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NETWORKS OF ANXIETY – FROM THE DISTORTIONS OF LATE MODERN SOCIETIES TO THE SOCIAL COMPONENTS OF ANXIETY

abstract

The article aims at exploring the social constituents of anxiety, which is considered to be a phenomenological cost of late modern social distortions. Firstly, the social theoretical background is elaborated based on a network theoretical synthesis of Bourdieu's and Habermas' phenomenologically grounded social theories, which aim at elaborating the social suffering caused by unfair competition and distorted communication. Secondly, an attempt is made to identify the key phenomenological characteristics of anxiety: based on psychoanalytic and cognitive psychological descriptions, it is defined as a non-reactive, non-targeted fear, resulting in the generalization of worry. These two approaches are connected in order to identify those social distortions, which contribute to the emergence of such diffuse fear. The most typical examples are networks characterized by unstable competition and non-transparent and volatile competition or collective traumas, distrust or inefficient systems.

keywords

social phenomenology, anxiety, critical theory, late modernity

It is a commonplace in contemporary social theory that late modernity is characterized by the increase of social contingencies and unpredictable risks, which result in new ways of social integration and new phenomenological burdens as well, including the general increase of anxiety (Giddens, 1991). However, despite these grandiose diagnoses, related sociological explanations are characterized by several shortcomings. While social theories rely on over-generalizing structural transformations without paying attention to the phenomenological details (Wilkinson, 2001), empirical analyses either neglect or fail to operate within comprehensive social theoretical frameworks (Tudor, 2003). In this sense, when it comes to analyse the causal relation between modernization and anxiety, the empirical evidence and the theoretical conclusions seldom go hand in hand. The main obstacle of such synthesis is the lack of a clear sociological conceptualization of anxiety, that is the elaboration of those social constellations, which are responsible for the emergence of anxiety disorders. In order to fill this gap, anxiety needs to be reintroduced on the fundamental level of intersubjectivity, as a consequence of distorted integration mechanisms.

However, this task is easier said than done, as sociological and psychological approaches are divided by epistemological differences originating from incommensurable disciplinary ontologies. Therefore, a common denominator is needed capable of bridging such distances. As the original intention of phenomenology is to provide a pre-disciplinary clarification of ontological and epistemological structures (Husserl, 1970), it seems to be a perfect candidate for the task. Accordingly, the article attempts to link the psy-descriptions of anxiety to the sociological theories of interpersonal relationships on a phenomenological level. This synthesis enables the exploration of the links between the contemporary structural transformations and the increase of anxiety, which is explained as a phenomenological cost of various social distortions.¹ Classic phenomenology focuses on the notion of lifeworld, which is defined as the domain of the 'taken for granted' (Husserl, 1970). The interpretations born in intentional and pre-intentional processes outline a horizon of the world framing the actors' relation to the things, the others and the self. Sociological theories from the beginning aimed at similar goals by describing the horizon of 'taken for granted', even if they did not always refer to phenomenology. However, unlike classic phenomenology of the consciousness, 'social

1 For a similar project aiming at elaborating a social phenomenological analysis of depression, see Sik 2018.

phenomenology' explains the construction of lifeworld with intersubjective processes.² By understanding one's relation to the world, as a fundamentally intersubjective phenomenon, its pathologies, such as anxiety, can also be explained, as the consequences of a distorted social environment.

In the first part, the social theoretical tools are introduced. Bourdieu and Habermas are probably the two most impactful critical theorists, who also provided original contributions to social phenomenology along their original diagnosis of social pathologies. While their theories focus on different dimensions of social suffering (competition vs. communication), both of them provide important insight for understanding the social components of anxiety. In order to reach a more comprehensive social phenomenological ground, their ideas on action coordination are reintroduced as network dynamics with the help of White's theory. In the second part, this network phenomenological framework is applied in order to reinterpret anxiety. As a preparatory step, an attempt is made to identify the key phenomenological characteristics of anxiety based on psychoanalytic and cognitive psychological theories: anxiety is explained by referring to non-reactive, non-targeted fear, which results in the unconditional, diffuse and general expansion of worry. These insights are combined with the concepts of 'network phenomenology': those various social distortions are identified, which contribute to the emergence of such fear.

