period.

tives’ would be more open and less contaminated with ideas such as ‘authenticity’ or ‘truth’.

⁴³ Nineteenth-century autobiographies about conversion aim precisely at belonging to the new group. See A. SCHASER, “Schreiben um dazuzugehören: Konversionserzählungen im 19. Jahrhundert”, in: *Selbstzeugnis und Person*, pp. 381-398. For autobiographies of orthodox communists, see C. JUNG, *Flucht in den Terror: Das sowjetische Exil in Autobiographien deutscher Kommunisten* (Frankfurt am Main, 2008). For competing memberships and their temporal limitations in modernity, see S. HIRSCHAUER, “Un / doing Differences: Die Kontingenz sozialer Zugehörigkeiten – Un / doing Differences: The Contingency of Social Belonging”, *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 43.3 (2014), pp. 170-191.

⁴⁴ U. BECK, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (Los Angeles etc., 1992), p. 131.

⁴⁵ RECKWITZ, *Das hybride Subjekt*, pp. 47ff.

⁴⁶ U. BECK, *Risikogesellschaft: Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main, 1986), p. 211.

The discussion so far informs us that the old candidates for defining individuality do not really match the findings, not even in our days. Putting aside the somewhat romantic definition of (modern) individuality as being highly self-reflected and autonomous, the studies mentioned coin the individual and its individuality by the culture she or he lives in. Bourdieu, Beck, and Reckwitz, although using different approaches and different sources, go even a step further: It is not the inner self that brings about ‘the self’, but the given society in a given moment seems to produce the way in which people consider themselves ‘individual’:

From the cultural-theoretical point of view, the individual ... can only be imagined as a subject, i.e. as a socially-culturally modelled entity. However, this individual social-cultural entity includes idiosyncrasies. They must not be misunderstood as indicating a kind of ‘liberty’ which – in the form of a freely chosen existentialist act – separates and takes position against the social-cultural forms; rather these idiosyncrasies develop in the course of the subjective appropriation and reproduction of the form itself.⁴⁷

This is not to say that reflecting about the self and the writing of autobiographies is irrelevant. It only means that these reflections and writings take their point of departure as well as their concepts not from an imagined ‘inner self’ but from society. The basic idea as such is not at all new; in fact, it is almost as old as sociology.⁴⁸ The question is what that means for a long-term historical analysis of ‘individuality’.

⁴⁷ RECKWITZ, *Das hybride Subjekt*, p. 48: “Im kulturtheoretischen Verständnis ist der einzelne ... niemals anders denn als Subjekt, das heißt als eine sozial-kulturell modellierte Instanz denkbar. Aber diese einzelne sozial-kulturelle Instanz enthält Idiosynkrasien. Diese dürfen nicht als Kennzeichen einer ‘Freiheit’ missverstanden werden, die sich – nach Art eines existentialistischen Aktes der Wahl – separiert und gegen die sozial-kulturellen Formen positioniert; vielmehr bilden sich die Idiosynkrasien im Innern der subjektiven Aneignung und Reproduktion dieser Form selbst”.

⁴⁸ See, e.g., the classical study of G.H. MEAD, *Mind, Self and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist* (Chicago, 1934). One could attribute this concept, that emphasises society as a strong ‘agent’ that brings about individuality, to a *déformation professionnelle* of sociologists. Psychiatrists would probably argue in a different manner and not look at society but rather at psychological dispositions. The question is, which approach is more adequate and more beneficial to historical research?

6. *Historicising Individuality in Sociological Theory I: Georg Simmel*

In a classical study, Georg Simmel suggested an inspiring model of how society could possibly shape individuality. In every society, according to him, the single person is placed within various 'social circles' (family, work – which by themselves offer different social circles of participation –, citizenship, membership in different associations, clubs etc.). The difference between modern and pre-modern lies both in the way these circles are related to each other and in the relationship of these circles with respect to a given person.

For modernity, Simmel postulates that a single person participates in many circles that exist independently of each other and sometimes have hardly anything in common. The person, in this model, functions as a kind of intersection of these different social circles (a given student goes to a certain university, has a job downtown, holds the passport of a certain country, practices his / her religion, his / her sport, is a member of a charity organisation, goes out with friends who do not share his / her nationality nor his / her workplace ...). Modern individuality, Simmel suggests, is essentially based on a synthesis of participation in the various social circles, a synthesis that is unique already because hardly two persons participate in all the same circles. 'Individuality' as the outcome of a synthesis of various circles of life – perhaps the basic idea may be summarised this way. This synthesis again, as the thought may be continued, results at the same time in the individual's distancing from each of the circles (an aspect we will have to return to).

Concerning the Middle Ages, the sociologist assumes that either the social circles existed in parallel, side by side, without intersection by the individual, or that they were concentrically organised around the individual. Simmel gives some examples of this: university students in Bologna who wanted to be granted the citizenship of that Italian town were excluded from the university. Both university and town were 'associations' (*Genossenschaften*) that would not allow double membership. Thus we have two social circles existing parallel to each other, demanding an either / or decision by the individual, but not a synthesis. In contrast to that, the social circles of guild and city were organised concentrically, enclosing the individual. This type of 'intersection' would not demand the kind of synthesis modern society with its structures asks for. Of course, as Simmel already knew, the situation was not always that simple, and indeed, the pre-modern age also proves to be increasingly complex. Simmel discusses this and takes the medieval English royal court as an example. The

court is well known for its already very refined administration with different offices and tasks people had to perform. The tasks themselves, however, were not “sufficiently differentiated”, the author says, to demand a synthesis like that of the nineteenth century, for instance.⁴⁹

Simmel’s text has many more and different facets than can be recalled here. For instance, he refers to the fact that being located within concentric circles is found even in the modern age, just as, on the other hand, ‘overlapping’ circles may not be totally absent in the pre-modern age.⁵⁰ And there is a certain teleological bias in his writing when he thinks that the number of social circles a single person participates in could serve as a yardstick of cultural development.⁵¹ Nevertheless, his suggestion provides us with a concept of individuality that not only locates its origins within the structures of society. More than that: having different modes of ‘doing society’ in mind, his concept opens up possibilities for a more differentiated description of modern and pre-modern individuality. If we want to see a difference at all between modern and pre-modern autobiographical writings and concepts of individuality – and the very fact that the literary genre of ‘autobiography’ is a modern one makes this promising, along with much recent research that highlights ever more differences – this text makes an inspiring suggestion. Seen in the light of sociological theory, different forms of self-consciousness and self-reflection are but secondary effects, depending primarily on specific structures of society.

7. *Historicising Individuality in Sociological Theory II: Niklas Luhmann*

In a way, the suggestion made by Niklas Luhmann seems to be a continuation of Simmel’s concepts.⁵² His approach also assumes that it is primarily the

⁴⁹ G. SIMMEL, *Soziologie: Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung*, ed. O. RAMMSTEDT (Frankfurt am Main, 1992: *Georg Simmel Gesamtausgabe* 11), p. 475: “Indem derselbe Kreis von Personen sich zu so mannigfaltigen Amtskollegien gruppierte, ist ersichtlich eine besondere Charakteristik der Subjekte durch diese Synthese nicht gegeben: die objektiven Funktionsinhalte konnten unter solchen Umständen noch nicht hinreichend differenziert sein, um ihre Vereinigung auf den Einzelnen zur *ratio essendi* oder *cognoscendi* einer ganz individuellen Bestimmtheit zu machen”.

⁵⁰ See SIMMEL, *Soziologie*, pp. 472. and p 475.

⁵¹ SIMMEL, *Soziologie*, p. 464: “Die Zahl der verschiedenen Kreise, in denen der einzelne steht, ist einer der Gradmesser der Kultur”.

⁵² See A. NASSEHI, “Gesellschaftstheorie, Kulturphilosophie und Thanatologie: Eine gesellschaftstheoretische Rekonstruktion von Georg Simmels Theorie der Individualität”, in: *Differen-*

social structures which create the modern kind of individuality, and his approach also knows how to distinguish between pre-modern and modern kinds of individuality. However, he goes further insofar as he develops a much more differentiated image of both modern and pre-modern society and is thus able to be more precise in theorising ‘individuality’ in the named epochs and to give reasons for the observed differences.

