
'Horse Whispering', Participation and Teamwork—The Constitution of Social Character in Technological Civilisation

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Abstract

The article seeks to elucidate the conditions and forms through which social character is constituted and constitutes itself at the current stage of technological civilisation. Phenomena such as participation and teamwork, which emerged as emancipatory ideals during the social movements of the 1960s, have in the meantime been transformed into disciplinary methods, subordinated to the needs of valorisation in the new economy. This is accompanied by an artificial reproduction of sociality. The disciplining of the individuals based on participatory concepts such as teamwork is analysed using the examples of industrial organisation, education, the punishment of criminals, and television shows like 'Big Brother'. The article seeks to further critical reflection on the concepts of participation.

Introduction

A few years ago the Californian cowboy Monty Roberts achieved international fame as a 'horse whisperer'. He uses a non-violent method to break even wild horses. It is based on the observation of the horse's behaviour, on knowing and manipulating their needs. The horse is taken out of the herd and then driven in circles in a round pen. It feels unprotected and its only chance to regain security is to submit and follow its trainer. Roberts calls this the 'Join-Up' method. There is no need for whips, spurs and loud words. Monty Roberts is popular; the queen invited him to England and curious industry managers constantly visit his ranch. Clive Warrilow from Volkswagen North America for example sees Robert's methods as an exemplary 'metaphor for a certain style of management' (Warrilow 2000: 12). Instead of using pressure it would be more effective to support creativity and commitment for making the

employees work. 'We have to find concepts to change the way how people see themselves alone and in a team during their work' (Warrilow 2000: 12).

Each industrial epoch produces certain cultural habits and social characters. The society associated with the conveyer belt and mass consumerism has been thoroughly described. Since the spread of the computer and Internet, the influence of new technologies on work and life has become evident, and the outlines of a new social character have become visible. The following text attempts to flesh out this outline in a little more detail.

To this end, certain fields in which society constitutes itself will be elucidated: work, education, punishment and mass culture. We will begin with the observation that modern forms of work, education, even punishment as well as popular forms of entertainment, such as television, are characterised by two things in particular: they invite you to participate while the authorities move into the background—there is a whispering going on.

Participation and teamwork in industrial management

The huge restructuring and rationalisation of production by new technologies, which started in the mid 1970s throughout the industrialised world, brought forth new concepts of industrial production. While the Tayloristic method of production based on conveyor-belt labour was characterised by authoritarian, bureaucratic and stiff management styles, the effective use of computers in the production process results in a less rigidly organised way of working. One is now expected to willingly engage in the learning of new tasks, to participate in collective work on problems with the machines or to be ready to do different kinds of work. Catchphrases that characterise these new qualities are 'flexibility', 'mobility' and especially 'social competency'.

Worker participation in the working process is presently requested and required by the management. A 'participatory change inside the management' has occurred (Kocyba and Vormbusch 2000): this includes the manipulation of subjective attitudes for optimising the process of

production. The most advanced form of participatory work is teamwork.

Although industrial teamwork was already in discussion in the 1970s, it became widely popular in the 1990s. Its purpose is to achieve two things in particular: the rationalisation of the production process by more efficient steering mechanisms and controlling devices and the increase of motivation and output of the workers (Antoni 2000). In a period of smaller markets, it becomes a competitive advantage to be able to produce and to deliver the goods ordered faster; the orientation towards the consumer becomes a competitive factor. 'The basic principles of Taylorism-Fordism, which were the selection of work and function, which were successful in the sellers' markets, turn into disadvantages in buyers' markets. This fact leads to a stiff and bureaucratic organisation, which cannot react to the wishes of clients in a flexible way' (Antoni 2000: 15). Teamwork should guarantee the fast production and delivery all over the world, even of individually built products. This is the material nucleus of participation and teamwork as a strategic element in management concepts.