According to Parsons, it is a basic task of any social theory to answer the question, how is 'double contingency', that is the mutual unpredictability inherent in every social interactions, handled?³ From this perspective, the history of sociological thought can be described as various attempts of identifying those mechanisms, which are capable of coordinating social action, thus enable cooperation. Social theories since Parsons attempted to conceptualize the substantive and formal characteristics of action coordination. While classical theories tended to focus on specific levels of action coordination (e.g. the markets in case of Marx, or the system of division of labor in case of Durkheim), contemporary theories elaborate a more comprehensive approach. According to them, double contingency inherent in every social action situation is either handled on 'pre-intentional' level (by mutually shared or compatible motivations unreflected by the actors); or on intentional level (by mutually accepted interpretations of the world); or on structural level (by social constraints reproduced as unintended consequences of social action). Social theories analyzed below are variants of pre-intentional, intentional and structural integration mechanisms.

In Bourdieu's approach, action coordination can be understood through the notions of habitus, illusion and field. According to his concept, social practices are embedded in the multidimensional *field* of material and symbolic capitals, which are responsible for structuring the space of actions. Each type of capital outlines a set of goals and values orienting those being involved in their pursuit and accumulation. While the intention of acquiring the specific capital is shared by everyone involved in a field, the chances of success are unequal: as the rules of the game are defined by those in privileged position, the competition contributes to the reproduction of existing hierarchies (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1994). As a consequence,

1. Towards a network phenomenology of competition and communication

2 Examples such as rites reproducing collective consciousness (Durkheim), symbolic interaction reproducing universes of meanings (Mead), discursive power reproducing naturalized discipline (Foucault), mediated communication reproducing system semantics (Luhmann), actor-networks reproducing inter-objective order (Latour) are just a few examples of understanding the reproduction of the 'taken for granted' as a social process.

3 Every social action may be described as a situation where actors perceive each other as a 'black box', mutually incapable of predicting the reactions of the other. Solving this mutual unpredictability is the presupposition of every social action (Parsons-Shils, 1951: 16).

fields are characterized by inevitable tensions between actors sharing the same goals, but having different chances of realizing them. This tension is lessened on the one hand by those interpretations, which legitimize the existing social relations by introducing the social inequalities as consequences of 'natural' differences. These interpretations transmitted in the process of symbolic violence maintain an *illusion*, that is the veiling of power relations by framing them as natural differences (Bourdieu, 1998). Beside the mutually accepted illusions, the social practices are also coordinated by those personal experiences, which are attached to the different field positions. As structural positions outline the space of action, they also indicate the accessible set of experiences. By being socialized in a certain class position, one experiences the limitations of action and practices strategies functioning within the given frames. These incorporated strategies are prior to reflection; they orient practices on the level of dispositions, as a *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990).

In Habermas' approach, action coordination can be understood through the notions of lifeworld, communicative action and social system. *Lifeworld* refers to the natural understanding of the world, which outlines the horizon of actions. As long as it provides a similar enough interpretation for everyone, it remains unreflected. However, if the actors' interpretations differ so much that their interaction is hindered, then the natural attitude gives place to intersubjective reflection. This *communicative action* can be described as an attempt of reaching mutual understanding in a series of speech acts (Habermas, 1984). Besides the mechanisms of action coordination relying on a shared interpretation of the world, integration is also ensured by mechanisms independent from the actors' lifeworld. Such mechanisms are the symbolically generalized communication mediums (e.g. money or law). These mediums rely only on a very specific set of common knowledge, namely the affirmation of the mediums. With the help of the mediums, a limited, but at the same time widespread communication becomes available, which connects distant actors, while creating specialized, autonomous subsystems of social action. These *social systems* are detached from the moral-communicative ground of the lifeworld and follow the logic of instrumental rationality (Habermas, 1986).

In sum, Bourdieu and Habermas introduces two different types of sociability. According to Bourdieu, social units are integrated by material and symbolic capitals (as mutual goals), illusions (as biased, but legitimate sets of rules) and habitus (as interiorized class position capable of naturalizing inequalities). According to his approach, social units are always characterized by latent conflicts, as their basic dynamics is a zero sum struggle for capitals. According to Habermas, integration is secured by the mutual lifeworld potentially renewed in communicative action, or by mediated communication originating from social systems, such as economy or politics. In this sense, social units are based on a latent, explicit or institutionalized consensus. By outlining different answers to the question of social integration, these two theories also elaborate their own phenomenological frameworks. In Bourdieu's approach, such framework is determined by the redistribution and competition for material and symbolic capitals. As the interpretation of the world is never a disinterested process, it is affected by the often unperceived, hidden struggles for material advantage or symbolic recognition. Thus, meaning construction is characterized by various perceptual blindspots and hermeneutic distortions, which depend on one's position within the structure of fields. Based on Habermas' theory, there is a chance for mutual understanding based on argumentative debate. However, such democratic ideal is on the one hand threatened by dogmatic speech acts implying meanings considered to be undebatable. On the other hand, meanings being born in linguistic interactions are also threatened by mediatized communication. Mediums such as money, law, mass media or information technology distort the interpretation of the world by narrowing its contents. This results not only in the homogenizing, but also in the loss of meanings.