A quick glance at how Luhmann conceptualises modern and pre-modern society is necessary. Modern society is structured by different systems: law, economy, politics, but also religion, art, family and love are portrayed as such systems, each operating by its own distinction (right and wrong in the case of law, transcendence and immanence in the case of religion, for instance). These systems should not be confused with institutions; rather, they point to spheres of communication (as clearly indicated by ‘love’) which are oriented along specific distinctions. As long as a painting is discussed in respect of its aesthetic value, communication takes place within the realm of ‘art’ (and the painting’s originality may be compared with that of a novel). As soon as the price of the painting is discussed, we are operating within the economic sphere (and its value may be compared with that of a car, for instance). While, on the one hand, it is clear that the systems may influence each other, on the other hand, due to their specific modes of distinction, they do operate independently.⁵³

This is a far too brief summary of what systems theory is about. Instead of describing the theory at length, I would like to highlight the consequences for our topic. In a functionally highly differentiated society the individual participates in each of the different systems only in the form of (limited) roles. In politics we are voters or, at best, Members of Parliament or of the government, in the economic system we are reduced to buyers or producers of goods, etc. While this echoes Simmel’s ‘social circles’, in contrast ‘systems’ are entities based on communication and are defined by the defined distinctions. What is more: Luhmann highlights that, first of all, expectations of a given person are linked to the specific role he or she has to perform, acting within the frame of a given system. True, when approaching a supermarket checkout, when talking to the owner of an art gallery, or participating in religious gatherings, it is ex-

zierungsfolgen: Beiträge zur Soziologie der Moderne, ed. A. NASSEHI, (Opladen and Wiesbaden, 1999), pp. 85-104. The ongoing PhD-Project of Katharina Hoß (Bielefeld), “Individualität und Persönlichkeitskonzepte im Spiegel spätmittelalterlicher französischer Selbstzeugnisse”, is based on the concepts of Simmel and Luhmann.

⁵³ See N. LUHMANN, *Social Systems*, trans. J. BEDNARZ, Jr., with D. BAECKER (Stanford, CA, 1995: *Writing Science*).

pected that conversation would not only deal with paying the bill, discussing the aesthetics of the pictures on the walls, or the sermons and liturgy performed. Most of the time one or two sentences about the weather, recent sports events, or private matters are expected to be exchanged on these occasions. It might even be helpful to know whether the police officer that caught you speeding is the type of person that likes a little joke or not. Conversation that focusses on roles does not exclude the person behind the role, but takes this into account as well.⁵⁴ And certainly, clothes and language, the way people dress and act, has a strong influence on how they treat each other. Nonetheless – and that is the crucial point of the argument – the overall expectations of the participants in these (and other) conversations are *not* built on the (imagined?) *general status* of the individuals involved, or on their (presumed?) membership of certain groups.⁵⁵ What is more: acting within a framework of roles makes it easier for everyone to approach others and communicate, precisely because

⁵⁴ There are – to paraphrase Armin Nassehi – a number of functional systems, which explicitly utilise the *individualised* individuality of persons. In these systems, the participants in communication are indeed approached as individuals. Nevertheless, this does not at all put into perspective the fact that the individuality of individuals itself has to be placed in the area of exclusion of society. A. NASSEHI, *Geschlossenheit und Offenheit: Studien zur Theorie der modernen Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main, 2003), p. 107: “In den meisten Programmen der Funktionssysteme ist Inklusion so vorgesehen, dass die Teilnehmer an Kommunikation tatsächlich als Individuen thematisiert werden, was freilich keineswegs die Diagnose relativiert, dass sich die Individualität von Individuen selbst im Exklusionsbereich der Gesellschaft verorten müsse”. See A. HAHN, “Partizipative Identität”, in: *Konstruktionen des Selbst, der Welt und der Geschichte: Aufsätze zur Kulturosoziologie*, ed. A. HAHN (Frankfurt am Main, 2000), pp. 13-79, at pp. 59 f.; E. GOFFMAN, *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face-to-Face Behavior* (New Brunswick, 2008).

⁵⁵ And, getting even more specific, Luhmann illustrates (N. LUHMANN, *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt am Main, 1997), 2, p. 1052): “Neue [i.e. from the late eighteenth century onwards] Rollenkomplementaritäten wie Regierung / Untertan, Produzent / Konsument, Lehrer / Schüler, Arzt / Patient, Künstler / Kunstliebhaber und selbst Priester / Laie identifizieren nicht mehr konkrete Individuen, sondern nur noch Rollen nach Funktionssystemzugehörigkeit. Sie definieren nicht mehr den Sinn der Lebensführung, sondern nur noch Aufgaben und Regeln; und sie lassen auf privater wie öffentlicher, auf individueller wie auf sozialer Ebene einen Bedarf für neue, zusammenfassende Identifikationen auftreten. Darauf antworten Singularbegriffe wie (individuelles) Subjekt oder eben: Nation” (N. LUHMANN, *Theory of Society*, 2, trans. R. BARRETT (Stanford, CA, 2013: *Cultural Memory in the Present*), p. 287: “New role complementaries such as government / subject, producer / consumer, teacher / pupil, doctor / patient, artist / art lover, and even priest / layman identified people no longer as concrete individuals but only in terms of their belonging to a functional system. They no longer defined the meaning of a way of life but only tasks and rules; and at both the private and public levels, both the individual and the social levels, they engendered a need for new, summary identification. This need was met by singular concepts such as (individual) subject or nation”).

expectations and demands are limited, and the position of the people who communicate in society *in general* is not at stake.⁵⁶

This is but one side of the medal. As a consequence, society does not provide a space for the self as such.⁵⁷ The self cannot, not even for itself, insist on, for instance, being first of all a professor, or first of all a merchant, or even a family man. Ethnicity, religion, or citizenship may, up to a certain point, be considered modern helpers for creating personal identity. However, claiming to be American or German could hardly serve as a central theme for an autobiography.⁵⁸

Modern society obliges the individual person not only to synthesise different roles he or she has to perform. More important and decisive is the lack of a societal space to place the self in, so that the result of reflections and systemisations create a room of their own. Exclusion individuality does not set aside or dismiss the influence of socialisation, of family, friends, education and work. It argues that the efforts to synthesise all these (and more) influences, and the self-reflections combined with it creates a space outside society:

No longer the individual can belong to just one societal sub-system. He may be professionally committed in the economic system, in the legal system ... also, and in a certain way the social status follows the professionally determined lines of success, but it cannot exist within just one functional system. 'Society' no longer provides the individual with a place where he might exist as a 'social being'. He can only live outside society, can reproduce only as a system of his / her own within the environment of society, society providing the necessary environment. No

⁵⁶ The case of Trayvon Martin, whose skin colour and clothing seemed to have been enough 'evidence' for a private security officer to shot him, is but a recent and extreme case (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trayvon_Martin). The public outcry that followed went, in my view, beyond denouncing racism. At the same time it showed disapproval of a general classification of persons as a basis for communication in a given situation.

⁵⁷ NASSEHI, "Gesellschaftstheorie, Kulturphilosophie und Thanatologie", p. 96: "*Die moderne Gesellschaft zeichnet sich insbesondere dadurch aus, daß ihre innere, horizontale Differenzierungsform ein Zentrum ausschließt, von dem her die Einheit der Gesellschaft für alle verbindlich repräsentiert werden könnte*" ("Modern society is particularly characterised by its inner, horizontal differentiation rules out the existence of a centre based on which the unity of society could be bindingly represented for everybody").

