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## CHAPTER X

# **BIOGRAPHICAL TRAPS OF THE TRANSFORMATION PROCESS – COHORT 1980. THE POTENTIALS OF DISORDER AND SUFFERING IN THE EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG POLISH WOMEN ENTERING SOCIAL WORLDS OF ART, MEDICINE, AND ACADEMIA**

### **Introduction**

A lot has been said and written about systemic transformation in Poland examining it mainly from the macro level and subjecting it to analysis in the theoretical-methodological frame of the normative paradigm.<sup>1</sup> The description categories and definitions related to the process of changing the political order for which 1989 was agreed as a breakthrough date (although this issue is also debatable) were often uncritically and carelessly accepted and included in public discourse, and thus in social awareness. These, superimposed by politicians, journalists, but also sociologists' categories, have been "glorifying" those who were able to cope with the systemic change in Poland after 1989 and criticizing or even "disregarding" those who could not handle it (easily). But, many of them (for example these related to the distinction into transformation "winners" and "losers" or "being accused" of having a *homo-sovieticus* mentality) in their simplified version do not really reflect extremely complex, multi-layered, and ambiguous biographical processes and their feedback to social processes. Still, they had and still have a real impact on social policies, media ways of explaining social reality, and common-sense knowledge. A meticulous and rigorous analysis of narrative interviews gathered as part of the project in which cohorts born in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. were studied, basically verified these binary, schematic

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance: Krzemiński 2010, Leder 2014, Rychard, Federowicz 1993, Ziółkowski 2015.

images and allowed the capturing of paradoxes, tensions, ambivalences, and biographical traps, which often resulted from a more or less conscious inability to deal with the expectations which people had to face while dealing with the new rapid and comprehensive changes after 1989.<sup>2</sup>

The contrastive analysis of interviews collected in all cohorts allowed, however, the showing of a special constellation of experiences in the biographies of people born between 1980–1990.<sup>3</sup> Most of the collected data verified the common-sense knowledge and “state of the art” for many years. This was supported by social scientists and “abused” by politicians. Those who grew up after 1989 and have lived their entire conscious life fully in conditions of freedom were able to take full advantage of the benefits offered by the free-market economy and the democratic organization of the state. Sociologists also hardly ever took into account that the generation entered their adolescence period (and at the same time – labor market) in a very specific socio-cultural context. This is framed by the dynamics of interrelated processes of political transformation, entering the European Union, vibrant modernization, globalization, and, last but not least, development of neoliberal ideology. Their experiences were particularly associated with some difficulties or inability to meet the requirements of culture located between panopticism and “governmentality” (Czyżewski 2009: 95), which promotes and legitimizes (inter alia through public and media discourses) specific life attitudes mainly articulated in the form of ubiquitous discourse of agency and self-responsibility, as well as their participation in intensively multiplying social worlds with their divergent stocks of knowledge at hand, clashing ideologies, conflicting moral standards, dissonant rules of conducts, and expectations (Clarke 1991, Schütze 2002).<sup>4</sup> In many autobiographical renderings, such social frame conditions contributed to the sense of a growing disorder and, in fact initiated the process of the trajectory of suffering.<sup>5</sup>

Summing up, therefore, the special connections of social processes with their own specific biographical experiences often led to the chaos of orientation typical of contemporary complex societies which results from “the dissonant concert of social worlds” (Schütze 2002: 75) and irritation caused by the inability to see one’s own life as a whole (Schütze 2002: 75). Thus, although

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<sup>2</sup> See Part I.

<sup>3</sup> Clearly, the assumptions of the project included individuals’ positioning in social, historical, and economic processes and structural conditions framed by them. For it seems crucial in which stage of one’s life course the process of moving from the discourse legitimizing the oppressiveness of the socialist social formation to the language promoting the attributes of the neoliberal subject took place.

<sup>4</sup> See Part III in this book.

<sup>5</sup> See *Methodological note*.

the cohort, born in the 80s, is said to be the first full “beneficiary” of systemic and political changes in Poland. It is also the first one exposed to such deep and overwhelming biographical changes. For this reason, the frequent “accusations” that young people are unable to take advantage of the opportunity given to them or disregard their freedom, often seem unfair.

Particularly interesting from this point of view turned out to be life histories of three well-educated young Polish women: Inga – a visual artist (b. 1984), Hanna – a medical doctor (b. 1981), and Julia – a doctor of political science operating also in the coaching and training industry (b. 1984).<sup>6</sup> The detailed and minimally contrasting<sup>7</sup> (Strauss 1987) analysis of their autobiographical accounts showed exactly that their experiences have been oftentimes connected with the experiences of losing control over one’s life and the feeling of being caught in a biographical trap. All the narrators bear biographical costs related to the sense of having to meet the (imagined) expectations of the family and the implementation of the way of organizing the course of life and life orientation motivated by external pressure (although often mistakenly recognized as their own). Consequently, the basic mode of their adult life is sustaining the precarious balance of everyday life.

When it comes to family relationships, here we are dealing with particularly strong and emotionally connected bonds of a community rooted in modernity, which sets institutional patterns dominating the narrator’s biography and thus partially (more or less consciously) suppresses their own biographical line of development. However, paradoxically, it is also a kind of “safety valve” – a mechanism that allows you to control the trajectory potential. As for the labor market, the narrators operate in the field of specific and contrasting professional social worlds (Clarke 1991, Strauss 1978, 1982, 1984). The first of them is associated with the elusive and vague concept of “talent” (art world) (cf., Becker 1982) and, one could say, the eternal immanent problems of

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<sup>6</sup> All interviews were conducted by Joanna Wygnańska. They were already discussed in two papers: Katarzyna Waniek (2016), “Potencjały bezładu i cierpienia w biografiiach młodych kobiet wchodzących w świat sztuki i medycyny” [The potentials of disorder and suffering in the biographies of two young women entering the world of medicine and art], *Przegląd Socjologii Jakościowej* 12(2): 114–144 and Katarzyna Waniek (2019), “The precarious life situation trap. The case of ‘zealous’ Julia – A Proponent and a Victim of Neoliberal Reality,” *Qualitative Sociology Review* 15(4): 164–193. <https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.15.4.08>

<sup>7</sup> The minimal comparison strategy – next to the maximum comparison – is a key element of the analytical procedure aimed at building a theoretical model. It involves a very detailed and insightful cross-reference of similar cases in order to show the nuances and diversity in the course of specific process structures and their connections with a specific social framework.

employment instability and income insecurity<sup>8</sup> related to this field. The second with a “prototype profession” requiring not only “esoteric knowledge” (Hughes 1963: 655) and special technical skills, but also a calling (medicine) (Strauss 2001 [1975]: 11). The third, and supporting the adaptation of individuals to free-market realities or “producing compliant subjects” (Foucault 1988: 178) based on staging practices in the sense of Goffman (1959).

At the outset, the common dimensions of the experiences of all three narrators will be outlined, resulting, on the one hand, from their embedding in similar social, cultural, and historical frames,<sup>9</sup> and on the other, from similarities in their individual biographies. Then, the specific differentiating features of each case will be identified, so that each case can then be discussed separately.

### **Frame conditions of the narrators’ life course**

Among the most important common features of all three biographies is the fact that the narrators belong to the cohort of people born in the first half of the eighties of the last century. First of all, this means that their process of socialization within an educational career was no longer based on ideological messages related to the socialist era, but still was not strongly rooted in the “project me”-self (Bröckling 2016: 189–191) idea. Both Hanna (born in 1981) and Inga and Julia (both born in 1984) were still attending an eight-year elementary school, which they had started in 1988 and 1991, respectively. Therefore, one may risk the claim that they, at this stage of their life cycle, did not experience the “upbringing in the socialist spirit” and escaped the ideological indoctrination with the ideas of socialism (already weakening). Their early educational career took place in an experimental attempt of education reform according to the western model already partially implementing the logic of “entrepreneurship” and competitiveness. Their early youth fell in the period of Poland’s entry into the European Union and the promotion of various forms of civic activity. Moreover, the process of their adolescence and entering into adulthood, and thus the labor market, was no longer shaped in a socialist social organization, but during a period of intense socio-economic and modernization changes in Poland oriented towards the

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<sup>8</sup> What I mean here is the artists’ dependence on the ability to recognize their artistic activities as valuable by patrons or sponsors, which has its roots in antiquity. Artists were almost always a precarious group, that is, an unstable life situation, which depended on the “whim” and taste of the patron (regardless of whether it was a king, pope, magnate, wealthy entrepreneur, state, or international institution).

