Interpretations of organizational expectations and robust knowledge[1]

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The regulative idea presented summarily (without more detailed arguments) in this paper is that the variety of <u>cognitive formats</u> cannot 'commonize' cognition to an equal degree relating it to regimes of engagement, that due to specific qualitative complexity <u>critical organizational capacities</u> (enactments) have got the decisive role in getting things going, and that <u>discordance</u> (or discordant concordance) is the source of relevant conceptual tools and robust knowledge.

The general presuppositions enabling the discussion on this idea are, first, the relevance of recognizing the <u>modes of apprehension of reality</u>, and, second, the orientation towards <u>greater reflexivity</u>.

Ad(1): The critical study of modes of apprehension is relevant not only because there are diverse observation angles and techniques but because the agent with his modes of apprehension is an integral part of the object. Beyond the opposition between implicit forms of knowledge and the formal knowledge required for scientific validity, new research fields have turned attention to the variety of formats in which the <u>experienced environment as a reality</u> is grasped, and especially in which frameworks of (cognitive) transaction, (social) interaction and (decisional) coordination become defined.[2]

Ad(2): Greater reflexivity is present with respect to the models that are in use in different collectivities (subsystems, spheres). Reflection is not a cognitive device of late modern salvation against being wracked by ambivalence and guilt, but a means of questioning transveversal relevance of measurements and categories. Indirectly this will help to avoid the circularity of defining society through the canon of social science vocabulary by

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[1] The paper draws on "Representations of Welfare and the Challenge of Complexity" presented to Esd-Unipid Seminar, Turku Business School, 7th May 2008, and on "Organizational enactments and resymbolizations of representation prepare the ground for paradoxical expert situations" presented to the tth Annual IAS-STS Conference "Critical Issues in Science and Technology Studies", Graz, 8th-9th May 2008.
[2] Laurent Thévenot: The Plurality of Cognitive Formats and Engagements. Moving between the Familiar and the Public. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 10(2007)3, 409-423.

bringing in <u>a third term</u>, namely political constructions, grammars etc.[3] It will also help to bring in empirical research with the questioning.[4]

Societal Differentiation

Vital infrastructures, national security requirements, global cultural management, ethical advisory boards in medicine and in environmental expertise and the role of art-science in contemporary interdisciplinarity [5] appear to be exemplary fields that demonstrate cognitive complexities and visions of robust knowledge. This takes place in the context that is a dynamic place for reconciling the incommensurable, the inevitable difficulties that stem form the fact that subsystems may well survive in apparent 'plural cognitive ignorance', but still decisions have to be made at the intersection of different subsystems and action spheres (economy, law, politics, science, art, religion etc.) each following their own logic of rationality.[6]

The concept of societal differentiation offers a tool kit for understanding this development. It refers to structural differentiation of society. Conceptualizations such as division of labour (Durkheim), differentiated value spheres (Weber), differentiated social circles (Simmel), forms of functional differentiation (Luhmann) and different fields of action (Bourdieu) as well as rational-theoretical differentiation figures of philosophy and economics are quite generally known. In one way or another, the question is in them in trying to conceptualize the <u>assembling of societies in different action contexts</u>.

The synchronic question is no more directly reduced figures of fatal indifference, of socio-moral implosion or modal compression. Instead of showing the drama of the elements, far more relevant is to bring in the principles that make or make not the systems work. Each subsystem or action sphere has disparate criteria of relevance for the themes such as action and interaction, for the regulation of forms of inclusion and exclusion, for confronting knowingness and communicability and for defining time perspectives and expectations.

Normative Collective Consciousness

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[3] Laurent Thévenot: A Science of Life Together in the World. *European Journal of Social Theory* 10(2007)2, 233-244.
[4] See Peter Wagner: *Modernity as Experience and Interpretation*. Cambridge: Polity Press 2008, Ch. 9.
[5] Andrew Barry, Georgina Born and Gisa Wezkalnys: Logics of Interdisciplinarity. *Economy and Society* 37(2008)1, 20-49.
[6] Risto Eräsaari, Antti Hyrkäs, Risto Kangas, Antti Silvast, Mikko Virtanen: "Lost in Translations. Organizational Enactments at the crossroads of the differentiated spheres of society: the cases of vital infrastructures, medicine, art galleries and property institutions (unpublished research plan, 2008). In the following I am drawing this.