⁵⁸ Discussing the importance of citizenship for identity, HAHN, "Partizipative Identität", pp. 30 ff., underlines the impossibility to include modern individuality as a whole in one system ("*die Unmöglichkeit, [die] einzigartige Individualität als ganze zum Teil eines sozialen Systems zu machen, sie als ganze zu inkludieren*", *ibid.*, p. 54). See recently HIRSCHAUER, "Un / Doing Differences".

longer [referring to pre-modern times] can the individual be defined by inclusion, but only by exclusion.⁵⁹

One consequence would be that, being obliged to create a space outside society, trying to integrate the various roles one has to perform almost ‘naturally’ ends up with a unique story about the self, a story – and that is the essential issue here – that puts a distance between society and its roles and what is conceptualised as ‘individuality’. At this point, the idea (or should we say ‘ideology’) that everybody is a unique individual steps in precisely to support the need of conceptualising ourselves as self-referential entities in opposition to society or outside it. Modern individuality as conceptualised by system theory is the consequence of a specific societal structure. That is far from celebrating any ‘discoveries’ or modern self-reflected man. Nor should we confuse exclusion individuality with autonomous individuality.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ N. LUHMANN, “Individuum, Individualität, Individualismus”, in: ID., *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik 3* (Frankfurt am Main, 1998), pp. 149-258, at pp. 158 f. “Die Einzelperson kann nicht mehr einem und nur einem gesellschaftlichen Teilsystem angehören. Sie kann sich beruflich / professionell im Wirtschaftssystem, im Rechtssystem ... usw. engagieren, und in gewisser Weise folgt der soziale Status den beruflich vorgezeichneten Erfolgsp Bahnen; aber sie kann nicht in einem Funktionssystem allein leben”. Society “bietet ... dem Einzelnen keinen Ort mehr, wo er als ‘gesellschaftliches Wesen’ existieren kann. Er kann nur außerhalb der Gesellschaft leben, nur als System eigener Art in der Umwelt der Gesellschaft sich reproduzieren, wobei für ihn die Gesellschaft eine dazu notwendige Umwelt ist. Das Individuum kann nicht mehr [referring to pre-modern times] durch Inklusion, sondern nur noch durch Exklusion definiert werden”. ID., “Die gesellschaftliche Differenzierung und das Individuum”, in: ID., *Soziologische Aufklärung 6* (Opladen, 1995), pp. 125-141, at p. 131: “Die Umsetzung der gesellschaftlichen Systemdifferenzierung in ein sachlich und zeitlich je einmaliges Rollenmanagement – das ist der Mechanismus, der nach soziologischer Vorstellung die Individualisierung der Person erzwingt” (“The implementation of societal system differentiation happens by way of topical and chronological role management respectively – this is the mechanism which, according to sociological thought, enforces the individualisation of the person”).

⁶⁰ LUHMANN, “Individuum”, p. 52: the individual “findet sich genötigt, mit sich selbst zu kommunizieren und jene Ganzheit zu werden, die es im fragmentarischen, sprunghaften Verlauf seines eigenen Vorstellungslebens zunächst gar nicht ist. Simmel und Mead steuern hier die traditionsbildenden Formulierungen bei – und blockieren damit zugleich Rückgriffe auf transzendentaltheoretische oder auf psychologische Bewußtseinsanalysen”.

8. *Comparing the Self, Conceptualising Pre-Modern Individuality*

Jean Jacques Rousseau's "*Si je ne vaud pas mieux, au moins je suis autre*"⁶¹ ("If not better, at least I am different"), one of the opening phrases of the *Confessions*, expresses a turning point in conceptualising the self that is in line with what has just been said. Despite the fact that competition may be seen as a hallmark of all societies, but especially of modern society, when put to the test the individual today would rather opt for being different than being better. No doubt, we like the idea of being smarter than our neighbour, of earning more than the people next door. But at the end of the day our individuality feeds more on claiming otherness than superiority. That in itself is somewhat astonishing. Late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century autobiographies seem to put this to extremes when, as mentioned above, the texts are consciously enriched even with fictional elements to get a hold on a self which is otherwise difficult to grasp.

In contrast, during the Middle Ages and even in the early modern period, as far as I can see, autobiographical texts would opt for 'being better' rather than 'being different' (the "if not better" in Rousseau's phrase echoes this concept). "Individuality, as alterity, could only mean disorder", Brigitte Bedos-Rezak states, looking at the attacks of Arnulf of Lisieux against Girard of Angoulême and Pope Anacletus,⁶² and with David Gary Shaw, who looked at late medieval English sources, one might add "social selves worked upon each other to get beyond and above each other".⁶³ Again, this does not mean a lack of self-confidence or self-esteem,⁶⁴ but rather a distinct form of 'doing individuality'. The above mentioned Thietmar gave one (very refined) example of how this is done: he excels others in being more humble and devote. Being humble was not an option for a sixteenth-century merchant like Lucas Rem, whose autobiographical text will be discussed in a moment. At this point it is enough to mention that for him being better than most of his colleagues, although he uses different means to describe this, was as important as for Thietmar.

⁶¹ ROUSSEAU, *Les confessions*, p. 5.

⁶² B. BEDOS-REZAK, *When Ego Was Imago: Signs of Identity in the Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2011: *Visualizing the Middle Ages*), p. 230.

⁶³ D.G. SHAW, *Necessary Conjunctions: The Social Self in Medieval England* (New York, 2005: *New Middle Ages*), p. 198.

⁶⁴ SHAW, *Necessary Conjunctions*, *ibid.*: "even quite modest social selves were authentic actors".

This is not, of course, to say that in modern autobiographies one could not find passages where the author considers him / herself better than others. Yet, the emphasis is usually on uniqueness, originality, on being different. These conceptualisations of the self are hardly to be found in pre-modern autobiographical texts – and here, again, the idea of being superior is not the same as being unlike others. ‘Being better’ establishes a relationship to the person or group one compares oneself with, while ‘being completely different’ tries to cut this relationship (although, of course, an imagined ‘opposite’ is needed in comparison with whom one could claim to be different). In this respect, uniqueness and originality are but concretisations of self-referential concepts of individuality, of an individuality that considers itself opposite to, not part of society. And this concept, to connect the argument to what has been said above, would in turn be rooted in the highly differentiated structure of modern society.

9. *A Place in Society*

The important point of our theoretical approach is the suggestion that pre-modern individuality is grounded in inclusion, and that pre-modern society would offer a specific place for the self.⁶⁵ The idea is that groups (families, households, guilds, religious orders etc. – in Luhmann’s terms: segments) work as agents of inclusion, while status is defined through the strata persons belong to. Developed by a sociologist, in the eyes of a medievalist system theory may be considered somewhat imprecise and superficial for talking about the Middle Ages.⁶⁶ But as long as the key assumptions hold and help the medievalist to understand new facets of the sources, this should not bother us too much.

One aspect of this approach that has to be discussed is, that there is only one place or group for a person to be situated in.⁶⁷ Was not everybody – even in the early Middle Ages – a member of various groups? Did not people back then have to play roles as we do today? A quick recall of Simmel’s above-men-

⁶⁵ LUHMANN, “Individuum”, pp. 157 and 160.

⁶⁶ Luhmann, for instance, puts too much weight on ‘families’ instead of other groups, and although he is aware of social mobility in pre-modern times, he does not really expand on this.

⁶⁷ Families and households function as ‘inclusion regulators’, and every individual belongs only to one such subsystem of society – which does not of course exclude social mobility (LUHMANN, “Individuum”, p. 157: “*Jedes Individuum gehört ... einem und nur einem Subsystem der Gesellschaft an*”).

tioned approach may serve as a bridge to Luhmann's idea: Simmel suggested that the relationship between the 'circles' to which everybody belongs (family, citizenship, job ...) is different in modern and in pre-modern times. While today the individual forms a kind of intersection point for very different circles which otherwise are independent of each other, the pre-modern relationship of the circles does not provide such an intersection point. Instead, they *either* form (concentric) 'rings' around a person (since a commune would enclose the guilds, and guilds households, it is no problem to be a member of all three units) *or* are placed next to each other without allowing for an intersection point (Simmel's example was that of university and town).

Simmel's description of his 'circles' shows the way towards understanding how 'place in society' can be understood. System theory will take us a bit further, because it combines 'inclusion individuality' with a distinct and more abstract concept of pre-modern society. In contrast to modern society, which is characterised as being functionally differentiated, pre-modern society is described as segmentary-stratificational. The guild, the *familia*, religious orders, etc. may be called segments, while the strata are the different layers of society. It is important that this society has an explicit hierarchy, that there is a top and a bottom and there are many in-betweens. The relationship of a given person to society is completely different from the functionally differentiated one of our times. Already the way one becomes a member of a guild or other social spheres – often in the form of a classic transition ritual – indicates that flexible differentiation of roles is not on the agenda, but rather the inclusion of the entire person into a given association.⁶⁸ And because this society is by definition a hierarchical one, together with membership of a group, by definition it offers the single person a space to place him / herself within this society.

Admittedly, this description of medieval or early modern times looks somewhat simplistic. Do our sociologists not underestimate the complexity of medieval society? Is it not the case that people were forced to take roles and be as flexible as we are, quickly adapting to the changing circumstances we are confronted with every day? And is a (fixed) hierarchy not a nineteenth-century myth, while quite often not even kings and popes were honoured and accepted as Hollywood movies would like them to be?

⁶⁸ LUHMANN, *Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft* 2, p. 622: somewhere one was "durch Geburt oder Aufnahme [in einen Personenverband] zu Hause".