Rationalisation by participation

With the implementation of new technologies and teamwork the form of work has changed. The psychological core of the working process is no longer routine, obedience or instrumentalism, but a discursive understanding of work. While the Tayloristic mode of communication was one of orders, the participatory forms of organisation deal with conflicts, with discussion. Social communication training therefore often accompanies teamwork. Participation cannot be forced. Foremen are turning into trainers, moderators or coaches. By changing or maximising the duties of the workers, their competence to decide and to control becomes wider. So participatory forms of work, especially teamwork are related to needs such as recognition, self-determination and collective work.

Teamwork also relates to needs like the freedom to decide, creativity and co-determination. But in the end, these needs are manipulated. It is assumed that the worker's subjectivity is recognised, but in fact his subjectivity is accepted only insofar as it is an element of the social technique of industrial production.

We know from Harry Bravermann that the process of rationalisation and the division of labour is characterised by a permanent refinement of steering mechanisms. Teamwork continues this development: rationalisation is now based on a more efficient functioning of the workers. They are expected to be responsible and committed. To give the workers more responsibility supports their identification with the firm. As a 'process owner' the workers should feel responsible and use their knowledge, even without direct order of the boss, to maximise production. By anticipating orders and commands, workers are participating in their own rationalisation.

The unfulfilled promise of participation

Participatory concepts such as teamwork and the needs related to it are realised only within the framework given by industry; there is a freedom to decide how to do something, but neither the aims nor the content of this practice are self-determined. This form of heteronomously determined self-organisation (Voß and Pongratz 1998) is based on identification and commitment. But it works only as long as workers adapt to the aims determined by the industries.

So a new mode of discipline is created. It is no longer realised by foremen, but by self-control via internalisation of the aims of the industry, as well as by the pressure of colleagues' expectations. While in former times the hierarchy went from top to bottom, now everybody controls everybody else. Completely new norms of self-understanding and representation are becoming relevant. The workers can no longer understand themselves as the object of processes, as sufferers or victims; they must constantly see themselves as independently acting subjects, as autonomous and authentic. This mode of self-understanding and representation not only shows a specific mode of self-discipline, but also a new stage of alienation. The team worker is deceived about what the management had promised him: self-determination.

Concepts of education

The demand for self-determination was a central part of the anti-authoritarian concepts of the 1960s and 1970s. 'Self-determination was a basic programmatic formula of emancipatory pedagogy. At that time it was about a program of liberation. The chains of tradition, of social background, of continuity were supposed to be broken, a self determined way of life was supposed to come about.' (Liebau 1999) Also an alternative to the 'secret plan of instruction', based on selection, competition and efficiency, was to be found. Ironically these anti-authoritarian experiments, which were undertaken as social revolutionary experiments, became attractive for the new forms of valorisation based on high technology. An example of this bizarre and completely unintentional alliance between participatory concepts of education and modern conditions of valorisation is the concept of teamwork in schools. Especially in the 1970s it was understood as a progressive form of education. Teamwork was necessary, according to Günter Schreiner, for the 'historical reason, that a socially integrated and democratic way of leadership would serve as an ideological counterweight to the authoritarian style of leadership that was rooted in Germany in particular because of the former Nazi-regime' (Schreiner 1977). Since the end of the 1960s pupils have been sitting in circles in the belief that they are co-determining the lessons.

There have always been two aims connected with education in groups: independence and satisfaction. Authoritarian bosses are disappearing. Not only in the managed chaos of the production process, but also in schools. Whereas the foreman views himself as a coach, the teacher sees himself as a moderator.

Lubricated teams of children

In his introduction to education in teams (published for the 5th time in 1998) Gene Stanford describes the aims, means and motivation involved in team education. He gives numerous examples to illustrate the training method. 'In a certain way I tried to build up a technology, which makes the science of the dynamic of groups practical. The core of this technology

consists of structured exercises' (Stanford 1998: 7). Stanford is convinced that a group behaviour comes about neither by itself nor solely through the personality of the teacher. It must be practised; behaviour should be specifically moulded.

