

Social work as a science of doing: *In the praise of a minor profession*

The purpose of this chapter is to apostrophise the ever open questions of the nature of social work in order to give the reader a leeway, a practical footing to wrestle with more technical research methods chapters. It consists of two distinct parts. In the first part we will try to, in a sketchy manner, contribute to the thinking on the origin of social work, trying to deconstruct the different threads of the making of the social work in order to arrive to some kind of a genealogical definition of social work. The second part is an essay (an attempt) to comment on the working parts and components of social work. The work in social work is crucial to understand the specific difference of social work in comparison to other sciences. It is a list of attributes and components that determine scientific, professional and epistemological composition of the social work as a science of doing. The second part is therefore written in rather poetic, epigrammatic way. The manner of almost a manifesto is chosen by the necessity of telling a lot in a restricted space and trying to convey the gist that sometimes can be lost in more discursive manner of writing.

The chapter is also a personal synthesis of what we have been doing in last decades. Therefore, not many references will be given. The influence of ideas and in some cases also working together must be acknowledged to David Brandon, Bernard Stritih, the tradition of Franco Basaglia in Trieste, and I should not fail to mention Félix Guattari (and via him Gilles Deleuze) for the way I have put the ideas together in this chapter.

On the Origin of Social Work

The phylum of help

While it is a fact that social work as a profession came into being at the turn of the century, it is not clear from what it had emerged. It was, obviously, established on the fundus of help, solidarity, caring for the weak, protecting the powerless, redistribution of the accumulated wealth – long and neglected history of helping among the people. Characteristically the feudal era was one of immediate charity, taking

place actually on the doorstep of courts and manors, homes and homesteads. The emergence of towns led to indirect institutionalised charity with special places, timetables and special people doing it. Although care for the city's poor was assigned to designated people, these were not of special profession but of special municipal or state function performed by a person (e.g. almoner) or whole groups (e.g. religious fraternities). Although particular groups specialised in care for the poor, the feeble and the deviant, and were specifically trained to do this, had certain knowledge about it and carried it out in special institutions¹, their care was still woven into the late feudal structure and carried out to order and on behalf of the absolutist ruler.

Feudalism	Immediate charity
Early townships	Indirect charity
Industrial revolution	Philanthropy
Turn of the Century	Social work

Tutelarian (Caring) professions

When absolutism was replaced by the bourgeois republic, people become sovereign individuals, and when feudal commitments and obligations were replaced by contractual relationships, the newly formed bourgeois society found itself in a difficulty; namely, what to do with those who could not (or would not) enter into contractual relations. Castel (1976) lists five such groups: mad, children, beggars, criminals and workers. For the workers, their labour was established as property enabling them to eventually become included in the world of contractual relations, with labour becoming the basis of the welfare state, of social integration and social participation (Castel, 2002). Criminals are included via the concept of punishment and through the legal system, children through family, teachers and the school system. Psychiatrists are invented for the mad as their guardians with the mad being put into madhouses, while (less successfully) beggars are socially included via economic policy (work for all) and forcedly locked up in workhouses. The common characteristic of all these operations is the patronage (tutelage) on one hand, and confinement in institutions based on a certain ideology on the other.

¹ Jones (1989) describes how religious fraternities educated and trained women to preform work needed in the early institutions.

Group	Career	Legal code	Confinement place	Ideology
Workers	Capitalist trade union	Labour legislation, social security	Factories Workers' settlements	Production
Criminals	Judge Police Prison warden	Criminal Law	Prisons	Correction
Children	Parents Teachers	Compulsory schooling	Schools	Education
The mad	Psychiatrist	Mental Health Legislation	Madhouses	Cure
Beggars and paupers	? (Workhouse masters and matrons)	»Social« legislation (New Poor Law)	Workhouses	Charity?

Alongside the three groups tutelarian professions were formed, characteristically replacing the subjectivity of contractually incapable people. While workers had the patronage of employers, the two groups were always in (class) conflict so that an additional actor caring for workers emerged, namely the workers' movement and trade unions. There was no group of professions formed around beggars; their management was left to people who occupied a function, a position, and employment.²

The crisis of institutions and creation of the social

The beginning of the 19th century in general was marked by Romantic utopias. So was the care for people. The utopia of the confined places (unlike the socialist utopias of the time) is based on utilitarianism. Bentham's project of the Panopticon as the fundamental plan of the organisation of disciplinary devices is but a design to harness non-productive potential for production. The Romanticism of the early 19th century sees an economic solution. Entering the world of work through recovery, upbringing, correction is accompanied by an immediate harnessing of what Foucault calls the microphysics of power. At the macro level, the very legislation

² At least in England it could be argued these proto-professionals could be regarded as precursors of social work, since the first course at LSE was meant for them and the *National Association for Local Government Officers* (now a trade union with social work membership) was form as a professional body for the staff employed as masters and matrons of workhouses and the *out-door relief* officers. Hence the workhouse system in England has given almost simultaneous birth to nursing and social work professions (Crowther, 1981).

dealing with the poor (the New Poor Law) brings about the separation of the economic from the social (Polanyi).

Less than half a century was needed for these utopias to be proven impossible. Not only did the liberation of the Economy not bring welfare for all – just wealth for some on account of others, but industrialisation also rapidly increased the pressure for more intake on different total institutions, them being the main devices of care. Confined places became too small; it became obvious they were not therapeutic, educational or corrective. It was impossible to see these institutions as providing a way of entering the world of work – rather than machinery for inclusion in production they primarily became warehouses for the reserve labour force.