Inevitable conflict and potential consensus express two divergent traditions in social theory. Despite their complementary character, the framework of Bourdieu and Habermas are seldom used simultaneously: the same interaction can be either interpreted as the expression of latent class struggle, or as an attempt of reaching mutual understanding via linguistic and mediated communication. In order to overcome such theoretical incompatibility, a meta-theoretical framework is required, which is capable of incorporating both approaches. The network theory of Harrison White is considered to be a model having such potential, as it provides an alternative approach to integration (White, 2008). This theory attempts to dismantle general mechanisms of action coordination elaborated by conflict or consensus based theories (such as lifeworld or habitus) and rebuild social integration from below, based on the close observation of how actors, institutions and objects relate to each other (Fuhse, 2015). From this perspective, the morphological network characteristics, the structure of relations, the position within a network, the dynamism of connecting and disconnecting gets special attention, as they determine the frames and extent of social action.

In White's approach, the basic dynamic of social action is the attempt of gaining control over a certain situation. The control may be secured in different ways for actors in different positions. The way of securing control outlines the identity of the actors, in a given network configuration. If the network is expanded or lessened, the relative balance is replaced by uncertainties implying the formation of new identities elaborated according to the new patterns of control. In this sense, the basic dynamic of social action is the mutual adaptation to the continuously changing networks, that is an endless attempt of controlling new configurations by connecting or disconnecting, while also elaborating new identities. Based on these premises, the task of social theory is to identify those mechanisms, which are capable of stabilizing the control patterns (creating 'network domains') and consequent identities in certain network configurations.

Such mechanisms, on the one hand include *stories* about the networks, which exemplify the previous ways of controlling the situation by different actors. Stories constitute the fundamental level of stabilizing a network, as they are capable of covering controversial issues and identities as well. Besides of the general stories clarifying the basic features of a network, the stabilization also relies on *disciplines*, which are responsible for outlining various set of rules. Different rules – grounding an interface (instrumental action), a council (communicative action) or an arena (expressive action) type network – provide opportunity for different control attempts, thus enable different identities. Disciplines are complemented by *styles* providing detailed paradigms of identities and mechanisms of control (e.g. the concepts of rationality or personality). Stories, disciplines and styles are fundamental in networks constituted of direct ties. However, solely they are not capable of explaining the stabilization of networks constituted of actors not being in personal interaction, affecting each other only indirectly. These networks rely on institutions legitimized by a certain rhetoric appearing in the public sphere and *control regimes* regulating interactions according to hierarchical roles, such as expert-client, or patron-employee (White, 2008).

White proposes a paradigm shift: instead of focusing on the question of double contingency inherent in every social action, he focuses on an extended space of contingencies inherent in the networks. In this sense, he does not attempt of modeling mechanisms capable of solving 'double contingency', but mechanisms capable of solving 'network contingency'. This paradigm shift reveals the limitedness of the model of double contingency: as social actions are embedded in networks, their coordination depends on the interference of every constituent actor, not only those who are directly involved in a situation. Those models of action coordination, which neglect the network embeddedness, inevitably miss a fundamental element of explanation: in their eyes, the always changing, complex web of interactions,

which directly or indirectly affects the action situation is considered to be driven by a homogenous logic of integration. The basic difference between the approach focusing on action coordination and the network approach is the extent of social relations taken into consideration: by taking network theories seriously, the idea of a single logic of action coordination is replaced by the need for theorizing the inevitable clash of heterogeneous logics.

