"Biographical Learning" reloaded. Theoretical grounding of a challenging approach

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For Theodor Schulze

Abstract: This article discusses an apparently 'outdated' concept of thinking about learning within the lifespan. Obviously, the term 'biographical learning' has been replaced by the label of 'lifelong learning'. In a first section, this position is critically examined and the importance of the biography for all learning experiences is emphasised. In a second step of argumentation, it is conceptually specified what the peculiarity of biographical learning actually is. The specifity of this learning concept can only be understood from a biographical perspective through the dimensions of 'temporality', 'contextuality' and 'reflexivity'. The concluding third part introduces the concept of 'biographicity' and proposes a theoretical understanding of the complex biographical learning idea using the 'grammar metaphor' from language theory.

Key words: biographical learning, lifelong learning, temporality, contextuality, reflexivity, grammar of the social, biographicity

Biographical learning is an idiosyncratic term. It seems a bit outdated and competes with the fashionable concept of "lifelong learning" that has been established in international further education since the 1970s. However, the idea that we are lifelong learners is a kind of triviality for adult education. The realisation that we learn during the entire lifespan has been a matter of course long before the targeted political labeling of lifelong learning in the 2000s. But what does this actually mean? Do we really know what learning in the life course stands for? And is a deeper understanding of social learning processes adequately covered by the political concept of *lifelong learning*?

The British educational sociologist John Field has convincingly worked out that behind the programme of lifelong learning a "silent explosion" could be hidden (Field, 2000, pp. 35 ff.), not simply the change to an educational society for all, rather possibly the danger of a political instrumentalisation of the learners and a division in society into those who know and those who don't (cf. Alheit & Dausien, 2002). As early as 1997, the OECD pointed out in a prognosis that the economic compulsion for lifelong further education could lead to processes of social exclusion that threaten the most advanced societies of late modernity. And what the forced learning process "does" to individuals, how they personally react to it, how they organise it in their own way has not been adequately researched until today – neither empirically nor theoretically.

The following article tries its own way of approaching these problems. In a first section (1), the critical disposition to the concept of lifelong learning is turned positively, so to speak, by

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linking it to the concept of "biography". The conceptual focus on biographical learning (Alheit, 2009) enables not only empirical access to the concrete individual and his or her experiences; it also creates the theoretical prerequisite for overcoming a false dualism of "subject" and "world", of individual and society. Rather, as the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa (2016) suggested, the subject-world-relationship is conceived as a form of "resonance", a dialectical oscillation between the contexts in which we live and the biographical resources that are available to us. This theoretical metaphor seems particularly suitable for describing biographical learning processes – a project that characterises the second section (2), in which those dimensions identifying learning from a biographical perspective are worked out more systematically. In the third part of the article (3), a kind of "mental grammar" of the lifetime is to be presented with the innovative concept of *biographicity*, which places the biographical learning process in a social-historical framework. And it is precisely this perspective that is not "outdated". We urgently need it for a contemporary theory of education (*'Bildungstheorie'*).

1. Learning and Biography: perspectives of a "new resonance"

1.1 Lifelong learning as a challenge

When we spontaneously think of "lifelong learning", it may not be the positive associations that come to mind at first, but rather the problematic ones. Let us mention, for example, artists in music: the vast majority of musicians do not have a "job" for their entire life. They are forced to be flexible and have to constantly adapt to new conditions. They have to learn to function in different cultural settings. They take on many roles, face completely new audiences and are forced to learn with the growing challenges (cf. Smilde, 2009, pp. 1 f.). In the pandemic crisis, for many the entire economic existence is even being called into question. Basically, for them, the need for lifelong learning has become a *conditio sine qua non*, perhaps even an unavoidable basic requirement that affects late modern societies in a very fundamental way: the inescapable compulsion to learn continuously.

