Advanced modern societies are experiencing a transformation of their politics and style of policy making that may suitably be described as a \textit{paradigm change}. Over the past decade or so, established European Democracies, have not just been modernising their economic structures and social systems in order to adapt to the necessities of the increasingly globalized economy, but they have, arguably, been caught up in a comprehensive transformation of late-modern democracy. The ‘continuous decline of effectiveness that undermines the confidence of citizens in the democratic regime’ (Roller 2005: 1) has concerned political elites and academic observers for some time. In ‘nearly all advanced industrial democracies’ and ‘by almost any measure, public confidence and trust in, and support for’ the established structures of democracy ‘has eroded over the past generation’ (Dalton 2004: 191). There is evidence suggesting that ‘adherence to the norms and ideals of the democratic process have apparently increased’ (ibid.: 192), but citizens are becoming ever more ‘sceptical towards politicians, political parties, and political institutions’ (ibid.: 191) which are widely perceived as, to put it bluntly, \textit{a waste of time}. Public debates about the ‘end of democracy’ or even the ‘end of politics’ (Baumann 1999; Gamble 2000; Furedi 2005), but also about the ‘reinvention’ (Beck 1997) or ‘revival of politics’ (Boggs 2000: 243ff) indicate just how intensely the arrival of a turning point in democratic politics is being perceived.

It sometimes seems that in advanced democracies ‘voters want to run the show directly and are impatient with all forms of intermediaries between their opinions and...
public policy’ (Dahrendorf 2000: 311; Dalton 2004). Non-traditional forms of political articulation such as consumer boycotts, single issue pressure groups, or direct action movements are actually on the rise (Cain et al. 2003). It has, therefore, been suggested that the ‘fundamental paradigm that dominates our politics is the shift from representative to direct democracy’ (Dahrendorf 2000: 311; my emphasis). Others have tried to capture the ongoing transformation of advanced democracies with terms such as de-parliamentarization and post-parliamentary democracy (e.g. Benz 1998; Blumenthal 2003). Debates on the politics of delegation (e.g. Thatcher and Stone Sweet 2002; Strom et al. 2003; Flinders 2004a,b), the presidentialization of democracy (e.g. Poguntke and Webb 2005), and on the new politics of leadership (Körösényi 2005) are, arguably, centring on very closely related phenomena. This also applies to the literature on depoliticisation (e.g. Burnham 2001; Buller and Flinders 2005), the politics of regulation (e.g. Czada et al. 2003; Moran 2003), and the transition from the politics of decisions to that of presentation (Sarcinelli 2003). Whilst these debates are all taking different perspectives and focusing on different aspects, they are ultimately all concerned with exploring the ongoing transformation of democracy, and they all converge in the basic diagnosis that in the evolution of democratic politics ‘we have unmistakably arrived at the end of the parliamentary epoch’ (Walter 2005: 57).

To pull together some elements of these debates, and to theorise the post-parliamentary and post-representative form of politics towards which the ongoing transformation is taking late-modern democracies are the objectives of this article. Key terms in the analysis that follows will be the post-democratic revolution and the politics of simulation. The first of these, the post-democratic revolution (Blühdorn 2004a), is, I will argue, the motor that powers the ongoing transformation of democracy. The term aims to indicate that this transformation may be seen as the counterpart of the participatory revolution since the late 1960s (Blühdorn 2007a), and it implies that the experience of hyper-complexity, normative disorientation, and democratic sclerosis are important drivers of this ongoing paradigm shift. The second concept, the politics of simulation, refers to a theoretical framework for the conceptualisation and interpretation of late-modern politics (Blühdorn 2002, 2003, 2004b, 2005, 2006b, 2007b). It suggests that the form of democracy that emerges beyond the phase of parliamentary democracy, and that is characteristic of the late-modern condition, is a mixture of democratic performance and uncompromising adherence to the metaphysics of efficiency (Blühdorn 2006c). Insofar as Britain has been described as a country with a particularly post-democratic political culture (Crouch 2004), whilst Germany’s political culture has been very strongly reshaped by the participatory revolution and is, not least because of this, beset by problems of hyper-complexity and democratic sclerosis, these two countries are important points of reference throughout the analysis that follows. Yet, with its focus on the transformation of democracy and the efficient management of late-modern complexity this article is a journey into democratic theory in a much larger sense.

As was indicated above, much of the recent literature on the current transformation of democracy proceeds from the assumption that the vast majority of citizens in late-modern democracies are deeply committed to democratic ideals but have become what Klingemann (1999) calls disappointed democrats. Accordingly, the objective in this literature is to identify means by which contemporary institutionalised democracies may be moved closer towards the democratic ideal. It will be
immediately evident that an analysis that is built upon the concepts of a post-democratic revolution and the politics of simulation will take a very different approach and pursue a much less normatively loaded agenda. This article begins by reviewing different ways in which the historical evolution of democracy and its most recent transformation have been conceptualised. In order to prepare the ground for the analysis of what I am calling the *post-democratic revolution*, I will then undertake a critical discussion of the way in which Colin Crouch (2004) has used the term post-democracy. Section three focuses on depoliticisation and delegation which are, arguably, the core constitutive elements of the post-democratic revolution since the 1990s and the primary strategies late-modern societies have developed for the efficient management of their unprecedented complexity. Section four delves into the theory of the politics of simulation and develops the concept of *simulative democracy* which is contrasted, as a third historical form of democracy, with the models of direct and representative democracy. The concluding section focuses on the *performance of democracy*. It supplements the exploration of the performance of democracies in terms of their tangible outcomes (e.g. Roller 2005) by a discussion of democratic performance in the sense of the simulative regeneration of emancipatory-progressive values.

1. Great transformations

Robert Dahl has suggested that ‘the history of democracy can be viewed as consisting of three great transformations’ (1994: 25). The first of these was the one that led from pre-democratic societies to Athenian assembly democracy; the second one was the transition from Greek direct democracy to modern representative democracy in the nation state; and the third one is the currently ongoing transformation from national representative democracy towards a third form of democracy whose contours are only gradually becoming visible. How may this third transformation be determined in temporal terms? What triggered this third transformation? What kind of qualitative transformation does it entail? For Dahl, the third transformation of democracy is associated with the era of globalisation. As societal function systems and the life world experience of modern individuals are growing beyond the nation state, the internationalisation of politics is a necessary and inescapable consequence. Size and complexity were the key factors which triggered the transition from city-state democracy towards nation-state democracy, and according to Dahl, these factors are now once again at the centre of the shift towards a transnational or even global democracy: The Greek ‘city-state was made obsolete by the emergence of the large scale nation-state’ (1994: 25), and the currently ongoing transformation is ‘something like the second transformation writ large on a world scale’ (ibid.: 27). ‘Like the second transformation, then, the third is associated with a great increase in the scale of the political system’ (ibid.: 28).

As regards the qualitative changes to democracy which come along with its third transformation, Dahl notes that at the levels of national and sub-national politics, the efficient management of ever increasing societal differentiation and complexity ‘will require considerable delegation of power’ (1994: 27) and reduce the scope for ‘effective citizen participation’ (ibid: 28). At the level of transnational politics, he warns, ‘the danger is that the third transformation will not lead to an extension of the democratic idea beyond the national state but to the victory in that domain of de facto
guardianship’ (ibid.: 33; my emphasis). Thus the history of democracy may firstly be
described as the development from city-state democracy towards nation-state
democracy and further towards an as yet unknown transnational or even global
democracy. But beyond this it is, secondly, a process of qualitative transformation
leading from direct participation via parliamentary representation towards de facto
guardianship. In the course of its historical evolution, democracy seems to be
incrementally moving away from the theoretical ideal of rule of the people by the
people, and an increasing ‘democratic deficit’ (Dahl 1994: 23) emerges.