<sup>9</sup> Fritz Schütze argues, influence sometimes even conditions the course of the biographer’s experience and, in turn, are shaped by the biographer (2008a, b).

development of the capitalist market economy (this is the period from the mid-nineties of the last century till the present day). Undoubtedly, the childhood experiences of the Polish People's Republic "backward" reality have only an ethnographic character in the stories cited here, manifesting in such pictures as, for example, the one from Hanna's account: shops which were rather empty. And long queues no one knows what for.

Common to all three biographies is also that while the parents were absent, absorbed with work, grandmothers took care of the narrators, all of them have siblings, all of them were good students, active volunteers, and all of them got higher education. None of them has children, though Julia – married as the only one of them – thinks very seriously about motherhood. However, if the cases of Hanna and Inga (in a certain simplification and with caution in adapting Bourdieu's statements to Polish reality) can be considered as examples of parents' social position reproduction (Bourdieu, Passeron 1977, Bourdieu 1986)<sup>10</sup> in the conditions of a vividly changing political and social framework, then Julia's case shows a strong orientation to improving social position thanks to the education and the possibility structures offered by a capitalist market economy. In contrast to both narrators, Julia was not born in a big city and does not come from an intellectual family, and spent her childhood and early youth in a small town.

Thus, the life histories analyzed in the chapter show (minimally contrasting) theoretical variations of the biographical entanglement in neoliberal reality giving an illusory sense of freedom and control over one's own life, while in fact it only blots increasing disorder, anomie, and alienation towards oneself (Riemann, Schütze 1991, Schütze 2012 [1995]). They reveal many features typical of modern complex societies that are a consequence of entanglement of individuals into numerous social worlds. Not only are these worlds constantly growing (often competing for members), but there are more and more of them (Schütze 2002). Consequently, the narrators – like many of their peers<sup>11</sup> – not

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<sup>10</sup> Later I will show on what I base my assumptions about the narrators' origin. This supposition is important because it is associated with a particular type of cultural transmission (Giza-Poleszczuk 2005: 42–43).

<sup>11</sup> It seems that this process intensifies significantly among people born in the 80s. Their life histories are dominated by the sense of confusion, tension, disorientation, and irritation caused by the cacophony of logic, moral orientations, standards, and ways of organizing work, criteria for assessing undertaken actions, ideologies, values, or obligations characteristic of different social worlds (cf., Clarke 1991, Strauss 1993, Schütze 2002). It does not mean that such phenomena did not occur before, but only that the autobiographical narrative interviews collected in the autobiographical research projects show that in the years 1980–1990 there was a significant change in both the content and the form of the story.

only have to deal with various (often contradictory) styles, logic of behavior, and moral standards of social worlds to which they belong, but also with the dynamics of internal changes and disputes regarding the authenticity of core activities in each of them. In addition, all of them – requiring specific knowledge resources, creating their own “We” – culture and awareness (Schütze 2002: 63) – create a sense of moral commitment to achieve common goals and obligation to loyalty. Interestingly enough, Julia goes a step further, unlike Hanna or Inga, who are subordinated to the expectations of the new capitalist order in their professional social worlds, she also becomes an expert who actively promotes and implements this order.

A special dimension of their experience is the expansion of a specific European mental space,<sup>12</sup> that is, a process in which Europe becomes an important frame of reference not only symbolically, but is increasingly becoming a real field of activity and an open structure of opportunity. Not without significance for the stories of life discussed here is the gradual opening of the Polish borders and leaving the isolation of the Eastern Bloc (the turning point is both 1989 and 2004). Europe is increasingly being considered not only as an element of a contrast set, but also as a place to realize one’s life plans or a place of escape (cf., Waniek 2015). For Hanna, it will be, for example, a Danish hospital and social care or an image of medical practice in England as mediated by a friend. For Inga, on the other hand, it will be a place of studying and the opportunity to compare Dutch and Polish universities, including, first of all, the relations between students and lecturers, but also the possibility of financing various forms of activity and cooperation (e.g., artistic residencies or Inga’s projects). For Julia, this will be a space for seasonal labor migration to Germany, allowing her to support herself as a student and then a PhD student.

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<sup>12</sup> I am referring to the concept of the European mental space, which is produced and modified as a result of *encounters* with Europe in the process of personal experiences of individuals including face-to-face interaction with a culturally different Other (in the sense of G.H. Mead). The processes of acquiring knowledge about European affairs from significant interactive partners (Schütz 1946), peer groups, educational contexts and all types of media communications, and the need to struggle and comply with the requirements imposed by the European Union. This usually entails: expanding and transforming common knowledge resources, reference schemes, and relevance systems (in the sense of Alfred Schütz) following the acknowledgement and consideration of the Other’s point of view, and also entails the need to compare different performance standards and criteria and tools for their assessment (as Anselm Strauss describes in the concept of “social worlds”) (Schütze, Schröder-Wildhagen 2012, Schütze, Schröder-Wildhagen, Nagel, Treichel 2012).



## Framework conditions for disorder and anomy potentials

In the light of the narrators' "common" biographical profile presented above, it may seem puzzling that the structural analysis of their narrative reveals that the potentials of the trajectory of suffering (see: Chapter I: *Methodological note*) are clearly related to the family and the field of work. I am not saying that these are the only areas of possible danger of suffering and chaos in their world of life, but these – as the empirical material shows – are dominant. It is interesting at the same time that the reference systems provided by the parents shaping the hierarchy of the narrators' values are at the same time a kind of "protective mechanism" against the full and uncritical acceptance of "governmental"<sup>13</sup> reality, constituting – at least forcing reflection on their own experiences – the opposite.<sup>14</sup> Thus, they allow one to master or mitigate these potentials and balance the precarious equilibrium of everyday life. In the cases discussed here, we are dealing with the initial stage of this process, in which the "trajectory potential" plays a huge role. This, as Fritz Schütze shows: "usually has a component of biographical dispositions to be hurt and a component of a set of key contradictions within the current life situation [...]; both of these components interact with each other, reinforcing the tendency to fall into a trap [...]" (Schütze 2012 [1995]: 428).

The hypothesis which emerges from the analysis of all three interviews is that the first component has its source primarily in family relationships, while the latter most strongly activates when entering the labor market. Remembering that both these elements dynamize each other's influence on the individual's life – they will be separated below for analytical purposes. It should also be emphasized that at many moments in the life stories discussed here the trajectory process becomes dynamic and the narrators actually have to deal with the need to maintain a state of precarious equilibrium, balancing on the edge of a total loss of control over their lives.

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<sup>13</sup> "Governmentality" is understood as a "neoliberal variant of the art of government," which – as Jerzy Stachowiak explains after Nikolas Rose (1998, 1999) – "is oriented [...] to governing through freedom" – managing the actions of entities convinced of their autonomy, independence, and self-determination." (Stachowiak 2013: 144; see also Czyżewski 2009a).

<sup>14</sup> Contrast sets are one of the significant structural elements of the autobiographical narrative interview. Their occurrence and insight can reveal the narrator's way of seeing the world, but also reveal his reflective biographical work (see, e.g., Schütze 2008a, b). From this perspective, it would be interesting to compare the interviews discussed here, in which the narrators are in tune with their own family with the stories of people whose relationships with their parents are conflicting and have led to a break in contacts. The question would then be: do and to what extent do they become aware of the subordination to neoliberal ideology, and what role does it play in their lives?

However, a supplementary commentary seems to be necessary here. In understanding the mechanisms of the development of suffering, the key issue is not only to determine *what* causes them (it can be a serious illness, educational failure, or unfulfilled love), but first of all *how* the individual experiences and gives meaning to specific events at a given moment in their biography and what impact this experience has on their further fate (and hence, how they later reproduce them in a spontaneous story). There is, of course, a fundamental difference between a situation in which a person is unexpectedly faced with an overwhelming, unexpected, and irremovable fate, and a situation in which the institutional pattern of expectations becomes unbearable and blocks one's own line of biographical searches (including the process of transformation). Or, when the biographical action scheme (associated with intentional attitude towards one's own biography) as a result of a fateful coincidence leads to disturbances in the order of everyday reality and drives a person (even for a moment) into a dead end. In the first case, we are dealing with the appearance of something indelible and irreversible, and in the other two cases with something that seems to be possible to eliminate with sufficient and systematic effort and thus restore control over one's own life. All these events, however, are experienced as uncontrollable external circumstances which introduce disorder into everyday reality and in an individual experience characterize the trajectory of suffering.

