

Toffler's future shock is today a fact

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There are a lot we now know that we did not know fifty years ago. Technology has opened up completely new opportunities for human thinking and communication. The new research on the brain, human motivation and his social relationships has created a deeper understanding of man as a human being, but also of his life crises and suffering.

In 1970, Alvin Toffler published the book "The Future Shock" in which he pointed out that we were in a service society. Toffler's observations were supported by statistical data. At the time, more people were involved in service activities than in direct production activities. Factory work decreased and service work increased (Toffler 1970).

But Toffler was not content to point to statistical data. In his next book Third Wave, he pointed to a much deeper change than just that the labour market was different (Toffler 1980). The individual's possibilities and room for manoeuvring would be dramatically increased by the development he and his wife could see ahead of them.

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Technological developments have been toughened and, for us ordinary citizens, it has only been to adapt to the new opportunities that are opening up in all areas of life. It has been more difficult to come to terms with how the new knowledge of man and his relationship with other people, groups, activities, institutions and societies have affected human interaction.

Around the same time as Toffler, historians of ideas and philosophers with a social focus such as Michel Foucault had defined the concept of discourse (Foucault 1970;1980). With "discourse" means a system of thoughts and logics used to talk about a phenomenon. These thinkers were particularly interested in social phenomena such as the organisation of human activities, processes, power relationships, inequality, injustice, etc.

Several sociologists noted that existing discourses "resisted" reasoning that did not "belong" in society. In this there were already habitually embedded systems of thoughts and logics that were often perceived as natural. One of many explanations for the difficulty of changing a discourse was that people in their conversations must "recognize" what the others are saying (Shotter 1993).

Science theorist Thomas Kuhn noted a similar relationship precisely when it came to technical and scientific issues. He called the habitually established discourse around a particular phenomenon a "paradigm" (Kuhn 1962).

In science, there were ways to get around this problem because concrete physical experiments and measurements could show that current reasoning did not match the way nature actually worked. To reason as one did created *anomalies*. These anomalies forced a new thinking. The established theories and discourses must then be revised.

In the social field, the situation was different. The concepts used in the discourses were socially constructed. They were referring to an abstract world of imagination. It was conceived by others referring to the same concept and participating in the same discourses. It affected how people acted together – but in this area it was much more difficult to discover which underlying assumptions prevented social events from becoming as they were thought in theory and in the discourses. The connection

between language and action called Wittgenstein "language games" (Janik 2013).

Inappropriate and unrealistic reasoning led not, as in science, to anomalies, but to *crises* and unexpected and unfortunate outcomes, in that the forms of work, decisions, conclusions and plans argued for, did not meet expectations. The problem with overcoming the underlying assumptions was that there were always plenty of possible excuses. How does a discourse change? It wasn't obvious to anyone.

In order to overcome such crises – and the social problems that resulted from them – completely new discourses were needed according to Toffler. But conversations- based on the new knowledge of society and the experience of the human social nature have been shown to be perceived as alien, threatening and dangerous by many.

Those who have tried to include such new insights into the argument have for fifty years been forced to fight against the established discourse. They have been neglected, rejected and isolated. The discourse has resisted attempts to change it.

This has led to recurring crises and a growing sense of uncertainty and fear that has often transformed into anger and hatred. Toffler foresaw this possibility and also predicted that the crises would only worsen as time passed if the then dominant discourse was not overcome.

What has made the adaptation so difficult seems to be that the new possibilities require taking into account some of the complexity of the social events that have been neglected in the past. Now the need to be able to take account of this complexity breaks through with full force.

In my later blogs I have illustrated the differences in the basic reasoning to two different approaches that seem to have emerged in parallel during the 20th century – Emile Durkheims and Gabriel Tarde. The difference has been described by Anton Törnberg in his thesis (Törnberg 2017). It is time to take Tarde and the human complexity more seriously.

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