Dahl’s analysis anticipates key elements which have been elaborated in much detail in
the critical literature on corporate globalisation, yet it seems at odds with the widely
held view that advanced western democracies have actually become more open,
participatory, transparent and accountable than at any earlier stage. Mark Warren’s
assessment of the current transformation of democracy may be regarded as
representative of this literature. In his article A Second Transformation of
Democracy? Warren (2003) raises the question whether the currently ongoing
changes really ‘so alter or complement the institutions of representative democracy
that we are entitled to speak of a second transformation of democracy\(^1\) leading to a
third historical form’ (2003: 224). He shares the view that ‘in the face of
globalization, the de-centring of the nation-state, complexity, and functional
differentiation’, representative democracy faces, ‘if not obsolescence, at least
diminished importance’ (ibid.). Yet he suggests that the notion of a second
transformation is appropriate only if ‘democracies now function in ways that
represent a qualitative break with the representative model’ (ibid.; my emphasis). The
pluralisation of political arenas and conflict lines; the unprecedented opportunities for
political articulation and participation; the ever increasing scepticism of democratic
publics towards their elected representatives; the high level of public information
about political issues, and the rapid spread of experiments with elements of direct and
deliberative democracy lead Warren to suggest that ‘something as dramatic as a
second transformation of democracy’ (ibid.: 246) has indeed occurred. He believes
that recent decades have brought ‘only moderate increases in democracy in political
venues closely tied to the representative electoral system’, but ‘dramatic increases
in those venues that supplement, complement, and compete with the representative
system’ (ibid.: 246; my emphasis). So he implies that a ‘third historical form’ of
democracy has actually emerged, but he remains rather vague how it may be
conceptualised, how exactly it is categorically different from its representative
predecessor and in what respect this ‘third historical form’ of democracy is
categorically new.

Essentially, the transformation that Warren discusses is the one that has been initiated
by the emancipatory social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Whilst in Dahl’s
model the second and third great transformations appear as moves away from the
democratic ideal, Warren’s second transformation is clearly a move towards citizen
empowerment and democratic self-rule. Warren is ambiguous whether this second
transformation has actually been completed or whether it is still ongoing. But
interestingly, he gives no indication that the changes which have occurred to western
democracies since the collapse of their communist counterparts and since the

\(^1\) Warren counts the transition from Greek direct democracy towards modern representative democracy
as the first transformation.
emergence of the post-communist era of economic globalisation may represent a further transformation. Whilst Dahl regards these changes since the 1990s as the essence of his third transformation, Warren does not seem to believe that they represent a further ‘qualitative break’ that leads beyond the ‘historical form of democracy’ which the participatory revolution since the 1960s had brought about.

So, Dahl and Warren are both highlighting important dimensions of the ongoing third transformation of democracy, yet neither of their models offers a satisfactory conceptualisation of the paradigm change that is the focus of this article. Dahl does not recognise the enormous significance of the participatory revolution which is undoubtedly a determining factor in this third transformation. Warren, in turn, fails to recognise that his second transformation is in fact only the predecessor of the third transformation which has been going on since the early 1990s. Warren not only neglects much debated phenomena such as increasing political cynicism and apathy, but he also does not recognise the significance of Dahl’s point about complexity, delegation and guardianship. This shift towards delegation and guardianship, however, is arguably the central dimension of the great transformation that is currently reshaping late-modern democracies. It has been explored in the burgeoning literature on the politics of delegation, the media-related trend towards personalisation, and the presidentialization of western democracies. But in a way that goes well beyond this literature, András Körösényi (2005) has interpreted this shift as indicative of a categorically new form of democracy that he calls leader democracy.

Like Warren, Dalton and many others, Körösényi takes ‘the decline of political parties and parliaments in the last decades’ (2005: 358) and ‘the crisis of representation’ (ibid.: 368) as the starting point for his analysis. Yet in trying to identify the novel elements in contemporary democratic politics he looks into a direction that is exactly opposite to Warren’s citizen empowerment. Reviving the Weberian-Schumpeterian model of competitive elitism, he points towards the delegation and concentration of power, and to the striking rehabilitation of leadership as the most striking political innovations of the past fifteen years. The rise of these phenomena most certainly represents a radical ‘qualitative break’ from the principle of self-rule and DIY-politics that was promoted by the participatory revolution. Körösényi’s primary empirical point of reference is Britain under prime minister Tony Blair whose political career and government is indeed widely associated with the explicit celebration and promotion of leadership. Yet, Körösényi suggests that the decline of traditional-style representation and the new appreciation of leadership are phenomena which have significance well beyond the UK. Indeed, even in Germany, which for historical reasons has in the past half century been deeply suspicious of any leader figures and centralisation of political power, there has recently been a striking rehabilitation of the idea of leadership.²

Körösényi argues that in late-modern democracies there is a marked shift from input responsiveness and input legitimacy towards output responsiveness and output legitimacy. For contemporary electorates, he believes, What matters is what works!

² In his famous Ruckrede speech of 1997, Federal President Roman Herzog declared: ‘In times of existential challenges only those will win who are genuinely prepared to lead’ (Herzog 1997). More recently, the ‘anti-Führer-state’ and the participatory consensus culture have explicitly been branded as the ‘German defect’ which renders the country ‘inefficient, slow and unwilling to reform’ (Steingart 2004: 135ff/153).
(Gordon Brown), and in order to make sure that things work, late-modern democracies have embraced the principle of leadership. In leader democracy, Körösényi suggests, citizens are assumed to be ‘less competent than politicians in deciding on specific policy issues’ (2005: 361). Political elites, are therefore expected to take a lead and get on with the job, and electorates who ‘may be capable of giving some overall retrospective assessment of the achievement of the government’ (ibid.), make use of the democratic elections in order to pass their verdict on their leaders’ performance. The distinctive feature of leader democracies, Körösényi believes, is that the ‘political process is not generated by the political preferences of the electorate’ but ‘by the aspirations and ambitions of politicians’ (2005: 364). Rather than identifying and accommodating electoral preferences, rival politicians are, supposedly, ‘trying to shape and produce the electoral preferences of the people themselves’ (ibid.). Efficient political communication and the government’s public relations machine are, according to Körösényi’s analysis, the primary tools by which politicians are trying ‘to convince the public or rather to generate a public opinion that suits them’ (ibid.: 365). In leader democracy, the political process works top-down rather than bottom-up. ‘The active players of politics are not the constituents but the politicians’ and electorates are merely ‘reactive’ (ibid.: 364). In the political market, Körösényi suggests, ‘the emphasis is on the supply side’, and a successful leader is ‘a political entrepreneur who does not cater to existing demands but creates new demand by supplying new policies’ (ibid.: 367). The categorically new feature in advanced modern democracies is, therefore, that ‘representation means not re-

presentation or the mirroring of something existing’ but ‘creation of something which has not existed before’ (ibid.: 375). The objective of leader democracy is not to provide ‘responsive government’ but, if anything, to provide ‘responsible government’ (ibid.: 378).

On the basis of Körösényi’s model, the historical evolution of democracy can be described as moving from direct democracy via representative democracy towards leader democracy, or as the transformation of participatory government into representative government and further into responsible government. Körösényi’s analysis seems to describe a political condition that is radically different from the one that Warren finds himself confronted with. Whilst Warren regards post-representative democracy as more direct and more participatory than its predecessor, Körösényi’s leader democracy could hardly be further away from the ideal of the demos ruling itself. Körösényi’s model sheds an interesting light on Tony Blair’s politics: Blair’s public sector reform, his constitutional reforms, and his ever more sophisticated management of public relations and political communication can all fruitfully be interpreted within Körösényi’s framework. Indeed the model of leader democracy is a useful tool for the analysis of late-modern democracies well beyond Britain, and in particular, Körösényi offers a very perceptive analysis of the changing meaning and significance of representation.