### **The hidden component of the trajectory potential in the family**

It will certainly not be anything new to say that the "biographical background" of childhood and adolescence – and thus primary socialization (Berger, Luckmann 1967) is usually crucial to understanding the individual biography (cf., Rosenthal 2000). Let me begin my analysis from, as Daniel Bertaux describes, "the level of lasting relationships with the parents and the close ones (significant others G.H. Mead)" (Bertaux 2012: 312) because this is where the first possible source of disorder is revealed. In the chosen biographies, an extremely interesting issue is the absence of the busy – though loving – parents, who are largely "replaced" in their caring and educational functions by grandmothers. They introduce their grandchildren into the world of life and "set the rules of the game" (Beger, Luckmann 1967: 154).

In general, in the life stories analyzed here, the original trajectory dynamics finds its source in the family relationships, which are created according to traditional patterns:<sup>15</sup> marriage is "for life" (Marody 2015: 141), it has (despite

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<sup>15</sup> Some clarifications are needed to avoid misunderstandings. By "traditional family" I mean the colloquial use of the term. In sociological understanding, however, I refer to the model of a family typical of modernity.



the difficulties) linear, stable, and harmonious character, children (not a child) appear, but on the other hand, the requirements of modern times put this pattern to the test – above all by the need for paid work of both spouses.<sup>16</sup> A special role in this system is played by grandmothers, whose function is not limited to taking over part of the burden of overworked mothers (taking care of children and maintaining the household – “existential facilities for working time” (Marody 2015: 143),<sup>17</sup> but it manifests itself in supporting, against the socio-cultural trends, the model of life based on a traditional family. Thus, on the one hand, the grandmother allows the narrators’ parents to create a strong image of a coherent family, and on the other, it sort of eliminates tensions arising from the special moment of transition between two (almost mutually exclusive) orders – modernity and post-modernity. Let’s note that, in the case of Hanna and Julia, the grandmother appears in the story immediately and in the foreground, which is related to the parents’ professional activity during the PPR, whereas Inga’s grandmother “enters” when the parents’ absence intensifies after (and as a result of) the political transformation in Poland.

Let’s take a look at the childhood memories of the narrators. Inga recalls: “Well, somehow by accident a doctor of technical sciences and a psychologist began to run a coach and tourist company to the Netherlands. And then I remember that I didn’t see my parents at all because they worked a lot and grandmothers raised us.” Hanna says: “And my parents, they always worked a lot, so they were often not at home, so it was early childhood, it was mainly grandmother.” Finally, Julia says: “Actually, my grandma brought me and my older sisters up [...]. My mum was at work all the time, my father was at work all the time as well. And to tell you the truth, my childhood/ I’ve got vivid memories [...] only of having tea with my grandma.”

The analysis of all three autobiographies clearly shows where the sources of possible tensions are located in the family: first, in the strenuous efforts of the narrators’ parents to maintain a specific family model in the face of the necessary

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<sup>16</sup> It should be noted, however, that the inclusion of women in the world of paid work should not necessarily be explained only by the enthusiastic emancipation of women, but one must remember that the constraints resulting from the war, which always “reduces the resources of men” (Marody 2015: 139–145), as well as the requirements of modernization processes and the need to ensure economic security for their own family. In the latter case, it is worth mentioning the triple burden on women (wife-mother-worker) in the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe (cf., Kenney 1999, Kaźmierska 2014, Schröder-Wildhagen n.d.).

<sup>17</sup> Using the help of grandmothers and not external institutions (nanny, babysitter, school dayroom) has two advantages grounded in two different orders: firstly, they guarantee growing-up in a sense of strong emotional bond, commitment, and unconditional love; and secondly it is help free of charge.

paid work of both of them,<sup>18</sup> and secondly in the often not explicitly expressed expectations as to the direction of the development of their children, and thirdly in the hierarchies of values and orientation systems transmitted by them, which seem to conflict with the requirements of the neoliberal labor market and the nature of late modernity. Undoubtedly, the strength of influence of family ties – in the stories cited here – is of considerable, formative importance for the narrators, but – paradoxically – it is also a kind of barrier. Well, a sense of order and stability created “against all odds” and constituting the basic dimension of the process of socialization, in which “the child internalizes the world of his parents” (Berger, Luckmann 1967: 161) rooted in such values as durability, responsibility, loyalty, trust, reciprocity, commitment, or community (often built in opposition to the outside world)<sup>19</sup> seems to hinder the process of gaining autonomy and independence and entering a capitalist reality. Such understanding of the family can become counterproductive in the face of challenges of the modern world and the temporality, episodiness, contingency created by it, and a jungle of equal (or lacking) values, reference systems, and moral responsibility – no matter how we evaluate them. In the adult life of the narrators, the tension between the commitment to the family home (defined as a secure base, which always offers not only food, maintenance, and psychological support, but also financial help) and the desire to be an independent person following autonomous biographical plans is clearly visible. For example, Hanna says that when it comes to parents, even when she was already a student she *had the conditions created on their part which were optimal for her to function at home. And also financial help, et cetera*. Therefore, the narrators are shaped, to a large extent, through their homes as good schoolgirls, engaging in various types of voluntary activities, are hard-working, conscientious, have a sense of duty, but are also sensitive and open to the world (thus filling an institutional pattern of expectations). Meanwhile, they face the world of other values and

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<sup>18</sup> Very often, as can also be seen in many other life stories of people whose parents both work hard, maintaining such a state of affairs requires a huge organizational effort (and you can’t always count on the help of grandparents) and work on feelings. This must be aimed at maintaining intimate ties with spouses and children so that all family members continue to remain integral parts of their biographies (see Schütz 2008). Undoubtedly, there is a huge potential for disorganizing family life, because many times parents do not have enough time or strength to build and maintain common everyday practices and lasting, trust-based relationships with children.

<sup>19</sup> It is worth noting that both families – thanks to grandmothers – keep their children under protection, supervising the space of freedom (e.g., by an unexpected visit to a camp trip, as is the case with Hanna) and largely directing their biographical activities (e.g., by offering extracurricular activities). Grandmothers themselves not only play a protective, but also a controlling role – limiting the narrators’ contact with alternative outside worlds.

“virtues” that must be strictly sought. Their repertoire is outlined by both modern specialist and daily dictionaries to quote only some of them after Marek Czyżewski: “creativity,” “activity,” “innovation,” “flexibility,” “quality,” “perfection,” “success,” “fluidity,” “participation,” “project,” “responsibility for yourself,” “knowledge,” [...] “team spirit,” and “personal development” (Czyżewski 2009: 93).

### **The field of work as a potential for chaos and suffering**

The sphere of work is undoubtedly an important frame organizing the lives and renderings of the narrators (empirical evidence in the content of the interview will be shown below when discussing individual cases). It is influenced by processes and phenomena, which will be discussed below, but first of all, attention should be paid to the specificity of their professions-jobs, which do not close in clearly defined working hours, as it is difficult to stop thinking about it. In addition, the autobiographical accounts analyzed below reflect the socio-cultural tendency of organizing all the areas of social life according to a neoliberal pattern, and therefore a society subordinated in all manifestations of its existence to the supreme market laws (mechanisms of competition and rivalry), losing sight of man.<sup>20</sup> As Czyżewski emphasizes, the point is to be entrepreneurial, competitive, and profitable with our actions. Therefore, triumph is celebrated by “economizing” rhetorics and “economizing” validations (cf., Czyżewski 2009: 91). From this perspective, it is worth looking at the specificity of the professional careers chosen by the narrators, and thus: in Inga’s seemingly “socially useless” profession of artist, which, as it were “by the nature of things,” fits into the spirit of neoliberalism – it requires creativity, agency, it is based on temporary, project work logic;<sup>21</sup> in the case of Hanna, the

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<sup>20</sup> It is Hanna who mainly talks about it, comparing her work as a doctor to the work of her parents – also doctors – for whom the patient was in the first place, while now bureaucratization and proceduralization push the patient to the background. Let’s look at this comparison: “[...] they have already told us about it at university that the first thing to think about, before one thinks about the patient, is to think about documentation. And this is something that was totally not there when they [Hanna’s parents] started working / or for a large part of their work.” In this context, her work at the clinic is particularly difficult (I will return to this thread in the main text), where – as she herself shows: “you sit these seven hours and take one patient after another [...] you can barely keep up with filling in papers [...] and writing prescriptions. [...] After going out of such work, you are totally stupid.”