'*Wealth*' was the general term that was used both by Adam Smith and by Sigmund Freud who discussed aspects of existing wealth, wealth itself and surroundings alongside wealth as singular and collective quality. '*Welfare*' can be understood as having subjective and objective, local and global, descriptive and analytic, political and ideological, human and non-human and as processual and container-type-of qualities. Statisticians, politicians and economists coordinate welfare, philosophers and sociologists define principles of welfare and priests and journalists try scandalize pity and exclusion, but an individual's self-description of his welfare is a rare this. This is rather expressed through 'quality of life' or degree of 'well-being' that – unlike standard of living – is not a tangible concept and therefore cannot be measured directly. '*Worth*' is a concept introduced by Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot to thematize legitimate worth involving broad specification of common good. '*Wellness*' is usually understand to mean a healthy balance resulting in overall feeling of well-being, also carrying the meaning of progress towards an ever-higher potential of functioning and an active process of becoming aware of and making choices toward a more successful existence.

Debates and tension about the way in which individual and collective well-being and welfare are understood reflects the degrees of responsibility, autonomy, legitimacy and functioning of institutions. The emergence and maintaining of collective normative concepts always depend on political constructions and their interpretations. Study on the rationales of welfare "reveals it to be an extraordinary complex political value".[7] The emergence and development of the welfare state or welfare society has taken place with institutionalized welfare regimes consisting not only of the mundane scale of welfare growth but also of institution of the modern world.[8] Thus in our context the welfare state proves to be both explanandum and explanans, both that which have to explain and that which explains patterns of social change.

But beyond normative self-description there are other modes of apprehension reflecting different angles, distances, scales and stabilization. We know that the welfare system is *not* an autonomous system. Politics of welfare is dependent upon a successfully oprating economy, and, et the same time dependent on achieving its own results when enacting more and more resources of economic calculation, just to mention this most marked link. In order to adapt 'welfare' to the societal context communication must be efficient. But there are structural limits in beyond which there is nothing. A society which is structures according to function systems has not overall coordination or central agency, "it is a society without an apex or center".[9] This means that representation of the system in the system is not possible. "Representation" has become "a hopeless, romantic category". When saying there is no 'center', the idea is to refer to societal ethics (Aristoteles: friendship directed towards a center as paradigm of virtue) and when saying there is no

[7] Norman Barry: *Welfare*. 2nd Edition.. Buckingham: Open University Press, 13.
[8] Christopher Pierson: *Beyond the Welfare State. The New Political Economy of Welfare*. Cambridge: Polity Press 2006, 231, 242-243).
[9] Niklas Luhmann: *Political Theory in the Welfare State*, Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter 1990, 14, 31-32; Niklas Luhmann: *Risk. A Sociological Theory*. New Brunnswick and London: Aldine Transactions 2005, 143.

´top´, the idea is to refer to order that is hierarchically structural and that, as a consequence become vulnerable to structural decisions.

Societal presences

A model or a system of representation of society can be constructed on the assembly of different contexts, thematic logics and time rhythms. Beside form of communication, we ought to assume that world is also a world of events (Mead) in which the locus of reality is the presence and in fact becomes a reality of presences.

The condition of presence – not to be confuses with the ontological 'human condition' of living together in the world – appears as the practice of experience and interpretation, neither an open horizon of the future nor an unending progress towards a better condition brought about unique institutional arrangement. On the contrary it is a realm of unexpected repercussion in other systems, of conditional arrangements of steering, of frequent boomerang-effects of measures and decisions, and of the primacy of cognition and coordination.