Nevertheless, the model of leader democracy is, if taken on its own, clearly not a sufficient conceptualisation of contemporary post-representative democracy. ³ For example, it does not account for the enormous influence which professional lobbies and organised interest groups have on political leaders. It does not acknowledge the tight restrictions that transnational economic actors – or systemic imperatives –

³ Indeed Körösényi does not make any such claim.
impose on the leaders’ supposedly ‘free mandate for leadership’ (Körösényi 2005: 375). Also, Körösényi’s model does not account for the enormous significance of opinion polling in contemporary swing-voter democracies. It does not recognize that in certain respects the democratic expectations of contemporary electorates are indeed getting more inflated, that there is a significant measure of grass-roots direct action and bottom-up political interference, and that governments feel under considerable pressure to experiment with new methods of democratic involvement and direct participation. Beyond this, the concept of leadership is at least as closely connected to varieties of irresponsible government, such as populism, neo-authoritarianism and soft fascism (Sennett 2004) as it is to Körösényi’s notion of responsible government – which is, incidentally, a concept with very questionable normative overtones. And very importantly in the present context, Körösényi does not offer any explanation why the shift towards leader democracy is supposedly taking place. He neither takes up Dahl’s point about complexity and efficiency, nor does he give any alternative reasons for this ongoing transformation.

Thus, Körösényi’s model is just as reductionist as the ones discussed before, but it fully develops an important dimension of the ongoing great transformation that Warren ignores and that Dahl only touches upon. In different ways, Dahl’s, Warren’s and Körösényi’s models are all unsatisfactory, but their discussion has provided important clues about the temporal dimensions and constitutive elements of the great transformation which is the focus of this article, and it has revealed some distinctive features of the third historical form of democracy that is characteristic of late-modern societies. The tensions and indeed incompatibilities between the ways in which Dahl, Warren and Körösényi conceptualise and assess this ongoing transformation highlight the extent to which their three narratives rely on simplification as a key strategy for making sense of a highly complex and unintelligible development. If it is possible to develop any more comprehensive conceptualisation of the currently ongoing third transformation of democracy, this would have to integrate the seemingly incompatible perspectives and constitutive elements discussed so far. It would have to a meta-narrative that can accommodate and explain these apparently conflicting narratives. The concept of the post-democratic revolution (Blühdorn 2004a, 2007a) is a stepping stone for the development of such a more comprehensive model. It corresponds to the neo-materialist silent counter-revolution and the post-ecologist revolution (Blühdorn 2002, 2004b), and it aims to capture a qualitative transformation of democracy that responds to both the social movements’ participatory revolution and to the process of globalisation. The concept will be further developed by taking a critical look at the way in which Colin Crouch has used the notion of post-democracy.

2. Post-democracy and the repression of the emancipatory-progressive project

Colin Crouch’s Post-Democracy (2004) warrants some discussion firstly because it contributes further to the analysis of democracy beyond the parliamentary-representative model, and secondly because it helps to identify pitfalls which an adequate conceptualisation of the third transformation of democracy should seek to avoid. Like Dahl and Warren, Crouch, too, tries to capture the historical development of democracy with a three-stage model. In his version, a pre-democratic condition is followed by an extended democratic moment in which political elites come under pressure ‘to admit the voices of ordinary people into affairs of state’ (2004: 4), until in
post-democracy ‘these voices [are] being squeezed out again, as the economically powerful continue to use their instruments of the influence while those of the demos become weakened’ (ibid.: 5). Crouch suggests that European societies have had their ‘democratic moment’ in the first few decades following the second World War, and the phase of post-democracy emerged in the latter part of the century. According to Crouch’s analysis the characteristic feature of post-democracy is that ‘virtually all the formal components of democracy survive’ (ibid.: 22), but ‘citizens have been reduced to the role of manipulated, passive, rare participants’ (ibid.: 21). Indeed, Crouch notes that ‘the forms of democracy’ not only ‘remain fully in place’, but are ‘today in some respects…actually strengthened’ (ibid.: 6). Nevertheless, ‘politics and government are increasingly slipping back into the control of privileged elites in the manner characteristic of pre-democratic times’ (ibid.). Post-democratic politics has ‘little interest in widespread citizen involvement or the role of organizations outside the business sector’ (ibid.: 3). Citizens remain indispensable as the source of political legitimacy, but this can be obtained by ‘means of encouraging the maximum level of minimal participation’ (ibid.: 112). Ritualised elections, consultation processes and tightly managed exercises of public involvement adequately fulfil this purpose, whilst ‘politics is really shaped in private by interaction between elected governments and elites that overwhelmingly represent business interests’ (ibid.: 4).

Crouch believes ‘the idea of post-democracy helps us describe situations when boredom, frustration and disillusion have settled in after a democratic moment’ (ibid.: 19). He suggests that ‘egalitarians cannot reverse the arrival of post-democracy’ (ibid.: 12) because it is the result of an ‘inevitable entropy of democracy’ (ibid.: 104). To some extent, ‘the growing complexity of issues’ (ibid.: 9) is responsible for this inevitable entropy, and this complexity problem is aggravated by the fact that ‘democracy has simply not kept pace with capitalism’s rush to the global’ (ibid.: 29). Another explanatory factor, Crouch argues, is the decline of the industrial working class and its replacement by a highly fragmented service sector (ibid.: 53-57). Yet, ‘the fundamental change lying behind the advance of post-democracy’ is, in Crouch’s view, the ‘growing political power of the firm’ (ibid.: 105; my emphasis). What he means by this is not just the much debated power of transnational corporations, but also the transformation of politicians into ‘shopkeepers’ who, in order to stay in business, are ‘anxiously seeking to discover what their customers want’ (ibid.: 21), and the transformation of political parties which privatise and delegate substantive politics to non-elected bodies, and then fully concentrate on cultivating their brand and marketing their image (ibid.: 101-103). Thus, for Crouch post-democracy is the condition where (a) democratic institutions and rituals are maintained, but (b) the demos has been largely disempowered, and where (c) party politics and political competition are more or less void of substantive content, whilst (d) the substance of political decisions is dictated by ‘the firm’. Post-democratic politics, for Crouch, is neither representative, nor participatory, nor indeed responsible. On the contrary, the post-democratic fusion of populism and corporate dictates gives rise to highly irresponsible government.

In a number of respects Crouch’s diagnoses are very close to those of Körösényi, and like the latter, Crouch presents Blair’s Britain as his primary empirical evidence and illustration for his theory (ibid.: 5). He suggests that ‘the shift from Labour to New Labour can be read as the shift from a party suited to democratic politics to one prepared for post-democracy’ (ibid.: 64). Like Körösényi, however, Crouch is keen to
point out that his diagnosis is, *mutatis mutandis*, also applicable to other advanced democracies. A significant difference between the two models concerns the centre of political power. While Körösényi and Crouch converge in their diagnosis of a radical shift of power away from the demos and towards elites which are at best symbolically accountable, their views of political leaders seem diametrically opposed to each other. Crouch’s model leaves little space for Körösényi’s ‘free mandate for leadership’. Instead political elites are torn between their ‘anxieties about their relations with citizens’ (ibid.: 21) and the categorical imperatives emerging from the global economic system and its powerful agents. Indeed this paradox between the politicians’ obsession with opinion poll ratings and the increasing disempowerment of citizens is, in Crouch’s view, a defining criterion of post-democracy: ‘One cannot call this kind of politics non- or anti-democratic’ because relations with citizens are so important a factor for political elites, but it can also not be called democratic ‘because so many citizens have been reduced to the role of manipulated, passive’ spectators of the political process (ibid.: 21). Like Körösényi, Crouch sees the *management of public opinion* by means of the media-based public relations machine as the central tool that renders public disempowerment compatible with government dependence on public approval. But whilst Körösényi’s model of responsible government places considerable emphasis on the substantive performance of political leaders which is measured and assessed at election time, a distinctive feature of Crouch’s post-democracy is its reliance on rhetorical performance that is not backed up by the delivery of any substantive outcomes.

Crouch’s analysis takes up all the major elements which are commonly rehearsed in post- and neo-Marxist critiques of corporate globalisation; and while in a number of respects its social-theoretical foundations are appreciably more solid than in much of this literature, the major weaknesses of his analysis are indeed of a Marxian-modernist origin. Having stated that the changes that lead towards post-democracy ‘are so powerful and widespread that it is impossible to see any major reversal of them’ (ibid.: 104), Crouch then proceeds to suggesting that ‘the time is ripe for a counter-attack on the Anglo-American model’ (ibid.: 107). He argues that ‘however far post-democracy advances, it is unlikely that it will exhaust the capacity for new social identities to form’, and points out that the prospect of ‘mobilising new identities’ is what ‘gives egalitarian democrats their main hope for the future’ (ibid.: 116). The flexibilised, fragmented and politically excluded ‘bottom third of the working population’, in particular, is at the centre of Crouch’s hopes, and he believes that in the ‘purely market-oriented societies to which we are moving’, ‘a potential radical and democratic agenda remains unused’ as long as no political party takes up their ‘cause’ (ibid.: 66-67). In line with the bulk of the anti-globalisation literature, Crouch is confident that eventually ‘a massive escalation of truly disruptive actions’ will put ‘global capital’ under sufficient pressure ‘to bring its representatives to the bargaining table’ (ibid.: 123).

