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Beitrag zum Workshop "Creative precarisation? Early career and life paths of graduates of media- and design oriented courses of study at universities and Universities of Applied Sciences in selected cities in Germany, Austria and Switzerland"

(Vorbereitung eines DACH-Forschungsprojektes)

Juli 2014-06-25

Freie Universität Berlin

The main thesis of the future research project consists of the premises that the erosion of normal working conditions and increased re-orientation towards project work within media- and creative professions constitute new career paths. Subsequently, the research project investigates to what extent working-biographies are determined by this increasing discontinuity.

Using the example of graduates of media- and design orientated studies and via methodic tools and strategies like qualitative interviews, recourse to recent literature which supports the main thesis and secondary studies, the following guiding research questions should be answered:

1. To what extent does the structure of an unstable career- and life-planning affect the living conditions of the concerned persons?
2. How are the forms and modes of these career-paths and life-courses subjectively dealt with by the affected individuals?
3. To what extent are the experiences and personal horizons of the people involved in creative vocations gain in significance due to the changes in the labour market?

The courses of action of the affected individuals will be investigated. Here a central question is, to what extent the increasing work experience affects the career- and life-planning experience, the narrations of the career- and life planning and the coping strategies to deal with the instability of the working market.

An important aspect is the question of how the increased amount of limited project work is experienced in the different stages of the career paths of the affected individuals?

In addition, re-structuring of the working world in other sectors orientate themselves on the creative professions when they change their plans of action and norms within day to day work.

So, – with reference to Boltanski/Chiapello (2003) – the creative profession can be understood as pioneers within the working world.

Following this analysis, the differences and overlap between the involved countries and between their different education programs will be analyzed and put into relation to each other.

Via this research strategy it will become possible to point out the diverse advantages and disadvantages of the structures of work within the creative professions, using the example of the chosen media- and design-professions of three countries. Thereby structural deficits and benefits and best practice examples are shown with regard to the specific country.

A special focus of the research project is the practice orientated goal setting. Particularly the collaboration between universities and Universities of Applied Sciences makes it possible to investigate the national differences and orientations within the education programs with regard to different career paths and career chances of the respective professional field in the different countries.

Another goal is the publication of booklets and the organization of events for stakeholders (such as representatives from politics, business and society) to anchor the results of the research project within the public domain and discourses and to provide scientific based, practice orientated solutions.

Our investigations focus on current questions and problems related to the sociological analysis of the world of work. This analysis faces a significant rise in public demand for explanations of current transformations in the world of work, for diagnoses and interpretations of the many different economic, social and cultural consequences and implications.

Analyses of the concept of work (e.g. Krempf 2011), such as sociological theses on the transformation of work in the 20th century (Menger 2006, Reckwitz 2006), increasingly converge the term of 'work' with the notion of 'art'. This is controversial since art is associated with quite specific normative content: on the one hand it implies aesthetic freedom (Thomä 2010), which appears to permit a certain distance to the economic sphere (and other social constraints) and is seen positively in terms of an increasing emancipation of the worker (Menke/Rebentisch 2010); on the other hand, it also implies virtuosity in the economic sphere, which is concentrated in the model of the creative entrepreneur and is seen in more negative terms as an increasing instrumentalisation of the worker (Boltanski/Chiapello 2003, Bröckling 2007). The idea of independent creative work is assumed to have led to the blurring and dissolution of the boundaries of work (Gottschall/Voss 2003). Although this is initially to be understood temporally (no more fixed working hours), it also refers to access to workers' resources that were formerly considered private: their feelings, their personality and their private life (Sennett 1998, Moldaschl 2002). The aestheticisation of work is thus evaluated in different ways. Researchers do not yet agree on how to deal with this plurality of assessments. It would be helpful to decipher the idealised notion of the artist against the background of the reality of his/her life:

1. We understand 'gainful occupation' as a regular gainful activity carried out for the purpose of earning a living. Although in historical comparison (Castel 2000) this modern concept of work is fairly clearly defined, it is by no means reduced to a mere functionalist definition: in many cases it is morally charged. People want *fair* work, cooperative working relationships and social equality (Muirhead 2004, Sennett 2012). Within the social philosophy of work (e.g. Söhler 2006, Honneth 2010) it is the subject of some controversy whether normative content is merely superimposed onto a value-free reality or whether it is contained to a certain extent within the modern world of work itself. The debate has not yet been resolved.