Before discussing this in more detail, I would like to seize on an observation made by Max Weber. He states that pre-modern membership in formal as well as informal groups was based on ‘status contracts’:

The distinction [to the modern purposive contract (=Zweck-Kontrakt)] is based on the fact that all those primitive contracts by which political or other personal associations, permanent or temporary, or family relations are created involve a change in what may be called the total legal situation (the universal position) and the social status of the persons involved. ... For a long time their symbolism retained traces of that character, and the majority of these contracts are ‘fraternisation contracts’ (*Verbrüderungsverträge*). By means of such a contract a person was to become somebody’s child, father, wife, brother, master, slave, kin, comrade-in-arms, ... vassal, subject, friend, or, quite generally, comrade (*Genosse*). To ‘fraternise’ with another person did not, however, mean that a certain performance of the contract, contributing to the attainment of some specific object, was reciprocally guaranteed or expected. ... The contract rather meant that the person would ‘become’ something different in quality (or status) from the quality he possessed before. For unless a person voluntarily assumed that new quality, his future conduct in his new role could hardly be believed to be possible at all. Each party must thus make a new ‘soul’ enter his body.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ M. WEBER, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundrisse der verstehenden Soziologie*, ed. J. WINCKELMANN (Tübingen, 1980), p. 401: “Alle jene urwüchsigen Kontrakte, durch welche z.B. politische oder andere persönliche Verbände, dauernde oder zeitweilige, oder Familienbeziehungen geschaffen wurden, hatten zum Inhalt eine Veränderung der rechtlichen Gesamtqualität, der universellen Stellung und des sozialen Habitus von Personen. Und zwar sind sie, um dies bewirken zu können, ursprünglich ausnahmslos entweder direkt magische oder doch irgendwie magisch bedeutsame Akte und behalten Reste dieses Charakters in ihrer Symbolik noch lange bei. Die Mehrzahl von ihnen ... sind ‘Verbrüderungsverträge’. Jemand soll fortan Kind, Vater, Frau, Bruder, Herr, Sklave, Sippen-genosse, Kampfgenosse, Schutzherr, Klient, Gefolgsmann, Vasall, Untertan, Freund, mit dem weitesten Ausdruck: ‘Genosse’, eines anderen werden. Sich derart miteinander ‘Verbrüdern’ aber heißt nicht: daß man sich gegenseitig für konkrete Zwecke nutzbare Leistungen gewährt oder in Aussicht stellt, auch nicht nur, wie wir es ausdrücken würden: daß man fortan ein neues, in bestimmter Art sinnhaft qualifiziertes Gesamtverhalten zueinander in Aussicht stellt, sondern: daß man etwas qualitativ anderes ‘wird’ als bisher,— denn sonst wäre jenes neue Verhalten gar nicht möglich. Die Beteiligten müssen eine andere ‘Seele’ in sich einziehen lassen”. ‘Verbrüderung’ und ‘Statuskontrakt’ wird so dem ‘Zweckkontrakt’ gegenübergestellt, der auf Geld- und Marktwirtschaft basierend jeweils nur ausdifferenzierte Teilbereiche des Handelns einer Person erfasst, jedenfalls keine allgemeine Statusänderung herbeiführt”; trans. M. WEBER, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, trans. G. ROTH et al. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1968), p. 672.

Two things are important to note. First, Weber's 'status contract' does not, like Tönnies' 'communal relationships' (*Vergemeinschaftung*),⁷⁰ emphasise emotions as the basis of pre-modern society. Rather, he points to the legal dimension of the phenomenon. In its forms and results, pre-modern 'membership' differs strongly from modern concepts, even from that of citizenship ("the person would 'become' something different in quality"). Secondly, Weber, although taking a different view at society, clarifies why 'membership' or 'socialisation' takes on a different meaning in pre-modern times. This reason matches Luhmann's concept of a society that provides a space for a person to be placed in.

Metaphors like 'place' and 'space' can now be clarified according to Weber's description of pre-modern 'membership'. Having one place in society instead of participating only as 'role players' in different spheres does not mean, of course, that a duke, a monk, let alone the citizens of a town would not have to differentiate their *behaviour* according to particular situations. The main point is not 'flexibility of behaviour' but what *essentially* generates the *expectations* of the participants in a given situation towards each other. While in pre-modern times expectations are related *predominantly* to the overall status of a person, his / her rank and his / her 'membership' of a family or community, in modern times these expectations are connected *predominantly* to circumstances and functional societal spheres, and thus to the role he or she has to play in a given environment (job, shopping centre ...).⁷¹

The essence of the sociology discussed so far identifies great differences in the relationship between single persons and groups or societies in modern and pre-modern times respectively. Weber and Simmel argue, in my view, in the same direction as Luhmann. Circles, fraternity contracts, inclusion individuality, to name only the catchwords – does that mean that people were tied to

⁷⁰ F. TÖNNIES, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft: Abhandlungen des Communismus und Socialismus als empirischer Culturformen* (Darmstadt, 1972); Weber has a similar concept of *Vergemeinschaftung*, which is – and that is interesting – not employed here: WEBER, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, pp. 21 f. A good overview of the concept of *Vergemeinschaftung*, which, in my view, tells us more about the nineteenth century than about the Middle Ages, is provided by *Theorien der Gemeinschaft zur Einführung*, ed. L. GERTENBACH *et al.* (Hamburg, 2010).

⁷¹ "Not, then, men and their moments. Rather moments and their men", as GOFFMAN, *Interaction Ritual*, p. 3, sums up the results of his classical studies. For the diverse concepts of multiple membership given in ethnological, political and sociological research see HIRSCHAUER, "Un/Doing Differences". Hirschauer himself, after having given a sound overview, underlines that the importance of nationality, ethnicity, gender, race, class background, age, etc. varies with the (personal and institutional) situation one is in.

their memberships? Do these sociologists not tell the same story already told by Jacob Burkhardt, just in a different wording? And is Luhmann's strong abstraction not a hindrance rather than a help when dealing with concrete sources?

Inclusion individuality, so much is clear, does not point to any emotional components or psychological categories. 'Membership' of a given segment is conceptualised from the viewpoint of society: the household, family, or guild functions as a gatekeeper for inclusion in society (again: modern society includes not via segments but via functional systems, and only in the form of roles, which marks the difference). While this structure, on the one hand, has very concrete consequences for the way autobiographical text are written (and with it, one may presume, for the way the self is conceptualised), that does not mean, on the other hand, that these texts exclusively write about the membership of a concrete *group*. Their overall aim seems to confirm that the given person has his / her place in *society*. The core issue has always been presenting a self that was included in a social world that was part of society.⁷²

10. Inclusion Individuality – Thietmar of Merseburg and Lucas Rem

'Inclusion individuality' and 'place in society' are broad concepts that allow for many different ways to spell them out. The strategies are manifold, creative, often unique and 'individual'. Having said that, I would like to name two of them, prominent in most of the texts I have looked at (and most of the time combined). One strategy was to portray the self as fulfilling or over-fulfilling norms. The other is showing the author's (many) relations with other living or dead persons, 'embedding' him in social contexts.

An example of the first strategy – overdoing norms – has been given above already. The text by Thietmar of Merseburg operates in this way, when he says that he is "dissimilar" ("*longe dissimilis*") to the noblemen he knows and when he describes himself as being most ugly and most sinful. While he is very detailed about his body and his character, it is not clear to whom he considers himself "*longe dissimilis*". Other bishops? Other monks? Or is his physical

⁷² This is even true for Abelard. F.-J. ARLINGHAUS, "Petrus Abaelardus als Kronzeuge der 'Individualität' im 12. Jahrhundert? Einige Fragen", in: *Zwischen Pragmatik und Performanz: Dimensionen mittelalterlicher Schriftkultur*, ed. C. DARTMANN et al. (Turnhout, 2011: *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy* 18), pp. 165-198, at pp. 169 ff.

ugliness a contrast to the beautiful nobility? He can be vague in this respect because in essence, rather than having concrete persons in mind, he is drawing on general norms of the elite of his age which, for instance, order one to proclaim to be humble and see the connection of virtue and beauty as a given.⁷³ But Thietmar is trying to go beyond the average when he speaks of himself as a “glutton and a hypocrite, greedy and disparaging” (and, no wonder, the opposite virtues to these vices were the central values of his time) and concludes: “I am much worse than one can possibly say”.⁷⁴ Taking the *humiliatio-exaltatio* model to extremes (and he is not different from many many others in doing so), he tries to do just this: overdoing norms.