As Crouch correctly states, what he is outlining in this part of his argument are his *hopes* rather than insights derived from descriptive-explanatory social science and social theory. Given that ‘the growth of the firm’ has not only reshaped political parties and competition, but has also comprehensively remoulded the very structure of late-modern identity and identity formation (Blühdorn 2006c), any implicit suggestions that democracy which has ‘not kept pace with capitalism’s rush to the global’ still can – or would even wish to – catch up seem highly questionable. The
problem is not simply that, as Crouch himself indicates, the neglected cause of the post-industrial service proletariat is in fact so differentiated, fragmented and volatile that, from a sociological point of view, any coordinated and sustained mobilisation is virtually inconceivable, but ironically, one might even say that (at least inside of the late-modern universe) there is no cause at all that might be represented. In the late-modern context where identity construction is a highly individualised project pursued, first and foremost, by means of ever accelerated product choices and acts of consumption, the capacity to form social identities which are not only distinct from the market but could also be mobilised against it is rapidly disappearing. At Crouch’s hypothetical bargaining table the mobilised consumer proletariat would undoubtedly voice a wide range of concerns, but their key messages for the representatives of global capital – complementing the middle class demand for higher returns of their direct and indirect investments – may well be the battle cry that rules at the bargain table: Geiz ist geil! and Billig will ich! Rather than challenging the principles of global consumer capitalism such messages would provide them with something like democratic legitimacy.

Crouch’s narrative of the ‘massive escalation of truly disruptive actions’ is based on the Marxist dichotomy of labour and capital, or the post-Marxist tension between the system and the individual. In the late-modern condition, however, the Marxian category of alienation is rapidly loosing its sociological foundation. There is little evidence of any serious desire to remove what the old progressive left used to portray as false consciousness. Social movements which would genuinely threaten the established political-economic system are nowhere in sight. However, the bulk of sociological and political analysis remains deeply indebted to the pervasive tradition of idealist-humanist thought. In Crouch’s model this is more immediately evident than in the ones discussed before, but at closer consideration this is also applicable to Dahl, Warren and Körösényi. Despite all their differences, Crouch’s narrative of truly disruptive actions, Dahl’s narrative of the expanding democratic deficit, Warren’s narrative of progressive citizen empowerment, and Körösényi’s narrative of leadership and responsible government are all united in their firm reliance on deeply modernist assumptions and normative frameworks of analysis. Essentially, none of them really captures the ongoing great transformation, but first and foremost, they are all fighting the old emancipatory and progressive battle. In line with Beck (1992; 1997) and Giddens (1990; 1991) they are hoping for a second modernity. Even where their tentative explorations of the post-representative or post-democratic condition do not swiftly metamorphose into open campaigns for a neo-democratic turn, their key concepts such as the democratic deficit or responsible government still reproduce the fundamentally modernist beliefs about the autonomous individual as the central category of sociological and political analysis, of democratic ideals towards which existing democracies are – or ought to be – progressing, and about a common good which, beyond the limitations of participatory and representative government, may still be pursued through responsible government.

Ultimately, Dahl, Warren, Körösényi and Crouch all produce societal self-descriptions which, intentionally or not, provide reassurance that the modernist values

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4 This does by no means preclude the short term mobilisation of social protests such as the east-German Hartz IV protests of 2004.
5 Greed is cool! is the motto of an extended and very successful advertising campaign of German electronics retail chain SATURN; Cheap is what I want! is the slogan of German food retailer PLUS.
and belief systems are still in place (Blühdorn 2006b). None of them really captures the state of politics that emerges beyond this framework. They all assume that the progressive emancipatory project is essentially still operational, even though it may suffer repression and require reactivation. This is most graphically illustrated by Crouch who claims that the evolution from pre-democracy through the democratic moment to post-democracy follows the line of a ‘parabola’ (2004: 5), but then remains firmly within a model that believes in a fixed ideal of democracy which is incrementally realised through of cyclical phases of mobilisation, demobilisation and remobilisation. Morally and politically, these campaigns are highly commendable. Yet from the perspective of social and political theory, a post-democratic era that genuinely deserves this name only starts beyond the abdication of this supposedly unchanging democratic ideal, beyond this cyclical movement, and beyond the exhaustion of the motor that powers the emancipatory-progressive project. At this point any reminders that ‘the market is not capable of being an absolute principle, a categorical imperative, since it is a means for achieving ends and not an end in itself’ (Crouch 2004: 84), or that ‘the apparent efficiency gains’ achieved by contemporary agendas of modernisation ‘can become quite illusory’ and ‘may even be a loss of real effectiveness’ (ibid.: 87) will be received with a complete lack of understanding. Sociological and political analyses which aim to capture this condition will have to abandon normative guiding questions such as the ones for ‘the balance of improved efficiency against distorted goals’ (Crouch 2004: 110), how we may ‘move the democratic process closer towards its theoretical ideal’ (Dalton 2004: 203), or how we may ‘reverse’ the ‘distortions’ of post-democracy (Crouch 2004: 104). Instead, questions such as What are the distinctive characteristics and specific problems of the post-democratic condition? and How do late-modern democracies manage these challenges? will have to move into the centre of attention. For such analyses, the concept of post-democracy will be unsatisfactory because, like all conceptualisations relying on the prefix ‘post’, it fails to capture the distinctive features of the new phase that is said to be emerging. It determines this ‘third historical form’ only in the terms of the one that it supersedes. Whilst the notion of the post-democratic revolution, if used in conjunction with that of the participatory revolution, is a helpful label for the ongoing process of the third transformation, a more powerful concept needs to be found in order to describe the new form of politics that this transformation is bringing about.

3. Depoliticisation and the exhaustion of the emancipatory-progressive project

In contrast to narratives of the suppression of the emancipatory-progressive project which may, however, be reinstated and revitalised, the argument that is explored here is that the ongoing third transformation of democracy may have to be understood as the exhaustion of the emancipatory-progressive project which implies that any reinstatement of earlier democratic ideals or revitalisation of earlier democratic agendas will not easily be possible, nor in fact desired. This exhaustion, or at least radical transformation, of the modernist-emancipatory agenda is what the concept of the post-democratic revolution aims to capture and it is, therefore, clearly distinct from the way in which Crouch uses the concept of post-democracy. Phenomena such as the deparlamentarisation and presidentialisation of advanced democracies (Benz 1998; Poguntke and Webb 2005), Kőrössényi’s shift towards leadership and
responsible government, the proliferation of non-parliamentary advisory, regulatory and auditing bodies (e.g. Power 1997; Moran 2003), the advance of political marketing (e.g. Lees-Marshment 2001; O'Shaughnessy and Henneberg 2002) or Crouch’s shift from substantive politics to the politics of presentation and communication (also see Sarcinelli 2003) may all be interpreted as indicators of the exhaustion or at least radical transformation of the emancipatory-democratic agenda. Arguably, they can all be summarised under the conceptual umbrella of depoliticisation which is at the very centre of the post-democratic revolution.