2. Aestheticisation is a key notion in research even outside the work context: sociologists and philosophers have described how more and more areas of society are being aestheticised (Reckwitz 2006, Moebius/Lieber 2011). Even managers these days avail themselves of art (for instance by seeking the advice of artists), or see their occupation itself as art (Byrnes 2009). This dissolution of the boundaries of art is assessed in a number of ways in the literature: on the one hand (inspired, amongst other things, by poststructuralist diagnoses) it brings the promise of liberation for non-artistic fields. On the other hand, there is a fear that it may have negative consequences, both for business practice and for art itself: Sennett (2009), for instance, takes the view that artistic practice, understood within the context of creativity, authenticity (cf. Knaller/Müller 2006) and the possibility of making experiences for their own sake, is subverted by its release into the economy, i.e. by its economisation.

3. The economisation, which is increasingly being observed in the public sector for example (Czerwick 2007), can also be felt in artistic practice. Loacker (2010) fears this might lead to a precarisation of the people working in art. The aestheticisation of 'normal' work (3.) is thus merging with an opposing trend, the economisation of artistic practice. The notion of creativity is positioned in precisely this field of tension: it is used in art as well as in economic theory (Raunig/Wuggenig 2007, Jansen et al. 2009, Reckwitz 2012). It appears, however, that the dialogue with artists and creative workers is somewhat neglected in the theories of creativity (Mahrenholz 2011). And vice versa, literature and dramatics projects (e.g. the DFG network '*Kunst und Arbeit*', www.kunst-u-arbeit.de) show little coordinated effort when it comes to qualitative research. We believe this to be a major research gap.

4. Another conceptual bridge between the interpretations of art and work is the idea of self-realisation: as a form of expressive self-relation it originally had its place in aesthetics (Taylor 1989), but has meanwhile found its way into the normative discourse on 'work' (Muirhead 2004, Sichler 2006).

Just like the subjective testimonials of working people contain central elements of an artist's life, the life of the artist, from the perspective of self-relation or subjectification, must also be understood as a blueprint for existence in an ever-changing world of work.

Until well into the 1970s, art was rarely the subject of reflection in the sociology of work as a traditional alternative to the bourgeois concept of work and to the idea of gainful occupation formed in industrial society (Manske/Schnell 2010). The category of 'cultural professions' established at that time, including artistic, creative and journalistic activities, are to this day liberal professions that are not protected by any professional regulations (Müller-Jentsch 2005). This former niche subject only became interesting for the sociology of work at the end of the 1990s: based on the thesis of the paradigmatic nature of artistic forms of work (e.g. in knowledge-based economies, Lash/Urry 1994) and labour markets and in view of the crisis of full employment and the question of the 'future of work' (Haak/Schmid 2001) the sociology of work in the German-speaking world has increasingly focused on examining creative work as an example for the general transformation of the world of work. In the context of the new self-employed, one-person entrepreneurs and the dissolution of boundaries and marketisation, the main focus has been on precarisation as a consequence of flexible forms of gainful occupation such as 'new self-employment' (for instance Keller/Seifert 2006; Manske 2007). Following notions such as 'artist critique' (Boltanski/Chiapello 2006) or the 'entrepreneurial self' (Bröckling 2007), studies emphasised the 'self

precarisation' of creative workers (Lorey 2007: 127) or asked, by making reference to the 'high level' of precarity suffered by creatives, what new forms of sociability may result from their fragile social position (Manske/Merkel 2009). Other researchers look into gender as a structural category of old and new labour markets (cf. Banks/Milestone 2011).

Analyses of the changes of occupational profiles resulting from structural expansion are more targeted towards the inherent logic of the cultural sphere: older distinctions such as between independent, artistic-creative and commercial, entrepreneurial occupations are increasingly less relevant for 'the new cultural entrepreneur' (Mandel 2007). What's required instead is a flexible and strategic combination of different projects and roles (Manske/Schnell 2010). From a normative-programmatic perspective, the interlinking of creative and entrepreneurial values is also addressed in the management literature, economic discourses and, from the perspective of social and cultural theory, in the governmentality studies (Bröckling 2007, Eichmann 2010).

In Switzerland, for instance, the cultural and creative industry has grown at a similar pace as the economy as a whole between 2005 and 2008: in 2008 over 5% of all people in gainful occupation (200,000) and 10% of all businesses (40,000) were active in this sector. Forecasts predicting further increases in employment figures reflect the continued attractiveness of the creative sector – despite below-average income because of the surplus on the labour market, often temporary employment relationships, and the widespread need for a second job (Dapp/Ehmer 2011, 6). People in cultural and creative occupations are generally well educated and are prepared to accept the risks of self-employment. There is no other sector where the proportion of self-employed people and freelancers is higher, and in no other sector do you find as many small and micro-businesses. This social profile and the associated implications for the creative labour market make it worthwhile taking a closer look at the situation of people in creative occupations as an idealised avant-garde of future worlds of work.