Consequently, a more Realistic approach was developed. This meant the invention of psyche on one hand and society on the other. Psychology and sociology were developed as academic disciplines to understand the new reality. Essentially, this was about a double articulation of the lack of the social. What the economy could not solve, the socio/psycho/logies should resolve. On one side, moral statistics, on the other psychoanalysis, on one Dürkheim, on the other Freud and Lombroso. As Foucault (1976/1978) said regarding incest, on one hand freedom of speech about it for bourgeoisie and on the other social hygienic regulation and sanitation of the crowded flats of working class. Accordingly, social work has also been divided from the very beginning between the individually-oriented social diagnosis of Mary Richmond and communal projects of the settlement movement (Jane Adams, Octavia Hill).

Social work was born, not only at the crossroads of individual and collective, communal, but also at the nexus of reformist, revolutionary women's and workers' movements. The production of sociality and subjectivity occurred more often in art and politics than in psycho/sociological sciences – these were more instruments of ruling – used to manage the individuals and social aggregates. Social work was a part of what may be called social action.

Social work was developed in the wake of the creation of new social constructions, in terms of looking for solutions to social distress. It came into being amidst the swarm of diverse social experiments and projects from social security to social assistance (with social often meaning also mutual). And social workers were the cadres who carried out this work systematically and purposefully. The very name of the emerging profession shows that it is not about a position³, it is not about charity or philanthropy, it is not about help, it is about creating something – it is about work.

3 Although social workers were at times called welfare officers.

At the beginning, social worker also means to be a social activist, somebody engaged in a project of social improvement. But in contrast to the good-doers, social work is not only vocation it is becoming profession as well. This means that social workers don't feel as much called to do welfare for people as they feel committed to it since this is what they do. It in fact is a very autopoietic definition.

Therefore, social work was developed as a non-institutional tutelarian profession, oriented to the creation of new conditions in people's living environment and – in contrast with sociology and psychology – oriented to action, changes and not to understanding and explanations.

A minor⁴ profession of transgression

At least as late as the affirmation of the welfare state, social work is a minor profession. It is carried out by women, almost exclusively. Men, even if they do social work (e.g. doctors or priests running charities), do not enroll in social work courses. Social work as a female profession has more interest in minor, small things and stories in people lives. It also does not have its own territory, its special temple (the clinic, the law court, the school or the church). It does not have its own territory that would guarantee its own language and rules not applicable elsewhere – it does not have its own esoterics, something that has to be learned upon entering the special space. Social work works among people and together with them, i.e. it uses their everyday language. This very weakness is also its very strength and power, because it gets to know people in their real context and not in the artificial context of institutions. That is why doctors, judges and teachers as well as priests need social workers.

In addition, the representatives of the established tutelarian professions (priests, doctors, teachers, judges) who set out on people's turf do so by transgressing the framework dictated by their doctrines. Most creative innovators became such through transgression. Makarenko, Reich, Freire and every anonymous teacher, priest, doctor or judge who wanted to do something with people truly for their own good, in a way became a social worker and, at the same time, a traitor to their own profession, because they became socially engaged. The stage of going native, identification, transgression to the other side, out of institutionalised sanctuaries is needed for anything to be done with people for their authentic interests.

4 I am echoing the concept of minority after Guattari and Deleuze (1975/1986, 1980/1988) which simultaneously means minor, small, minoritarian and soft (minor in music), fr. *mineure*.

Functionaries of consent in the welfare state

Up until the Second World War social work was a marginal profession and not yet a science at all. An instrument and accessory of other professions and institutions. Only after the Second World War did social work obtain a roof over its head and its institutional fundus – the welfare state. If the welfare state means the redistribution of national wealth and corrections of social injustices, the place of social workers is not only in the »administration« of provisions in money and in kind (services), they are not only distributors of the newly emerged social goods but also of services for the rehabilitation of people, i.e. for some a re-inclusion in the world of work and for others the maintenance of an attachment to it through legal institutes (sick leave, disability, guardianship) and through institutions of care (e.g. old people's homes, adult training centres and similar). In other words, besides money and the rules of just distribution for the welfare state to function people needed to become adjusted to provision and provisions to people (increase in accessibility, information to those eligible, persuasion of the relevance of services, education of the beneficiaries etc).⁵

Social work becomes the basic and fundamental profession in the social care systems, and social care a steering and corrective system of the welfare state. While the welfare state serves as a means of the legitimisation of social order and the maintenance of consent, social workers are the functionaries of consent in Gramscian terms (Gramsci, 1949/1974). A caricature of the classical social work as function of consent would consist of: on one hand, persuading people to enter institutions of control, on the other it is to make them understand that their social failure is a result of individual or at best family problems, and, as a reward, there is the candy – a social benefit.

At the same time, we can say that amongst the caring professions, social work is the profession which comes closest to distress as experienced by people, and that it works outside institutions and among people. This is what even increases the possibility of social workers to go native, to convert from the functionaries of consent into the activists of dissent, of – if not rebellion – resistance.

Thus, for example the 1950s and 1960s – when Western society was becoming affluent and employability was almost at one hundred percent, when standards of

⁵ One of the most important roles of social work within such an ambience was (and is) the role of a translator from institutionalised languages into everyday language, and vice versa. In this sense, social work presents a membrane between institutionalised esoterics and everyday community life, for the example of psychiatry cf. Tilbury, 1993.

living for all groups were improving and the welfare state functioned relatively well juvenile delinquency emerged. This was inexplicable at the time and impossible to eliminate with traditional means. Individual treatment was not enough in terms of financial benefits nor in terms of counseling and psychotherapy, and if gang leaders were sent to correction institutions the gang immediately got a new leader. Social work was a leading profession and science in acquiring knowledge of the »street corner society«, youth subcultures and development of street, street corner-work. Thus, since the 1960s, it has become more than a follower of the rebelliousness of young people.