The implications and significance of depoliticisation are best explored by contrasting it with the concept of politicisation. The three dimensions of politicisation are, firstly, the politicisation of issues, secondly the politicisation of people, and thirdly the politicisation of social organisations and institutions. The first of these dimensions implies that previously non-negotiable issues become negotiable and decidable, i.e. these issues are dragged from non-political spheres such as religion, tradition, nature or intangible political authorities into the arenas of public contestation and scrutiny, where value pluralism gives rise to alternative scenarios, and where decisions have to be justified and democratically legitimated. The politicisation of people implies that citizens or groups of citizens who have previously been uninterested in politics and excluded from it become engaged in political debates and turn into political actors. And the politicisation of social organisations and institutions is the process in which previously non-political organisations, such as nature conservation societies, sports clubs, youth centres, universities, or even courts of justice embrace and more or less openly promote specific political agendas.6 In the most general sense, politicisation is the realisation that established social norms, social practices and social relations are contingent rather than sacrosanct, that things could also be different, and that citizens, individually and collectively, have political agency by means of which alternatives can be explored and implemented. This recognition that things could also be different has always been the igniting spark of emancipatory-progressive movements, and politicisation has always been their key strategy.

Against this background, depoliticisation can be described as a process in which previously political issues, people and social institutions are becoming less political or non-political. As regards political issues, their depoliticisation implies that they are relocated from the arenas of democratic contestation and decision into arenas which are governed by – at least supposedly – unambiguous and non-negotiable codes rather than contestable social values. Economic markets, scientific laboratories, regulatory bodies, courts of justice or international regimes are prominent examples of such supposedly unpolitical arenas, and interest rates, education standards, health provision or environmental quality are just a few examples of issues which have recently been transferred towards them. The depoliticisation of people, secondly, implies that citizens which had previously been interested and engaged in public affairs withdraw from political arenas and retreat into the non-political pursuit of their personal affairs and well-being.7 Widespread disengagement from political organisations and

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6 This obviously also includes the formation of new social organisations or institutions which are established for the pursuit of specific political values and goals.

7 In this context, non-political must be understood as self-centred and uninterested in the elaboration and implementation of social alternatives. The non-political pursuit of personal affairs may well entail the uncompromising exploitation of all available means in the fight for perceived rights and entitlements.
activities, the delegation of political interests to (semi-)professional agents (single issue groups, lobbies), the spread of political cynicism and apathy, and the focus on individualised activities of entertainment, consumption and wellness may be seen as evidence for the depoliticisation of citizens in advanced modern democracies. The depoliticisation of social organisations and institutions, thirdly, implies that bodies ranging from environmental organisations and alternative self-help groups to building societies and retail co-operatives shed their ideological commitments and political agendas and focus on their core business. Deideologisation, professionalisation, pragmatism, managerial best practice, and the pursuit of efficiency gains are the principles that guide this transformation of social institutions. Ironically, this process even affects political parties which are keen to avoid association with any ideological orientations, but want to be perceived as pragmatic managers of public interests and professional contractors for the political job that needs to be done.

In some of the recent literature, the phenomenon of depoliticisation has been defined and discussed in a much narrower way. Rather than as a conceptual umbrella for a wide range of practices and tendencies which in the present analysis are all interpreted as indicators of the ongoing third transformation of democracy, this literature understands depoliticisation primarily as a form of ‘statecraft’ and a ‘strategy of governing’ (Burnham 2001; Buller and Flinders 2005). Like the politics of delegation8 (e.g. Thatcher and Stone Sweet 2002; Strøm et al. 2003) it has been analysed first and foremost as a ‘novel code of polity management’ (Buller and Flinders 2005: 529) that has been employed in a particularly skilful manner by the British government under Tony Blair. A common criticism of practices of depoliticisation and delegation is that they merely veil the essentially political character of political decisions and deprive democratic electorates of their right to deliberate and decide upon the affected issues (Burnham 2001; Buller and Flinders 2005). Conceptualisations of depoliticisation and delegation along these lines capture an important dimension of these phenomena, yet they are, arguably, rather reductionist and on the whole not conducive to an adequate understanding of the exceptional significance of these practices for the ongoing transformation of democracy. Depoliticisation and delegation are much more than just elements of statecraft, strategies of government, means of ‘ideological mobilisation’ (Burnham 2001: 129), or ‘control mechanism[s], enhancing central government management whilst off-loading difficult issues’ (ibid.: 140) and ‘responsibility for unpopular policies’ (ibid.: 137). They are insufficiently understood if they are explained, as Burnham does, primarily as a response to accelerated economic globalisation since the collapse of the bipolar world order or, as Buller and Flinders do, as the result of ‘domestic factors’ such as the ‘institutional duality between the industrial and the political’ (Buller and Flinders 2005: 540). Instead, depoliticisation and delegation should, arguably, be regarded as phenomena which are relevant at all levels of advanced modern society (Boggs 2000, pp. 25-40), and as the key elements of the post-democratic revolution that transforms not only late-modern politics, but late-modern society as a whole – and indeed the notion of modernity itself.

What the wide range of practices which may be summarised under the conceptual umbrella of depoliticisation have in common is that they all serve the purpose of

8 Delegation is the key strategy for the depoliticisation of issues. It implies the transfer of decision making powers and responsibilities to scientific experts, economic markets, courts of justice, transnational regimes, or any other institution or authority that seems more or less insulated from the problems that tend to befall pluralist democratic politics.
reducing the complexity and increasing the efficiency of societal systems and processes. The objective of all of them is to reduce the potential for conflicts, to accelerate decision-making processes and to increase the effectiveness of policy delivery. In the most general sense, depoliticisation means taking the politics out of issues, people and institutions, and in each case this implies a dramatic reduction of complexity which is achieved by cutting the number of potential veto players and veto points and reducing the number of alternative perspectives and scenarios which have to be considered. Depoliticisation bears the potential for considerable efficiency gains because it simplifies issues and allows people and institutions to focus on their core business, however that may be defined, optimise the use of their issue specific expertise, and get on with the job. Strategies of depoliticisation are thus geared towards a central problem of late-modern societies: Unprecedented normative pluralism and structural complexity belong to their key characteristics and severely reduce their ability to address their major problems ranging from economic growth and environmental protection to social justice and international security. In late-modern society’s political economy of uncertainty (Baumann 1999: 173-175) the efficient management of this complexity is the central challenge that has to be confronted at every level of society, from the individual management of comparatively mundane life world decisions – what Giddens (1991) calls life politics – to the management of highly complex scientific and technological issues by national and transnational governments. Whether or not practices of depoliticisation can actually deliver on the objectives of complexity reduction and efficiency gains is a secondary question that is difficult to assess but that does not need to bother us here. More relevant in the present context is that they promise to achieve these objectives, that they offer at least short term relief from the problems of complexity, and thereby respond to problems and concerns which in the late-modern societies are pervasive. In a condition where complexity-induced sclerosis and paralysis are a permanent threat, but where decisions still have to be taken, practices of depoliticisation help to facilitate decision making, reduce anxiety and re-establish some measure of certainty. They may well be unable to genuinely resolve the problems of hyper-complexity and low efficiency, but they still provide assistance with the management of late-modern complexity.

In the sense that the problems of normative and institutional hyper-complexity have been, if not originally generated then at least severely aggravated by the participatory revolution; and in the sense that depoliticisation and delegation are the exact opposite of the core demands promoted by the participatory revolution, the post-democratic revolution may appear as a reactionary counter-movement against the participatory revolution since the 1960s. Curiously, however, strategies of depoliticisation and delegation pursue objectives which are surprisingly similar to those of which the participatory revolution believed that they could be achieved only by means of politicisation, the disempowerment of established authorities, and the shift of decision making and executive power towards the democratic grass roots. These objectives were

- to protect the public good against systemic irrationalities (e.g. political, administrative, economic, scientific-technological);
- to protect the public good from sectional interests and the irrationality of short term fashions, populisms or media generated moods;
• to manage highly complex technologies and risks responsibly, and generally improve the quality, legitimacy and implementability of policy decisions;
• to replace political short-termism by a long-term societal perspective; and
• to protect minority identities.