It quickly becomes clear what this is all about. Like a handbook for managers it says: 'A successful group of a class are a productive team of workers. These teams have to be developed with great care. The teacher has a guiding function. He has to have the aptitudes and patience to lead a group through the labyrinth of the process of development. The building of a group happens in five steps: 1. orientation, 2. introduction of norms, 3. handling of conflicts, 4. productivity' (Stanford 1998: 12 f.). Belonging to the steps of development are for example the building of responsibility for the whole group, listening and talking to one another, co-operation instead of competition, reaching consensus and handling problems; a 'we' feeling should be built up.

Stanford names exercises like sitting in a circle, active listening, handling problems etc. Another example is the following.

'The human machine

This non-verbal exercise demonstrates how the members of a group can combine their different contributions to build a functioning unit, in which the individuals work together instead of operating by themselves. The pupils form a big circle. Next, they are supposed to build one big machine with their bodies. One person starts with a repetitive movement of his arm while this moving is accompanied by a certain sound. The other pupils join this machine one after the other, by adding their movements and noises. The aim is reached when the whole group is connected with each other and moving in a common way making a lot of noises. The teacher should finish the game by asking the members of the group which similarities they find between the human-being machine and the learning group.' Stanford continues: 'Sometimes the pupils are very enthusiastic about the aims of the group and they work together like an oiled engine' (Stanford 1998: 210). Through exercises like this, the mode of functioning and the rationality of machines become an ideal of anti-authoritarian concepts of education.

Co-operative competition

Wilfried Bürger, another pedagogue, who has been quoted very often since the 1970s, outlines the importance of common activities such as games, for the development of groups. Some games could not serve as a positive example, because many of them in the Western culture have a competitive character. But there are games that are both competitive and co-operative, and thus would be only half as bad. An example is a team game in which the team that cooperates best wins. In these types of games, as the author enthusiastically says, the whole group competes with itself. An aim could be for example to increase the 'speed at which information is conveyed by one group of pupils anti-clockwise in a circle and the other clockwise' (Bürger 1978: 250). This well intended form of social learning by games, which relies upon the competition of the players as well as their co-operation, precisely describes the structure of teamwork: competition of the teams against each other as well as a competition between the individuals. The fact that precisely the 'speed of information transport' which is the functional principle of the computer, becomes the content of the game, is a remarkable analogy. Numerous quotations from the pedagogical literature can be found, which recommend the same social methods of training for successful teamwork that are found in modern industrial management. It seems, that the programs of social training which have now been taught in school for about thirty years, are continued in industrial organisation.

If we understand the school as a place in which not only education but also selection for the labour market takes place, then it becomes obvious that the so-called 'education of differentiation', which is currently very popular, intends the maximisation of pupils' efficiency. All that is left of the emancipatory pedagogy of the 1960s, it would seem, are the social technological training programs that appear in modern industrial organisation. I do not of course advocate a general rejection of these concepts of education; I merely want to examine their meaning and the purpose they serve.

Forms of punishment

In modern industrial nations prisons are a necessary medium to uphold norms and values. The form of punishment is based on a certain understanding of both violence and property. Historically, 'innovations' in punishment have occurred in the countries that are the most highly developed economically. Hegemonic powers such as the Netherlands, Great Britain and the United States came up with new forms of punishment while at the peak of their power and influence. Since the first house of correction was built, a permanent refinement of selective control has been going on. This leads from the separation of the prisoners in the house of correction during the night, all the way up to the methods of so-called 'sense deprivation' (Teuns 1973). Since the time of early industrialisation the 'fortress of fear' has been transformed into a 'machinery of punishment' (Bienert 1996). It is no coincidence that the implementation of solitary confinement was systematically implemented when industrialisation began. What new tendencies are visible now and how do the punished participate in their punishment?

