

Institutionalization of dissatisfaction

Towards the dichotomy of »order and disorder«

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Introduction

The notion of »order« has always been identified as the main object of the social sciences. In the course of its history this notion has taken on a variety of semantic meanings and has thereby allowed for controversial ideological statements about social reality. A primary example of such controversies in the definition of order is the generally used dichotomy of order and disorder,¹ which has embraced the concept of order in itself and which introduces something structural and systematic in contrast to something chaotic and changeable.

This study suggests another view on the relationship between categories of »order« and »disorder«. The main concern of the paper is to demonstrate that disorder cannot be seen beyond order in the study of the object within a sociological analysis. They both are in a continuous flow and present themselves rather as two sides of a common whole. Various order problems like, for example, unemployment or criminal activities always originate as complementary parts of order and possible ways of its development (Lipp 1994). This view of order problems allows to

1 The relation between the concepts of »order« and »disorder« has influenced the sociological manner of questions and is worthwhile to study already for the purpose of a closer determination, as this relation refers to the problematic status of sociology in the society (Galanova 2011). On the one hand, the sociologist searches for possibilities to a solution of the problem which endangers the social structures and brings chaos to social life. Hence, she or he positions her- or himself as someone who searches for disorder to settle an order instead. On the other hand, her or his results may cause disorder for the normality scale.

overcome the normative weighings of (dis-)order and to consider the concepts of order/disorder in a fluid continuity. Such a free-of-value concept of order allows to develop more possible ›forms of order‹ and replaces the mentioned dichotomy of ›order/disorder‹ by the question: How does social reality originate from different possibilities and how is it determined by the concrete actions of social actors (Rehberg 2001)?

The goal of this paper is to concretize this ›dichotomy concept‹ of social order and to show that social reality cannot be seen as a static phenomenon which is constantly off balance and must be moved back to its original state. We propose to overcome this theoretical problem by applying an empirical analysis of those forms of actions which social actors routinely use when dealing with some kind of problems or disturbances of the social order.

Dissatisfaction as an indicator of the fragility of social structures

Instead of the working with some pre-given theoretically developed categories, we concentrate on settings which for the actors appear as actual inconsistencies. Within this perspective, the borders of ›order‹ and ›disorder‹ can be recognized at the empirical and phenomenological level as not meeting the expectations of social actors. What can we find out about the social reality if one starts out not from the unquestioned fact of the social order but questions it together with the actors? (Bergmann 1988). How do actors process the breeching of order in such a way that it turns into something unproblematic, integrates itself into the order and obtains, in addition, a new, order-supporting function (Garfinkel 1996)? By laying emphasis on the perspective of social actors it becomes possible to guarantee the closeness to the empirical reality.

The diversity of order disturbances social actors deal with can be reflected through the semantic field of the dissatisfaction communication. In the following we will demonstrate how dissatisfaction makes settings in which actors deal with different problems of order, visible and observable. Dissatisfaction will be understood as a »symbolic practice« (Castoriadis 1984) which points out to something undesirable (Grimm 1936: 2315, keyword »unzufrieden«) or to something which does not

correspond to our every-day expectations. Dissatisfaction will be conceptualized in this paper as a convenient object to observe the processes of how the social basic structures can be put into question by the disturbances of everyday life. For our analysis, expression of dissatisfaction is taken as a piece of litmus paper which makes unquestionably accepted events noticeable.

Institutionalization of dissatisfaction in different fields of social order

Dissatisfaction shows several figures and ways. Ways of its expression vary from simple and spontaneous (as for example a baby crying) to institutionalized and well-organized actions (such as public actions of a political opposition). Also the object of dissatisfaction seems inexhaustible. One can express discontent with her- or himself, with neighbors, with politics and politicians as well as with the whole world. The conditions under which dissatisfaction penetrates our life seem contradictory at first sight and not unambiguously determinable.