Academisation and dissent as conditions for the science of social work

With the growing importance of social care and the rule of the welfare state, education for social work gains in relevance. At first, social work is a professional study with mainly academics and teachers from other scientific branches giving lectures at schools for social work – chiefly doctors, lawyers, pedagogues, sociologists and psychologists. A typical curriculum of the time consisted of legal and social science subjects plus the methods of social work. This was the body of knowledge needed by social workers, i.e. knowledge of the languages of other professions, regulations of social protection and the specific methods characteristic of social work.

The science of social work was created at schools for social work. Among lecturers, primarily psychologists and sociologists joined in these processes as well as social workers who continued studies mainly within these two disciplines. These two disciplines were considerably well-established at the academic level but did not have their own separate, specific practical terrain – even more importantly – they did not have their own institutions. This is why lecturers who worked full-time at schools for social work were recruited from these two disciplines, while others such as lawyers, pedagogues and doctors worked at their institutions and were guest lecturers at schools for social work. The methodology of research and the scientific apparatus of social science were in these two professions incomparably more developed than, for example, in medicine or law.

In the 1960s the attraction of social work for psychology and sociology lay in its very possibility allowing social work to carry out practical dissent. Critical psychologists needed the field for social action and rebellious sociologists need a practical terrain. Not only attractive for or in accordance with the projects of radicalism social work as formerly a minor profession without clear institutional rules and in fact with-

out a concrete institution, situated within the virtual institution of social protection and the concrete network of institutions of social care, capable of transversal gaze with an unambiguous commitment to the welfare of its users, social work was also radical in its very composition. The radical direction in social work emphasised these essential disensual components and turned them into a scientific instrument.

Methods of scientific research and conceptualisation needed to be developed by social work for it to be dissentient and able to articulate its dissent on well-grounded arguments. Features such as: dialogue, empowerment, innovation, advocacy, understanding of the world of users, social construction and deconstruction, reflection, etc. are a result of the position occupied by social work in the mid-1980s, and thus construed the scientific method and conceptual apparatus of social work.

From the sixties on, social work became actively involved in a plethora of different social projects, and it was in many ways implicated in the new social movements (feminist, gay, mental health (antipsychiatry), handicapped, sex workers etc.). The concepts in social work could not be developed without simultaneous or preceding action. This meant that the research methods and techniques like action research, narrative methods, mappings, etc. were appropriated and developed in social work. These were not used only in the research projects, but also in reorganisations of services and reframing the provisions, as well as in direct work with users.

Towards a genealogical definition of social work

From the above sketchy summary of social work's origins, the following characteristics can be highlighted:

1. As we have seen social work undoubtedly connects to a long line of solidarity, compassion, philanthropy or simply help; it is its modern articulation which through professionalisation and situatedness within the space between solidarity and help, between mutuality and altruism, between the state and community, enables responses to social distress, which not only relieve the distress while simultaneously maintaining the status quo, but also provide space for essential changes and improvements in people's social lives.
2. Social work is one of the tutelarian professions, developed in the bourgeois regime in order to compensate the subjectivity or lack of the contractual power of certain categories of the population. Social work differs from other tutelarian

professions in starting to emerge at the time of the crisis of liberal capitalism and the institutional system of care. It was grounded in extra-institutional action and in an engaged creation of the social.

3. Social work as a minor, female profession and science is oriented to minorities and 'small' issues and above all it has no solid institutional apparatus to enable its own esoteric technical language and rules. That is why it is, by definition, a transgression from the institutional into the social depending on pragmatics and reflexivity without any a priori set codes.
4. With the emergence of the welfare state which defines it, social work becomes a pervasive profession, in its classical variation as one of the ways of providing social consent, and in its radical variation the articulation of the dissent of social minorities.
5. Apart from becoming a profession, social work is also becoming a science through research, the academising of education and the need for the scientific argumentation of the dissent in which it gets involved.
6. By involvement in everyday life and social change it remains a science dedicated to practical and immediate action.

This may be summarised in the following definition:

Social work is a modern professional and scientific articulation of issues of solidarity and help by creating social inventions going beyond the mere alleviation of distress; it is one of the caring professions that enables contractual subjectivity but without an institution, which is why it is minor, sensitive to the small and soft issues of everyday life; it works within the welfare state, not only to guarantee consent, but also to affirm dissent – which is why it necessarily creates rhizomatic conceptual network apparatus based on the co-operation of all actors and other scientific disciplines and why it has to be a science of doing and participatory praxis.

On the Work of Social Work

Social work is about work; not about reasoning, explaining, but about doing.

I remember how shocked, even ashamed I was about twenty years ago, when a senior psychiatric social worker was telling my students that she as a social worker is "feet to the psychiatrist". This seemed to me an extremely subservient attitude, unworthy of a social worker. While I still think that social workers should not be

subservient to any other discipline, now I see also another point that she (maybe unknowingly) was making. It was she who was doing the real work in the tandem – she was going out on the home visits, she got to know how people were really living, she was fixing the jobs, getting the user a flat to stay in; while the psychiatrist did the talking, understanding and explaining, prescribing etc. In the tandem she was by all reckoning the productive part; while the psychiatrist was involved in a very counterproductive construction of normality by defining the illness, she got things working.

Work in social work is not primarily about effort or labour – it is about producing.

Social work is not producing commodities. Even if we say it is producing services, these are not for the market. Is social work therefore producing something that cannot be, or should not be bought?

Social work is producing human deeds; it is producing arrangements; it is producing something that goes on, moves, is active. Not something that hinders, stops, falls back, is stable or stale.

Social work is producing change.