The security field offers a perspicuous picture of presence of presences. Making security 'organization' present is making security 'organization' explicit which, in turn, comes with the presumption that "information an organization obtains about itself is information to be acted on – knowledge about its achievements becomes constitutive of its aims and objectives".[10] In this specific case knowledge is pressed into the service of enhancement of security, and the present admonition to be explicit turns self-description into ground for further enhancement that is represented as grounds of improvement.

Security as an example

Thus lack of security or exclusion from security, in other words unexpected threats and dangers no more are explained through beliefs in ontological reasoning of security or in causal mechanisms involved in the production of presentations about security. Insecurities become organized as risks, as concepts that reorganize, stabilize or harmonize expectations about threats. Thus ontological insecurity becomes replaced by practical and activating 'security governance' or 'security management'. In more general terms this is communication of (rationalized) expectations of (human) security, and communication of threats and dangers through introducing specific and politically generalized precautionary principles and the prudence of preparedness.

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[10] Marilyn Strathern: Robust Knowledge and Fragile Futures, in: Aihwa Ong and Stephen J. Collier (ed.): Global Assemblages. Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems. Oxford: Blackwell 2005, 464-481, esp. 465.

Politicians, economists, local decision-makers, architects of national security systems dispute about the ways in which 'local', 'social' and 'societal' security may be achieved. The relevance of 'securities' is reassured by how the development of 'general risk society' – the emergence of novel cognitive representations of security – is reflected and apprehended in the conceptual changes of security concept and in the division of functions and responsibilities of security authorities. Even if security as such "is an empty concept" and only works as "a reflexion concept",[11] even if it is not a tangible concept, it has become one of the most omnipresent key concepts that is both a source for techniques and practices and for innovations and cognitive transformations. Fragile futures chew with enhancement about secure, solid and sustainable – not about flawy, fragile or fragmented – conditions and principles. To be able to become a certified or calibrated security standard, which is the precondition to become effective, the construction of security needs to be understood in other conceptual systems as well as to be reconnected to other systems and vocabularies.

Representations

To be able to say who are the people gathered around the issue and to be able to say what is the object of concern of those assembled around the matter, representations about the procedures and accounts are needed.[12] But once we have a look at the synchronic question of causal mechanisms involved in the production of representations, the question of how to define the human in terms of his most unique trait, the capacity for symbolic representation and the question of how to see the capacity and relevance of the representative structure, we cannot do much else than to face the fact that the above mentioned is a school concept of representation and that a world concept of representation is a much debated critical issue.

Thus the well known contemporary forms of "distributed representations"[13] such as mediatized political communication, knowledge economy, advanced forms of representations politics (of welfare, environment, economy, legitimacy etc.) that have become part of the process of coordination and decision making, should be called working representations. Often the question is about changing balances and reworked stabilities between the autonomy of self-descriptions (self-determination and – responsibility, choices and decisions, empowerment, citizenship) and the power of outside descriptions. Things and qualities that do not become represented or are dynamically under-represented (quality of inclusion, context, space, non-referential principles like identity, weak ties, emerging factors etc.) have been called non-representations.[14]

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[11] Niklas Luhmann: *Soziologische Aufklärung 5*. Konstruktivistische Perspektiven. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 134.

[12] See Bruno Latour & Peter Weibel (ed.): *Making Things Public*. Atmospheres of Democracy. Karlsruhe: ZKM; Cambridge, Mass. & London:The MIT Press.

[13] John Smith & Chris Jenks: *Qualitative Complexity*. Ecology, cognitive process and the re-emergence of structures in post-humanist social theory. London and New York: Routledge 2006, 11.

[14] Nigel Thrift: *Non-Representational Theory*. Space, Politics, Affect. London: Routledge, 2007.

