
Mit diesem langfristigen Transformationsprozess ging aber auch die alläusen in der Tradition von der Menschenrechts- und Sozialgarantie – von der der Arbeitnehmer, der der Gemeinde. Bis hin zur gesellschaftlichen und politischen Organisation von „subjective social experience“, in den unterschiedlichen Konkretionen des dem Gesellschaftlichen Spielregen wurden kurzerhand umgeformt, der Spielen der Betroffenen aber funest auf einem langfristigen Prozess des Reibeprozes in diesem Spiel und dem Desillusionen darin, dass es dabei mit so manchem Ding, das es sich lohnen, hinkt aufgrund seiner Lebensregung, der auch hier nicht allein besteht, sondern solche komplexe, subjektive wie gesellschaftliche Desorientierungen, die hierbei spielerisch, kann sich in der Gesellschaft gewissermaßen zum Ausdruck bringen. Am beobachtendsten ist es, wie sie zu passiver, zu passivierenden und therapeutischen, sie also als Phänomene individuellen Leidens, Lebensgeschichte, Beziehungswissen an dem Vermögenden, sich dem Laufe der Zeit anpassen, zu interpretieren, statt nach ihren gesellschaftlichen Ursachen zu fragen. From a constructive point of view, this reality is certainly not an unchangeable fact, but rather a socio-historical construct generated by complex collective practices and collective aspirations. These social constructions have a greater or lesser degree of duration and reliability and offer the participating subjects more or less stable orientations and planner structures for the everyday lives of their being. Just how fragile these collective systems exist for everyday life, can also be the something which we have probably had to experience to some extent.

The following conversation located on the Internet through a Google search using the keyphrase "disorientation" provides a concrete expression of this experience.

**Blackschoot: Subjective evidence of a social experience**

Romodela describes the following problem in a chat room conversation: "My problem is this is a few times lately I haven't been able to remember which day it is, whether it's Monday or Wednesday. For example. It's as if I've had a total blackout. I should add that I recently finished my final high school exams and have been on holidays for around six weeks (probably that's the reason). I'm really worried about this. Has anyone else had this experience or should I be worried about it? Any answers would be very welcome." Romodela doesn't have to wait long for an answer. A contemporary using the phrase "Minnie" interpreted her words of concern: "I assume that you had a daily rhythm up until your exams and now you're on holiday, you haven't been keeping one. Try to get a rhythm back in your routine again. It's about pursuing your activity (or activities) until you start at university. Otherwise, I try to get up, eat, etc. at regular times." Another chat room participant, Seez, notes from experience how this can be a collective phenomenon: "objective reality and ascribes the responsibility for 'disorientation' in this reality to the individual, regardless of how this reality is shaped. The fact that this clinical picture is referred to by doctors and psychiatrists, psychologists and teachers as part of their everyday work is not being questioned here. What is being questioned is the treatment of orientation and disorientation solely as a physiological or psychological defect at an individual level. If we take, for instance, the phenomenon of suicide as an indicator of an extreme form of existential crisis and loss of orientation, then, at least since the publication of Fromm's groundbreaking work Suicide, it has been clear that suicide also represents a social phenomenon that exhibits a certain social regularity and rule-guided character and which are to a great extent rooted in the dynamics of social life. The thesis presented here argues analogously that the complex question of orientation and disorientation needs to be dissociated from the reductionistic, subjectivist viewpoint and interrogated in terms of its elementary and constitutive social factors. In this context, the reality which individuals may experience as precarious under certain conditions is not seen as a quasi-normal, self-evident given but as a social construction.

From a constructive point of view, this reality is certainly not an unchangeable fact, but rather a socio-historical construct generated by complex collective practices and collective aspirations. These social constructions have a greater or lesser degree of duration and reliability and offer the participating subjects more or less stable orientations and planner structures for the everyday lives of their being. Just how fragile these collective systems exist for everyday life, can also be the something which we have probably had to experience to some extent...
but rather belong to a collectively implemented and shared frame of reference called “normality.” This frame of reference involves an ensemble of cultural, processual and institutionalized time and space, which predates the individual and which, after a long process of internalization and naturalization of this order, makes it possible for individuals to precisely discern the situations they encounter, that is, to recognize, accept, and meaningfully relate the spatial, temporal, and human activities they confront with. Orientation thus refers to the socially organized discourses and reference points that, on account of their relative reliability and stability, allow individuals to habituate and anticipate, consciously or unconsciously, to get their bearings.

The distance or destruction of this order—first, in the context of catastrophe, states of emergency such as war, totalitarian institutions such as the concentration camp, etc.—gives rise to collective disorientation in the sense of a socially generated situation in which the reliability (stability) of spatial, temporal, and human references disappears or is lost, leaving individuals “disoriented” and perplexed.