Social work is not needed to maintain what there is. Where routines are established, where forms have to be filled, where procedures are set and to be followed, Bill Jordan says, there is no need for social work. Social work is needed where change is necessary, where distress is so great that people cannot cope with it anymore, where change is happening and assistance is needed to fare better through the process, where a change has happened and we have to learn to live with it, or when there is a substantial possibility for a change to occur and we want to get ready for it or prevent it.

The social work – a machinic science.

It is not only about the work, actions and changes; it has also to be about wanting, needing, wishing, and desiring. The major part of social work is geared towards combining forces and resources in order to get what people want. Social work can indeed be defined as a science that arranges social forces and resources in order to produce what people want, need or desire.

The tricky part is often the desire itself and how to get to know it. Sometimes it is simple, we just have to ask people what they want and they will tell us, as long as we do not “forget” to ask. Often it is not that easy.

People who have lived in institutions for years have, for instance, learned not to wish for anything. Or people who are hooked on the desire for a drug, or who want something forbidden, even if it is just to die, or who desire what other people are specifically trying to avoid or dislike, as when parents both want to be the sole guardian of a child.

Social work is not simple mechanics – constructing a machine that will produce the objects of our desires. It is also about constructing the desires, that will not only produce what people desire, but will also be fueled by and consist of desires.

Transversality

Social work is not only interdisciplinary, but it also connects many different planes of existence. Therefore it is unable to reduce the variety of meanings and functions to a single dimension, to the homogenous space of a reductionist profession. When an old person is placed in an old people’s home, we know that we cannot attribute this placement to only one criterion, e.g. their bodily feebleness, or their personal inability to care for themselves. There may be many different stories involved: it is also about the job their nephew has, the cat that will be left behind, their relationship with neighbors, etc. All these forces and events interact and produce vectors and tensors that will slide an old person into care or let them stay at home.

Transversal action is seeking meaning that is to be sought on yet another plane, connecting to otherness and amplifying resonance.

Social work understands and employs the events, circumstances and materials, connecting them to other planes. There, a different meaning, use, and function can be found, other than the one in the clean, homogenous zone of existence (like illness/health, right/wrong, clever/stupid etc.).

Shabby clothing and neglected, “mental patient” appearance, will be seen within the framework of mental health as a sign of the illness, and deterioration; it can be read as a sign of not having many reasons to keep up appearance, or as a loss of interest in self appearance on account of being secluded from the ordinary

life, etc. When this person falls in love, he will be dressed well, shaved and trimmed. Was not being in love the reason for his miserable state?

The dialogue (Freire) is one of most important tools in social work. It literally means talking (and thinking) through (the matter). Enunciating what is to become.

Dialogue is a way to see through the material forces, it is a way of including people, being in cahoots with them in this gaze, seeing what there is going to be. Dialogue is a way of rendering the social arrangements into a material (reducing substance to matter) in order to transform them. Just like love was, for that man, a reason to dress better.

Pragmatic

The "language" of social work relies on the actual utterances that are ruled by the context and imminent "meanings", rather than on a grammatic ruling.

Social work does not have much its own special language, a jargon, a professional slang⁶ that would serve as the professional liturgy, as Latin has been in church. Is it because there is no temple in social work (no equivalent to hospital, no asylum, no prison, no barracks ...)? Or is it because in social work there is no higher truth to be defended and related to people? Not having a jargon of its own in social work is an advantage and a necessity.

The fact is that we have to perform an operation quite contrary to the standard operation of other professions. Namely, the inmates of the special institutions have to learn the esoteric languages and pertaining rules of the institutions. Social workers, in turn, have to learn their tongues, talks and speeches and underlying rules, relations, mores etc. in order to understand what is going on between people. So far – similar to anthropology. While the latter translates the learned into the deeper meanings of structures or functions, social work is satisfied with the imminent meanings and their mappings and their transformation into action. The new meanings will be acquired after the questions: "What is to be done?" "What will we do?" "What will happen?" etc., have been asked.

⁶ We do not even know how to call people we deal with. Are they clients, claimants, patients, protégés – we settle for a wide meaning word user.

Social work is not interested in what is right or wrong, but what works or doesn't.

We do not consider whether the use of drugs is right or wrong, or whether a parent should stay with their children or not, whether one should not talk to oneself, or kill oneself, should have a home, drive a car, wear socks of the same colour etc. We know that a drug can have destructive, but also creative effects, and that parents are a major resource, but can also pose a major threat to their children, we know that inner voices can be equally encouraging or demanding, etc. it is not a question of relativism, it is a question of what kind of machine is at work.

The criteria for the construction of the machine should be that the arrangements ensure maximum gain and minimum loss to all participants, not only in economic terms – damage and improvement could be also bodily, emotional, sensual: pain, disgust, hurt and joy, pleasure, beauty; satisfaction to some degree.

The reduction of harm and increase of benefit; the pragmatics escape the binary division of the grammatical rules, both are not a choice between health or illness, right/wrong, success/failure, black/white – we want the picture to be at least black and white, but preferably in colour.

What is specific in this construction, is the mandate of social work to observe the stakes of the weakest participants. Social work is there with the purpose of being a guardian or an advocate, to safeguard the interests of the weak who cannot do this for themselves, and to advocate on the behalf of those who do not have enough power to be heard on their own.

Harm reduction is a leading notion replacing the guilt, the mistake, the lack.

When things go wrong traditional professions look at whose fault it was. Somebody has to be made responsible, and faults and lacks corrected so they will not make such mistakes any more. This mechanical notion of guilt has some logic within its domain of virtual ideals, but fails in real life. First, punishing-correcting is not only time consuming (and sometimes impossible task), but it can cause even more pain, harm and distress. Secondly, it is usually blaming the victim. Thirdly, it individualises and personalises guilt, eradicating the always present social dimensions. Fourthly, it transforms something that has, or will have happened into a personal determinant. Someone who has stolen is proclaimed a thief, someone who cannot speak or hear a deaf and dumb, etc.