In the German-speaking countries, qualitative empirical findings and ethnographical approaches to the world of work of specific creative occupations mainly focus on immaterial production, such as the advertising industry, PR services, the digital industry and software companies. Topics here include occupational self-concepts or identities (Eichmann 2010). There are already studies looking into the wider field of artistic production (cf. Schultheis/Schulz 2005, Schultheis et al. 2010) and into 'small graphics businesses' (Schultheis et al. 2010). With regard to the fundamental appeal of qualitative methods we should mention in this context that qualitative interviews are also increasingly being used in contract studies on regional 'creative industries' (e.g. Basel Rossel 2010), where quantitative methods tend to dominate. The sociological literature also mostly comprises quantitative reports on the social situation of artists (e.g. for Austria Schelepa et al. 2008), which can serve as basis for positioning subjective testimonials in this area in a sociodemographic contexts.

The development of new media, e.g. in the areas of web technology and social networks, gives rise to new occupational fields and occupations, especially in the tertiary education sector and among its graduates. According to Durkheim (1992) this can be interpreted as a form of individualisation brought about by division of labour and new occupational profiles. While the debate in Germany sees the notion of individualisation, following Beck (1986), as a dissociation from social matrices, the debate in France places greater focus on its embeddedness in an unfolding social structure. The project thus examines the new situation of a project-oriented work process between the extremes integration/disintegration, autonomy/constraint, interest/disinterest,

qualification/incompetence, self-design/precarity, since, according to Boltanski/Chiapello (2003), these areas of work are inherently an ideal-typical model for the restructuring of working life. These fields of tension will therefore be examined for the media and creative professions with a primary focus on design-oriented fields in selected cities in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Media and creative professions in particular are often seen as guaranteeing social advancement and self-realisation, which is why these courses of study are becoming increasingly popular among young adults (for instance, the number of applicants for design programmes at FH JOANNEUM in Graz has been high from the outset, as a result of which the number of approved student places has also risen).

The field of tension between self-realisation, work and lifestyles will therefore be examined in its various guises, a field of tension that is expressed in new forms of social insecurity, continuous pressure to succeed and existential fears of loss in terms of a 'precarisation of existence' (Ehrenberg 2011).

There are two basic approaches to studying the transformations in the world of work that are currently taking place and the many associated economic, societal and cultural consequences. The two approaches today largely divide along the same lines as the disciplinary division between economics, administrative studies and jurisprudence on the one hand and the social sciences, on the other:

Economists and some socio-economists generally draw on the neo-classical model and its developments (search theory, shrinking approaches, efficiency wage model) to explain macro-structural phenomena, according to which market forces automatically yield the best outcome. Differences between employees, in accordance with the theory of 'human capital' (Becker 1964) and signalling theory (Spence 1973) are understood as a consequence of their different abilities and skills. There are other studies that emphasise the position of the employee: their unequal opportunities on the 'market' are explained through opportunities for monopoly rents (Sørensen 2000), the segmentation of areas of work by sector (Averitt 1968) and within companies (Sengenberger 1978). These studies recognise the power disparities within industrial relations between employers' associations and trade union federations and within the respective parties (Freeman/Medoff 1984), the significance and quality of regulatory institutions (cf. Scharpf/Schmidt 2000), the position in social networks (Putnam 1993), and the position within the labour organisation (Podolny/Baron 1997) as well as gender (Allmendinger/Podsiadlowski 2001, Reskin 1988) and ethnicity (e.g. Kalter/Granato 2001). Explanations of the differences through reference to technological changes (Arvanitis et al. 2003) and transnational merging of the worlds of work (Wood 1998, Wulff 1998) are of particular topical interest. Methodologically, these two lines of debate draw on multidimensional models, mostly based on quantitative data.