Orientation/Disorientation: A Few Anthropological Considerations on the Reality of the Human Capacity for Orientation

The previous example—in all its mundanity—is intended to illustrate that the life-world of human beings is based on a complex ensemble of pliability structures and corresponding dispositions, which create security in times of “normality” and enable the individual to find his way through the everyday life of his society and to perform his actions without the need for constant problematization and critical reflection. However, these pliability structures are fundamentally more fragile, vulnerable, and crisis-prone than the highly individualized individuality of late-modernity that can imagine or reconcile with his own self-awareness.

It is worth recalling here the widespread consensus in anthropology that the human being comes into the world as what Arnold Gehlen refers to as a “deficient being” with profoundly reduced instincts. In order to reach the approximate level of maturity of other mammals at birth, the human child would actually have to spend a further full year in the uterus. Instead, it is placed in the world as a “normalized premature birth,” which means that parents who are in a state of extreme helplessness and in fact, in danger of survival only because of the intensive care and support provided by its environment, or what Adolfs Bornmann calls the “social uterus.” At the same time, from an anthropological perspective, this enormous degree of social needness is the central precondition for the ability of human beings to create culture as a mammal with reduced instincts and an extremely limited capacity to protect its body and for itself, the human child in the social order is “open to socialization,” predicated to adopt a species-specific habits and roles as collectively learned behavior.

During this leisurely process (in terms of time, energy, and care) socialization phase the new arrival in the social world is socially imprinted with all the cultural competences and experience that it needs in order to be able to orientate itself and move within this world in the future. The reduction of instinct and the resulting extreme plasticity of the human being, and this creates an incredible range of opportunities for cultural development and perfection. However, it also entails enormous risks because the social system of coordinates is organized by the individual itself, providing orientation in a hyper-complex world is subject to socio-historical change, which can take place more or less rapidly and drastically and can thereby produce destabilization and disorienting for the subject is affected. It is this effect that will now be discussed.

The Two Faces of Collective Disorientation

A major source of the suffering associated with the conditions of social life stems from rapid, radical, and even revolutionary change in social structures and everyday living conditions. Such change is reflected in a crisis between the social structures internalized and “incorporated” by human beings (the ensemble of thought patterns, moral standards, and behavioral habits that Pierre Bourdieu refers to “habitus”) and the prevailing social framework. The result is what sociologists refer to as anomie, that is, a lack of normative coordinates and orientations on which one can reliably base one’s expectations and actions.

Anomia denotes a state of lawlessness, a lack of rules, a lack of social order and the collapse of cultural order, a lack of social integration, and disorientation. The term describes an overall social situation in which dominant norms become generally destabilized, existing values and orientations lose their binding character, group morality is significantly challenged, and social control is largely undermined. In Durkheim’s view the collapse of a society’s system of normative coordinates gives rise to a situation characterized by unlimited aspirations. Because these cannot be satisfied, the result is a frustrating unanchored social existence. It is expressed in statistically measurable disruptions in the form of negative social acts (suicides, criminality, divorce, etc.). According to Durkheim’s empirical studies, the extreme form of disorientation and destabilization, the social suicide, feds, can even manifest in phases of economic depression and of economic boom, in both cases orientation to the habitual relationship between social goals and the means to achieve these goals is disrupted. Either the goals are unachievable because of economic hardship or are not quickly achieved on account of prosperity, with the result that they lose their capacity to orientate action. This leads to disorientation. This is the basis for the following attempt at a contemporary diagnosis using empirical research into current socio-economic change.

There is widespread consensus among experts in the social sciences, economics, and the humanities that we are living in a time of massive economic, social, and cultural upheaval. Most experts agree that this radical change began around 1986. However, there is a difference of opinion as to whether this upheaval should be interpreted in terms of globalization, the advent of post-industrial society, or neoliberalism. According to the current state of research, as documented in numerous social-scientific publications, this upheaval involves a fundamental change in the structures of society. The economic system is no longer based on the distribution of goods and services according to register, nor on the use of a contemporary term, human capital. Based on a long-term analysis of management discourses over the last decades, Iac-Cohnam and Evi Chappello (2005) have identified a number of key terms constituting an ideal-typical description of the normative-requisitional profile of a marketable employee. These terms include: autonomy, employability, flexible work, capability, capacity to generate incentive, innovativeness, communicativeness, capacity for comprehension, creativity, life-long learning, capacity to inspire others, mobility, multiple competences, project management, readiness to assume risk, self-management, self-assurance, self-evaluation, capacity to create social capital, spontaneity, availability, mediator function, networking, diversity of projects, visibility, etc. It goes without saying that this kaleidoscope of expected competences cannot be mastered by everyone.