What is striking here is that the blueprint of the normal biography obviously has become disordered. Organised around a work biography, the institution of the "life course" (Kohli, 1983, 1985) is becoming increasingly diffuse. The unproblematic sequence of a learning and preparation phase in childhood and youth, an activity phase in the center of life and a rest phase within old age only applies to a small number of (mainly male) people. The phase transitions have long since become social risk situations (Heinz (Ed.), 2000). Ever new status passages come into being. At the same time, the importance of the active work phase in the center of the life course begins to decrease noticeably. Just a drastic proof: in 1906 an average working year in England still took about 2,900 hours, in 1946 it was only 2,440 and in 1988 1,800 hours (Hall, 1999, p. 427).

The "inner structure" of the work has also changed. The massive redistribution of jobs from the industrial to the service sector is only a superficial symptom of this. More importantly, the notion of a consistent "working life", while traditionally excluding women, is finally a thing of the past. Average employment no longer means exercising one and the same job over a considerable span of life, but alternating work and further training phases, voluntary and involuntary career breaks, innovative career switching strategies, self-chosen alternation of work and family phases (cf. Arthur, Inkson et al., 2000). In this process, the focussing power of that Protestant work ethic, which according to Max Weber's diagnosis was one of the most effective orientation patterns of Western capitalist modernity, also seems to be dwindling

(Weber, [1904] 1920). New "post-materialistic" orientations become visible (representative: Inglehart, 1989).

In the process, "careers in social space" (Bourdieu, 1990) almost inevitably lose their clarity. Class, gender and generational status still have the significance of "biographical resources" (Hoerning, 1989), but their prognostic value for the perspective of actual biographies seems to have fallen significantly. Collective biographical patterns tend to be superseded by individual risk situations (Beck, 1986; Reckwitz, 2017). Longitudinal studies of female work biographies show a surprising degree of differentiation (already Moen, 1985). Studies in traditionally homogeneous social milieus observe increasing erosion processes (Mooser, 1984; Beck, 1986; Reckwitz, 2017). Comparative studies within the same age cohorts have found an increase in heterogeneous biographies, especially among older people (Dannefer, 1988; Dannefer & Zell, 1988).

In addition, there are influential changes from the recent past, to which the Polish-English sociologist Zygmunt Baumann (2005) in particular drew attention: modernity has, so to speak, "liquefied". Conditions are changing faster than those affected can understand. Life becomes "precarious life, lived under conditions of constant uncertainty" (Baumann, 2005, p. 2). This development forces individuals to wander back and forth between "unconditional individuality" and "total belonging" (cf. ibid., p. 30). Globalisation is changing the economic and cultural conditions of reproduction at ever shorter intervals. On the one hand, the internet and social media convey the feeling of being able to be anywhere in seconds; on the other hand, however, they overwhelm people with escalating decision-making options that "exhaust" the modern self, as the Parisian sociologist Alain Ehrenberg (2008) diagnosed.

So it seems that it has become more complicated to "live a life". Outdated biographical drafts lose their accuracy. Biography itself has become a field of learning in which transitions have to be anticipated and managed, and personal identity is possibly just the result of difficult learning processes. Biographies are becoming more wayward, more individual, more unpredictable, but at the same time more colourful, more autonomous and more headstrong. The life course seems – unplanned – to become a kind of "laboratory" in which we have to develop skills that for the time being have no real "curriculum".

But is lifelong learning – as demanded by the current political programmes – really the alternative? Does the adaptation to the external changes of the "social world" have to be the logical consequence? Would it not be just as useful to ask where the resources of the affected *"subjects"* lie, what potential for resistance and action is hidden in the biographies of the individual people? – However, this presupposes an interest in very concrete biographies, in *biographical learning processes*. Only when – besides the dramatic processes of change in the "social world" around us – the associated reconstitution of the "subject" has been understood does it make sense to systematically think about practical consequences – for example for learning in adult education.