<sup>21</sup> Magda Nowicka points out that, unlike poetry, “visual and applied arts are harnessed to the neoliberal rhetoric of creative industries.” M. Nowicka, “The discreet charm of non-fulfilment or what poetry does not do,” <http://wakat.sdk.pl/dyskretny-urok-niespełnienia-albo-to-czych-poezja-nie-czyni/> [12.12.2015].

invariably “useful” medical profession, which, when we consider the ageing of the society, as well as the increasing medical perception of people, turns out to be extremely useful and necessary for the smooth functioning of society; or finally for Julia, who becomes a zealous propagator of alleged universal attributes of neoliberalism both in the social world of academy, non-governmental organizations, or multinational corporations. Project, task-oriented work, highly proceduralized, and consisting of drifting not only from employment to employment, but also between several simultaneous jobs. Demanding constant acquisition of knowledge and development of competences becomes the ordering principle of the entire biographical experience of all three narrators. It seems that in their lives there is no place, time, or strength to implement other lasting (and therefore requiring constant effort, commitment, but also emotional outlays) life plans.

Let's start analysis of three minimally contrasting cases

### Inga's life history

It is all so precarious that it can just be blown down by a gentle breeze.

Inga was born in the large Polish city of A. in 1984. Currently, after undergraduate and graduate studies at Dutch universities, she is developing her artistic career in the Netherlands and partly also in Poland.

Inga was born in an urban family (as evidenced by the stories opening her narrative about her grandfather, the manufacturer, or a huge apartment in a tenement house, still vivid stories and even family secrets, artistic interests of her father, which influence the course of her own biography). Her parents, seduced by the possibilities that emerged in Poland after 1989, abandoned their professions (engineer and psychologist) and started to run a travel company. This required them to be extremely committed and dedicated, and thus completely “absorbed” their “private” time (Marody 2015: 143). It can be assumed that – like most people at that time – they counted on the possibility of an amazing improvement in material conditions and an escape from the PPR mediocrity. Initially, they put the childcare (Inga and her older brother) in the hands of grandmothers and later also in extracurricular art classes.<sup>22</sup> These,

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<sup>22</sup> Anselm Strauss, in his book *Professions, Works, and Careers* in the chapter titled *Some aspects of recruitment into visual arts* (2001 [1975]: 101) draws attention to the fact that, initially, children treat art as fun and most probably many talented young people will never begin to approach it seriously unless there is a person (biographical carer) who makes them realize that different meaning. In Inga's case, it is her father who plays that role.

as it turned out, played a significant role in the development of the narrator's interests and constituted her artistic and professional path constituting next to her father who instills in his children a longing and probably even a love of art, an important element of "initiating rhizomes."<sup>23</sup>

Let us return, however, to the parents and the biographical consequences of their getting lost at work and the persistent maintenance of a precarious balance between home and work responsibilities. The first "victim" of this lifestyle was the father who, as a result of the activation of a genetic disease, came close to death and never returned to work again. While he devoted himself to writing books and achieving his passions in a country house, her mother became the "breadwinner" of the family. As Inga says: "my mother always worked so hard to ensure a good start for her children and to maintain a good standard of living." Such, perhaps extremely high in this situation, good levels for both them and her husband, the narrator's assessment in this passage shows that her mother most likely worked excessively in the face of her expectations. Thus, she inscribed in the "symbolism of sacrifice" often (over-) used by women working abroad and allowing rationalization of their absence with children left at home (Urbańska 2015: 234-236).

The action plan implemented by the parents – establishing a travel and coach company – resulted from the structural possibilities brought about by the socio-historical change in Poland after 1989. In fact, they appeared to be satisfying – on the condition of hard, demanding huge sacrifices – work – the "American dream" (repeatedly being just a pursuit of illusion) paid for in this case by the serious illness of the father and overworked mother. This undoubtedly influenced the narrator's decision to quickly become independent, grounded in her biographical orientation, which is determined by the conviction that "since my mother works so hard, I have to as well." Paradoxically, however, the constant accumulation of economic capital (with social and cultural capital stored during the Polish People's Republic and later restored and developed) thanks to the hard and time-consuming work of the mother allowed the narrator to enter the capitalist reality and "condemned" her to a multitude of choices (which she read about in college):

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<sup>23</sup> I am referring to the metaphor of Piotr Szenajch, who, searching for supra-individual sources of "genius" and "talent," reaches for the concept of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, as well as the considerations of Pierre Bourdieu and Michael Foucault. Compare Piotr Szenajch's material presented at the conference "Creative Applications of Biographical Research: Theory, Practice and Policy" at the University of Durham, September 2014 based on his unpublished doctoral thesis *Supra-individual conditions of "talent," as well as cultural sources and social costs of omitting them* prepared at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology. See also: Kaźmierska, Waniek, Zysiak (2015).

I just wanted everything. I couldn't decide what. This is also probably one of the biggest problems of modern times. I read about it everywhere and think to myself: yes, it's about me! The simple choice is not to choose something. And the hardest part is [...] To deprive those opportunities that are and choose only one.

Let us now take a closer look at the biographical moment which the narrator commented with the quote above. Inga, following her biographical plan (and her brother<sup>24</sup>) wanted to study painting at the Academy of Fine Arts, where, however, she was not admitted at first. However, she could study at the Faculty of Artistic Education of the same university, which, however, she treated as a "waiting room." A year later she did get to the dream faculty, but her situation was already completely different then. Her aunt, at whose place Inga spent her holidays in the Netherlands,<sup>25</sup> persuaded her to study there, and the narrator got admitted. Tempted by "the promise of commercialism, being responsible, and a chance to earn money" (the order of arguments specified by the informant), Inga decided to study illustration abroad, where – as she still believed – "everything is better."<sup>26</sup> The father, let's add, did not fully accept his daughter's decision (using his words) to go to some idiotic school. Her "pragmatic and functional" field of study at a Dutch art college seemed to be a huge opposite of Polish, "nineteenth-century and romantic" perceptions of art, which Inga puts in the neat slogan of "brushes, paints, and turpentine." Unfortunately, as it turned out, the profile of this school was strictly professional and therefore it did not offer any lectures on philosophy or history of art. Inga felt that her cultural capital in this area – acquired and shaped in Poland (both by the parents, as well as at school) – is significantly greater than that of her classmates, who undoubtedly could impress others with "useless" knowledge. She defines it herself: "I was such a total snob there."

Implementing the main premise organizing her biography at the time, Inga tried to free her mother from the obligation to support her during her studies and earned her living working as a waitress. Only after half a year, she moved out from her aunt, who she initially stayed with. Inga attributes great importance to her waitressing work (although she thinks it sounds like a cliché when she talks about it): "thanks to that [...] I learned Dutch" and adds: "it [...] will sound completely ridiculous, but I learned life, really, because I couldn't do

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<sup>24</sup> Her brother started studying at the Academy of Fine Arts earlier and Inga was impressed both by what he was doing there and the environment in which he was mingling.

<sup>25</sup> During which, let's stress, she works illegally washing dishes, and describes that experience as "nightmarish" and "heroic."

<sup>26</sup> Inga reproduces here "the stereotype placing Poland towards the West in civilizational (but not cultural) inferiority positions" (Piotrowski 1997: 359).



anything. In general, when I lived here [in Poland], I had it all served on a tray, and there [in the Netherlands] I had to deal with it myself." This last sentence takes the form of a contrast set, in which the narrator's transformation from a full-fledged "feathered chick" into an independent adult and mature woman is shown. This type of construction in which the narrator shows who she was and who she became as a result of subsequent events in her life captures the process of identity change – here subjected to reflection and biographical work. This process of transformation was undoubtedly accelerated by almost total immersion into the Dutch culture and contacts with its representatives,<sup>27</sup> who, as Inga shows, were "very nice," but their "Protestant mentality, common sense, withdrawn nature" caused that at first, she did not completely find herself there. The process of "familiarizing" another culture was marked by suffering and loneliness,<sup>28</sup> and according to the narrator, it lasted four or even six years. One could say that we are dealing here with the liminal phase of her life cycle and the experience of *communitas* (van Gennep 2006, Turner 2010), during which she abandoned the routine of things and subjected herself to tests in order to prove to herself and, above all, to relatives that she is able to organize her everyday life independently, she is able to meet the challenges posed by her fate, she can be independent in both her actions and thinking (cf., Waniek 2015). However, a problem arose when she did not know what to do with her life, choosing to go to Switzerland with her boyfriend at the time, return to Poland, or stay in the Netherlands. What's more, as we learn from the construction in the background having the character of fading out of awareness,<sup>29</sup> her father died during this period. The mother no longer ran a transport company, but became the owner of a dental clinic, she returned to her profession as a psychologist, who not only began to practice again, but also lectured at private universities – most likely all the time feeling responsible for the material sphere of life of her already adult children. The death of her father played a huge role in Inga's

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<sup>27</sup> Inga spent the first four years at the university, where only the Dutch studied and she was the only *foreigner-freak*. This situation is completely reversed when she gets to the Master's level. Then in her student group "everyone is from somewhere" and only one Dutchman.