Expressions of dissatisfaction appear in society in spite of all religious and moral sanctions. Accordingly, in the early modern times it was a religious taboo to express dissatisfaction with one's situation in life because the existing social order was considered God given. At the same time, the principle of dissatisfaction turns out to be the driving force of the Reformation. The discontent with the Catholic Church and its institutions, in particular with the selling of indulgences, had to be legitimated (as, for example, a struggle against corruption).

At the legal level, the institutionalization of dissatisfaction legitimizes its identity by the right to criticism. However, these rights are also equipped with the certain containments which refer to the personality of the complainant. If this person falls under the category of »trouble-maker« which *constantly* searches to frown on something, his or her discontents are defined as a result of psychic illness and the contents of his complaint are not treated under the right to criticism any more.

Also the ambivalent assessment of dissatisfaction in moral instructions is a cause for the fact that the process of its institutionalization cannot be defined unambiguously. On the one hand, expressing dissatisfaction can be easily disapproved as moaning. Already in the year 319 B.C., Theophrast in his *Characters* described moaning as an immoral behavior. At the same time, with this partial tabooing of expressions of dissatisfaction, morality, just as religion, turns out to be the instance which serves for the legitimacy of concern of the discontented person. Dissatisfied persons appeal not least to moral authorities to justify their emotionality and to make it comprehensible. By referring to basic moral principles they often legitimize their own dissatisfaction with dominating negative states.

The ambiguity in the moral assessment of dissatisfaction is also reflected by popular sayings. Some examples: »The discontented finds no comfortable chair«, »moaning fills no chambers«, »complaint does not fill the stomach«, »February is the month in which the farmer has the fewest to grumble, at most only 28 days«. In Russian popular sayings, dissatisfaction has found a specific medium in spite of moral and religious bans. It legitimizes its expression so so-called anecdote stories (Lewis 2008) and joking songs (*chastuschki*) (Adonjeva 2006). Dissatisfaction is not simply expressed in them but is turned and legitimized in a humorous tone. Here the »discontented« compete with each other to show the situations of everyday life more sharply and wittily. In a society in which criticism of official politics could not be freely and openly picked out as a central theme, such communication forms served above all as channels of political dissatisfaction. Openly expressed dissatisfaction, possibly in the form of protest and uprisings, was always nipped in the bud by the government or was knocked down bloodily. Hence, dissatisfaction could be expressed only in private or made in an unfamiliar humorous or ironic form. The Soviet song-writer Vyacheslav Butusov formulated this situation very appropriately by the remark: »The people blow the trumpet tacitly.«

Similar to the relationship of dissatisfaction and morality, one also finds ambivalences in the relation of dissatisfaction and political power. There

are numerous examples in which the ways, of how to express dissatisfaction have also been arranged by the dictatorial political forces. This holds e.g., for the *Lettres de cachet* in France of the 18th century, which are analyzed by Michel Foucault (1989). From them it is evident that these complaints, extremely dangerous for the citizens, were written in full trust in the power and goodness of the feudal king.

Another example is the complaint culture of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), which was also interpreted by the state as trust of the citizen in his state. As Ina Merkel describes, the German government had never before received as much post as did the leadership of the GDR. Petitioning had become a widespread complaint practice there and showed a direct form of communication between the citizens and the state. Petitions were used not only as a remedy to achieve some personal goals and private interests, but also to draw attention to the serious social defects with proposals for a change in politics. For instance, free elections or the demolition of the wall were demanded by anonymous complaints. The rising dissatisfaction at the end of the 1980s can apparently be read from the often threatening style of the letters, where GDR politicians were also accused. The complaints compensated the plebiscitary function due to the lack of public and the weakness of the informational policy and even caused one law or another to be changed (Merkel 1998: 11-19).

Also these days the politics create many rooms and media channels which serve as platforms to reveal expression of dissatisfaction about political events, to bundle up and to channel dissatisfaction of the citizens. Thus, political forums are organized also on the Internet where the citizen can articulate his or her discomfort with politics.