Despite unified science programme, expansion of interdisciplinary approaches and cognitive mechanisms of meta-representations, the concept of representation of the world has arrived under heavy critique. In intellectual context it appears "as if the whole idea needed to be abandoned because there just is not way to verify the relation between the world and thoughts about the world other than again by the use of thought (even though not exclusively by thought)", Peter Wagner writes, in other words "certain knowledge of *adaequatio* is in principle unattainable".[15] Recent debates these doubts have been labeled as crisis of representations,[16] but, Wagner thinks, "implicitly and misleadingly pretending novelty of these doubts" – the crisis has been in many respects the background to the 'science wars'.

Revival of 'knowingness'

The question of cognitive formats that was mentioned in the beginning seems to be intensively shaken by the reviving <u>epistemic problematique</u> often appearing together with unexpected effects, emergent factors and other new qualifications. It is unwise to ignore or abandon it since with all their shortcomings it clarifies or illustrates the status of statements about the world. Wagner concludes that a war over this issue would be a very peculiar war: it cannot be won, not even by the attempt at annihilation of one of the belligerent parties since such annihilation is impossible".[17]

What is lacking is not and cannot be 'the real legitimation' or ´the accurate representation' but a better insight into the experienced and interpreted particularity of the differentiated societal system. Accurate representations are representations of presences behind representations. The presence that accurate representations represent, is however achievable through distributed working representations. No wonder in the contemporary cognitive world one of the keywords is "the active representations of a performance of consultation" whereby "organizations are mobilized to perform *as* organizations" and whereby explicit organizations are dynamic organizations obtaining information about themselves – "information to be acted on".[18]

In the discussion concerning "epistemic modernity", we have to make a difference between knowledge forms involved in decision, description, regulation, coordination, anticipation etc. For example: "deliberation may be usefully understood as the communication about handling things in common and distinguished from regulation as the (self-) acting upon society by means of rules and policies – thus avoidinf the barren

[15] Peter Wagner: *Modernity as Experience and Interpretation*. Cambridge: Polity Press 2008, 151.
[16] Wim Weymans: Understanding the ptresent through the past? Quentin Skinner and Pierre Rosanvallon on the crisis of political representation. *Redescriptions*, Yearbook of Political Thought and Conceptual History Vol 11, 2007, 45-60.
[17] Wagner, op.cit, 152.
[18] See note 10.

opposition between substanceless conception of the political, on the one hand, and an overly economically determined one, on the other".[19]

Cognitive representation is in cognitive economy seen as a means of replacing many with one, but the operation of political representation is seen to consist of a variety of representing modes. The relation "between the political and the cognitive is seen as more closer and more fundamental one that of political forces influencing the production of knowledge", Thévenot writes, criticizing sociologists for treating "this influence in terms of subjection of knowledge to interests and manipulation" and thus for a sort of idealism of making direct influences transparent to public debate. But the understanding of the problem in these terms means that "we leave aside the more profound relationship between political and epistemological representation, a relation that cannot be reduced to manipulation strategies".[20]

Thus, according to Thévenot, there are different scopes or scales of format: cognitivegeneralization is valid in seeking enactments for coordination that may potentially extend to humanity at large, whereas evaluation takes on the format of the common good. On the other hand, cognitive formats characterize the actor's access to reality: these formats an integral part of a human being's engagements while engagement emphasizes the grasping of environment by means of a certain cognitive format, and while engagement refers to a quest for the art of knowing that makes is possible to assess what is relevant to know. Thus the format becomes defined as something that constitutes <u>information</u>. An engagement, on the other hand, lends itself to <u>communication</u> of varying scope depending on the format. This is just a beginning of contextual analysis of cognition, organization, knowledge and representation.

Conclusion

The insistence on knowing as intelligent problem-solving in a given action sphere or a given situation has to allow for different kinds sub-systems and for different experiences of a sub-system. What comes immediately mind, are for example situations with broader or narrower degrees (scales) of experienced security. And not just to allow for different experienced but also for different interpretations of such cases. This makes it also necessary to recognize solutions to problems that work by generalization and solutions that work by specification, small-scale vs. large-scale resolution knowledge. Thus there are also varieties in the search for certainty, security and credibility.

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[19] Wagner . op.cit, 272 n11.
[20] See note 2, 414-415.