This ‘overdoing’ had two effects. First, it would provide our bishop a top rank among his contemporaries – but that is of lesser interest here. Secondly, this form of comparing oneself with norms in terms of outbidding still links the person to these very norms – and in doing so gives him a prominent place in that society. In this respect, the person gains ‘uniqueness’ by outbidding others in over-fulfilling central categories of a not-yet-clear peer group or of society as such. And he would gain ‘individuality’ in its pre-modern form by the way he procures this with an exceptional story and by how he narrates it. Does that fall short of modern self-descriptions? If ‘otherness’ is on the agenda today, then ignoring or breaking norms where others would observe them, and respecting them where others would possibly break them, becomes an icon of autobiographical story-telling. And this modern strategy is not at all ‘individual’.

Before turning to the second strategy, ‘embedding’ the author in social contexts, it has to be said that in most texts both strategies can be found. For Thietmar, one central *causa scribendi* of his *Chronicle*, as Gerd Althoff and others have already found out, is memory. On the one hand that of the relatives and episcopal colleagues he mentions – and here he does give names. On the other hand, the book as a whole is aimed to support the memory of Thietmar himself.⁷⁵ Thus, many relationships of different intensity and various forms are

⁷³ It is interesting to note, however, that Thietmar is not using the much stronger term *difformitas* for his self-description, which was used in invectives of the time and had the potential to almost destroy the social existence of a person. For this term and for an inspiring discussion of physical appearance and individuality see BEDOS-REZAK, *When Ego was Imago*, pp. 229 f. Guibert of Nogent has an interesting passage on beauty in *Monodiae* 1, 3; see ARLINGHAUS, “In and out, then and now”.

⁷⁴ See *supra*, n. 1.

⁷⁵ G. ALTHOFF, *Adels- und Königsfamilien im Spiegel ihrer Memorialüberlieferung: Studien*

part of our bishop's book, and while these relations do not establish a concrete group, through it he did 'embed' himself in society.

Roughly four hundred years later, living in a completely different environment, an Augsburg merchant called Lucas Rem (1481-1541) still used the same strategies in his 'family book', although in a very different manner. Lucas, being part of the urban elite of his home town and working for the famous Welser company before he founded a company himself, wrote his autobiographical text during the first decades of the sixteenth century, continuing them until the year before his death.⁷⁶ In his 'diary', as the editor called it in 1861, he wrote about his ancestors, about his many travels, reported the costs of the weddings of his children, and a lot of other things. One core element is formed by his business activities. That he is a better merchant than his colleagues is emphasised especially when he elaborates on his expertise in bookkeeping. Rem was to help Anton Lauginger, a representative of the Welser in Milan, who was "lost" ("verirt") in his accounts. Finding a solution here brought him "luck and great praise."⁷⁷ Likewise, he adjusted the accounts of the Welser agency in Fribourg (Switzerland), where the local merchants were "completely lost" ("gar verwirt") in their balancing of the books.⁷⁸ In episodes like these the 'being better' concept is obvious, but our merchant, different from Thietmar, sees no need for acting the humble servant. It is important to note that bookkeeping, especially double-entry bookkeeping, at that time was more than just a business tool. Upper German merchants around 1500 went to Italy, especially to Venice, to learn that refined method, and Lucas was no exception to the rule, as we learn from his family book.⁷⁹

While writing about his life – and the short notes rather resemble entries in an account book than an autobiographical text – he constantly mentions people he stayed with, or did business with, or simply met while travelling. In terms of name dropping the merchant outdoes our bishop easily. What is more: Lucas's

zum Totengedenken der Billunger und Ottonen (Munich, 1984: *Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften* 47), p. 235; for a brief summary of the discussion, see recently PATZOLD, "Nachtrag", pp. XLIV ff.

⁷⁶ The 1861 edition of B. GREIFF, "Tagebuch des Lucas Rem aus den Jahren 1494-1541: Ein Beitrag zur Handelsgeschichte der Stadt Augsburg", in: *Sechszwanzigster Jahres-Bericht des historischen Kreis-Vereins im Regierungsbezirke von Schwaben und Neuburg für das Jahr 1860* (Augsburg, 1861), pp. 1-110, is still useful.

⁷⁷ GREIFF, "Tagebuch", p. 6: "Adj 2 febr. kam in der Comp^a haus zuo Anton Lauginger. Der was in seyner rechnong verirt, daraus Ich Im halff unds krecht fandt, des mir zuo fil gluck und fudrong halff".

⁷⁸ GREIFF, "Tagebuch", p. 16.

⁷⁹ GREIFF, "Tagebuch", p. 5.

text offers various forms of social relations the protagonist took part in. Some of the merchant colleagues he worked with or simply met on his innumerable journeys were probably foreign merchants;⁸⁰ most of them came from Augsburg or collaborated, in one way or the other, with the big Augsburg merchant companies, especially the Welser.⁸¹ Since he had a controversy with precisely this company – and this is an issue in his book – it is telling how strongly he emphasised his doings and his importance for the work of that company.

Lucas Rem started writing a family book,⁸² and by this alone contributed to creating a restricted group – his family – he considers to be part (and head) of. The description of his forefather Hans Rem, born in 1340, 140 years before Lucas, is a story from rags to riches – but with special features. In 1357 Hans, presumably seventeen years old, sold everything he had, and with the 500 guilders gained in this way started trading. On his first journey to Venice he lost 100 guilders, but that did not scare him off: he invested the rest and travelled to and fro between Augsburg and Venice, and despite robberies and other hardships, by God's grace and a lot of luck made a fortune.⁸³ More than about success, this story is about a perfect merchant who performed his business no matter what obstacles he encountered and who, as it happened, was the founder of the Rem family. By the time of Hans Rem, Lucas's grandfather, the normative and the social not coincidentally merge into one.

While business transactions, dowries, weddings, etc. are prominent in the book, other aspects – from a modern perspective – fall short. Our author is

⁸⁰ Besides the names of Jer^o Delanave and Guido d'Angelo in Venice and Piero Deburg in Lyon, where he staid as a young man to learn the local languages (and in Italy probably bookkeeping); see GREIFF, "Tagebuch", pp. 5-6, and the following pages, e.g. p. 8, of the edition for more names (Jan Buchly de Metlin, Cesaro Berzi in Valencia (Spain), Julian Jocunda in Lisbon ...).

⁸¹ GREIFF, "Tagebuch", p. 12: "*adi. 23 dito kam ich gen Äntorff. Fand alda Conrat Imhoff, Ulrico Honolt, Bartolomeo Welser*"; *ibid.*, p. 21: "*... kam adi 1 Ottobrio morgens gen Antorff. Da ritt ich bey Juan Gabriel Bongarten ein, der mich on al mas wol, erlich, wohlfail hoult*"; and *passim*.

⁸² An excellent overview of the genre is given by *Haus- und Familienbücher in der städtischen Gesellschaft des Spätmittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. B. STUDDT (Cologne and Weimar, 2007: *Städteforschung A 69*). Tuscan family books, *libri di famiglia*, are much better known than the German ones; see G. CIAPPELLI, *Memory, Family, and Self: Tuscan Family Books and Other European Egodocuments (14th-18th Century)* (Leiden, 2014).