The lowest common denominator in this profile of the ideal employee seems to be that he works constantly and throughout his life for profits and at least preserve his “human capital,” that is, his own person, which one can reasonably rely on to secure income or a continued stock of social capital, (finite and acts within a framework of temporary and limited projects rather than in terms of a life long professional career, and situates himself within a context of personal, social narratives this “social capital” of activatable resources and support rather than building on institutionalized networks. The employable man orientates himself to his own means of living and market demand and instead of aspiring to an enduring status, and is satisfied with a lifestyle contingent on economic conditions and situation rather than clung to a long-term life plan. The marketable employee is politically mobile and professionally flexible, and knows how to organize his private life accordingly, which thereby tends to assume the character of a set of temporarily limited projects.

This economic habitus of the employable man directly mirrors the general features of the neoliberal economic and social doctrine. This includes aspects such as: optimization of market transactions (number and frequency), optimization of signed contracts (number and frequency), reduction of the emoluments of contracts to the effective services to be provided (performance-linked payment and goal-based contracts), belief in the rational and moral necessity of the market, constant extension and intensification of market principles in the social sphere, removal of all obstacles to the “marketization” of society, creation of quasi markets or sub-markets within and the same enterprise, firm belief in the superiority of a market society as the result of a free process, and enforcement with the social figure of the entrepreneur as the model of a morally superior actor who reacts sensitively and rationally to market forces. *
members of the amalgamating firms were invited to take part in a competition held at selected venues to determine whether they would keep their jobs, that is, survive. The goal was to prove that their level of employability was higher than that of other competitors. (2)

In order to ensure that the losers did not simply end up on the streets (which would not have reflected well on the firm), the company decided on a very generous redundancy plan, which provided the basis for bringing a group of sociologists onto the scene. (3) The interview group charged with the "socially acceptable" staff provided us with an insight into their work and enabled us to observe and analyze the social and human costs of the rationalization process.

Our research made use of different methods such as participant observation, the analysis of a wide variety of written sources, statistical evaluation of personnel files (so-called "demographic profile of the population of discharged staff according to socially relevant criteria such as age, marital status, etc.), and, in particular, qualitative interviews with more than one of those affected, a sample that covered a range of status positions within the firm. The aim was to bring to light the human experiences of the upheaval from the point of view of those concerned and to obtain and record their personal views. This central aspect of the project served, among other things, to provide a view of the changes in the firm, which in future will probably be celebrated chiefly from the perspective of the firm's management as a massively successful adaptation to the contradictions of the market and increased global competition - from the perspective of the normal employee and to make clear that there were two distinct sides to this corporate transformation. This transformation not only entailed enormous feelings of loss and distress for its victims, who experienced it from a position of powerlessness and thus like a stroke of fate; it also denaturalized the relationship between those who retained their positions with the company. In the long term it may destroy the trust placed in the enterprise by the ordinary worker, resulting in so-called survivor sickness syndrome, which can, in turn, have long-term, negative consequences for the firm in the form of reduced identification (the evolved corporate identity) and staff motivation.

By means of statistical evaluation of the demographic and social characteristics of some 4,000 surplus workers, we were able to take the first step to look at the question as to whether the posted competition for survival was really as egalitarian as was claimed or whether there were, in fact, typical loser and typical winner profiles.

Let us first take for this purpose the profile of the "losers" in this contest for survival. We look at the personal characteristics and profiles that predisposed for employees of the amalgamating firms for dismissal - what were in a certain sense "handicaps" in the contest for limited jobs (or artificially limited for reasons of rationalization according to the logic of shareholder's value) - the first factor that became evident was gender. Women were strongly over-represented in the population of leavers, which to a large extent could be connected with a further type of handicap or disadvantage for members of that family situation. Other statistical analyses revealed that mothers of young children, as well as those of children of school age, were significantly handicapped in terms of their perceived employability and were retrained at a rate well above average. (3) On the other hand, fathers in the same family situation were spared such a fate as "structural casualties" of modernization. Children as a handicap! Those who believe that our developed industrial societies have made progress in the field of gender equality are quickly disillusioned in the face of current socio-economic changes.