Such paradigm shift has implications for social phenomenology as well. While Habermas and Bourdieu postulate general mechanisms of meaning construction and consequent definitive frameworks of relating to the world (such as habitus shaped in latent and manifest competition or lifeworld based on mutual understanding), they fail to operationalize the coexistence of these modalities within the same network and the potential shift between these ways of relating to the world. By reintroducing theories of action coordination as network ties, these shortcomings can be overcome. More importantly, a network phenomenology becomes accessible, which is characterized by the dynamic shift of various integration logics implying various phenomenological textures in the same network depending on the broader dynamics of connecting and disconnecting. Below Bourdieu's and Habermas' theories are reinterpreted from this perspective.

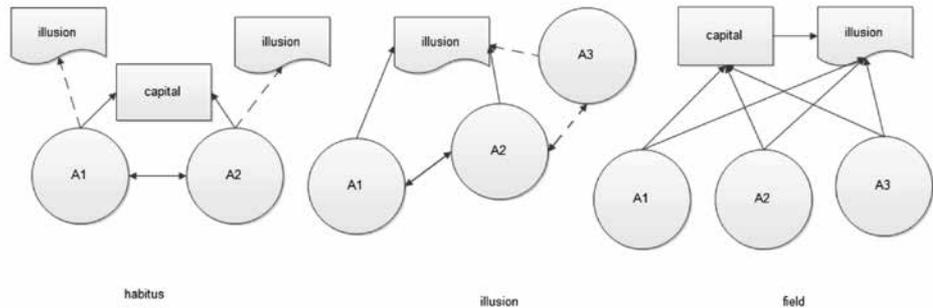


Figure 1. Network characteristics of habitus, illusion and field⁴

The habitus orients social practices by providing corporeal strategies of relating to the other and structuring desires based on the logic of a certain capital. Networks being integrated according to the logic of habitus are characterized by actors oriented to the same material or cultural capital, while being disconnected from intentionality. In this constellations, the actors focus solely on the capital and act according to their pre-intentional strategies in order the acquire it. Illusion orients social practices by providing a mutually accepted, naturalized interpretation of worthiness. Networks being integrated by an illusion are constituted of actors identifying with a certain set of goals and rules of acquisition, which is considered to express the natural state of the world. In this constellation those, who do not accept the illusion are excluded from the networks. Fields are macro networks, which integrate actors indirectly, by determining interpretations of the world and providing desirable goals. In this constellation the actors are not necessarily interacting with each other, instead they aim at

⁴ Lines indicate connection, dashed lines indicate the lack of connection. Circles symbolize actors, rectangles symbolize structural elements of the network, and wavy rectangles symbolize intentional elements of the network.

the same target and act according to the same illusion. However, this adds up and the network operates on the basis of latent structural constraints expressing the overall distribution of capital.

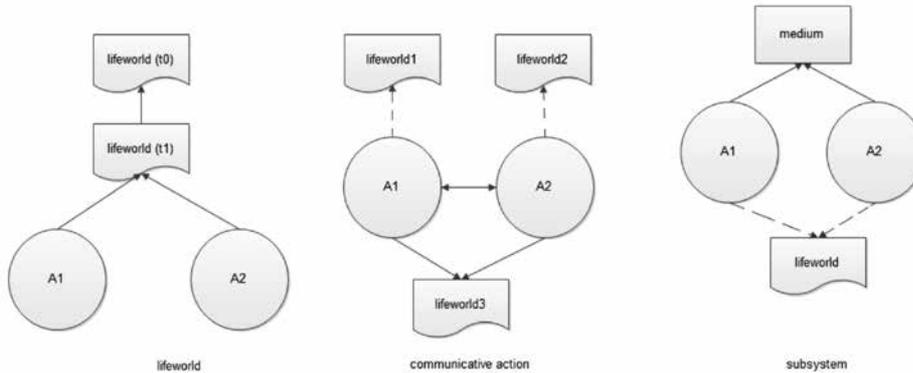


Figure 2. Network characteristics of lifeworld, communicative action and subsystems