The advantage of these studies is that they emphasise the mutual interdependence of economic stakeholders and phenomena and the relative autonomy of the economic sphere vis-a-vis external (religious, moral or political) regulations. It allows them, for instance, to shed light on the gulf between employers' demand for qualifications and the dispositions of employees (Henneberger et al. 2004), to investigate the opportunities that are opened up by the introduction of new technologies and new organisational models (Arvanitis et al. 2003) and to determine the qualification needs of economic sectors. However, the subjective experiences of employees and the way they deal with the demands placed on them are barely touched upon in these studies. Neither do they pay much

attention (Fleetwood (2006) to employees' (employment) biographies and their points of view or to issues relating to their overall social situation (positional problems, geographic and social mobility etc.). The other side of the debate about the world of work comprises studies that stress the subject-related aspects of working reality, such as attitude to work, motivation and identification. These include the classics of modern sociology of work and industrial sociology which originate between the mid-1950s and the late 1960s (Popitz et al. 1957). They focused on the subjective orientations of workers, and they analysed workers' consciousness, which always reflects a specific social awareness. The research tradition of a subject-oriented, qualitative work research and industrial sociology continued into the 1990s (cf. summary of Schumann 2003). Here, the seminal studies were the so-called 'shipyard study' (Schumann et al. 1981), a study on the future of employees ('*Zukunft der Angestellten*', Baethge/Oberbeck 1986) and a study on the end of the division of labour ('*Das Ende der Arbeitsteilung?*', Kern/Schumann 1984). Since the end of the 1990s sociologists of work have been interpreting the transformations in the world of work with reference to and critique of these traditional works, and increasingly in terms of a 'subjectification' of work (cf. Moldaschl/Voss 2002) or as a blurring of the boundary between work and life ['*Entgrenzung von Arbeit und Leben*'] (e.g. Gottschall/Voss 2003). Views diverge, however, when it comes to the form and quality the trend towards the 'subjectification of work' takes (Lohr/Nickel 2005, Schönberger/Springer 2003). With his concept of 'subjectifying work action' (Böhle 1997), developed based on his study on high-tech industry (Böhle 1996), Fritz Böhle emphasises the significance of experiential knowledge for the work process. Günter Voss and Hans Pongratz (2003), on the other hand, use the concept of the 'entreeployee' to stress the active achievement of the individual. There are also prominent international discussions on technopoly (Postman 1993), McDonaldization (Ritzer 1993) and on the end of the working society (Rifkin 1995).

The particular merit of these studies is that they have directed attention to the behavioural dispositions of workers. The heuristic value of this is now also increasingly being recognised in economics (Frey/Osterloh 2002, Neckel/Dröge 2002) – in addition to the critique of the rational choice approach theses on the 'erosion of work ethics' (Schallberger 2007) in particular have pointed out how integral the latter is for the social organisation of work. The social demand for a comprehensive view of the current transformations in the world of work is evidently growing. The phenomena of mass and long-term unemployment in the 1980s and 1990s have increased the demand for empirically sound knowledge about the dynamics of economic changes in politics, business and administration. It is increasingly believed that the current changes go to the very heart of the social regulation of work. This is particularly apparent in the inflationary use of concepts related to the world of work in sociological debate since the 1980s, which increasingly attempt to typify the current development. Ever since, such phrases as 'crisis of the working society' (Offe 1983), concepts such as 'immaterial work' and 'symbolic work' (Hardt/Negri 2001) and society labels such as 'information society' and 'knowledge society' (cf. Stehr 1994) have been relatively prominent in economic sociology and the sociology of work.

Rising demand for a multi-disciplinary view of the transformation processes in the world of work are also increasingly reflected in the interest German-speaking economic sociologists take in a conceptual basis of their discipline, which has been observed since the second half of the 1990s. The interest in the 'new economic sociology' in the US (such as Schmid/Maurer 2003, Windolf 2005) deserves a particular mention in this context.

This trend, which became international in the 1980s (in the tradition of the American neo-institutionalism) offers a great number of possible conceptualisations beyond the predominant *rational choice* paradigm (e.g. Fligstein 2001, Swedberg 2003, Pettinger et al. 2005), and has become stronger over the past few years (e.g. Baecker 2006, Minssen 2006, Vobruba 2006).

The study 'The New Spirit of Capitalism' by Luc Boltanski/Ève Chiapello (2003) does not just have considerable theoretical rigour and plausibility, it is also of great empirical relevance for understanding the current process of change in the world of work. The study attracted considerable attention among German-speaking sociologists (Eickelpasch et al. 2008). Boltanski/Chiapello's well-informed and well-documented study shows that since the 1970s work requirements have not just fundamentally changed, different areas also show similar developmental dynamics. These findings are further supported by the socio-historical study 'The transformation of the social question' by Robert Castel (2000), which talks about a newly emerging employee who faces a specific 'social vulnerability' in the form of fragmented employment biographies, precarious employment relationships and social exclusion.