Overall the participatory revolution aimed to create space and provide the necessary power and tools for the realisation, articulation and experience of diversified individual and collective identities and the implementation of the public good. The notion of comprehensive social efficiency (Blühdorn 2006c) summarises these objectives. However, the strategies favoured by the participatory revolution, i.e. the strategies of politicisation and grass-roots empowerment did not deliver. Or, more precisely, they did deliver in that they created unprecedented space for the differentiation of value preferences and life styles, but they were a failure firstly in that they led into a condition of normative disorientation and democratic sclerosis, and secondly in that they obstructed rather than facilitated economic growth and the efficient provision with consumer goods which – in the face of changing patterns of identity construction – became increasingly central to the project of identity construction. Hence, the strategies of politicisation and grass-roots empowerment had to be reviewed and supplemented by strategies which can firstly remedy the unexpected and undesirable side effects of the participatory revolution and secondly deliver on those expectations which the latter has failed to deliver. Strategies of depoliticisation and the delegation of issues, decisions and responsibilities to supposedly non-partisan, professional, independent and objective mechanisms, agencies and authorities are expected to achieve exactly this. They are expected to deliver on two equally important fronts: to reduce normative complexity and give relief from the condition of normative disorientation; and to reduce systemic complexity, i.e. the complexity of social organisations and processes which reduces their efficiency. Both of these bear significant emancipatory potentials.

In this context it is worth calling to mind that politicisation and the shift of power towards the demos have actually never been regarded as intrinsic values, but they have always merely been means for the realisation, expression and experience of the modernist ideal of the autonomous Self (Blühdorn 2006c). In the late-modern condition, however, notions of the Self and patterns of Self-construction, Self-expression and Self-experience have changed. More than anything, Self-construction, Self-expression and Self-experience have become a matter of product choices and acts of consumption (e.g. Du Gay 1996; Baumann 2000, 2005). And this late-modern form of Self-construction, Self-expression and Self-experience is no longer pursued most effectively through the strategies favoured by the participatory revolution. Indeed, to the extent that these strategies obstruct economic growth and the availability of a wide range of affordable consumer options, they have actually become counter-productive, and strategies of depoliticisation and delegation now appear as far more effective. So in the sense that the key strategies of the post-democratic revolution are still geared towards the same purposes as the strategies of the participatory revolution – Self-construction, Self-expression and Self-experience – the post-democratic revolution is not a counter-movement to the participatory revolution, but it actually continues its agenda. Therefore, the claim of the British Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs, Lord Falconer, that the ‘depoliticisation of key decision-making’ and policy delivery ‘is a vital element in bringing power closer to the people’ (Falconer 2003) is not simply a piece of cynical rhetoric, but it contains an element of truth.
Thus the transformation of democracy that is, according to this analysis, propelled by a post-democratic revolution in response to the social movements’ participatory revolution may be said to entail a shift of emphasis from politicisation to depoliticisation, from DIY-politics to the politics of delegation, from extra-parliamentary opposition to post-parliamentary government, from public discourse to public management, from democratic deliberation and representation to post-democratic leadership, from the idealist notion of individual and collective identity to the late-modern individualised consumer identity, from hyper-complexity to manufactured simplicity, and from social efficiency to economic efficiency. Table 1 further expands this tentative list of distinctive features. Rather than claiming to be in any respect exhaustive, the table merely aims to capture some key characteristics that have emerged from the discussion so far:

Table 1: Distinctive features of the participatory versus the post-democratic revolutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participatory Revolution</th>
<th>Post-democratic Revolution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>politicisation</td>
<td>depoliticisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grass-roots demand for decision making power</td>
<td>delegation to non-political authorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grass-roots demand for executive power (DIY)</td>
<td>delegation to service providers, agents, professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grass-roots demand for control and scrutiny</td>
<td>delegation to auditors and regulators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>extra-parliamentary politics in civil society</td>
<td>extra-parliamentary politics in depoliticised bodies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>decentralisation of decision making and provision</td>
<td>centralisation of managerial powers and subcontracting, outsourcing of provision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>civil society as the seedbed of radical alternatives</td>
<td>civil society as a resource for efficiency gains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>democratic deliberation</td>
<td>post-democratic leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>substantive value-based contestation</td>
<td>formal rule-based managerialism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bottom-up representation</td>
<td>top-down persuasion / communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bottom-up activism</td>
<td>top-down activation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>input legitimacy</td>
<td>output legitimacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>idealist autonomous Self</td>
<td>late-modern consumer profile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social efficiency</td>
<td>economic efficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>differentiation, pluralisation</td>
<td>complexity reduction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As regards the driving forces that power the ongoing transformation of democracy, most of the existing literature has placed the emphasis either on the globalising economic system and its demands for competitiveness, innovation and expansion, or on the political system which is under pressure to provide favourable conditions for economic growth, which lacks the financial and other resources to comply with rising public expectations, and which has to generate electoral support and reproduce its basis of legitimacy. These are, undoubtedly, important explanatory factors, but they need to be supplemented by a closer analysis of the changing needs and expectations of late-modern individuals and, more specifically, of their desire for complexity reduction and efficiency gains. It is, therefore, worth reiterating the point that in late-
modern societies, hyper-complexity has become a major problem. In a way that had not been anticipated by the participatory revolution, the differentiation, fragmentation and ephemeralisation of identities, values, interests and political actors have rendered democratic processes slow and cumbersome. At the same time, the complexity of the social, economic, environmental, scientific or security issues which the political system is expected to handle has increased so dramatically that they outstretch in the capabilities of democratic procedures. Whilst late-modern individuals are fully occupied trying to manage their ever increasing opportunities, risks and responsibilities, they expect scientific, political and administrative elites, now reconceptualised as public service providers, to offer leadership and secure the efficient management of societal affairs. Whilst consumption-oriented patterns of identity construction fuel the demand for effective and efficient policy delivery, foster the desire to maximise earning capacity and spending power, and up-value the logic of competitiveness and accumulation vis-à-vis the logic of co-operation and redistribution, the ethos of the new service society nurtures public frustration with problems of democratic tardiness, with politicians who fail to deliver on their promises, and with policies decisions which bear the marks of a democratic compromise. All this is radically incompatible with the visions and beliefs which the social movements had sought to promote. In all this, however, two points are important to note: firstly, nothing has been said about whether the strategies of complexity reduction and efficiency gains can really deliver what is expected from them; and secondly, it would be entirely inappropriate to suggest that the post-democratic revolution has put a halt to and superseded the participatory revolution.

4. The simultaneity of opposites: the politics of simulation

The analysis of depoliticisation and the post-democratic revolution reveals a number of distinctive features of the emerging third historical form of democracy, but for an appropriate understanding of this new state of democracy, further discussion of the relationship between the participatory and the post-democratic revolution is essential. It has been noted that the post-democratic revolution is not simply a counter-movement reversing the participatory revolution but, at least in a sense, it continues its agenda. In fact, the post-democratic revolution which is currently reshaping western democracies must not be understood as the historical successor of the social movements’ participatory revolution, but as co-existing with it. The proliferation of local direct action groups and transnational social movement networks (e.g. Diani and McAdam 2003; Carter 2005) provide plenty of evidence that whilst the post-democratic revolution is pursuing its efficiency-oriented agenda of depoliticisation and delegation, the participatory revolution, with its agenda of politicisation and grass-roots empowerment, is still going on as well. Indeed, the simultaneity of these two movements is a distinctive – and most confusing – feature of the emerging third historical form of democracy. Depoliticisation does not replace politicisation, but supplement it. In fact, in late-modern societies the objective is to retain – and further develop – what the participatory revolution has achieved in terms of democratic rights and expectations, but at the same time to reduce normative and organisational complexity and thereby achieve higher levels of systemic efficiency.

These objectives are complementary in the sense that they are both geared towards the emancipatory goals of Self-construction, Self-expression and Self-experience. But
they are *contradictory* in the sense that they pursue two different and incompatible notions of the Self: the idealist *subject* and the late-modern *consumer*. Whilst the participatory revolution is committed to the idealist notion of *autonomy*, the post-democratic revolution centres on the notion of *efficiency*, which in late-modern society is understood almost exclusively in terms of *economic* efficiency (Blühdorn 2006c). The modernist idea of autonomy is compatible with this late-modern understanding of efficiency if, and to the extent that, it is itself interpreted in economic terms, i.e. as free choice from a wide range of consumer options provided by the market. Indeed, this is the very understanding of autonomy that is much trumpeted by contemporary politicians and economic entrepreneurs, and it is much appreciated by voters and consumers. However, unless it is supplemented by other interpretations, this is an unacceptably narrow form of autonomy. For this reason, the participatory revolution needs to continue alongside its post-democratic counterpart. Their simultaneity represents the attempt to have the best of both worlds: autonomy in the *idealist* sense, and *efficiency* in the *late-modern* sense. Put differently, it is the attempt to elevate the late-modern *consumer profile* into the status of an *idealistic subject*.