This overview of examples of different mechanisms of the institutionalisation of dissatisfaction brings to light how dissatisfaction embodies a conflict between different forms and possibilities of order. On the other hand, dissatisfaction has to be seen as a mechanism which regulates relationships between different contradicting and co-existing processes of social order.

Formal variety of expressions of dissatisfaction

As we have already pointed out, dissatisfaction can appear in different communicative forms and in varied frames of social relations. Expressions of dissatisfaction by a single actor, for example, should be distinguished from that what appears in communications of two, three, or four interacting actors. However, the statement »two-, three- or four- interaction« does not mean the exact number of persons taking part in the conversation. Instead, the number refers to the communicative status. By help of this variety of interactive and communicative forms of dissatisfaction in different constellations we can show the variety of actions allowing social actors to deal with unexpected and unwanted situations and sometimes making it even possible to correct inconsistencies of order.

To develop the classification of ways of expressing dissatisfaction we refer to empirical data which have been already been analyzed and classified in different studies (Goffman 1978; Günthner 2000; Galanova 2009, 2011). The detailed analysis of concrete conversations show different ways of expressing dissatisfaction and can be found there. For this reason we will only concentrate on the system of different forms of dissatisfaction with reference to the previous results. We will pay, however, extra attention to the questions of how participants recognize some problems and disturbances of order, of how they make these problems recognizable for others and of how the situation can change after dissatisfaction has been expressed.

We begin with the dissatisfaction of a single actor. Erving Goffman calls such format of dissatisfaction »spill cries«. These are exclamatory utterances (exclamatory statements) which are »emitted to accompany our having, for a moment, lost guiding control of some feature of the world around us, including ourselves. Thus a woman, rapidly walking to a museum exit, passes the door, catches her mistake, utters Oops!, and backtracks to the right place« (Goffman 1978: 801). The sound can provide a warning to others present that a piece of the world has gotten loose, and that they might best be advised to take care.

Spill cries allow social actors not just to point the disappointment of some expectations and routine circumstances but also to let others know that something goes wrong and some help is needed. For example, if a person falls down in the middle of the street and utters Ooh!, other people know that something unexpected and unwanted has happened. In such a situation it is common practice to help the person to stand up.

Dissatisfaction in a two-interaction is expressed by a reproach which usually serves one actor for informing another about a violation of rules (Günthner 2000). In the case of a disregard of control these communicative formats allow to point out to a mistake and to force the violator to correct his or her behavior.² In such situations, the actor may express his or her dissatisfaction to force the opponent to correct his or her behavior.

However, people can express dissatisfaction in form of reproach not only to point out to a disturbance of order and to enforce the correction of the problem. Reproach makes it also possible to take the communicative position of supervising the implementation of control and active correction of a »broken order«. Advantages of this role should be considered as an additional profit from expressing dissatisfaction in the reproach (Galanova 2011).

Another communicative format of dissatisfaction is the complaint. A three-interaction is typical for the development of this communicative genre: First, a person who complains; second, the object of complaints, and third, the witness to whom dissatisfaction is addressed. This constellation usually appears when in order to demonstrate and to stand his or her own point of view on the situation a complainant shows his or her dissatisfaction with the behaviour of a conflict originator towards a third party (Günther 2000). Thereby he or she tries to restore his or her social competence if this was questioned in the past by the object of the complaint. To persuade the complaint recipient, one usually reconstructs

2 It is to be supposed here that in households whose members carry out a firmly defined allocation of duties the reproaches are to be heard more often than in others.

the actions of the opponent as unacceptable and unfair. Hence, often the negative moral assessment of the mistake of the person serves as a main strategy of the complaint talk.

By a constellation of four-interaction there are four different speech statuses: a dissatisfaction producer; an object of dissatisfaction; an immediate recipient; and an observer whose presence is known to all participants. Such a form of relationship can be observed in situations when somebody indirectly tries to include an observer into a group. In such settings dissatisfaction can take on, for example, the form of open provocations which are used to invite the observer to demonstrate his or her response reaction and thereby to become involved in the conversation. Provocation, alienation and surprise effects are commonly known as universal strategies by which the actor calls on an observer for active attention.