1.2 "Resonance" and "biographicity"

For as little as the "world" that surrounds and influences us was always there – regardless of the fact that we experience it as "subjects" and can actively shape it – the "subjects" are just as little equipped with awareness and the ability to act before any encounter with reality. The relationship between "subject" and "world" is not necessarily bound to the Cartesian subject-object-duality that has dominated the development of modernity (cf. Merleau-Ponty, 2003, pp. 47 ff.). It is relationally constructed and characterised by mutual penetration. The

"subject" is decidedly not "dead", as Nietzsche and the poststructuralists would like us to believe (cf. Frank, 1986). Nor is it an unresisting product of "objective relations," not a mere epiphenomenon of discourses or dispositifs, as Foucault (2002) suggests. And the "world" is also not a simple construction of the subject, not a cognitive artefact without an ontological *raison d'être*. "Subject" and "world" are really interwoven in a way that is expressed in the formulations of phenomenology – such as Heidegger's "being in the world" or Merleau-Ponty's "être-au-monde" (cf. Rosa, 2016, pp. 65 ff.). The phenomenologist Bernhard Waldenfels, who is also quite interested in social sciences, says there must exist

> "a basic trait of responsiveness that in a way shapes everything that goes on in our speech, action and other behaviour. Responsiveness means what makes answering answering, which [...] may be called 'answerability'. Responsiveness, if our attempt proves valid, would assume the same proportions as the more familiar conceptions of intentionality and communicativeness, while at the same time exhibiting a 'logic' of its own, distinct from the logic of intentional acts and communicative acts." (Waldenfels, 2007, p. 320; *translation by the author*)

The phenomenon of "answerability", which is clearly distinguished from the reflexive "responsibility", describes, so to speak, the "pre-conscious" and always bodily-related experience of the subject in his or her world. It characterises a "resonance relationship" between the subject and the entirety of his/her environment. And "resonance" means – at least optimally – always the oscillation between the two spheres of "subject" and "world". It represents the 'natural' connection between the two, which can also be endangered (cf. Rosa, 2016, pp. 517 ff.). Similar to the "I"-dimension in George Herbert Mead's idea of the "Self" – as opposed to the conscious "Me" (Mead, 1973, pp. 212 ff.) –, "answerability" represents an immediate, spontaneous, cognitively (not yet) comprehensible reaction to internal or external impulses, it is a kind of openness and sensitivity to the world and to others, which is the basis of our social existence.

However, such sensitivity does not determine the uniqueness expressed in our personal biography. Who we are is not given by a "being like that" (Heidegger's *"Sosein"*), but by the temporality of our very own social "becoming", i.e. through an ongoing biographical learning process. It is interesting that this process does not follow general "laws", but has its own individual "logic" (Alheit & Dausien, 2000). It is part of the peculiarity of the biography that institutionally and socially specialised and separate areas of experience are integrated and (re)assembled in the process of biographical perception processes to form a special meaning. This achievement of the subjects can be summed up with the term *"biographicity"* (cf. Alheit, 1990, 1996, 2020; Alheit & Dausien, 2000), which takes up the idea of the "self-willed" subjective appropriation of learning opportunities (Kade, 1994; Kade & Seitter, 1996), but also accentuates the chance of creating new cultural and social structures of experience. Policies and pedagogical concepts of lifelong learning affirmatively build on this educational potential contained in the biographical construction logic of experience and action, but without taking seriously the critical impulse which also belongs to it (Alheit & Dausien, 2002). For this reason, it is necessary to clarify the "external" framework structure of a life and learning history for the analysis of individual biographical learning processes. In the following, both the concrete uniqueness of a biography and the integration into social framework structures are to be related more systematically to the concrete learning field "life".

2. Biographical learning as "artistry of life"

First of all, a certain modesty is required. More than 50 years ago, the German philosopher and educator Günther Buck rightly stated in his phenomenological study *Learning and Experience*: "Of all human achievements, learning by its nature seems to belong to the most hidden and unknown phenomena." (Buck, 1967, p. 11*; translation by the author*) In fact, in everyday life we experience that we have learned something, for example to play a demanding piano sonata; but the concrete learning process, i.e. the question of how we learned and internalised the playing, remains largely elusive from direct experience. We cannot watch the learning process, we can only reconstruct it *ex post* based on the traces it left behind:

"We learn many important things, as one say 'unconsciously', i.e. in such a way that we cannot, in principle, remember how the learning took place. One day we 'can' do a certain performance. But we know nothing to say about the process that led to the competence, because this ability is the condition for our becoming conscious of learning." (Buck, 1967, p. 11; *translation by the author*)