When therapeutic concepts become a part of punishment

It belongs to the liberal understanding of our time that criminal policy should be replaced by social policy. In the Western countries the aims of imprisonment are thus determined by interests of reintegration and social therapy. The principle that a prisoner participates in the punishment process by working on changing himself, his personality and his character, belongs to this underlying notion of social-therapeutic prisons. In the wake of the disintegration of the social movements of the 1960s and the exposure of different prison scandals, a new science of punishment was implemented in the 1970s. The miserable conditions in prisons had been documented empirically for the first time and the importance of reforming the prison system soon became widely known.

The socio-therapeutic prison became a part of German law in 1969. Since these institutions were intended to change the prisoners' personality; a therapeutic climate was created. From an architectural point of view,

this manifests itself in the following way: 'The elimination of the traditional signs of prison, such as an absence of private space, hall systems without roofs and the typical parts of prisons such as cells, iron bar doors and surrounding walls will reduce the afflicting character of prison as well as the typical behavioural disturbances of the prisoners, which are a result of the imprisonment' (Dudda 1996: 71). The selective treatment and control is a part of the overall idea. First they 'investigate personality and the personal way of life' (§61 StVollzG) of each prisoner. The centre of this kind of imprisonment is the implementation of living groups and treatment groups. About 15 person live together in a group. Inside the prison there are both single rooms as well as common living and working space for the inmates. These kinds of group exist as therapeutic communities in prisons such as Berlin Tegel.

The pedagogical transformation of imprisonment began in the 1970s when the term pedagogy of delinquency was coined. The first professor's chair for the sociology of delinquent behaviour was founded in 1972. A chair for the pedagogy of delinquency followed in 1974 and a chair for social and criminal psychology in 1975. Politically the pedagogical transformation of punishment had the same implications as the support of industrially innovative technology. For example, the former minister of science in the German state of Nordrhein Westphalia, Johannes Rau, emphasised that the pedagogy of punishment was a scientific field every bit as important as computer science, automation, high energy physics and security technology (Deimling 1994: 380).

The beginning of a cut in expenditures policy as well as the growth of public debt at the end of the 1970s might have been the reason for the reduction of financial support for these programs. It became too expensive to pay the battalions of social workers, pedagogues and psychologists, who intended to re-socialise the 'whole human being'—as Albert Krebs, the founding father of the pedagogy of punishment, put it. It is possible instead to save money by using technological surveillance and control systems like video cameras, panoptical transparency etc. The most expensive aspect for any prison system are the costs for the security personnel. The pedagogical approach to punishment no longer plays an important role today.

Mass camps or selective technological observation?

Today the approach to punishment is characterised by two extremes: On the one hand there is the widespread internment of potential criminals, especially in the US. On the other hand we find more and more selective observation of the individual by electronic devices such as sensors or cameras. There is a world-wide tendency to put more and more people into prison. Particularly in the US the number of prisoners has increased enormously, even though the crime rate has not changed. The number of prisoners has risen approximately 400 percent since 1970 (Monthly Review 3/2001: 1). The rapid increase of arrests began in the 1980s. Since 1990 more than 200 new prisons have been built. The number of prisoners is five to eight times higher than in Western Europe (Monthly Review 3/2001: 11). 680 out of every 100 000 US citizens were in prison in 1999. In Great Britain in contrast the corresponding number was 125 and in Germany 95 (Monthly Review 3/2001: 11).

The situation in the USA is determined by different factors. One of them is the reduction of income. In 1992 the minimum wage was one third lower than in 1970 (Feltz 1997: 5). The income of young black families was halved. Sebastian Scheerer mentions the overcrowding of prisons as a consequence of 'global migration and the re-barbarisation of international relations' (Scheerer 1997: 23). But the widespread internments also have an economic effect: The prisoners do not appear in the unemployment statistics so that the number of people officially registered as unemployed is reduced to two percent. The 'Correction Corporation of America' (CCA), the largest private prison corporation in the US, is quoted on the stock market. The value of their stocks has skyrocketed to 3.5 billion dollars (1997). There are more than 75,000 people in the private prisons of the CCA, which also has branches in Great Britain, Australia and Puerto Rico. The fear people have of crime becomes an important factor in the security industry. In order to maintain its position in the stock market, the full quota of prisoners has to be guaranteed.