⁸³ After informing briefly about Hans' birth in 1340 and his marriage in 1365, Lucas writes: "*Gemelter mein anher verkauffett im 1357 Jar als wz er hett, und machett bey 500 gulden In als. Fong darmit an zuo handeln. Ynd an der ersten Rais gen Venedig verlort er an waren hinein 100 gulden. Rest leget err an, 400 gulden, damit er hie aussen wol gwan. Fuor wider hinein, und also hin und her. Gab gott gnad, und gros gluk, gewin ...*" (GREIFF, "Tagebuch", p. 1).

already fifteen years old when his father passes away, and his entry on this event could not be more brief. “On 3 August 1496 my father died, *ganzt geschickt in got*. God give him eternal rest”. True, in general, but not always, the notes in the family book are short, but this event would, in our view, have deserved more attention. What is more, this short entry is followed by naming the children of the deceased – and the legacy in land and assets.⁸⁴ For a modern reader, even in the context of a family book, Lucas has the wrong priorities. Every now and then, however, he gets more comprehensive and even emotional. Once, on a business journey, Lucas Rem’s horse, going downhill, stumbled, fell, and overturned so that the saddle cracked and, he added, it was a miracle that he survived and was not hurt. “And I may say that this day I was born again”, he concluded.⁸⁵ In another entry he almost turns into a storyteller when reporting about his apprenticeship in Lyon in the house of Piero Deburg. The latter’s wife being stingy, Lucas and his colleagues did not even get enough to eat. He added: “but a ream of paper would not be enough to write about the ploys and thefts we resorted to to get food and wine”.⁸⁶

Although many-faceted – and much more could be said about this book⁸⁷ – the autobiographical text develops clear-cut strategies to assign his author a concrete position in the social world of his time. Different stages of group-affiliations – the wider mercantile elite of his hometown, his family portrayed as a generations of tradesman – give unmistakable indications of how he wanted to be seen. In terms of storytelling and the content of his book, it is not so much about his profession as about how the late medieval urban elite saw itself, and about how an individual wanted to obtain a prominent place within

⁸⁴ GREIFF, “Tagebuch”, p. 2: “*Adj 3. Aug^o 1496 vergieng mein vatter mit dodit, ganzt geschickt in gott. Der verleicht Im und uns alen die ewig ruo. Hatt verlassen seine kinder: Endris, Lucas, Hans, Gilg, Örg, Madlena. Noch ain dochter, Kattarina, ist vor Im dodit. Hat Uns gelassen Riethaym, ward verkafft um 8200 gulden, seyne heysser hie, und in Hans Vechlin Gesellschaft 4500 gulden, hausratt, silbergeschir, claynett etc. etc.*”.

⁸⁵ GREIFF, “Tagebuch”, p. 14: “*An Scta. Cattarina tag wolt Ich von Alvalada gen Sct. Cattarina reitten und fuol mir mein ros am kraden berg ab. fuol das ros auf’n rucken, den satel zuo sticklin – überschluog sich. Ich kam wunderperlich darvon, on al laid. Also mag ich sagen, ditz tag erst niu geporn sey*”.

⁸⁶ GREIFF, “Tagebuch”, p. 6: “*Von 19 bis 29 Julio war Ich in der Comp^a dienst. Und bey genanntem Piero Deburg, het 3 brieder gewachsender bey Im, die al mein heren wasen, lidt mich 13 monet on Mas fil, insonder mit össen, trinken. Seyns weibs karkeyt (Anm. 33 Geiz) het kain mas. Aber ain Ris bapeir wer fol zuo schreiben, der listikait wir trieben mit esendt ding und wein, wir stalen. On des hetten wir al eehalten nit kinden gedulden*”.

⁸⁷ His illnesses and their treatment in spas (where he kept precise accounts of the number of baths he took) would be but one of a number of interesting topics.

that elite. The perils he masters, sometimes with luck (his horse accident), sometimes with wits (the hardship suffered as an apprentice), fit, notwithstanding all variety, all too well with the merchant's life, and many of his colleagues could surely tell similar stories. That no feelings about the death of his father are articulated, but the inheritance is carefully registered, should not be read as coldness of heart or a specific mercantile mentality.⁸⁸ Rather, it is in line with the general plot of the life story he does not want to have diluted.

"This is the record (*verzeichniss*) of Lucas Rem's whole life, all his doings to set an example (*ein Exempel*) of virtue for his descendants, so that they turn to diligence and prudence (*Fürsichtigkeit*) and to turn away from dissolute useless things, eating, drinking, gambling ... so they might spend their time with virtuous doings ...".⁸⁹ It was a grandson who, using a free page in the book, commented like this on Lucas's writings. That he is thought to be an "example of virtue" only holds with respect to the specific merchant / urban elite values. He does not, for instance, emphasise learning – except bookkeeping –, as humanists like Willibald Pirckheimer would do,⁹⁰ and self-humiliation or piety, as Thietmar did, are not on the agenda either. Nevertheless, in the eyes of his grandson, like him a citizen of Augsburg and a merchant, Lucas seemed to have struck the right cords.

It should not be overlooked, however, that the content is only part of what Lucas's writing offers. The above-mentioned 'personnel' of his text – merchants of foreign countries and of his home town as well as members of his family – are at least as important. Both groups, colleagues and family, are actively put in place by the author; and both groups form an essential part in the build-up of Lucas's individuality. A member of the merchant elite is some-

⁸⁸ I learned much from Christian Bec's classical study of Italian *libri di famiglia*, but have difficulties to see a mercantile or capitalist mentality at work; see C. BEC, *Les marchands écrivains: Affaires et humanisme à Florence 1375-1434* (Paris and The Hague, 1967: *Civilisations et Sociétés* 9), p. 437.

⁸⁹ GREIFF, "Tagebuch", p. 3: "Lucas Remen dess III verzeichniss seines gantzen lebens, thun und lassens darob seine nachkumne ein Exempel der tugend nemen könden, damit sy sich zu Fleiss und Fürsichtigkeit gewenen, darneben sich von liederlichen unnütz ding, essen, trinken, spilen, pracht enthalten, welches leichtiglich geschicht, so sy dem anfang wehren und in nutzlichen tugentlichen sachen ir kurtzweil suochen und damit die zeit zuobringen".

⁹⁰ The family he was born in, wrote Willibald Pirckheimer in his 'autobiography', was decorated with many very learned men and even women: "Ex hac igitur familia clara et antiqua Bilibaldus Pirckheymerus natus est ... ut quam plurimis ornata fuerit uiris, immo mulieribus etiam doctissimis" (W. PIRCKHEIMER, *Der Schweizerkrieg: De bello Suitense sive Eluetico: In lateinischer und deutscher Sprache: Neu übersetzt und kommentiert von Fritz Wille* (Baden, 1998), pp. 142 ff.).

one – to adapt a phrase by Harald Müller coined for humanists of that time⁹¹ – who is in contact with other merchants of the urban elite. Lucas Rem, besides his virtues, documented this by name dropping and mentioning who of the family had married whom. Together with the ‘qualities’, Lucas characterises himself as an exponent of a certain ‘group’, and as someone who in most ways performs better than the rest. This is a conscious reflection which merges belonging, status, merits, personality and individuality into a single elaboration on the position in society he had – as far as possible – chosen to be his.

11. Pre-modern Strategies of ‘Placing’

Four and a half centuries separate Thietmar of Merseburg and Lucas Rem, and not only this huge time span seems to make any connection impossible. A bishop in his palace here and an urban merchant there, a historiographer here, who almost in passing informs us about himself, a father there whose life story forms part of a family myth – the list of differences certainly does not end here. No wonder that the way in which both reflect on themselves is in many points quite different. Autobiographical texts of the twelfth and early sixteenth centuries differ in many respects and clearly show that self-descriptions had changed in many ways in the course of the long centuries between the Middle Ages and the early modern epoch. But they do have in common an enormous degree of self-esteem, self-consciousness and self-reflection. Neither Thietmar nor Lucas were “dreaming or half awake”, as Jacob Burckhardt would have it,⁹² when

⁹¹ H. MÜLLER, *Habit und Habitus: Mönche und Humanisten im Dialog* (Tübingen, 2006: *Spätmittelalter und Reformation*, N.R. 24), p. 77: “Humanist ist, wer mit anderen Humanisten im Gespräch ist und bleibt. Der Zugang über die Vernetzung in Form von Briefkontakten trägt dabei den bislang noch nicht ausgeschöpften Erkenntnismöglichkeiten, welche die Korrespondenzen in inhaltlicher und sozialgeschichtlicher Hinsicht für dieses Thema bietet, ebenso Rechnung wie der Schwierigkeit einer kohärenten inhaltlichen und formalen Bestimmung des Humanismus selbst. Erst dahinter rangiert der Blick auf den Inhalt. Er ist gleichwohl von eminenter Bedeutung, denn erst ein spezifisches thematisches Profil macht einen Briefwechsel zur Humanistenkorrespondenz” (“A humanist is someone who talks and continues to talk with other humanists. Access by way of networking in the form of correspondence takes into consideration the as yet unexhausted cognitive possibilities provided by correspondence when it comes to topical aspects and those of social history, just as the difficulties of a coherent topical and formal definition of humanism itself. Only then the view is on content. Nevertheless, the latter is of outstanding significance, for only it makes an exchange of letters a humanist correspondence”).

⁹² BURCKHARDT, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, p. 98.

reflecting about their selves; in respect of self-consciousness they do not differ too much from what we find in modern autobiographies.