Paradoxically, the "learner's lack of experience with regard to his/her learning" (ibid.) goes hand in hand with a certain "knowledge" about one's own learning. For example, we know that we struggle to learn vocabulary; we know that repeated etudes on the piano bore us. But we also know that we only learn complicated movements on the piano or violin if we have repeated them endlessly. The contradictory relationship between concealment and evidence, between knowledge and ignorance, has to do with the fact that we can somehow perceive the difference between the beginning of learning and its result, but know almost nothing about the process that lies between these two points:

"Since we don't know what learning as a process is, we talk about learning as a process that takes place between two states of a system, namely the state before 'learning' and the state after 'learning'. We call this specific state change learning. The conclusion is: the first thing we can say about 'learning' is that learning is an explanatory model for the observation of very specific changes and not a term with a contentually precisely definable reference area. And the observation conditions to be taken into account are anything but simple." (Schmidt, 2003 pp. 11 f.; *translation by the author*)

When we talk about biographical learning, the problem seems at first glance to be much more complicated. How can it work to understand a life-history learning process if we fail to really decode the limited process of a manageable learning progress? After all, biography is itself a temporal construct. To understand it means to know crucial things about time structures that determine that life-historical learning process. But biography is also a concept that expresses the "subject-world dialectic" mentioned above. If we learn biographically, we must also have an understanding of the contexts in which we live. Ultimately, biographical learning describes an act of self-assurance, a reflective look at one's own life. The three dimensions "temporality", "contextuality" and "reflexivity" (Dausien, 2008, pp. 163 ff.) could therefore be of help in understanding the complex phenomenon of *"biographical learning"*.

Temporality. Unlike most psychological or didactic learning theories, learning from a biographical perspective does not refer to "small-scale" changing processes, but to time structures in which the formation of meaning is possible. As Theodor Schulze (1993) has clearly shown, such processes of creating meaning do not usually run linearly, but rather discontinuously and are linked in an unsystematic and unpredictable manner to form

superordinate structures of experience and interpretation. The decision to become a professional musician or a doctor produces a number of possible meanings in the course of one's biography, which are never fixed, but are constantly formed and reshaped over the course of time. Biographical learning processes are not bound to the sequence of learning steps in the manner of a "string of pearls", but represent complex, overlapping time structures. Educational pathways often involve detours, interruptions, spontaneous insights and decisions, revisions and caught-up processes.

Contextuality. However, biographies not only have a chronological order, they are, in the words of Pierre Bourdieu (1990), "careers in social space". They can therefore not only be located "in" the individual, for example as purely cognitive activities of a self-referential brain, but they must also be localised in the social worlds on which they depend. These "worlds" in which learning processes take place as individual and interactive practices are not homogeneous, designed learning environments, but complex, contradictory organised and socially and historically "layered" contexts of different scope: They are concrete situations, living environments and structured historical-social spaces.

People who acquire a profession encounter such contexts in their complex structure as a concrete challenge: There are the *situations of practical trying out* with their demands on professional skills that are required here, but also on the interactive ability with colleagues or clients to deal with the "responsiveness" and "resonance" mentioned above. A nurse who works with people living with dementia (Smilde, Page & Alheit, 2014) must, in addition to nursing expertise, develop "antennae of empathy" for her clientele who can perceive "vibrations" distant from their own experiences. There are the *cultural worlds* in which people have to feel at home through unasked acceptance by those close to them, through natural collegial recognition among colleagues. However, such lifeworlds are fragile and vulnerable, precisely because they are framed by *historical-social structures* and by unexpected crises that threaten the security and self-evidence of lifeworlds. The global Covid-19 pandemic is a dramatic example of such threats.