Linguistically speaking, it is transforming a verb into a noun, a predicate into a subject or an object. It is capturing an action, and forming it into a substance. Ac-

cidental deeds become not only incidental, but substantial to the person. Saying "a man who occasionally steals" is greatly different to calling him "a thief". This substantiation is a major operation in stigmatising people.

Saying things differently can make a difference. In social work there is tendency to pronounce people as *people first*. Expressions like 'people who hear voices', 'people who need continuous care', 'people who use drugs', 'men who have sex with men', etc. are slowly substituting old labelling nouns. But as with all politically correct speech when we use it, a feeling of not being completely successful remains. Just a new new-talk?

We know that pronouncing a label upon a person is nothing but a curse, if it is not accompanied by some real action, and if an actual change in a person's status does not occur. The strength of words depends not only on the status and investiture of the person who utters them, but also on the arrangements that follow. Many people were certain that Milosevic was a psychopath, and many of them were psychiatrists and psychologists, but no-one ever had the power to subject him to the diagnostic procedures let alone the therapy or even restricting his actions on that account. And it was impossible to put him on a trial before there was a Hague Tribunal.

It is also true that a wish is likely to remain a desire; a mental object to reflect upon, if there is not a concrete plan as to how to achieve it. If somebody wants to live on their own, there has to be a flat where they can do that. What is called a 'strength perspective' in social work is not just the enunciation of a person's strengths, but it must also be supported by arrangements that will guarantee actual empowerment, that will really render them strong.

There are many instruments in social work to achieve this. Among them, there are also many order-words that change people's lives in social work. Some are very powerful, decisive and restrictive (like taking away children). And the question is not whether social workers should do this restrictive ordering, but how to do it. Social workers do not have to be judges or doctors; they do not have to put people on trial or into diagnostic procedure. We have to seek ways of working with people even if this is about restricting their lives, it can be creating new words and new machines.

Dancing between the advocate and guardian

Social work is always about doubles, about Max and Maurice, Lolek and Bolek, Pooh and Piglet. It is about being the two at the same time. And it is about being able

to dance between the faces of guardian and advocate. The classic endowment of social work is that it has to safeguard the (virtual) interests of a person who cannot do it themselves. On the other hand it is also the essential task of social work to advocate for the same person's actual desires and necessities (that they can nevertheless express).

The guardian role in the human professions (medicine, health care, education, social work) is historically based on the pledge of the feudal masters to take care of and protect their subjects, to be their patron and protector. It is the basic relationship of the feudal society. The bourgeois society in turn is based on the sovereign, autonomous, independent individuals forming contractual relations. For those who are not capable of doing this or are not acknowledged as such, a special institute is needed which insures them a place in the social process. This gap is filled to a certain extent by the philanthropic professions who have taken on the guardian (patron, protective) role for people lacking in contractual power. Basic characteristics of this role are that, on the grounds of presupposed knowledge, somebody takes care of the virtual interest of an individual. In doing this security and care are of paramount importance, mandate from the society is given on the basis of the deficiency of the individual to be cared for; the underlying model of treating a person in care is the same for that of a child or a stranger, both being helpless and ignorant, in a need of help and patronage.

The advocate role is based on the tradition of the struggle for social emancipation of marginal groups (workers, women, ethnic minorities, etc.). In principle it is intended to present the interests of the people who have lost their voice; it intends to make up for the deficiencies and lacks and to recreate the people as fully invested members of the society. It is a professional stance that takes into account the perspective of power and strives to strengthen the social position of the individual. Basic characteristic of this role are to start from the actual interests and desires of an individual, to create knowledge on the basis of analysis of reality, to stress rights and prevent injustice, to get a mandate from the individual or a concrete social group, to concentrate on the irregularities and injustice in the society and to let the person regain the lost advantage. This is done on the principle of exchangeability of the roles (Prince and the pauper)⁷.

⁷ N.B.: These general roles and stances should not be confused with the concrete roles of an advocate or a guardian.

	Guardian	Advocate
Interests	Virtual	Actual
Knowledge	Beforehand, prior	After, situation based
Mandate	From the general society	From the individual, concrete group
Deficiency	Inside the individual	In the social order
Figure of the user	Stranger, child	Absent individual, Prince and the pauper

Contradiction between guardian and advocate roles is resolvable in different ways: by separating the roles (one member of the team takes one and another member takes the other role), by abstaining from the role of guardian (in case the court or any other instance has that role anyway), or by synthesis of both roles.⁸

Synthesis is possible if we follow both roles, continuously negotiate (in dialogue) our mandate and the possible outcomes, having in mind the interests and benefits of all the actors involved, especially of the user; if we consistently employ the least restrictive necessary measures and, together with the users, strive to reach the optimal solution.

For example, in removing a child from the parents, we can imagine the procedure as being twofold: moving in the direction of removing the child – at the same time checking the possibilities that will prove the removal unnecessary. Optimally we would create an alliance; the worker also on the side of the parents. Walk the path together, examining the possibilities of the child staying, eventually realising that the child cannot stay and has to be (temporarily) removed.

It is of vital importance to make decisions experientially. Sometimes we deem the desires of the users to be unattainable and impossible. However, we are not the advocates of reality; reality is strong enough to speak for itself. We, together with the user, have to test it. The experience will tell us what is possible and what is not. Social workers need not know in advance what is “real” and what is not. The user’s desire is a hypothesis to be tested. Life is an experiment anyhow.