At the same time, to create a more pleasant climate for the recipient, the actor can easily turn these contents into something amusing and cheerful. As a result, dissatisfaction can be easily changed into a joke, which often appears as a community-endowing mechanism to bind actors with different perceptions. In such format, dissatisfaction can be converted into something amusing and playful. Here, the ironic and funny presentation of disturbances of order should be called the parodying of the expression of dissatisfaction because such dissatisfaction is dissociated from its original goal of providing dismay. Instead, dissatisfaction becomes a caricature and a laughing ritual, which brings original values in rotation (Bachtin 1969: 32).

Expression of dissatisfaction as an order-supporting action

Through the description of the commonly known and recognizable forms of expressions of dissatisfaction we have shown that social actors actively use a well-organized system of ritualized actions to indicate different problems of order, to make them recognizable for other participants and sometimes to restore the disturbed order. What does it mean for the mentioned discrepancy of the order/disorder?

By the notion of *Entselbstverständlichung*, Arnold Gehlen defined situations when self-evident structures do not meet expectations and become problematic for social actors. From the moment these self-evident structures are interrupted they become an object of permanent reflection, understood as a critical attitude towards routine structures, the problemless nature of the institutionalized structures of the order not being guaranteed any more. Helmut Schelsky (1980) complements Gehlen's thoughts with the concept of an institutionalization of permanent critical reflection (*Dauerreflexion*). Institutions become functional via the institutionalization of critical reflection because this reflection challenges institutions to the fast and effective development of their functions according to new requirements. From this perspective the disturbance, the object of critical reflection and of the communication of dissatisfaction is not destruction but a mechanism in support of the order.

In addition, Schelsky introduces the definition of »adaptation«. In contrast to Gehlen, he understands adaptation as an ability to develop counter-models of behavior which enable a critical position in relation to the structures of social order. The possibilities of active adaptation – as a condition for the change and individual emancipation from the compelling behavioral legality – may by no means be excluded from the description of society. According to Schelsky, social order cannot be imagined without any deliberate doubt about the given structures and traditions.

Schelsky's idea of the institutionalization of »permanent critical reflection« is pivotal for the definition of (dis-)order, because it gives a fruitful concept of how actors deal with inconsistencies of order. They overcome and restructure order disturbances by the way they translate them into secure and familiarized behavioral strategies of dissatisfaction representation and thereby bring into effect the institution-stabilizing role of »permanent critical reflection«. Ritualized communicative formats of dissatisfaction can be defined as institutionalized and communication-

stabilizing forms which help to translate different problems of everyday life into the known and normal.³

Conclusion

In this study we developed the thesis that dissatisfaction is a medium which enables to register and to observe actions dealing with different problems and irritations of social order. The conceptualization of dissatisfaction by various communicative formats has enabled us to elucidate the relevant and understandable system of actions and has made it possible to investigate the question: How can actors articulate and indicate different problems, disturbances, and tensions by means of dissatisfaction?

We have described dissatisfaction in terms of an organized set of different communicative forms actors employ to reach a normalization of the situation in case of a problem and/or when certain expectations are disappointed. As a result, we have succeeded to retain the expression of dissatisfaction in its polyfunctionality and to formulate the general function of the expression of dissatisfaction. It consists of articulating a demand for establishing the order and in making this demand, as an improvement impulse, effective.

By the determining this function, it was then possible to return to the main thesis and to demonstrate that »order« and »disorder« are not finite given facts which should be imagined as a disjunctive polarity relation; rather it means those stabilized tensions whose balancing contains certain potentials related to social development dynamics. Dissatisfaction is a demand for order. According to Schelsky, this certain necessity for order should be imagined not as supporting a conservative adaptation to structures but as supporting an impulse for development and change.

3 Dominik Schrage (2003) formulated this idea as a question: »Which type of disorder does »ritualized action« address?«

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