In addition to the widespread internments, new technologies have also given rise to other selective forms of punishment. One of them is invisible observation by cameras: taking away privacy becomes a punish-

ment. One of the modern forms of punishment is the electronic bracelet, which has already been used in certain countries. A test has also been going on in Germany since May 2001: 30 persons are wearing an electronic transmitter attached to their ankles. They are allowed to go to work during the day but must be home in the evening. A satellite monitor ensures that a person does not move outside a certain prescribed radius of movement. The central computer is controlled by four social workers. This experiment, which is being conducted by the Max Planck Society, is based primarily on similar experiments in Sweden. But such projects also exist in the Netherlands, Great Britain and Switzerland. 'The general aims are the reduction of imprisonment and the reduction of the stigmatisation of the perpetrator, in order to diminish the bad side effects of imprisonment, to reduce costs, to relieve the administration of punishment as well as to stabilise the self-control of the perpetrator' (press release by the Max Planck Society, 2001). The minister of justice in the German state of Hessen, Christean Wagner, has also emphasised the 'effect of social reintegration', which would result from increased self-discipline. It is based on the notion of a voluntary participation: the convicted must be willing to wear the chains. He has no watchman and is controlled only by an invisible, electronically extended arm of the executive branch. The final consequence is that he disciplines himself.

By using new technologies of control, the costs for security personnel are reduced. Technologies function in this context as a disciplining medium and transmitter of self-control. 'Nowadays the loyalty or non-loyalty of the citizens is no longer as important as it was in the 19th century; the computerised resource management systems no longer depend on the inner agreement of the public' (Scheerer 1997: 16). Today the system demands more than agreement. It demands participation, the active building up of processes, based on the internalisation of aims. The electronic bracelet must be worn on a voluntary basis. Without the will of the individual to participate in the execution of punishment and the belief that the electronically chained prisoner had gained a 'bit of freedom', a large proportion of observation technologies would be scrapped.

Participatory mass culture

Phenomena such as the creation and control of artificial groups are reproduced by the mass media and are characteristics of contemporary mass culture. In television shows, for example there is no longer a single candidate, but teams that compete against each other. Talk shows suggest community and in shows like 'Big Brother' the collective destruction of socially disliked behaviour becomes a sensational spectacle. At the same time the popularity of these shows expresses the loss of communality as well as the reproduction of the experience of repression.

Simulated communality

Talk shows first appeared in the US during the 1950s and remained popular through to the 1990s. Talk shows are especially characterised by the fact that in them intimate themes are voluntarily exhibited in public. During the past few years the interest in the public exhibition of private life has grown. It would seem that the inner life of the others is observed and some type of mutual psychological research takes place. In this way the television enters areas which in former times had been occupied by the father confessor or the psychologist. On the one hand, ever more private conflicts are exhibited, but on the other, the number of lonely and socially isolated people also grows continuously; the need for advisors and orientation grows. It is in this gap that talk shows flourish; they simulate communication. 'Themes are discussed in a way that resembles an everyday and authentic discussion. The guests in the audience are deputies of the public at home, which they represent by speaking the 'people's voice' (Wilts 1999: 158). Through the simulation of presence the difference between mass-medial and direct communication is obscured. The personal report, the report of the 'eye witnesses' or the report of an affected person herself, suggests an immediacy that is intended to conceal the absence of authenticity.

The recognition of the 'personal' problems of the average guests is also simulated and this appeals to the wish of the public to step out of the anonymous mass. The 'Ideology of Intimacy' (Sennett) promises

release through revelation and emancipation through self-exhibition. But of course neither the guest, nor the public gets and answers and a real, personal discussion with his personality does not take place. Talk shows only simulate the feeling of belonging to a community. 'A feeling of taking part in a common predicament arises—in a problem, that has been discussed in public, a kind of a community of feelings' (Wilts 1999: 182). But in the end the spectator is left with the same feelings of helplessness that he had at the beginning.