Lifeworld orients social action by providing frames for a mutual interpretation of the world. Networks being integrated by a common lifeworld are centered around a collective set of meanings being transmitted as a ‘tradition’ from generation to generation. Such a traditional horizon of action transcends any individual perspectives. Furthermore, once internalized, the set of collective recipes of inhabiting the world connects actors without the need for continuous interactions. Communicative action is the process of reestablishing the mutual interpretation of the world through speech acts. Networks of communicative action are characterized by the actors’ disconnection from their original lifeworlds, while focusing on each other’s interpretation of the world in order to reach consensus. These constellations are flexible in a sense that they enable the free reformulation of the broader network by solely relying on the actual intersubjective processes. Subsystems are coordinated by mediums, enabling a limited but easily accessible form of communication. Networks integrated by mediums are characterized by the actors’ disconnecting from the lifeworld and each other, that is an exclusive attention to a certain medium. Similarly to fields, this results in automated paths of social action: mediums also function as indirect ties transcending time and space, however instead of organizing a competition, they enable functional refinement. From a phenomenological point of view, these models imply that an actor’s relation to the world is never only characterized by the struggle for capitals or by direct or mediatized communication aiming at cooperation. The phenomenological texture of the world is continuously shaped by these various effects depending on the broader network dynamics. In order to understand those distortions of social integration, which may contribute to the emergence of anxiety, all of these different types of social networks need to be taken into consideration simultaneously. On the one hand, specific distortions may emerge on the level of habitus by creating a problematic relation with certain capitals (e.g. being deprived from them); on the level of illusion by experiencing discredited interpretations of the social hierarchies and inequalities (e.g. disillusionment with meritocracy as a consequence of the lack of equal chances); also on the level of fields by biased structure of the capitals (e.g. dominance of a particular capital). On the other hand, specific distortions may emerge on

the level of lifeworld, as a consequence of a controversial space of experiences (e.g. collective traumas); on the level of communicative action, as a result of unpredictable communication (e.g. speech acts based on dogmatic meanings); also on the level of systems, as a consequence of dysfunctions (e.g. corrupted mediums of communication). While Bourdieu and Habermas provide a general overview of the negative consequences of social dysfunctions, they did not elaborate a specified analysis of the interrelatedness of social distortions and particular forms of suffering, such as anxiety. Before we could proceed into this direction, the phenomenological characteristics of anxiety needs to be clarified.

2. From psychological descriptions of generalized anxiety to the social phenomenology of detaching fear from experiences

As any other psychopathologies, generalized anxiety can be explained from the perspective of several psychological traditions. However, two are particularly important for a phenomenological analysis: psychoanalysis is capable of highlighting its pre-intentional aspects, while cognitive theory can help to explore its intentional level.⁵ A classic psychological analysis of generalized anxiety can be found in the works of Freud, who differentiated between realistic (facing actual danger), neurotic (systematic prevention of acting out id impulse) and moral anxiety (punishment for expressing id impulse). Generalized anxiety is the result of being exposed to the latter two: if children are punished for their id impulses, they learn to relate to them as being extremely dangerous. As even experimenting with them is considered to be too risky, any empirical contact with them is avoided, so the experience of a terrifying object is born, which is disconnected from the logic of trial and error (Freud, 1933).

The psychoanalytical approach is complemented in many ways by the cognitive, which focuses on irrational automatic thoughts exaggerating the threat of negative events, lack of social recognition or personal incompetence. Based on such assumptions, ordinary situations are perceived as particularly dangerous ones, which distorted interpretation leads to overcautious defense strategies (Beck *et al.* 1985). In many case, unpredictable negative events are the formative force behind such irresistible automatic thoughts: as they are irregular and uncontrollable, they motivate suspicion and overprotective attitudes. Recent theories emphasize both the positive and negative evaluations of worrying as equally important factors contributing to the emergence of a continuous, undifferentiated fear. 'Precaution' is considered to be beneficial for avoiding risks, so responsible actors may feel to be motivated to seek signs of danger (worry because of the threats). However, 'overreaction' is considered to be dysfunctional, which makes responsible actors seek the signs of exaggerated worries in order to avoid them (meta-worry because of worries). In sum, both paths lead to the emergence of a continuous, diffuse worrying: either because of the extreme precaution, or because of the fear from overreaction, a generalized pattern of anxiety may be born (Wells, 2005). Finally, behaviorist theories emphasize that in case of people having increased basic level of bodily arousal, the rituals of worrying itself may provide comfort: as discomforting situations are handled by reorienting one's attention to the well-known attunement of worry, such practice is reinforced and becomes a general attitude (Borkevic *et al.* 2004).