This simultaneous pursuit of *modernist autonomy* (participatory revolution) and *late-modern efficiency* (post-democratic revolution) is desirable, indeed necessary, not only because late-modern individuals, whilst they are happily immersing themselves into the consumer culture, still like to perceive of themselves as *subjects* which are clearly distinct from and autonomous vis-à-vis the market. Beyond this, there is a further respect in which the modernist notion of the autonomous subject remains indispensable even though it might have abdicated both as an ideal of self-construction and as a category of sociological analysis: Both the system of democratic politics and the system of consumer capitalism come under severe threats of *self-referentiality* unless the belief in the modernist autonomous Self can be stabilised. The former vitally depends on the autonomous citizen from which it derives its legitimacy and whose interests and values it supposedly represents; and the latter vitally depends on the autonomous customer whose interests and needs it supposedly serves and whose demand supposedly justifies the price. For these reasons, the agendas of politicisation and depoliticisation, i.e. the participatory revolution and the post-democratic revolution, have to be pursued at the same time. This is equally essential for the late-modern individual, the political system and the economic system. For its own stabilisation, late-modern society must secure the simultaneity of incompatibles. And the strategies which it has developed for this purpose may be described as practices of *simulation* (Blühdorn 2002, 2003, 2004b, 2005, 2006b, 2007b).

The concept of simulation refers to a range of societal practices which provide reassurance that in late-modern society the constitutive elements of traditional modernity are still in place, whilst at the same time providing space for the emancipation and liberation from their restrictive implications and undesirable side effects. Practices of simulation rely on *signs* which do not (no longer) relate to any substantive *referents*. In fact, simulation substitutes the *sign* for the *signified*, and presents the visibility of the former as evidence for the reality of the latter. Practices of simulation pursue the production of societal self-descriptions in which late-modern society portrays itself in the colours of traditional modernity. They are the societal *performance*, the *performative regeneration*, of modernist values and ideas which
have become exhausted but which, nevertheless, remain an indispensable resource. Simulation allows for the simultaneity of incompatibles; it helps to avoid trade-offs between, and facilitates the maximisation of, mutually exclusive goals. Put colloquially, practices of simulation allow late-modern society to have its cake and eat it. Thus, the distinctive feature of late-modern democracy is, strictly speaking, not really the simultaneity of the participatory revolution and the post-democratic revolution, i.e. the simultaneity of politicisation and depoliticisation, but the performance or the simulation of this simultaneity. For this reason, the emerging third historical form of democracy may suitably be referred to as simulative democracy, and the historical evolution of democracy can now be conceptualised as the transformation from direct democracy via representative democracy to simulative democracy.

The distinctive element in the contemporary third historical form of democracy, i.e. the feature that marks its difference from representative democracy and justifies the talk of a categorically new phase of democracy are not the phenomena of depoliticisation and delegation which have been described above as the core elements of the post-democratic revolution. Instead, this distinctive feature is the element of simulation which responds to the demise of representation. The identification of this distinctive feature renders it possible to describe the third historical form of democracy not just, as Crouch does, in retrospective and negative terms as post-democracy, but in positive terms as simulative democracy. What emerges is simulation, what it supersedes is representation. In a condition where individual and collective identity are rapidly being permeated by, and losing their autonomy vis-à-vis, the market; in a condition where, furthermore, differentiation, flexibilisation and ephemeralisation are not just liquidizing (Bauman 2000, 2005) but actually evaporating any stable individual and social identities, the idea of representation becomes increasingly problematic because, to put it drastically, there is nothing there to be represented. Of course there is a wide range of concerns, values, interests and demands. But these are highly diversified, inconsistent and volatile. They do not emerge from and cannot be (re)presented as the expression of any tangible identity. In this condition, the model of principal and agent which underpins the idea of representation loses its foundation. Körösényi’s (2005) analysis of leadership and the changing meaning of representation may usefully be expanded into this direction: Whilst the principal disintegrates, the agent adopts the role of the responsible leader. And this analysis also sheds light on the transformation of political parties which has been highlighted by Crouch (2004) and many others: It is in response to these changes, that political parties are abandoning any comprehensive ideologies, shedding any narrow orientation towards particular social classes, milieus or groups (social identities), and adopting strategies which try to identify, stimulate and surf sporadic waves of concerns and preferences in the political catch-all market.

In the sense that the dissolution of the autonomous Self and its immersion into the consumer market is the distinctive and defining criterion of late or denucleated modernity (Blühdorn 2006a), simulative democracy is the form of democracy that is particular to this state of modernity and that takes account of its specific needs and problems. In the same way in which the emergence of representative democracy addressed the evolving insufficiencies of direct democracy (problems of size; complexity increases emerging from social stratification), the emergence of simulative democracy addresses the evolving insufficiencies of representative
democracy (evaporation of stable identity; complexity increases emerging from the internal differentiation and temporalisation of identity claims). The models of direct democracy and representative democracy corresponded to the needs of traditional subject-centred modernity. Simulative democracy is democracy beyond the abdication of the idealist autonomous subject and is particular to contemporary system-centred modernity. The distinctive character of the three forms of democracy may be illustrated by comparing the ways in which each of them performs the three major tasks of democratic systems which are, firstly, to facilitate the self-determination and self-realisation of citizens, secondly to formulate the public good and make binding decisions about its implementation and, thirdly, to provide the executive organs of the state with legitimacy.

With regard to the first of these three tasks, direct democracy centres on and emphasises the role of the public-minded citoyen. Representative democracy centres on and calls upon the citizen as voter. And simulative democracy centres on the citizen as customer and consumer of options provided by the political and economic markets. In terms of the formulation and implementation of the public good, direct democracy places the primary emphasis on practices of public deliberation. In representative democracy these tasks are delegated to elected representatives and their agents. And in simulative democracy the emphasis is on practices of persuasion by means of which political elites advertise and sell their interpretations of systemic imperatives. As regards the source of legitimacy, finally, the model of direct democracy relies primarily on physical presence and immediate participation in processes of deliberation and decision making. In representative democracy, in contrast, legitimacy derives primarily from the transparency of non-participatory decision making procedures and from the accountability of elected representatives who are judged by their empirically measurable performance (effectiveness). And in simulative democracy, legitimacy turns into an issue of performance in a different sense: it derives from the performed persona of politicians and performance criteria such as efficiency and competitiveness which are purely formal categories but are presented as substantive values. These distinctive features of the three types of democracy are tentatively summarised in Table 2. In each case, the table flags up only those elements which are new and which distinguish a state of democracy from its predecessor. Just like representative democracy retains and reinterprets, rather than abandons, the key elements of participatory democracy, this also applies for the transition from representative democracy in simulative democracy. In each transformation of democracy constitutive categories such as autonomy, participation or legitimacy are reinterpreted so that the conceptual shells can be retained, and be used as signs which regenerate the belief in referents which have long since disappeared. In the third transformation, in particular, they turn into what Beck (2002) has called zombie-categories, but like stars whose light can be seen long after they have ceased to exist, they extend the life-time of traditional modernity well beyond its factual decline.
Table 2: Three historical forms of democracy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>direct democracy</th>
<th>representative democracy</th>
<th>simulative democracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>distinctive understanding of the citizen</strong></td>
<td>autonomous citizen</td>
<td>autonomous voter</td>
<td>autonomous consumer; presents political and economic customer as autonomous subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>distinctive pattern of decision-making</strong></td>
<td>deliberation</td>
<td>delegation</td>
<td>persuasion; presents systemic imperatives as public good and political choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>distinctive source and form of legitimacy</strong></td>
<td>participation, input legitimacy</td>
<td>effectiveness, output legitimacy</td>
<td>efficiency, performance legitimacy; presents formal economic efficiency as grounded social efficiency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The concept of simulative democracy should not be understood as a primarily normative concept that is used, first and foremost, with critical intentions. In this term, the emphasis is not on highlighting that in this form of politics democratic values and practices are merely simulated. Nor does it aim to signal that unreal or unauthentic democratic beliefs, institutions and procedures should be replaced by something different which is closer to the democratic ideal. In particular practices of simulation must not be interpreted restrictively as strategies deployed by social elites as means of deceiving, ruling and exploiting the masses. Any interpretation along such lines would – as was outlined in the critique of the neo-modernist approaches earlier in this article – once again fail to grasp the distinctive character of the emerging third historical form of democracy. Instead, simulative democracy ought to be taken as a primarily descriptive concept that, first and foremost, aims to flag up the distinctive characteristic of late-modern democracy, which is its concern with the performative regeneration of the modernist foundations of democracy which in denucleated modernity have become dangerously weak. What is being performed or simulated is not primarily democracy, but that the consumer-citizen still has the status of autonomy that was ascribed to idealist subject. In terms of the public good and its implementation, what is being regenerated by means of simulation is the belief in the existence of a public good and the belief in political decidability. And with regard to the source of legitimacy, what is being simulated is that economic competitiveness and efficiency are not just abstract and formal criteria, but that they are grounded in substantive social needs and values (Blühdorn 2006c). At the centre of all three of these dimensions is the simulative regeneration of the autonomous subject which was the very centre of traditional modernity and of the idea of democracy, and whose abdication is the distinctive feature of denucleated modernity.