<sup>28</sup> These processes can be identified in some of the narrator's biographical experience – at university, Inga was in a relationship with a Swiss, who wanted to return to his country immediately after obtaining a bachelor's degree. Inga then faced a dilemma: whether to follow him or stay in the Netherlands. Her reconstruction and projection for the future of her experiences related to entering a foreign culture look like this: "Again, not understanding the language, again not having your friends. I just felt that I could not stand it a second time – isolation (language), loneliness (no friends), unpleasant, suffering (I do not want to experience it a second time)."

<sup>29</sup> See *Methodological note*.

life, but – as demonstrated by the analysis of her narrative – has not yet been worked through. This is probably why the narrator describes her studies at the Institute of Fine Arts several times using the metaphor of being saved and shows them in very interesting optics. Comparing the relationships between students, lecturers, and the art field in the Netherlands and Poland, it essentially reflects the Bernstein distinction between the integrated code and the collection code, respectively (Bernstein 1975: 160–162, 171 onwards)<sup>30</sup> and processes typical of the social worlds (Clarke 1991, Strauss 1978). She emphasizes that people treat themselves there as partners, everyone learns from each other, often tutors (mentors) also have their own artistic practices, students are constantly visited by working artists and sums up:

Well, it is so completely partner-like, err [...] These are more or less relationships, I mean, I had to learn it, because I was brought up in this system, Sir/Madam Professor, and there is simply no such thing there. You just address your wonderful teacher by first name. And it is, it is difficult, it was quite difficult for me too. How can I say to [name is given here], who is just a great art critic who lectures at all the world's universities, how can I just call him Jan? Well, but it was like that there.

The hierarchical and ritualized educational attitude at the home university (reflected in the communication rules imposing the obligation to address the lecturer as 'Mr/Ms') is contrasted with the world of the Dutch academy, where distinction seems to be fading and the student has the impression that he/she has more control over his/her moves, actions, and style of communication, and that he/she has much more autonomy as to the choice, organization, pace, and time allocation of the knowledge acquisition processes (Bernstein 1975, Hernik 2007). Also, Inga shows that 'weak classification' and fluidity of boundaries between individual contents, openness to the external context – typical of the integration code – are accompanied by the interpenetration of various social worlds for which the basic activity is doing art, so the world of curators, students, lecturers, practising artists, or art critics.

This world of foreign academy, appearing to Inga as fascinating, almost idyllic, and certainly allowing to "free oneself" from the growing disorder and confusion has some traps, however. This lack of hierarchy and a sense of freedom of movement between specific worlds are often illusory and manifest themselves only on the surface of semantic structures. This code – clear for the "insiders" – often seduces and misleads the "outsiders." The former see not only

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<sup>30</sup> The collection code, the integration code refer to two different practices related to the way knowledge is acquired. And so the types of collection codes are associated with a strong separation and impenetrability of teaching content, with a strong classification.

the communicated at-face-value message, but also see the hidden semantic structures.

Inga believes that by staying in the Netherlands and undertaking her master's studies she did the right thing. The rightness of her choice seems to be confirmed (based on the principle of contrast) by her assessment of the artistic career of her brother, who graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Poland and at the beginning could not find a satisfying job. However, this situation changed when he opened an art gallery – we will come back to this issue later.

Let us now stop at the earlier reflections regarding transformations in the sphere of work. Inga's attitude towards this issue seems particularly interesting. First of all, one is struck by the naturalness (perhaps resulting from the specificity of the profession she practices) with which she speaks of *precariousness*. The first attempts to deal with this topic can be found in the proper narrative sequence, and therefore when Inga passes from the moment of graduation to the story of work. This fragment is of a dialogical nature because the narrator refers to and compares her position as an artist to the position of her interlocutor – a PhD student working on a research project.<sup>31</sup> Comparing her projects to a doctorate, she classifies them as *shorter ones* and continues:

[...] but every time I just explore a topic and try [...] to somehow tell it, somehow critically approach it [...]. And [...] I don't know, I suppose that, that [...] and I like this freedom as such. This is obviously very difficult, because you also have to apply for scholarships, grants, so we know it. When I listen to you and your work, or other PhD students, it seems to me that this is a very similar situation, so very precarious, such a fashionable word now. But, this is, this is me, yet, after all, it is quite fascinating. Well, you never know what will happen, but everything else is possible somehow.

In turn, when answering the additional question of the researcher – asked shortly after the main narrative line – who asks her to clarify what exactly her work consists of, Inga explains that her activities focus primarily on seeking funding for her artistic ideas, among which he mentions such forms such as grants, residences, projects, being an assistant to another (recognized) artist, et cetera. This requires, as she says later: “some luck and a lot of work.” She adds that: “of course, sometimes it will happen that someone invites me” and then she has the opportunity to make her own exhibition. However, Inga uses her social capital in a very interesting way, which makes her perform very well on the artists' job market. Mainly, as she puts it herself, she “connects the worlds.”

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<sup>31</sup> She is probably referring here to the topics discussed outside of the recording which belong to the phase introducing the potential narrator to this form of research (See Schütze 2008a).

Firstly, she does this by inviting her colleagues and lecturers from the Dutch university to the gallery run by her brother (and which – presumably to a large extent – is maintained by their mother), and secondly, having the opportunity to apply for financing projects not only in Poland or the Netherlands, but also throughout Europe (and even around the world). Thus, she defines her and her brother's professional achievements as we may have succeeded a bit. In turn, she talks about herself in the context of her mother who is constantly working hard and worrying about her "artistic children." She emphasizes her independence and the fact that she is no longer using her help "at the moment." And then she adds: "And now I can finally manage to make a living from what I do." Only that this success is impermanent, shakey, dependent on the situation, goodwill of sponsors, and requiring work in many places. This is clearly captured by the narrator's comment, who talks about her joint achievements with her brother in such a way: "It is all so precarious that it can just be blown down by a gentle breeze."

In the end, it is worth mentioning that this suspension between the worlds and the position of a "marginal man" (Stonequist 1961 [1937]) seem to be a ready material for artistic work, but also artistic work itself can be a way to control disorder and suffering or to work through one's own difficult biographical experiences. Incidentally, there is also a great potential for disorder here.

### **Hanna's life history**

[...] I suppose it is also mentally exhausting when you suddenly realize that you have stepped into something that will last properly until the end.

Hanna was born in 1981 in the city of A. She is an internist. Both of her parents are doctors who, being retired and in their late 60s, are still professionally active. She has a sister, 5 years older, who is a Master of Arts, started her own family and has two children.

The main principle organizing Hanna's biography seems to be a desire for security (Thomas 1976) expressed in the repeated statement that each place and situation requires a certain degree of familiarization and recognition, in theoretical comments in which she openly states: "I find it hard to get used to new circumstances or I am a coward," in the description of new experiences as clashes with reality, but also in the features of the surrounding reality which suit her best, such as silence, peace, or a pleasant smell (vs. noise, the rush which she is experiencing). It also manifests itself in her approach to the medical profession, where the feeling of duty and fear of harming the patient comes to the fore. Let us take a closer look at the fragment in which Hanna talks about

a milestone in her (but in fact in every) doctor's career which is independent duty: she is accompanied by the fear of the unknown, but at the same time a sense of great responsibility: "Oh Lord! It was terrible too. Before entering the hospital you had to cross yourself, even if you were not at all religious, but just to make sure nothing terrible would happen, to survive it somehow, so as not to hurt anyone." This last formulation: in order not to hurt anyone is semantically almost identical to the Hippocratic "firstly do not harm" (*primum non nocere*).