However, both texts are different – and this is a crucial point – from modern self-descriptions by the way in which self-consciousness is anchored, by what it is based on and by how it is expressed. Thietmar and Lucas placed themselves at the heart of society instead of external to it, and both seem to use strategies that resemble each other's, although with different emphasis. One strategy is dropping names or comparing themselves with other persons they consider vital for their 'placing'. Lucas's mentioning of the merchants he has met on his travels or merely has done business with fits perfectly well in that picture. Thietmar, being preoccupied with the memory of deceased friends and monks,⁹³ entrusts his own memory to the reader,⁹⁴ although he establishes relationships of various kinds in his text. Calling this carefully chosen personnel a 'group' would not be adequate, but they indicate precisely how the authors of the texts wanted to be seen, to which people they wanted to be related.

That resembles what some literary studies especially of the early modern period label 'heterologous writing', meaning that pre-modern autobiographical texts establish a relationship to other persons and the world as such in order to get hold of the author's self.⁹⁵ While the empirical side matches much (but not

⁹³ H.-G. LIPPELT, *Thietmar von Merseburg: Reichsbischof und Chronist* (Cologne and Vienna, 1973: *Mitteldeutsche Forschungen* 72), pp. 201 f., stated, that Thietmar transferred the institutionalised memory of the Merseburg necrology into a chronicle. For a systematic analysis, see ALTHOFF, *Adels- und Königsfamilien*, p. 228 ff.

⁹⁴ Thietmar, *Chronicon*, VIII, 16, ed. TRILLMICH, p. 458: "*Et haec idcirco dixi, ut tu, lector, mortalitate ac innata humanitate mihi consimilis in hoc consensu me graviter peccasse scias et amminiculis indeficientibus succurras*".

⁹⁵ E. KORMANN, *Ich, Welt und Gott: Autobiographik im 17. Jahrhundert* (Cologne, 2004: *Selbstzeugnisse der Neuzeit* 13), p. 300: "*Eine heterologe Subjektivität zeigt sich ... nicht in einer ausschweifenden Darstellung der eigenen Person und des eigenen Innenlebens, sondern dadurch, daß in erster Linie nicht Eigenes, sondern anderes dargestellt wird. Sie entsteht, wenn die eigene Person bezogen wird auf eine Gruppe ... oder auf Dinge oder Ereignisse in der Welt, mit denen man sich verbunden sieht. Erkennt man die Möglichkeit solch heterologer Subjektivität ... gelten Darstellungen von Gott und Welt in autobiographischen Texten nicht mehr zwangsläufig als Indiz für eine unzureichende Scheidung der eigenen Person von ihrer Umgebung und müssen Schilderungen von Gott und Welt, von religiösen und politischen Fragen, nicht mehr als bloße, erzähl-technische Zutat gewertet werden*" ("Heterologous subjectivity becomes obvious ... not by widely elaborating on one's own personality and one's own inner life but by presenting not first of all one's own but other things. It is created if one's own personality is referred to a group ... or to things or events in the world which one feels being connected to. If one recognises the possibility of such a heterologous subjectivity ... no longer depictions of God and world in autobiographical texts are necessarily considered an indication of insufficiently separating one's own person from

all) of what has been discussed above; ‘inclusion individuality’, on the other hand, offers an explanation for this when linking the phenomenon to structures of society, and the concept is, in my view, more precise and more abstract at the same time. By this approach, other important traits of medieval autobiographical texts can be detected as contributions to ‘individuality’ as well. This is true for the above mentioned second strategy: to over-fulfil the norms the writer considers important for his identity. Although we find this in Lucas’s writings as well, Thietmar with his rhetoric of humbleness is a wonderful example. The two strategies – overdoing norms and establishing a social environment – are present in both texts, but with different priorities. Both can be identified as concrete forms or practices of ‘placing’ which do not draw on emotions or forming identities in the way that, for instance, modern nation states with their parades and pathetic rhetoric were to do later on.

12. A Kind of Conclusion

The sociological concept of ‘membership’ and ‘inclusion individuality’ described above assigns a person to one concrete group: on the one hand, it is the ‘segment’ that includes (or excludes) a person; on the other hand, this person draws on this segment when reflecting about his / her self. While the argument developed here is based on this theory, when looking at Thietmar’s and Lucas’s texts this picture needs a little modification. The way pre-modern self-descriptions ‘work’, their basic strategies, can be attributed to the suggestions made by the system theory’s approach. However, in many ways the texts have a wider scope. For the two protagonists, when reflecting on themselves, ‘membership’ means first and foremost ‘membership (or inclusion) in society’, and pre-modern individuality, from the perspective of the authors of autobiographical starts out from there, is based on this inclusion. So there is a difference between the premordial inclusion of a given person, that is in fact performed by certain groups, and the self-descriptions of authors like Thietmar and Lucas. This opens up the possibility – and here the paper goes one step further than

its environment, and not necessarily depictions of God and world, of religious and political issues must be considered just narrative-technical additions”. See also EAD., “Hetero-reference and heterology: Autobiographical writing, individuality, and gender on the threshold of the modern period”, in this volume. For a discussion of the concept see also V. OLEJNICZAK, “Heterologie: Konturen frühneuzeitlichen Selbstseins jenseits von Autonomie und Heteronomie”, *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* 101 (1996), pp. 6-37.

the theory on offer – that through their autobiographical texts people form their own groups, more or less related to the concrete groups they are part of, to define their place in society and, in this way, to work on their individuality.

The growing number of autobiographical texts, the very fact that the ‘self goes literacy’, clearly points to a growing hiatus between the membership concept and the concepts of the self as they are displayed in these writings. On the one hand, the specific space offered has a strong impact on the self and the literacy of the self. On the other hand, self-descriptions not only refer to concrete groups that could be named but also take into consideration estates and bigger social entities that were far from being concrete. The concept of inclusion individuality, taken seriously, means precisely this: persons refer to a position in *society* to create their self-consciousness, their ‘individuality’; group ties, although they might play an important role, are quite another matter.

With creativity and even originality Thietmar and Lucas elaborated on ‘individuality’ as their specific place in society – and, no wonder, claimed a prominent one, superior to that of most others. In this respect they differ from most modern autobiographies which emphasise the author’s (presumed) distance to society, and in this way do not so much proclaim superiority but otherness. By linking how people reflect and write about themselves to basic structures of society, as has been done here in line with sociological research, telling stories about ‘liberation’ – be it from group ties or, in a modified version, from societal bonds – would not match the findings. Taking a bird’s eye view, the limits of expression between modern and pre-modern individuality resemble each other more than some would like them to. While the task of pre-modern people to express their individuality is to describe themselves as being similar or better than others and, in this way, as part of society, to explore their positions and elaborate on their place, modern individuality wants us to be distinct from everybody else and place ourselves outside society. Limits and demands, although of different kinds, here and there, and while all autobiographical texts, modern as well as pre-modern, may claim uniqueness, they do share the underlying concepts they draw on with most other texts of their epoch.

But there are not only limits. While on the one hand a given society obviously provides autobiographical texts with basic concepts of how to portray the self, within the coordinates of these basic concepts there are many possibilities and many ways of writing and reflecting on the self. It is in itself fascinating to see how different and with how much creativity pre-modern authors deal with

these concepts. And the same, of course, is true for modern autobiographies. It is fascinating to see how, within an abstract societal frame, the ways of writing and reflecting about the self may change almost from decade to decade.

13. *The Contributions*

The ten articles of this volume are the outcome of a conference held in Bielefeld in 2009. The aim of the conference and of the volume was to discuss the theoretical approach just outlined. I would like to thank all contributors for the very lively and inspiring discussion we had during our meeting. Knowing about the difficulties in getting one's mind around system theory, I am very grateful that all authors reflect on the suggested theoretical framework. That does not mean, of course, that all subscribe to what has been proposed. Instead, the opinions expressed a range from 'yes, but' via 'maybe' to 'no, impossible'.

How would a seventeenth-century married woman, who left her family and her country to follow her husband, conceptualise her 'self'? Mareike Bøth, analysing the letters of Elisabeth Charlotte, who was born in Heidelberg as the daughter of an Elector Palatine and was married to the brother of Louis XIV, explains that an aristocratic stomach, if it is of German origin, does not like French cuisine. For Elisabeth Charlotte (or Liselotte), a strong 'German' diet was part of a body regime that included a lot of fresh air, exercise and intensive hunting. With all this, as Mareike Bøth argues, she consciously distanced herself from the seventeenth-century French court and even from her husband, deliberately performing her individuality almost exclusively by linking herself to her family and land of origin.