Synthesis is possible also, because assessment, planning and happening are interwoven. In social work it is useless and even harmful to follow traditional scientific pattern of reasoning. Social work is not bound to assess first and intervene after.

⁸ Separation and abstinence are reasonable and productive in some situations, but we give up power invested in deciding. And this power can be the power to be used for the solution, desired by the user.

Concrete actions that we take from the start go beyond pure assessment as they immediately change situation (the young offender gets a job, finishes school; the father changes his communication patterns with his children). Good and concrete plans for the future change the present.

We can act as both – advocate and guardian, also because we can make things happen. If we as social workers can really sort things out and change something, the synthesis in action is possible. In this ability we assume the role of commissioner, integrating the user’s actual desires and necessities with their perceived virtual interest. We can plan and construct the arrangements (services, settings, resources, etc.) that will satisfy both – what he or she really wants and is supposed to be good for him or her.

Partisan and bias

We know now that there is no politically neutral or value-free science. In social work being biased, partisan, partial, is an imperative. If we want to learn what people actually experience, how life is for them, what they are living through, we have to take their own perspective. This is even more so, when we start doing things together.

However, impartiality to the interests of the users is a prerequisite of professional discipline which gives us credibility that we are not acting for some private reason. But, there is a whole history, not only in anthropology, but also in social work, of becoming native, i.e. of relinquishing the appointed role and mandate and joining the users. Not only joining youth subcultures, also joining trade unions, activist groups and movements.

This poses many questions. Not only about the nature of professional social work but also – is it possible to become something that you are not. Can one become old or a child when one is forty? Can we go across what is just empathy, qualitative research, just imagining how it is to be the other? Change, if a person remains the same, is allowed, metamorphosis is not. To transform into another is someone’s death (maybe just a shipwreck). Tarzan becomes an ape because Lord Greystoke dies. Becoming other is possible when there is no turning back, when the bridges are burned. Becoming other is abandoning the roles, the provisional identities.

Social work should relinquish the power invested in it, it is just that Prince has to become a pauper, for real, in order for a synthesis to happen.

Probabilistic

Certainties are our friendly phantoms of everyday life. We do not want to doubt the contingencies of living; we want to be sure our kids will be at home when we return from work, that our husband still loves us, that things will be where we left them. If we did not choose to believe in these, our life would be a misery. Social work deals with the situations where things turn out not to be the way they seemed, when things get out of hand, when people who were supposed to provide us with a sense of security (a husband, father) turn out to be a major threat, when our grandmother forgets our name, when we are left with no money in a local bar for the hundredth time, when the factory where we have been working for twenty years closes down – when ordinary transforms into uncommon, extraordinary.

We seek to reconstruct the ordinary, in many ways, by real guarantees (insurance, vouching, etc.), by going to safe or ordinary settings (safe houses, public spaces, etc.). Or, we try to rearrange the situation (by negotiations, removing the dangerous object or a threat). We de-dramatise the drama of the uncommon, by normalising or banalising (“it is nothing special”, “this happened before” etc.), by linking it to other people’s experience (“this happens to many of us”, “this happens when you are this age”), linking it to social (“it is the patriarchal”, “the economic crisis”, “the war”).

Or we may try to take the extraordinary on its own terms, as an aesthetic event posing its own questions or giving answers (we can take delirium as a story being told), and advocate people’s right for the alternate, separate realities and help them present those to others. We want to avoid being paranoid, to isolate the extraordinary events, treat them as symptoms of something (of some personality deficit, fate, higher power, conspiracy etc.), to avoid letting them flood the situation and people in it, making a drama.

Such quasi-causal relationships are nothing but the demons of our everyday life. They are usually constructed, not only in everyday life, but also in social work and social sciences in retrospect (he is a drug addict because he smoked dope or because he had an unhappy childhood) and are more examples of bad literature than of a scientific thinking.

Quasi-causalities are also constructed to avoid “mistakes”. For a judge, it is a mistake to put an innocent person in jail, so they will release ten guilty people in order not to sentence an innocent person. For a doctor, a mistake is not to cure a sick person, so they will rather treat ten healthy people rather than miss one sick person.

It is the way to construct certainties about our freedom and about being cared for on the account of committing other kind of mistakes.

In social work we do not want to curtail freedom on the account of being cared for, nor do we want to abandon care on the account of letting people free. We can do both at the same time, if we think about events in life as more or less probable and construct modes of anticipating, reacting or correcting, using and improving events that have already happened. Looking at the events in probabilistic terms requires more precision, more sense of eventuality, and less robust intervention in people’s lives.

Social work is more about possibilities than certainties. It is true that we want to diminish the likelihood of adverse events but what counts is to expand the possibilities.

Experimental

In social sciences tackle is not very valued. If not as charlatan, it is deemed as being more of a trade, craft, a matter of professional conduct than a science. Technical sciences in the arena of natural sciences, in turn, by no means play a minor role. Not many people would know of Einstein’s, Bohr’s, Planck’s theories, if there weren’t space journeys, nuclear bombs, television etc. In social and human sciences, even more than a hundred and fifty years after Marx said that “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it.”⁹, the science remains sacerdotal, priest-like. Social scientists see their role as explaining higher truths of society, culture, and human existence, and expect people to live by their axioms. (And, people sometimes do.) It seems as if the social sciences did not yet make the separation from religion the natural sciences did long ago. Social and human sciences function as secular religions and social scientists refrain from praxis. Are they afraid of contaminating their abstract theories? As it happens social scientists such as Freud, Marx, even Foucault, remain known for the praxis they sprang off, or at least gave an extra spin to. Most of the social theories, though, remain impotent, either by hindering action or because they are hindered by inaction.