After this general characterization of Hanna, let us now proceed to a more detailed analysis of the two biographical dimensions distinguished for the aims of this article, that is, family relations and work. In Hanna's story, the family (parents, sister, and grandparents) constitutes a particularly important – grounded in a coherent system of values and associated with huge stability, but at the same time outlines (and thus may limit) her biographical horizons. Being a member of this "we" community is associated with devotion, loyalty, and mutual support, which is to maintain internal order and ensure peace.<sup>32</sup> The description of the relationship between its individual members reflects some features of the modern family (which I will come back to), but at the same time – after Mirosława Marody – it points to some archaic, that is, non-contemporary features which are familiar to Hanna. Marody writes: "Sacrifice for the good of the family is treated as a symptom of a lack of assertiveness rather than a proof of maturity and responsibility of the individual" (Marody 2015: 145).

In early childhood, Hanna was provided with a sense of security and order in the everyday reality by her grandmother. It was in her small apartment, where she had been living with her parents for a while, that the narrator felt at home and had a sense of freedom. She allows her granddaughters "to do different hairstyles and wind their hair on rollers, but also to let off steam on a hated toy: she stood up to the challenge and came up with ideas for things which could be done to make the doll suffer, so the doll had salt put in her eyes [...], pins stuck under nails [...]." Hanna gained a sense of "a close-knit family" from that period. This pattern, as the narrator shows, was recreated in the relationship of her parents with her sister's children. When the grandmother died, the narrator was less than 9 years old and this is what she says about her passing-away:

And it was such a breakthrough moment because everything started to get re-evaluated at home. Especially that from those earlier memories and so, it's all about grandma. And the parents are somewhere on the margins, of course, they are remembered, although this, such a main core was the grandmother.

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<sup>32</sup> Peace does not mean stillness, but the opposite of the often senseless pursuit of something (a thing, a feeling, a desire, meaning).

The grandmother's illness and death forced Hanna's parents to abandon the routines of life organized around work and focus on the family. When the mother looked after the sick grandparents, the father went away with his daughters on winter holidays, which put him in a new light – this man, eternally absent from home, turned out to be a great and ingenious companion of fun. The narrator recalls it in this way:

[...] winter holidays spent with my father, who, at that time, had already been working so much that he appeared at home very sporadically. However, when he did appear, which irritated my mother terribly, he was the biggest attraction and this trip was also such an attraction that until now is present in my and my sister's memories. We come back to this very often [...] He invented great games for us, because if there were frozen puddles, for example, he could say how to lift a puddle. And he would pick up the puddle with a piece of branch, so we were fascinated by how ingenious he was. He invented fitness exercises for us, meaning that when we would go for some long walks we had to hold a stick of suitable weight in outstretched arms in front of us, I had a smaller one, my sister a bigger one, and our father the biggest one, and in this way we would walk around. [...] Anyway, it was extremely nice. There were no restrictions there, no one ordered anyone around. It was really nice, and in the evenings our father read "A Bear Called Paddington," "The Adventures of a Bear Called Paddington." And then we ate powdered milk, dry milk, powdered milk with sugar. Now I can't imagine how it can be eaten [...].

This passage is a description of a fascinating and joyful time which allowed both daughters (Hanna repeats that in her and her sister's memory these holidays have left a significant mark) to discover their father and the suspension of everyday rules (revealed in the text by a default contrast to the prevailing rules at home: "there were no restrictions, no one ordered anyone"). The narrator defines both the appearance of her hard-working father in her life and the trip with him during the holidays as an "attraction." A certain analogy can be drawn here to the transformations of the modern family described by Marody – mainly, the changes in relations between parents who are no longer in a relationship (divorced) and their children. Although Hanna's parents are married to this day, their intensive work and the related absence from the narrator's childhood leads to consequences similar to those characteristic of a broken family. One may get the impression that the parents at that time being "on the margins" were not part of the everyday routine, but rather a kind of "celebration" whose task is "emotional gratification" in the form of time "spent as attractive and intense as possible" (Marody 2015: 176). It can, therefore, be said that, paradoxically, a family for which its durability and coherence is a value, due to the intense work of both the father and the mother, it can be described using the characteristics typical of postmodern relationships between parents and children.



In many places the analysis of Hanna's life history shows a peculiar biographical tension, which is largely due to the collision of these two competing worlds: a traditional family and a neoliberal reality. The first, which has already been mentioned, is associated with extremely strong, emotional ties with a family which bears an intellectual trait.<sup>33</sup> It is thanks to the family that the narrator gains cultural capital which could also be successfully used outside of Poland: she is a well-educated doctor, knows French (and perhaps also English), has "familiarity with the world,"<sup>34</sup> but on the other hand – paradoxically – the same community seems to be a barrier to the use of the potential (e.g., European) structures of possibility. From her narrative, we learn that she is not ready to take up a job abroad, which she explains by the fondness of her family (here she mentions both her parents, sister, and her zoo). She adds later: "And besides, I'm a coward to leave completely on my own and suddenly deal with everything from scratch, no, no, definitely not." These declarations seem particularly intriguing in relation to the contrastive comparisons she introduces which show the preparation of young doctors, as well as the organization and working conditions in domestic healthcare in comparison with Denmark and England. Let us take a closer look at how the narrator draws the "absolute gap" between medical and social care in Poland and Western Europe.

The first contrasting set is based on her own observations while visiting her uncle in a Danish hospital:

When you go inside it actually looks like a museum, there are paintings on the walls, some sculptures exhibited in the showcases. And also what catches the eye

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<sup>33</sup> Looking at the account created by Hanna, we can approximate her position in the social stratum. We are given information about it through its interpretation framework, semantic resources, and hierarchies of values. Other indicators can also be a prestigious secondary school which she attended or scout membership. Also, the narrator herself shows that: "My parents made sure that I try everything" and mentions: mountain hiking, sailing, swimming, ice-skating, callisthenics, ballet. Her attitude also manifests itself in her attachment to certain values and perceptions of the world, as well as in her attitude of responsibility and loyalty to specific "we" communities of helping and having a sense of mission rather than passion in the chosen profession. But, perhaps the most important, though seemingly trivial indicator here may be a description of a tourist trip to Vilnius with parents in the early 1990s – while all its participants engage in commercial activities upon arrival, her parents tirelessly sightsee the city (by an empty coach), which shows some other system of relevance and orientation of her family. The set of elements listed above, and even their configuration, cannot obviously be regarded as irrefutable proof of its intellectual origin.

<sup>34</sup> Hanna mentions not only trips to her uncle in Denmark, but also a "trip around friends in Europe" (to do this, you just need to have these friends), holidays, and ski trips abroad.

is the silence. When you enter a Polish hospital, it is hustle and bustle, there are those, those food delivery carts, everything is clacking, it is so disgusting. However, there – there is peace and quiet. Nobody is running, no one is shouting to each other through these corridors. [...] Well, what also catches the eye [...] or in the nose actually, there it smelled nice. What can't be said about Polish hospitals, unfortunately. Everything is organized when it comes to [...] helping the patient to carry him, to wash him, groom and dress him. In Poland, it is that two or three nurses come [...] and they just have to manage, lift somehow [...] the patient. [...] They have their own techniques, but everything is forceful anyway. However, there [...] each room has a sheave on the ceiling [which] can be adjusted by remote control in which place the lift should be placed. A tape is placed under the patient, of course, this is all safe so as not to injure the spine, et cetera there and the patient is lifted without using force.

Another one refers to the experiences of a friend from university, who then had already had emigration plans motivated mainly financially. This fragment appears as an answer to the question of the researcher who is trying to exploit this thread which barely mentioned in the main narrative regarding the possibility of emigration:

[...] there is a different mode of work there [...] the specializations and scope of duties are slightly different. What she says is that there is a gap between the people who graduated in England and who graduated here [in Poland]. We are quite well-prepared in terms of theory, but when it comes to practice, it is rock bottom. We actually have these clinical classes/ they started from the third year. Well, it was also usually the case that a group of, let's say, ten people got one patient, so if there was a procedure to carry out, even from the patient's point of view, so as not to torment him [...] it was done by one person, maximum two, depending on what was supposed to be done. And the majority were just such onlookers.