Drawing on a great variety of mainly high medieval sources, Brigitte Bedos-Rezak sees more similarities than differences between *post*-modern and medieval concepts of individuality. In this respect, she considers that the strong binary framework of systems theory that opposes inclusion and exclusion individuality is somewhat simplistic as it ignores the "wide range of variables which arise from analyses of both periodisation and the experiences of individuality". Furthermore, in her opinion, the approach advocated by systems theory "tends to support the teleological and evolutionary impulse that sees the individual as a progressive outcome". Brigitte Bedos-Rezak's general thesis is that in both epochs, medieval and postmodern, "... the experience of individuality is ... that of an excluded, partial being who seeks completeness by means of

social inclusion". She furthermore underlines the high degree of medieval self-awareness and distinction by considering theological discussions and by analysing the ways that the pronoun 'ego' was used in documents. With reference to the seals, markers of identity which were 'individualised' on the reverse by fingerprints or the inclusion of hair, and engraved on the reverse with conventional pictures, she argues that, at least in this case, stereotypy was an effect of the seals's mode of signification, not of the concept of pre-modern individuality as such.

Eva Kormann takes us back to early modern autobiographical texts. Discussing the concepts of inclusion individuality and hetero-reference – a concept that resembles inclusion individuality in many ways – in self-descriptions, she first of all highlights the differences between Burckhardt and Luhmann. In contrast to the Swiss historian, who sees a "nebulous melting of the 'I' into the 'we'", the Westphalian sociologist suggests that pre-modern forms of individuality are "unable to dispense with the attachment to God and the surrounding world". The term she uses for this kind of 'autobiography' is 'heterologous subjectivity'. Like 'inclusion individuality', this does not per se rule out concepts of 'uniqueness' in autobiographical texts. From her perspective as a literary scholar, by a side glance, Eva Kormann discusses the self-referentiality of modern autobiographies. Against this background and with a look at the writings of women, she is able to develop a differentiated picture of the role of 'gender' for autobiographies.

"There is no sign of a particular group to which Hoccleve thought he needed to adhere" is one of the central phrases in David Gary Shaw's paper. After outlining Luhmann's concept of individuality within systems theory, he discusses whether the "transition from medieval to modern in terms of the individual's relation to society was underway in fifteenth-century England". His study draws on two interesting fifteenth-century figures: the poet and bureaucrat Thomas Hoccleve and the scholar and traveller William Worcestre. According to Shaw, in Hoccleve and Worcestre we find a kind of "individuality in transition", "moving from social integration through stratification towards modernity's weak integration through functional differentiation", which he sees in agreement with the beginning of functional differentiation in late medieval society.

Gabriele Jancke takes us to sixteenth-century Zurich, where Konrad Pelliikan, Professor of Old Testament Studies, wrote an autobiographical text about his life. Discussing the approach suggested by the conference, she considers

the possibilities offered by the theory to historicise individuality. Furthermore, the suggestions made by systems theory are, in her view, in line with the way in which Caroline Walker Bynum and Natalie Zemon Davis described individuality in the context of group cultures. In her own interpretation of Konrad Pellikan's *Chronicon* his 'household', as part of a group culture, plays an important role. However, Gabriele Jancke criticises the strong dichotomy by which this theory conceptualises modern and pre-modern societies and the two forms of individuality related to those epochs, and denounces the approach as, in her view, being too close to early nineteenth-century concepts of autonomous individuality. Relying on a refined version of Marcel Mauss's notion of 'person' as a category and on actor-network-theory, she supports a concept that would take more categories, especially spaces and boundaries of the self, into consideration.

"So, in the end, I might have to ask myself if individuality is not an alien concept to my discipline", the literary scholar Matthias Meyer asks, referring to the difference between literary characters and real-life individuals. The solution he offers is to define the 'literary character' as being composed of three components: mimetic, topical, and artificial traits which offer a relationship between literary and what might be called real-life characters. The texts of Ulrich von Lichtenstein, Helene Kottanerin, and Johannes Tichtel are discussed from that perspective, and more than once Matthias Meyer, thanks to his own methodology, is able to identify passages in the texts that give us an idea of how 'individuality' might be conceptualised in the late Middle Ages. What is lacking in all his cases, he observes, is a coherent autobiographical narrative. However, especially with Johannes Tichtel's writings, a certain type of individuality can be detected. Against the background of in- and exclusion individuality Matthias Meyer offers a mixed picture: on the one hand he finds clear elements of an inclusionary individuality (i.e. in the case of Ulrich von Lichtenstein), on the other hand he states that his authors "are located at the intersection of many and often conflicting discourses ..., they combine in themselves many opposing principles and thus achieve a high degree of individuality".

Gregor Rohmann, offering his own reading of Luhmann's suggestion, argues passionately against the usual interpretation of pre-modern individuality within systems theory. Analysing late medieval house books, he emphasises that these are not to be read as autobiographical texts but as devices for collective remembrance. For him, it is first of all Christianity – especially baptism,

which established an individual relationship with God – that fostered individuality. His main thesis is that during the early and high Middle Ages autobiographical texts develop their heterology mainly by a relationship with God. “From the later Middle Ages onwards, social strata and kinship bonds came to superimpose this religious inclusion and thus to emancipate the subject from God”. He then concludes that “kinship was not the obstacle to, but the medium of early modern individuation”.

Christoph Rolker analyses the late medieval practices of using surnames by bishops, noblemen and city dwellers (men and women), drawing on sources from the region around Constance in southern Germany. His research topic is interesting for our discussion, as family-names may on the one hand link a single person to a group, and on the other hand are able to ‘individualise’ him / her. After a short summary of the development of surname-giving practices in different parts of Europe, he discusses – taking our theoretical approach into account – whether names and the changing of names could be regarded as a form of (almost modern) role taking, whether it rather serves ‘functional’ purposes or highlights an affiliation to a certain family or group. The reader is given a very differentiated picture of name practices: “certainly with bishops, often with noble names, and partly with the multiple surnames of married women, we can assume the surname was used ‘functionally’ in the sense that the use of this or that name indicated the assumption of specific roles”. However, it is also true that “changing and multiple names are indicative of the changing and multiple affiliations which are summarised as ‘family’”.

The costume book (*Trachtenbuch*) of the bookkeeper Matthäus Schwarz (1497-1574), who worked for the Fugger company in Augsburg, is analysed by the art historian Heike Schlie. The book and its numerous pictures, which present Matthäus himself in different dresses and even naked, have already attracted some attention ifrom historical research. In this well-elaborated book Matthäus Schwarz tells us about his life, combining text and images. But beware! As Heike Schlie emphasises, “the images are not the result of self-consideration, but are at best models for this self-consideration”. This has to be taken into account when the drawings are interpreted. The core argument of her paper lies within these lines: she wants to “demonstrate that the bookkeeper has created a unique medium, in which the earthly, the cosmic and salvation history are visible in his person as on a projection screen and – uniquely – can be visible only in this way”. However, that does not mean that Matthäus as a person disappears. “The aim of the description of the self in the world is *vali-*

dation, which refers to both the order described and one's own positioning in this order. Individuality begins here with an individual perspective or view of the world, and this observer perspective of necessity means a partial detachment from the collective".

To find out how a person identifies him / herself and how he or she conceptualises others, Sabine Schmolinsky looks at 'dialogue situations', that is: the encounter of persons, quite often in everyday activities. Besides letters, which in their medieval form can rightly be conceptualised as such encounters, she draws on a great variety of texts, dating from late Antiquity until the end of the Middle Ages, which relate about such meetings. How do persons identify themselves in direct contact? Names, she argues, may (cautiously) be read as being self-referential, while pointing out to estate or family may be interpreted as being hetero-referential. As in the contributions of Miriam Bedos-Rezak and Roland Rolker, attention is paid to the 'I' and names – but she looks at these features from a different angle. Among various interesting insights, she summarises one major result as follows: "It thus appears that the topic of individualisation should be shifted to self-identification which may be conceptualised as a specific blend of self-referential as well as hetero-referential modes".

Let me again emphasise my gratitude to all contributors in confronting their sources with a not at all straightforward approach. 'Two scientists, four opinions', as a German saying has it – and this volume certainly seems to prove it. However, one thing has become clear: without a theory-based concept of what 'individuality' might be like it is difficult to gain concrete results that could, perhaps, form the basis for further research.