Based on these analyses we may argue that the phenomenological structure of generalized anxiety is characterized by the detachment of fear from the concreteness of actually dangerous events. On the one hand, such process can be described as a distorted process of socialization based on the hiding of fear from a relevant other and the self: if the parent forbids its children to experiment with their id impulses, a zone of taboos is created, which is terrifying and empirically inaccessible at the same time. On the other hand, such process could

⁵ For a broader overview of various approaches see Comer, 2010.

be understood as a result of maladaptative self-discipline: either because of the exposure to unpredictable events, or because of the ritualization of worrying, constant fear may seem to be an adequate general strategy of distancing the self from the world. As fear is disconnected from empirical feedback, it loses its concrete boundaries and starts to expand unlimitedly. The whole lifeworld is built around it, especially after becoming indifferent to opposing impulses: as too much worry leads to meta-worries, there seem to be no easy way out from the spiral of generalization. At this point fear starts to exist on its own: it is no longer operating as reaction to negative events, but as basis of the horizon of expectations.

While the psychological descriptions of anxiety explain it mainly as an inner process, it is worthy to note, that a latent, unexplored element of the social also appears in them: in case of psychoanalysis, the impact of the other is explicit (as they motivate the suppression of id impulses); in case of cognitive-behaviorist theory, it is implicit (anxiety originates from the lack of collective interpretations providing alternative for the ritualization of worry). This provides an opportunity for bridging psychological and social phenomenologies of anxiety. While psychological discourses describe a distorted pattern of relating to the world with a latent reference to the social, sociological theories provide opportunity for exploring this crucial aspect by adding network phenomenology to the formula. In what follows the question is raised: how do distorted social networks constituted of rivalries and communicative processes contribute to the emergence of such a non-reactionary, non-targeted pattern of fear?

In those networks, which are built around the struggle for material or symbolic capital, the fear from losing the competition represents a realistic aspect of threats. In a trial and error process actors may experiment with various strategies, seeking the ones, which promise the best chance of success. However, such constellations can be distorted by many factors. These factors can be systematically identified by referring to the network components introduced in *Figure 1*. Firstly, in those networks, which are primarily organized by competitive strategies based on the actors' dispositional habitus, it is the long term socializing experiences of the relevant capital, which play a crucial role. It is not the inequalities of chances or the exclusion from the competition, which matters, but rather the atmosphere of the social struggle: if competition includes the element of intimidation, then fear becomes the basic attunement of these situations, independently from the dynamics of winning or losing. In networks characterized by arbitrary power structures there is no opportunity for adapting to the constellation, developing strategies based on the differentiation between the dangerous and the harmless – thus fear becomes an untargeted, diffuse feeling.

Secondly, in those networks, which are based on the shared intentional framework of an illusion defining worthiness, it is the quality of the narratives of legitimacy, which matters. Even if illusions veil and naturalize often unjust hierarchies, they play a crucial role in establishing a stable interpretation of the values and rules. In this sense, besides their substantive content, illusions can also be characterized by their stability. If the complete annihilation and rewriting of the dominant values and rules are repeated so often that such events become the basic experiences, not only the actors become disoriented, but also a general atmosphere of unpredictability emerges. The basic trust in the possibility of a long term collective narrative of legitimacy is required for developing any sense of security. If it is lacking, then the social relations inevitably include the element of a threat as a result of their indefinite nature. Therefore, in networks characterized by constant local revolutions fear becomes a basic emotional structure, independently from the actual ongoing activities.

Thirdly, in those indirect networks, which are organized according to the logic of distributing capitals, the correspondence between the rules of the game and the actual practices of accumulation plays a key role. What matters in particular is the credibility and convertibility of the capitals. If they may lose their value unpredictably and become unchangeable to other

types of symbolic or material capitals, then the very structure of social existence becomes threatened. Careers, life strategies built around the accumulation of certain type of social recognition become questioned and the ground of everyday existence loses its stability. In macro networks invaded by an aggressive external regime of worthiness, not only the attacked field loses its autonomy, but also those become vulnerable, who have invested in it. As these actors experience the contingency of a formerly naturalized value, the very structure of reality is transformed in their eyes: it loses its taken for granted character and becomes a subject of continuous suspicion. Within such social environment, fear is gradually detached from actual losses. Instead of being a reaction to harmful experiences, it becomes a diffuse, free-floating, general horizon of expectation.