It seems that the image of the West – shown as civilizationally much higher in terms of the social world of medicine (regarding technology, organization of work, care for the sick, and care for the working people – including doctors) is extremely tempting. And yet, leaving the country is not considered by Hanna as an alternative to the Polish healthcare system exploiting young doctors. Let us mention here only a few descriptions of the narrator relating to the internal states accompanying her working mode: “washed out of all kinds of emotions, strength, and everything; the growing frustration inside of me; terrible torment.”<sup>35</sup> Hanna, therefore, is working on the borderline between

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<sup>35</sup> Let us add that this experience refers to the period in which the narrator had to combine her career with caring for her sister's child. She speaks of it: “It was a moment that was hard for me to go through.”

physical and mental exhaustion, fully realizing that this is not good for her or the patients.

Therefore, here we are dealing with a growing disorder and alarming exhaustion, that is, clear symptoms of the biographical process of trajectory of suffering (more about this below). In the meantime, we will return to the contrast between Poland and Denmark, outlined by the narrator, which she visits for the first time in 1993. She describes her experience of that time as “a collision with prosperity,” with “walls of crisps and sweets,” she is impressed by the range of colors and various flavors of ice-cream. With hindsight, however, she states that the availability of all goods and the possibility of purchasing them have become commonplace in Poland too. Additionally, she shows that although the Danish town she visits because of her uncle still remains charming, clean, and orderly, yet – unlike Poland – nothing has changed there. This is a very interesting comparison of the two countries, which, on the one hand, shows Poland’s entry into the process of mass-consumption, and on the other, its civilizational backwardness (primarily in the dimension of medical and social care).

Let us now move on to the confusing and intense experiences of the narrator, being the markers of a growing trajectory potential, and often an attempt to maintain the precarious balance of everyday life), which result from the hypertrophy of professional duties and the associated responsibilities. It is necessary to take into account the specific biographical moment in which the interview with Hanna was conducted. At that time, she was preparing for the State Specialization Examination, which completely excluded her from professional life and thoroughly organized her daily routines. It can be assumed, therefore, that some ways of presenting reality are exaggerated or “overblown.” Nevertheless, there is still empirical textual evidence that chaos and suffering have entered her life, and that she devotes great effort to try to control the disorder in the circumstances of an extreme workload, which also “exhausts one’s energy” (Riemann, Schütze 1991: 349 ) and leads to a loss of control over the everyday world of life. I will recall here a long fragment of the narrator’s account, which will be divided into two parts: the first one refers to the (dis) organization of the growing obligations towards various workplaces, the second one refers to the loss of control over her own emotions in the interaction with patients. Both point to the trajectory character of the narrator’s experience at that time.

The first alarming signal of the growing chaos and the emergence of a professional trap can be found in the narrative reconstruction of the situation in which Hanna registers her own company (becomes self-employed) and combines working in different places, knowing that while preparing for the specialization exam she will have to focus only on learning. She describes this

experience as “a marathon, actually, a little bit pushed to my limits...” Her calculations show that she worked 500 hours in the first month. She further explains how her duties were organized at that time:

So, it was that one would actually sit on the night shift somewhere in some NMA [Night Medical Aid], then one went to the clinic, then from this clinic one went to the next NMA, from that NMA to the next clinic. And actually, if I were to calculate, then I had a job in two outpatient clinics in A., in two such NMAs, one in W., the other in D., and I was also going to an outpatient clinic in S., and I was on duty in hospital at my place. And this is a total of six jobs, of which there is partially, one clinic in N. which is treated as one, but I was physically in two places, so in total it was three places in A. Well, it actually happened that with such a schedule you could get lost a bit because it was impossible without a personal agenda. And it happened to me once during these few months of such hard work to arrange two night shifts [at the same time]. I was prepared to go to the hospital on duty at 8 pm, so I was enjoying a short moment of being in my flat, so when I entered, I just immediately fell asleep. And suddenly the phone rings at 6:40 p.m. from the town of W. I answer: I say: “What’s the matter?” “And where am I?” I say: “At home, and where should I be?” “Well here, because everyone is waiting for me.” I say: “How is it possible that in W.? I am [on duty] in hospital today, it’s absolutely out of the question.” I look at the calendar and say: “I have definitely written down that I should be in the hospital.” I open the hospital schedule, well, I am in the hospital, which means that they had to be wrong. And then something dawned on me, I checked a text from a month before. And I say: “Well, you’re right, I am also on duty in the town of W.” In this W. it was hard because we are three people working there on shifts. There is one doctor on call, no one is from the town of W., everyone commutes from A. So I started calling people to the hospital. And finally, I managed to find someone to replace me in the hospital and I came late to that W. So well, these were such unpleasant things. But, once it did happen to me, afterwards I was very careful to check everything two or three times each time. But, I would not like to go back to that, because [...] it’s already a little bit beyond one’s strength. [...] But, I am not saying that it is good for my health, nor is it good for these patients. Because you know, if you work non-stop, you can’t focus and pay attention, despite really great efforts.

Here we can clearly see that the narrator has ceased to control her agenda and obligations in various workplaces. Let us first pay attention to the way in which she talks about the situation in which her shifts overlapped in two different, distant workplaces – it is recalled in the form of a dialogue, vividly and in detail reconstructing what had happened then. This means that Hanna really deeply experienced the loss of control over her life and immediately made attempts to counteract it, that is, she increased supervision of her schedule: “then I was very careful to check everything two or three times each” time and additionally she announces that she does not want to have to deal with such

organization of work (many faraway places, exhausting shifts, etc.). It should be emphasized that the strategy introduced by the narrator aimed at controlling the chaos, did not consist of giving up the excess of professional duties, but intensifying control over their distribution, which in fact did not eliminate the trajectory potential, but could intensify it. Luckily, it was a temporary period in her life, which she was certainly aware of when trying to control the trajectory by introducing the institutional pattern of the course of life.

There is another very interesting linguistic indicator in this passage, which allows us to confirm the narrator's declaration regarding her preferred workplace, which is the hospital, and at the same time her reluctance to work in an outpatient clinic.<sup>36</sup> Namely, at the beginning of the account quoted here, Hanna uses, in relation to this last professional activity, the impersonal forms of verbs "one would work," "one would go," which signals the distance to and the automation of the performed activities. She admits that her main motivation was to accumulate financial resources (for the expected period of unemployment before the specialization exam, holiday trips abroad, skiing holidays, paying off the mortgage, etc.). Meanwhile, when talking about work in the hospital ward, she already speaks in the first person singular: for example, "I was on duty," which expresses the identification with this place only deepened in the next phrasing: "in hospital at my place." These formal features of utterance in relation to two different ways of practising the medical profession can be found in the entire interview.

The second significant trajectory marker appears immediately after the work regime cited above. Hanna shows in general terms the interactive anomy between her (a doctor) and a certain type of patient. This description largely explains the reasons for a clear violation of the basis of cooperative reciprocity in the institutional context of night medical assistance: on the one hand, patients come to the doctor with *total nonsense* or groundless claims, and on the other, she, as a doctor, is on the verge of physical exhaustion. As a result, she is easily irritated and is not always able to control her behavior: Let us take a closer look at this passage:

Well, but also the approach to people/ they can irritate terribly at some stage. This means it is also another matter that [...] well, people also have a slightly strange approach to these various health institutions. So I always have/ I am such a calm person and so I was told by the people who I worked with/ I mean nurses with

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<sup>36</sup> She says, for example: Because counselling work can always be found, but [...] but it is not a thing which I'm dreaming of and definitely hospital work suits me better, I feel more fulfilled there – it is more... developmental. There is a larger cross-section of cases, the range of patients is greater – you can follow the cases of your colleagues... you can always learn something.

whom I work, or rescuers, that I am not irritable and I am very calm. But, such people can come, without thinking about it, because they are passing by, because they are coming back from a party or a name-day celebration. At two o'clock at night they come, shamelessly waking up the nurse and the doctor, because for example, they suspect having a tick [...], hundreds of times it turned out that this suspicious tick is, for example, a mole. Only why do I have to verify it at two o'clock in the morning and why should the doctor do it, since/ let's say that I can understand an elderly person who is senile and who cannot see well. But, it was often the twenty-year-olds who would come [...] such people just come with absolutely everything. [...] [they don't even take anything for a cold without a medical consultation]. And those elder people come when they really need help. And then I have nothing against it. Whatever time they would come, here you are, that's why you are there for. However, unfortunately, you can lose a lot of enthusiasm and desire and heart to/ by thousands of such people who come with total nonsense. And they come completely unnecessarily [...]. Or, for example, they come to get a prescription in the middle of the night, which you absolutely do not do in Medical Aid. But then, these are things that just annoy terribly. And it is at this stage that already after a few years of work in this NMA and after intensive work, it happened to me to shout at such people. [...] We have always had such a policy that no drugs are prescribed which are taken regularly, because this is the job of BHC [Basic Health Care], so it is refused. If someone came to prolong medication in the middle of the night, then on top of being refused, he was also shouted at, unfortunately.