In social work, doing comes often before thinking. What some of the colleagues in more academically distinguished disciplines often envy, is that we have a constant

opportunity (even necessity) to test our theories or even test reality. Social work is a string of constant innovations, experiments, projects and evaluations. Evidence-based practice in social work does not only mean that evidence is sought but also produced. If we wanted to prove that living in the community is better than living in the institution, we had to move the people out of the institution into the community. However, it is not only efficiency and effectiveness at stake, it is an ethical issue of the right for people to be free and live with others – but it still had to be shown that it can be done.

Reflective and reflexive

Where there is action, there needs to be reflection. Not only do we have to think about what has happened, about what has been done, but also what has to be redone, amended, repaired. Not that we have to interpret deeds and actions, we have to see them as a whole, with the context and all.

There is a need to be reflective but also reflexive. Our actions point back to immanence of interaction and are not mirrored/reflected in some kind of transcendental mirror. Social work operates in the everyday, ordinary, and banal. Most of human interaction is not ruled by rule of Law, God or hygienic regulations. It is ruled by the flexible, self-constituting little rules and ways of observing, talking, touching and inviting each other, by the rules that are both cultural and pointed to the intentions, purposes and inclinations of the people involved.

These rules and the imminent meanings are bound to the context where events happen. Since we do not have good maps for these ever moving territories, we almost always have to explore them, involving the people participating in them. Using transcendental shortcuts and axiomatic shorthand we will always risk imprecision and missing the point.

We should let people tell us their own stories, should encourage and help them reappropriate them. But, sad stories, “narrated” to us, are mostly narratives told more than a hundred years ago with fixed narrative patterns and literary structure. A story of a junky was told long ago by Thomas de Quincey and reiterated by Dostoyevsky’s Gambler, told by the Children of the Zoo Station, to be told again in the office of a social worker anywhere on this earth. We would complain of the lack of imagination and plagiarism, if it was only a matter of organising the narration, the way of telling the story. But, since it is also a way of organising actual experience, a

script to be followed in the actual life, we can claim that people are being caught in their biographies. In social work we have to invent means of escaping the biographies, transforming them, giving them different endings, sequels. We do not live novels with plots, heroes (usually tragic), resolutions etc. Human lives are more like intertwining series of novellas, in which we often overlook the final twists and miss a connection to something that there has not been before. And we fail to see that human lives are more comic than tragic.

Comic

Swearing on one’s father is different when it is done by Oedipus, Jesus or Winnie-the Pooh.

Social work is funny even when the jokes have not been told. The relationships with users are of transitional nature; hence we are allowed to play.

Humour allows moving on, to see (what happened, or will happen) but not to get engulfed or encysted in a drama.

Of course I am not suggesting that we should all laugh at funerals, but if we do, it will not be out of disrespect to the deceased, quite the contrary, it will add to good memories we have of them. A laughter makes the thoughts resonate on very different levels. The person who tells the joke laughs the most.

Ethico-aesthetic

I doubt that I succeeded to confirm the thesis that social work is a science of doing (it is anyhow difficult to do that by writing or talking), but I am tired of writing (and you of reading – I appreciate your politeness), so I will stop.

Just one final point: social work is an avenue towards an ethico-aesthetic paradigm in human and social science. It enables us to hear, feel, see, experience and go beyond encrusted normality, to move between the different planes of existence.

The new paradigm goes beyond transcendentalism of rational paradigm but still renders ratio useful. The end of the twentieth century may have shown the pitfalls of the Enlightenment project. But this is not where social work is constructing its consistencies from. It is to align its consistencies with the humanist project of the Renaissance.

P.S. The "Anything goes" of post modernism is a global integrated capitalism elephant crap – a sales slogan for death.

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Abstract

Durch ihre Entstehungsgeschichte kann die Sozialarbeit als eine Bewegung beschrieben werden, die sich aus den Wurzeln der tätigen Hilfe entwickelte, eine Bewegung, die so alt ist wie die Zivilisation selbst: die unmittelbare Nächstenliebe des Mittelalters wurde von der indirekten Wohltätigkeit des Stadtlebens und der Philanthropie der Industrialisierung abgelöst. Die soziale Funktion der Sozialarbeit ist in erster Linie schützend, das heißt, der Berufsstand agiert als Beschützer der Machtlosen. Indem sie diese Funktion ausübt, hat die Sozialarbeit gegenüber anderen Berufssparten (z.B. PsychiaterInnen, LehrerInnen, RichterInnen und BeamtenInnen im Strafvollzug) einen Vorteil: sie kann tätig sein, ohne in eine Institution eingegliedert zu sein, ja, sie

hat sich erst aus einer Krise der Institutionen heraus entwickelt, als eine soziale Tat, als Teil einer sozialen Bewegung.

Die ersten SozialarbeiterInnen waren Männer und Frauen, die die Grenzen der klassischen Berufssparten (Recht, Medizin, Schule) überschritten und sich in den sozialen Bereich vorwagten. Ohne einen eigenen Tempel, ohne esoterische Fachsprache und berufsspezifische Regeln ist es ein gewöhnlicher Beruf, er geht unter die Menschen, spricht ihre Sprache, es ist ein unbedeutender, weiblich dominierter Berufsstand, eine Wissenschaft, die sich an Minderheiten orientiert.