The communities of feelings reveal their repressive effects when social norms and values are at stake, when the staged community asserts itself against lazy, untidy, exceptional or unfaithful fellow creatures. The transgression of norms is especially interesting for the public, because offence against their morality provides them with the opportunity to develop a feeling of community against the excluded individuals.

Social selection

TV shows like 'Big Brother' go beyond this. The perpetrator is able to participate in a way that gives him the power to exclude others and to condemn behaviour that is not socially accepted. The boom of shows like 'Big Brother' in almost all industrialised countries can be explained by the identification of the perpetrator with those who are imprisoned in the team, observed by cameras and controlled by the public who are striving for social recognition. The social selection by artificial communities is reproduced, which allows the individual to see himself and get his share of repressive recognition. This explains the attraction of 'Big Brother'. The candidates are rewarded with popularity, money and advertising contracts. Human beings appear as an object of observation. They appear as enigmatic social beings that have to be observed. In their everyday lives the individuals find themselves more and more in an alienated social condition. The situation on the television screen also preserves a vision of last things: locked in a small area, with minimal resources, the candidates must occupy themselves with the struggle for survival. This condition is also associated with the fears of crises, the loss of order, competition and de-civilisation. The audience shares this feeling of being threatened

with the candidates. But what looks like a team, sticking together in order to survive, is in reality only a bunch of individuals in competition with each other. The candidates must constantly maintain their self-control in order to take part in the game.

Even heroes have a specifically historical character. In the current popular culture of team workers, the winner, who has been democratically selected by the audience, must choose the loser. Of course a 'traditional' hero would leave the stage because he would not want to make another person who is weaker—even when not in his team—a loser. The modern hero excuses himself by saying that he is only doing his duty. The candidates, the 'heroes', should—irrespective of whether they are playing team games at school, working in teams or being an inmate in a socio-therapeutic prison—demonstrate the ability to work in a team and also the ability to compete. In the end the hero fulfils the expectations of the public by excluding others.

The thrill of 'Big Brother' rests upon one of the central questions that the spectators confront in their everyday life: Who will make it and who will be kicked out of the team? He identifies with the ones who maintain their position in the group because he is confronted with his own fears: the fear of being mobbed, undesired and under supervision. But watching television is different from being involved in the production process: the spectator is not threatened personally. On the contrary: After spying through the keyhole of the camera, he is now able for a moment to play the role of the leader of the team and he finally has the power to select people. This selection becomes an amusing spectacle for the crowd. The brutality against the loser unifies the audience and the candidates: The elimination of socially undesired persons is transformed into a psychological ritual—and trained.

Conclusion

The technological transformation of society has changed the epoch of the 'separated individual' (Marx) into an epoch of the separated individual in artificially created communities; sociality—in an alienated form—became

a source of surplus value. This development results in new mental disorders. The third most common mental disorder since the 1980s is 'social phobia' (Morschitzky 1999). This sickness is accompanied by a great fear of social situations and of other people. The individual becomes paralysed socially.

At the same time the programs for conditioning team workers are more popular than ever. Structurally teamwork is the nucleus of an efficient valorisation of new technologies. Participatory teamwork is spreading throughout society. Participation, creativity and co-determination are wanted and welcome as long as the participants do not stray from the path set by institutions and management. To ensure the proper functioning of participatory models, the individual is surrounded by social workers, pedagogues, mentors, supervisors and psychologists. The 'antennas' that David Riesmann once talked about are no longer directed to the wishes of the others, but rather to their potential social 'defects'. An important attribute of the ideal-typical social character of the technological civilization is readiness to train oneself and the others socially. This happens gently like the training provided by Monty Roberts who whispers to his horses until the aim of 'Join Up' is reached.

Participation is less neutral than teamwork. The question about its emancipatory effects can only truly be answered if one asks at the same time what is produced for which purpose and how are these products going to be distributed.

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