The factor of age also proved to be a central selection criterion. From as young as 45 upwards employees were laid off significantly more frequently. From 55 upwards employees were automatically given early retirement, a decision that was quickly revised because of its catastrophic consequences for the company. (4)

Cultural capital in the form of school and university diplomas also proved to be a decisive selection principle: the staler the educational capital, the greater the likelihood of redundancy - this illustrates the level of simplicity of the criteria that can be distilled from the statistical analysis of the profiles of winners and losers. In addition there is a geophysical or socio-topographic aspect element that clearly marks the specific, historically developed situation in Switzerland: employees from the French and Italian-speaking regions of Switzerland were at significantly greater risk of losing their jobs than those from German-speaking Switzerland. This form of selection can be seen as a consequence of the principle of the dominance of the center (German Switzerland) as a centralist society located with the German-speaking and playing a role within this dominant language sphere (Zurich as the capital city of Swiss capital was the place that provided the best chance of "survival", while the Basel region and Eastern Switzerland were worse locations when it came to the chance of retaining employment). We turn now to a sociological aspect that is also interesting for physicians: the analysis of the distress caused by current processes of change. Within the group of "unemployable men" selected by the firm, we encountered many people who had often recently suffered from health problems, whether of a physiological or psychological kind.

We met people who, in describing their supposedly individual health problems, had pointed to evidence of a renaissance of collective intolerance for weaknesses and flaws of all kinds. These people had previously been through a process that had gradually furnished them with a sense of security regarding their physiological and psychological "pathologies", a "civilizing" of the conditions of life that had helped them develop a new self-assurance and identity. As a result, they were all the better prepared for the catastrophe they now faced. What Castel refers to as the "new uncertainties after social safeguards" affect people who seem all the more defenseless against them when the processes of the individualization and modernization of everyday life - in which they have been able to take part: not least because of social safeguards - have "liberated" them from traditional forms of community (family and extended family, neighborhood, colleagues, etc.) and this individualism becomes a "negative" factor for them. The "discharged" people we interviewed reported personal dramas, a fatalistic acceptance of their misfortune as it was a natural catastrophe, rage and hatred directed at the company, self-doubt, and resentment of particular superiority. Primarily the interviewees spoke of a fundamental and pervasive feeling of loss, the loss of a home, a loss of interpersonal relations, and community and, above all, a loss of trust in society and its cohesiveness.

THE NEW VULNERABILITY: THE RISE OF SOCIAL SAFEGUARDS

The varied statements collected in this study reflect the fact that the contemporary diagnosis of society is increasingly having to address the new vulnerabilities "after the safeguards" (Castel 2007), which constitute an existential threat to all forms of social solidarity. The beliefs that dominated earlier societal structures required the claim - which has now been accepted the status of a general norm - to an autonomous existence. As Castel correctly emphasize, property, as the material condition for autonomously planning and leading one's life, is required in order to have one's "own" life. In cases where private property is available in adequate quantities, often already at birth, this does not represent a problem. However, people who have only their labor power to exchange on the market for their means of subsistence face a fundamental precarity, uncertainty, and vulnerability. After a protracted learning process, our capitalist societies have established forms of social security that offer a minimum degree of collective protection against the standard risks entailed in gainful employment, namely, inviability, aging, illness, and unemployment, and have institutionalized the condition of the "catch-up" individualism in the lower social strata, whose social habits exhibits more or less clear signs of "gentrification".

However, this long-term process of transformation has also involved the dissolution of traditional forms of sociality and solidarity - from the family and extended family, to neighborhoods and associations, to national and political organizations - which, in their various combinations, reflected what was still attributable to "workers' culture" in the period of the economic miracle. In the course of the individualization of everyday forms of existence and patterns of behavior, these forms of sociality in the lower classes have also undergone rapid and substantial erosion. Along the route from traditional to traditionless, many of the community resources that provided protection and solidarity have disappeared - probably forever. This is where we encounter the radically new element of the emerging "new social question": the progressive dismantling of social guarantees and the retreat of the state from responsibility for public services is now affecting highly individualized individuals who are defenceless against the radical modernization of society because their habits is now fundamentally shaped by a progressive habituation to a minimum degree of protection from the (un)available aspects of everyday life in a competitive capitalist society. A pattern of the everyday conduct of life based on a level of reliability and calculability guaranteed by social and labor legislation is being stripped of its cohesiveness and the new rationalization of the individualization of society. A growing gap is emerging between these internalized certainties and their rapidly eroding counterparts in the form of collective guarantees. As a consequence people find themselves perplexed and confused by the roles and rules of the social game that have been suddenly redefined, while among these affected the understanding of the game, one based on long-term practice and the belief in its fairness and veracity, turns behind this development because of its remarkable power of persistence. The individual and collective, subjective and social deceptions that becomes evident under these circumstances can be expressed in many forms. The most reassuring approach is to interpret it in terms of pathology and as an object of therapy, to see it as a phenomenon of individual suffering caused by individual existential circumstance or the incapacity to adapt oneself to the passage of time instead of inquiring into its social causes.