In those networks, which are built around linguistic and mediated communication, fear from dissent and failure of cooperation represent realistic fears. These threats can be handled by the improvement of communication, through attempts of clarifying the divergent background assumptions. However, such basic dynamics can be distorted by several factors, potentially resulting in the decontextualizing of fear (see *Figure 2*). Firstly, in those networks, which are based on shared background assumptions serving as an implicit mutual ground of relating to the world, it is the content of the lifeworld, which matters. If the mutual horizon is constituted of frightening collective memories (either in the form of collective traumas or in the form of untreatable risks or harms), then the basic assumptions themselves will imply a world full of unpredictable hazard. Within these networks, fear is generalized as a result of socialization, which can be changed only at the cost of disconnecting from the community.

Secondly, in those networks, which are constituted of speech acts aiming at mutual understanding, it is communicative competence (that is the capability of convincing and being convinced), which plays a crucial role. If it is distorted in a way that the very process of argumentation becomes discredited, then the chance for a shared lifeworld is lost. In those networks, where the actors cannot trust each other, not even at a minimum level, the very act of socially constructing the world will be tainted by fear. If the others are perceived as being suspicious (e.g. they seem to be manipulative), the space of actual communication is suddenly narrowed. No one can be sure anymore, if those meanings, which were seemingly born as a result of an argumentative process are mutually considered to be valid or they are part of some greater scheme. In networks characterized by persistent crisis of confidence fear is detached from any particular situations and becomes a basic attunement defining the everyday existence.

Thirdly, in those networks, which are organized by communicative mediums capable of transcending the boundaries of local lifeworlds, the functionality of the systems plays a key role. In those networks, where the experiences of participating in mediatized communication do not meet the expectations of efficiency, the actors lose their motivation for relying on mediums instead of linguistic communication. Such chance of dysfunctionality grows particularly high, if the systems are incapable of securing an easily accessible, predictable way of automatized communication. This could happen, if the increase of complexity is faster, than the capability of information processing. If the channels of transmitting information and getting orientation are changed too fast, then the very essence of system integration is damaged: instead of providing efficient shortcuts for cooperation, mediums burden interactions with extra contingency. In these networks mediatized communication becomes an independent source of danger, as it unpredictably threatens interactions with failure. Thus, these lagging networks of subsystems contribute to the emergence of generalized fear, whenever communicative mediums are involved.

The following table summarizes the various idealtypical network distortions resulting in the experience of anxiety as an expression of social suffering.

	pre-intentional	intentional	post-intentional
Distorted networks of competition (Bourdieu)	Intimidated habitus	Over-contested illusion	Invaded fields
Distorted networks of communication (Habermas)	Collectively traumatized lifeworld	Distrusting communicative action	Lagging systems

1. *Table.* Network distortions implying anxiety

Of course, these various networks affect the actors not separately, but in parallel.⁶ This means that the sociologically accessible phenomenological constituents of generalized anxiety emerge in those situations, where both the competitive and communicative networks are distorted the same way. If on the one hand, struggles for capitals take place in a frightening game, the values and rules are never settled and the autonomy of the fields is also under constant attack; while on the other hand, collective memories are haunted by unresolved traumas, communication is based on suspicion and systems are incapable to process their own complexity, then fear is detached from frightful events and becomes a general sentiment characterizing social situations. In this sense the phenomenological pattern of anxiety is born when the very social basis of giving sense to the world is embedded in a homogeneously distorted, distressing network.

By approaching the phenomenology of anxiety from a sociological perspective not only our understanding of the potential treatments can be widened, but also the increase of anxiety in late modernity can be explained more precisely (Sik 2019). Thus, such analysis may facilitate a social criticism providing practical conclusions for social policies. Even if it requires further elaboration, besides of these sociological conclusions, a network phenomenology of anxiety may have implications for therapeutic practice as well. On the one hand, it may provide new diagnostic possibilities: analysis of network types and dynamics within biographical ego-network reveals the micro and macro social constituents of anxiety. On the other hand, it could contribute to the development of interventions targeting the network of the patient beside of its cognitive or behavioral attributes. The goal of such enterprise could be the deconstruction of the distorted relation to the world by increasing the proportion of undistorted micro/macro ties providing resilience on individual and community level. Of course, such approach is not meant to replace, but to complement intensive psychotherapeutic, psychiatric interventions, which are capable of resolving deadlocks, but struggle with treating relapse (as a consequence of the reemergence of distorted lifeworld). These issues reveal the directions of future investigations.

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⁶ Furthermore, while they represent three important social sources of anxiety, they are not the only one by far. The model can be complemented by including other critical theories such as Honneth's theory of recognition (1996) or Lash' theory of aesthetic reflexivity (1999).

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