Reflexivity. This term means the ability of individuals to put themselves in a reflective relationship to their own experience process, to perceive their own learning processes, to (critically) "observe" them on a higher level, to form and transform experiences. This is fundamentally linked to the disposition to enter into a discourse with others (and with oneself) about one's own experiences. However, the idea of biographical reflexivity also implies another aspect: experiences that we have had influence new experiences that we have afterwards. "Life history is not only formed in learning, it also has a reflexive effect on new learning processes." (Dausien, 2008, p. 166) Our biography – that is what the term "biographicity" means – is in a certain sense self-referential in generating action and constructions of meaning. In the course of life, it develops its own "experiential logic" (cf. Alheit, 1996; Alheit & Dausien, 2000). This undoubtedly causes a certain limitation of our learning and action potential, at the same time it makes meaningful, orderly action possible in the first place. In a sense, it is the basis of our "life skills".

In his inspiring study *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983, 1987), the American philosopher Donald Schön expanded the dimension of reflexivity by observing what makes us experts in our professional activities. He refers to Michael Polanyi's concept of "tacit knowing" (Polanyi, 1966). In his observations, professional competence has to do with the ability to deal with new, unknown and risky situations (Schön, 1987, p. 22). This ability hides spontaneous knowledge. Schön calls it "knowing-in-action" – a kind of knowledge that is based on many

years of practical experience, without actors being able to say why and how they know what they are doing. An experienced doctor, for example, intuitively recognises an illness when a patient comes to the treatment room with certain symptoms, without being able to describe exactly where this spontaneous "inspiration" actually comes from. These moments, which are based on an intuition that can hardly be explained, may also be found in pedagogical action. The reasons for the unconscious self-evidence of situational action cannot be described. In the situation of active action, implicitly available knowledge remains largely hidden (Schön, 1987, pp. 26 ff.).

Nevertheless, experienced practitioners can succeed in reacting flexibly even in the specific professional situation. However, this *"reflection-in-action"* is difficult to distinguish from "knowing-in-action". The subtle differentiation between 'reflective' and 'reflexive' in the English language may help to clarify what constitutes this idiosyncratic reflexivity: while *reflective* is usually used for cognitively controlled activity ('reflection *on*'), *reflexive* is used more for the intuitive reaction in the flow of action ('reflection *in*'). "Reflection-in-action" is a symptom of high intuitive skill. And at the same time it is an expression of what the term "biographicity" tries to capture: the subject's "pre-conscious" reaction to his or her world, as it were, which builds on previous experience and is at the same time capable of innovative learning intuition. It is about that "responsiveness" which Waldenfels speaks of (2007, p. 320). Through an intuitive "answer" to the concrete challenges of life, we, as unique individuals, are able to reinterpret our contexts if necessary and to experience the "world" as a space that can in principle be shaped. A final theoretical consideration should clarify why this seems plausible.

3. Biographicity als unique "grammar of the social"

What could be meant by the mentioned "uniqueness"? Certainly not the exclusion of "objective" influences, so to speak. For example, we know very well that being a man or a woman – including the existence as a "diverse" person – determines our lives. We have learned that a social advancement from a working-class background is associated with personal injuries. Or we experience that being a migrant usually means a struggle for recognition (cf. Honneth, 1995). And yet we try to be "ourself". So we have to solve the problem that "objective" characteristics and "subjective" uniqueness are not mutually exclusive. Perhaps focusing on the gender phenomenon will help us to understand the complexity of the problem.

To use a metaphor from language theory: the "semantics" of the gender code may be hidden in the historically changing institutionalised interaction orders (Goffman, 1994) or in the routines of social practices (Garfinkel, 1967), their "grammar" lies in the biographical action resources of the individuals, in their own *biographicity*. And this grammar produces performances that do not fit in with the concept of the deconstruction of gender, for example, because other semantics also have an impact on them: for example the semantic code of social inequality (*"class"*), but also the semantics of ethnicity (*"race"*), which are becoming increasingly important in the course of post-industrial modernity with its global colonisation processes and migration movements. The *world region in which we are born* or the *historical time that shapes us* can also be semantic codes.

These semantics work together in the affected subjects. And the "mental grammar" that every individual has to develop, which becomes the basis of his or her lifestyle and determines

the performance of everyday actions, precisely the *biographicity*, is not just a simple addition of those semantic codes; it is a unique productive resource for dealing with oneself and the world – a kind of "generating principle" of the temporally stratified performances of a concrete biography.