Dieser Schritt von den Institutionen in das Soziale ist angewiesen auf Pragmatik und Reflexivität, ohne a priori vorgegebene Codes. Mit der Gründung des Wohlfahrtsstaats wird Sozialarbeit zu einem allgegenwärtigen Beruf, in seiner klassischen Ausprägung ein möglicher Weg, allgemeinen sozialen Konsens herzustellen, in seiner radikalen Form der Ausdruck des Dissens sozialer Minderheiten, ausgedrückt durch die wissenschaftliche Diskussion und Disziplin. Daraus lässt sich die folgende Definition ableiten:

Sozialarbeit ist die moderne professionelle und wissenschaftliche Artikulation von Themenkreisen der Solidarität und der Hilfe durch die Hervorbringung sozialer Interventionen, die über die reine Milderung von Notlagen hinausgehen, es ist einer der helfenden Berufe, der vertragliche Subjektivität ermöglicht, ohne an eine Institution gebunden zu sein, daher ist sie sachte und sensibel, einfühlsam gegenüber kleinen und empfindlichen Themen des täglichen Lebens, sie arbeitet im Rahmen des Wohlfahrtsstaates, aber sichert dennoch nicht nur den allgemeinen Konsens, sondern bestärkt auch Dissens – daher bringt Sozialarbeit notwendigerweise ein weit verwurzeltes konzeptuelles Netzwerk hervor, basierend auf der Zusammenarbeit aller AkteurInnen und anderer wissenschaftlicher Disziplinen, und das ist auch der Grund, warum Sozialarbeit eine Wissenschaft der Tat und der partizipativen Praxis sein muss.

In der Sozialarbeit geht es in erster Linie um Arbeit und die Tat, nicht nur um das Erklären und Verstehen. Sie basiert auf dem Erzielen von Wirkungen, auf Veränderungen, auf dem Ersehnten. Als solche ist sie transversal, sie verbindet mehrere Ebenen der menschlichen Existenz. Sozialarbeit wird geregelt durch Pragmatik (und nicht durch Grammatik), sie fragt „Was funktioniert?“ und nicht „Was ist richtig?“, sie konzentriert sich auf die Reduzierung von Leid und nicht auf die Schuldfrage. Die Spannung durch den inhärenten Widerspruch zwischen der Betreuung und dem Eintreten für die Rechte der Minderheiten ist das Fundament der Sozialarbeit, es ist eine produktive Spannung, die paradoxerweise eben durch die Parteilichkeit aufge-

löst wird, die von der Sichtweise des Servicebenutzers ausgeht, die reflektierend ist und die Gesamtheit der Situation berücksichtigt und sie von innen heraus versteht.

Sozialarbeit ist auch eine probabilistische Wissenschaft, die sich auf die Wahrscheinlichkeit des Eintretens von Ereignissen konzentriert. Dabei geht es im gleichen Ausmaß um die Reduzierung der Wahrscheinlichkeit, dass ungünstige Ereignisse eintreten, und um die Entfaltung zusätzlicher Möglichkeiten. Sozialarbeit ist eine experimentelle Wissenschaft, die vor allem das Ziel hat, neue soziale Tatsachen hervorzubringen, und erst in zweiter Linie versucht, das Bestehende zu erklären, sie zieht die überraschende Wendung der Komödie der Katharsis der Tragödie vor. Sozialarbeit ist ein Beispiel für das ethisch-ästhetische Paradigma, das auf die ihr humanistische Tradition aufbaut und so die Passivität des postmodernen Relativismus überwindet.

Birgit Sauer

Geschlecht als Strukturkategorie. Wissenschaft als Gesellschafts- und Politikkritik

„Das Geschlecht ist die Religion des Volkes.“ (Goffman 1994: 131)

Das Geschlecht ist eines der zentralen Gliederungsprinzipien einer Gesellschaft. Die Einteilung in Männer und Frauen ist uns in unserer Kultur vergleichsweise selbstverständlich, ja wir empfinden es als geradezu notwendig, um mit einem Menschen kommunizieren zu können, zu wissen, ob er/sie Mann oder Frau ist. Diese Geschlechterdifferenz wird in der Regel an (vermeintlich) natürlich-biologischen Unterschieden festgemacht: am Körperbau, an der Stimme, an den Bewegungen. Die medizinische Wissenschaft hat in den vergangenen beiden Jahrhunderten viel dazu beigetragen, um diese Geschlechterdifferenz im Körper der Menschen festzumachen (Laqueur 1992) – beispielsweise im Schädelumfang und der Gehirngröße, im Hormonhaushalt und in den Genen. Ohne Zweifel: Männer und Frauen unterscheiden sich körperlich, vor allem in der Zeugungs- und Gebärfähigkeit. Doch dass dieses System der biologischen Zweigeschlechtlichkeit, das im Übrigen keineswegs immer eindeutig feststellbar ist, so große gesellschaftliche und politische Bedeutung erhielt, beruht nicht allein oder gar vornehmlich auf den natürlichen Gegebenheiten, sondern ist eine gesellschaftliche Konvention, die sich vor allem seit dem 18. Jahrhundert in westlichen Gesellschaften herausgebildet hat. Spätestens im 19. Jahrhundert wurden dann die Geschlechtscharaktere von Frau und Mann entworfen, naturalisiert, polarisiert und hierarchisiert (Hausen 1976).

Freilich war ein Großteil des wissenschaftlichen Bemühens, die Geschlechterdifferenz zu begründen, damit verknüpft, die Unterlegenheit von Frauen gegenüber Männern zu rechtfertigen und die biologische Ungleichheit als Ausgangspunkt und Begründung für gesellschaftliche Ungleichheit, für die Nachrangigkeit und Abhängigkeit von Frauen vom Mann – sei er Vater, Ehemann oder Bruder – und für den politischen Ausschluss von Frauen zu verwenden. Biologie wurde gleichsam zum Schicksal, und Zweigeschlechtlichkeit wurde in eine hierarchische Matrix eingebettet, die Männer höher rangieren lässt als Frauen. Bereits die ersten Frauenbewegungen des 19. Jahrhunderts in der Folge der bürgerlichen Revolutionen skandalisi-