5. The Performance of Democracy

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9 This is, of course, part of what the concept seeks to capture, but in order to escape modernist-Marxist patterns of analysis and grasp the specific condition of late-modernity, practices of simulation should more suitably be described as ‘societal strategies of societal self-deception’ (Blühdorn 2006b).
The notion of simulative democracy sheds a new light onto the concept of democratic performance. Questions about the performance of democracy have recently shifted into the very centre of the study of democratic systems (e.g. Eckstein 1971; Gurr and McClelland 1971; Fuchs 1998; Lijphart 1999; Roller 2005). For the measurement and evaluation of the performance of democratic systems, Fuchs distinguishes between systemic performance and democratic performance. With the first of these concepts he aims to capture all those functions which any political system is expected to perform (e.g. security, stability, material provision). The second concept, democratic performance, is intended to measure and assess the achievement of objectives which are particular to democratic political systems. These are the goals of self-expression, self-determination, and self-realisation, i.e. the implementation of the modernist-idealistic vision of the autonomous self, subject and citizen. Insofar as, ultimately, Fuchs’ two dimensions are both measuring the fulfilment of human, i.e. subjective rather than systemic needs, their distinction is not fully convincing or useful. In the late-modern condition, however, i.e. after the abdication of the autonomous subject and after the transition from subject-centred autonomy-oriented modernisation to system-centred efficiency-oriented modernisation (Blühdorn 2006c), Fuchs’ two concepts can usefully be redeployed: systemic performance may now be understood as the effective execution or implementation of systemic imperatives, i.e. as the responsiveness of the political system to systemic requirements such as innovation, competitiveness, efficiency, or growth. And democratic performance may now be read as the performative stabilisation or regeneration of the idea of the autonomous subject and citizen, its self-determination, its political participation and efficacy, and of the belief in grounded social efficiency, bottom-up legitimacy and so forth.

The strategies and practices which late-modern society has developed for this purpose, i.e. for the performative regeneration of the modernist belief system and the stabilisation of its own foundations, are manifold and diverse. The most prominent ones include:

- the celebration of the institutions and procedures of representative democracy which is becoming ever more dogmatic as depoliticisation and the rise of the metaphysics of efficiency (Blühdorn 2006c) incrementally turn these institutions and procedures into purely managerial bodies and formalized rituals;
- the cultivation of the conceptual shells of modernist democratic thought whose content, however, is being redefined in such a way that, as Tony Blair (2005) has diplomatically put it, ‘the values we believed in, become relevant to the time we live in’;
- the launch of well mediatized government campaigns for social inclusion, democratic renewal, corporate responsibility, environmental sustainability and so forth, which accompany the adamant defence of the agenda of growth, competitiveness, social inequality and unsustainability (Blühdorn 2006b);
- the articulation of radical opposition to corporate globalisation or military conflict, and the pursuit of social movement action for a new democracy, global justice, environmental integrity etc., which are, as Furedi notes, forms of ‘disengaged protest’ (Furedi 2005: 42-47) that is ‘motivated by the impulse to find meaning’ (ibid.: 47) and as such ‘no longer an means to an end but an end in itself’ (ibid.: 46) (also see Blühdorn 2006a);
• and the development of academic narratives about democratic deficits, emerging grass-roots revolutions, responsible government, cosmopolitan democracy, and so forth, all of which contribute more to the campaign for the neo-modernist and neo-democratic turn than to conceptualising the specific condition of late or denucleated modernity.

What all of these strategies have in common is that they make use of signs whose referents (autonomy, equality, inclusion, representation, democratic self-rule, environmental integrity etc.) have in the late-modern condition become unstable and questionable, and that if only by continuing to use these signs, they regenerate the belief in their referents. Of course any suggestion that late-modern society is a unitary entity which has acquired, or can acquire, consciousness of its late-modern predicament and is able to take co-ordinated remedial action would be sociologically indefensible. Nonetheless, it is perfectly possible to say that these diverse social practices, knowingly or unknowingly all contribute to the recreation of modernist narratives which – even though they have in many respects become counter-productive – are still an indispensable source of meaning.

On the basis of this analysis of late-modern society’s politics of simulation, we may, in conclusion to this article, consider an explanation for the widely recognised decline in confidence in, and satisfaction with, the performance of democracy that is very different from the one offered by Dalton and many others who argue along similar lines (e.g. Cain et al. 2003). As was noted in the introduction to this article, Dalton suggests that due to the ‘deepening commitment to democratic principles’ (2004: 192), democratic ‘expectations have risen faster than performance’ (ibid.: 199), and he believes that this has given rise to the perception of performance gaps and democratic deficits, which in turn, are presented as a major cause of the ‘dissatisfaction with contemporary governments’ (2004: 192). This article has developed a very different argument: It has suggested that in a third transformation of democracy, late-modern societies have moved beyond Dalton’s modernist democratic ideals which are, arguably, increasingly perceived as inefficient and counter-productive, but which can, nevertheless, not be abandoned. Trying to manage this dilemma, individuals and social institutions in late-modern societies have become, to use Hendriks and Tops’ words, ‘masters of ambiguity, conciliators of apparent contradictions’ (1999: 150). They have developed strategies which enable them to pursue their late-modern ideals and at the same time cultivate their traditionally-modern opposites. Yet, their practices of simulation can at best pacify, but never resolve the incompatibility between efficiency and democracy (Blühdorn 2006c). Ultimately, the (self-)hypnotising oratory of democratic renewal and civic empowerment never gets beyond the status of ‘non-convinced political communication’ (Luhmann 1992), and the need to constantly increase its volume is a permanent reminder that the late-modern preference for efficiency does not allow for – and perhaps not even require – more than the performance of democracy.

Thus widespread dissatisfaction with democratic systems is not simply the result of a performance gap in Dalton’s sense, but of the gap that remains between the indispensability and the counter-productiveness of the traditional modernist belief system. Dissatisfaction with the performance of democracy is the irremovable predicament of late-modern society. Dalton believes that ‘the contemporary situation is a pattern of dissatisfied democrats or critical citizens who want to improve the
democratic process’ (2004: 200). The analysis of the third transformation of democracy throughout this article suggests that the contemporary condition may be described more appropriately as a pattern of simulative democrats who, rather than trying to ‘move democracy closer towards its theoretical ideal’ (2004: 205), have firmly embraced the late-modern metaphysics of efficiency, and who keep trying to patch up its unsustainability with inevitably insufficient strategies of simulation. Any claim that late-modern societies have reached a final form of politics or even the end of history would undoubtedly be very short-lived, but it may become increasingly difficult to describe the further evolution of western political systems in terms of the transformation of democracy.

References

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