However, the wider theoretical context associated with this metaphor is by no means as straightforward as it might seem. Neither the relationship between semantics and grammar nor the multidimensionality of the concept of grammar itself has been clarified. Noam Chomsky, whose important studies on a *"transformational-generative grammar"* are directly touched upon here (cf. Chomsky, 1965), has remained ambiguous as far as his "grammar idea" is concerned. What makes his provocative concept interesting for the following considerations, however, is the idea that grammar represents a deep mental structure, a principle of creation that generates a (in Chomsky's case: *linguistic*) level of performance through certain transformation rules.

It seems conceptually essential that this deep structure is *syntactic*, as a system of rules for signs, and not – as in the case of George Lakoff (1971), Chomsky's prominent opponent – *semantic*, as a relationship of meanings. Because, if the narrow field of linguistics is left, if the question of a generative production principle is posed not only by language but also by behavioural dispositions, routines, practices, taste preferences, implicit knowledge and experience resources, Chomsky's model is more convincing than Lakoff's "generative semantics": It explains why a concrete individual reacts to very different "social semantics" – the gender code, the class code, ethnic and religious differences – in a structurally similar way, why there is obviously an "experiential code" for processing the various social semantics whose transformation rules remain relatively stable.

What distinguishes this transfer of the linguistic model to the more complex realm of biographical experience from Chomsky's basic theory is the criticism of the tendency to assume a kind of *'nativistic competence'*, that is, a basic ability already present at birth. However, biographicity as the unique social grammar of the individual only arises in the biographical process of experience. Through self-referential processing of external impulses, through dealing with the different semantics of the concrete social environment, an "inner logic" grows, which can also change again and again through new external impulses. But it does not change according to a determining principle inherent in the impulses, rather within the framework of this inner logic itself. We may say: it "drifts" (Alheit, 2020; already Maturana & Varela, 1988).

It is therefore possible that another theoretical reference is useful as a supplement: the concept of *"habitus"* in Bourdieu's theory (cf. Bourdieu, 1979, pp. 139 ff.; 1987, pp. 277 ff.). This concept also benefits from Chomsky's grammar idea (Bourdieu, 1997), but in the distinction between *opus operatum*, as incorporated form of generative schemata, "structured structure", as it were, and *modus operandi*, "structuring structure", so to speak (Bourdieu, 1987, pp. 282 f.), the dialectical idea of an active principle of production arises, which refers to a previous "social syntax". This deep structure is incorporated through practice. It is not a 'natural' competence (as with Chomsky), but "coagulated life story" (Bourdieu, 1997, pp. 57 f.).

Interestingly, with this idea of a "history turned into nature" (1979, p. 171), Bourdieu refers to a classic work in the sociology of education, Emile Durkheim's *L'évolution pédagogique en France* (1938):

"In each of us, according to changing proportions, there is the person of yesterday; it is he who, through the power of things, dominates in us, for the present is but a small thing compared to that long past in the course of which we took shape and from which we come. However, we do not feel this person from the past, since he has taken root deep within us; it forms the unconscious part of ourselves. Because of this, one is tempted to give account of it as little as of its legitimate claims. On the other hand, we have a lively feeling for the most recent acquisitions of civilisation, which, because they are recent, have not yet had the time to organise themselves in the unconscious." (ibid., p. 16; quoted in Bourdieu 1979, p. 171; *translation by the author*)

In this quote, Bourdieu is only interested in the "forgetting of genesis" (1979, p. 171), the unconscious willingness to understand one's own "(life)story" as a *fait accompli* and thus to prove the stubborn resilience and inertia of the habitus. Bourdieu's consequences from this interpretation are extremely radical and are reminiscent of statements made in his polemical essay on *The Biographical Illusion* (1990):

"By regarding the habitus as a subjective but not individual system of internalised structures, as a scheme of perception, thought and action, which is common to all members of the same group or class and which forms the prerequisite of all objectification and apperception, the objective consistency of practices and the uniqueness of the world view is thus based on the complete impersonality and interchangeability of the singular forms of practice and world views. However, this amounts to considering all conceptions and forms of practice generated according to identical schemata as impersonal and interchangeable – in the manner of the singular intuitions of space, which, if one wanted to believe Kant, do not reflect a single particularity of the empirical ego. [...] Since the history of the individual never reflects anything other than a certain specification of the collective history of his group or class, structural variants of the group or class habitus can be seen in the systems of individual dispositions, which are systematically organised precisely in the differences that separate them and in which the differences of careers and positions within and outside the class are expressed: the 'personal' style, that particular mark borne by all the products of one and the same habitus, all actions and works, is never more than a self-regulated and sometimes even codified deviation from the style peculiar to an epoch or a class, so that it is not only marked by conformity [...] but also by the difference that makes the manner first of all, it refers to the common style." (Bourdieu, 1979, pp. 187-189; *translation by the author*)

But is this really just about "personal style"? What about the "changing proportions" that Durkheim also mentions? What is the meaning of the generative power of an individual system of experience piled up in time, whose self-referentiality develops relative autonomy in the course of a life history? Can such a "de-indivualising" perspective on habitus still be justified in view of the significance of social constructivist insights developed in previous considerations?

Let us once again take up the dynamic relationship between "semantics" and "grammar" discussed 'metaphorically' above. Semantics are objectified horizons of meaning, such as the class position of individuals. The gender dimension is also such a semantic (see above). Empirically, it can hardly be denied that the formative power of these "meta-semantics" can vary historically. If we take the US society, for example, the class question already took a back seat to gender and race in the early 20th century. This has hardly changed. Rather, phenomena of "intersectionality" (cf. Butler, 1991) are emerging, the intermingling of objectified semantics, which also produce new dimensions of grammars, i.e. of habitus forms.

Bourdieu's self-assurance about the class dimension is possibly a contemporary and perhaps also a European syndrome. After all, his fascinating work on "male domination" (2005) gave gender semantics a central place.

However, it is undeniable that the *"grammar of the social"*, i.e. the principle of generation of certain behavioural dispositions, world interpretations and lifestyles of the subjects, has shifted from collective basic orientations to the individual him- or herself. The "individualisation thesis" (Beck, 1986, pp. 205 ff.; Reckwitz, 2017), which has been critically discussed for good reasons, is a superficial indication of this. Findings of the more recent neurosciences are possibly more sustainable (cf. Alheit, 2020). This could mean – and here Bourdieu's early work may sharpen sensitivity – that, particularrly in Europe, the "semantics of class" continues to have an incalculable influence on habitus configurations. At the same time, however, it means that the grammar of the social emerges in the biographical process of experience of each individual: as a "structured structure" and as a "structuring structure" – however, that the *process of "structuring"* has become more complex. It is no longer a dominant semantics alone that determines the structure; it is about a mix of external semantics, possibly about changing hegemonies in the mélange. What then develops as a grammar of the social is unique and bound to the biographical process of experience of each individual. It is the biographicity of each individual – if you like: his/her "*biographical* habitus".

In late or "postmodern" social formations we are dealing with new constellations in terms of figuration sociology: from the positional fixation of class existence in premodern societies to certain movements in the social space with relative stability of social habitualisation within modernity, the trend in current societies is now towards an erosion of socio-structural ties and securities and towards the concentration of survival risks on the individual him- and herself (cf. Reckwitz, 2006, 2017). This in no way means that forms of social relationships are becoming superfluous; it does mean, however, that they are not readily available as 'quasi-natural' resources, so to speak, but they must be produced over and over again. And the active basic competence for this process is the *biographicity of the individuals* (cf. Alheit, 2019: pp. 120-128 for details).

However, this also means that *biographical learning* takes on a new, almost political significance. It becomes a counter-concept to the dominant political strategy of lifelong learning, which forces the subjects to subordinate themselves to external circumstances and especially to economic and power interests. We are currently experiencing the dramatic and inhumane consequences of such a development with the example of an absurd war in the center of Europe. *A learning idea that takes the subjects seriously with their possibilities and resources, but also with their uncertainties and fears must oppose such developments. Biographical learning includes this resistance.*

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