The situation in which Hanna began to shout at her patient causes her surprise. In this behavior, she does not recognize herself, especially since – as she shows in the reconstruction of her “me” in the sense of G.H. Mead (1975) – among the lower medical staff she is considered to be a calm and composed person. The cumulative disorder and alienation with herself which we are dealing with here “constitute – as Fritz Schütze shows – the main aspects of the biographical trajectory of suffering” (See: Schütze 2012 [1995]: 230–231).

Finally, we come to the point where all of these experiences can be referred to Hanna's quote mentioned earlier as a motto “[...] it is also mentally exhausting when you suddenly realize that you have stepped into something that will last properly until the end,” which is the main principle organizing her life and biographical orientation at the time of the interview. It reveals most fully the feeling of being trapped, the growing discouragement, and hopelessness of the narrator's current position. These are typical experiences of trajectories connected with the fact that “even in those stages of suffering which are not dramatic, extreme situations, the existential world of the suffering person will tend to shrink, disappear” (Riemann, Schütze 1991). Let us note that the narrator's sad statement cited above is the result of her biographical work, in which she, first of all, relates her professional experience to the work and life



of her parents-doctors and, secondly, compares the organization of the Polish and Western health and social care system. In the first case, the narrator realizes that, on the one hand, despite the relatively worse working conditions, lower income, and having two children, her parents “managed” while she is already now on the verge of physical and emotional exhaustion; and on the other, she sees that – although they are already retired – they still have to work hard, suggesting that her “torments pushed to the limits” will never end. It gives her the feeling of facing a wall. In the second comparison what comes to the foreground is the huge gap (despite the constant technological progress) in the system of organizing medical care between Poland and the West, which makes the narrator aware that the chances of levelling the standards allowing a doctor to have a good and decent job are slim. This increases her frustration, and with the conviction that she stands no chance to settle abroad, it intensifies the feeling of entrapment.

Finally, it should be noted once again that in the case of Hanna we are primarily dealing with the initial stage of the trajectory process, that is, the accumulation of potentials of disorder and suffering, sometimes falling into the stage of having to balance the equilibrium. These experiences can be temporary and change their sense under the influence of new life circumstances which would rearrange the current hierarchies of significance and reference systems, overshadowing the pressures of external expectations and constraints.

### **Julia’s life history**

I always thought I didn’t know enough... I still had to learn, I had to [...]. And he [Julia’s friend] showed me I didn’t. People take money even if they can’t do something, they just devote their time, so they work.

Julia, was born in 1984 in Nałęczów (a small town ca. 230 kilometers away from Warsaw) as the penultimate of five of her parents’ children. She graduated from the faculty of political science and sociology in Warsaw. Her biographical experiences constitute another extremely interesting variant of the collision of expected and propagated (in family pedagogues, curricula or public discourse) attitudes and life orientations,<sup>37</sup> which changed dramatically along with the process of political transformation in Poland.

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<sup>37</sup> Referring to the method of autobiographical narrative interview, we can talk here about the different normative and procedural requirements of institutional expectation patterns (cf., Schütze 1981, 1984).

As much as for a socialist social formation based on disciplinary power the pattern of an obedient, amenable, diligent, and zealous man was useful in the “marketized” neo-liberal reality and the “governing through freedom” domination, creativity, flexibility, innovation, self-responsibility, and social commitment are required from the empowered individuals (cf., Czyżewski 2012a: 118, 2012b: 90).<sup>38</sup> The course of Julia’s life history is distinguished by – leading to increasing trajectory potential – disharmony between the zeal gained while in her family home and a lack of self-confidence: the tension between faith in reliable knowledge and the requirements of the external world in which creation of illusion, dramatization of own actions, and creating one’s own image counts (Goffman 1990). However, the paradox in this case is that being a member of the social worlds of trainers and coaches working in favor of “moulding and producing compliant subjects” (Stachowiak 2013: 142) desired in the “knowledge economy” and propagating allegedly inalienable abilities<sup>39</sup> she began to notice the game of appearances in this area, but not so much in the key activities and ideologies of this world as in executive technologies (Strauss 1993: 212). We will return to this issue later.

The interview with Julia took place just before her 30th birthday, which the narrator says herself at the beginning of the 49th page of the transcription.<sup>40</sup> She states that she had earlier talked to her husband Andrzej about taking part in this research and she told him: “well, OK, we will close a certain period of life.” This is an atypical situation of starting an autobiographical narration in a double meaning. First of all, we deal here not so much with the “standard” preamble,

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<sup>38</sup> Moreover, Marek Czyżewski emphasizes that in the conditions of the multifaceted “governmentality” complex a rapid problematization of identity takes place and their fundamentally impermanent and uncertain “social construction”; the term “identity,” which appears only in this syndrome, is often used in scientific discourses (including “sociology of identity”), journalistic and political; in the social sense, the narcissistic focus on one’s own identity may be accompanied, on the one hand, by the fear of permanent identity and, on the other hand, by the sense of the disappearance of identity. The liberation of identity from the obvious, imposed reams and the flexible outline of the preferred identities paradoxically lead to the formation of a limited set of “licensed” identities (“a creative worker,” “an active citizen,” “a responsible parent”) (2012a: 118).

<sup>39</sup> When explaining the concept of coaching, Tomasz Bogolebski writes that: “on the declarative level [...] it is – based on a collaboration and cooperation model – a way to extract their potential from individuals in order to maximize profits (understood broadly and without limiting them – explicitly – only to the financial perspective)” (2014: 180).

<sup>40</sup> The entire translation includes fifty-one pages – 50 lines each. It means that the first part of the interview based on a spontaneous autobiographical narration was extremely long.

in which the narrator usually tries to describe – yet not entirely clearly, even for him- or herself – the general global form of his or her own biography, as with a kind of metacommentary concerning the summary “function” of this event for – and this is the second extraordinary element – their (i.e., Julia and her husband’s) previous life. On the basis of the form of this preliminary statement, we can conclude that to a large extent the course of her life has been shaped together with or in relation to Andrzej, and that undoubtedly he is the key figure of the drama (*dramatis personae*) (Schütze 2008a: 173–174, 182), an important event carrier and the significant Other in the sense of George Herbert Mead (1934).

Julia’s childhood memories revolve mainly around her father’s alcohol problems, which most likely led to the fact that shortly after her birth he lost his job as a construction manager and looked after his little daughter (which, in her opinion, resulted in a much stronger bond between them later in life).<sup>41</sup> At that time, the mother became the main supporter of the family. Three or four years later her father left for France, where his family lived, to look for a job there. The goods brought from there, shaped the image of the West she had – as the land of *milk and honey*.<sup>42</sup> Julia recalls the return of her father from France: “I saw them for the first time in my life, Mars bars, Bounty bars, such tiny ones in the boxes and French cheese [...]” And then she mentions three colorful school backpacks, and how her father talked about “huge areas with shops where you just walk around and you look at them, yes. And there were so many of them and everything was so colorful and you could buy whatever you wanted ((laughing)).” A counterbalance to the colorful world of all sorts easily available goods (of course those important for the child) was the image of the PRL<sup>43</sup> queues “to everything,” in which Julia as a child had only one task “to stand in a line and look at the shop assistants with big eyes, take the goods and come back to the queue again ((laughing)).” This experience of contrast between the sad reality of the real socialist economy and the colorful world of capitalist prosperity may have had its repercussions on the image the majority of contemporary Polish society had of the “betterness” of the Western world and the unproblematic, thoughtless acceptance of its patterns.

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<sup>41</sup> However, one should take into account that in episodes of biographical meaning, or in situations requiring support, the narrator speaks of parents in general terms, and in a while the mother appears to be as an interaction partner, a commenter or a supporter.

<sup>42</sup> It was typical for many people whose childhood fell in the late 80s and the early 90s (cf., for instance memories of Hanna in this chapter).

<sup>43</sup> The Peoples’ Republic of Poland: the post-war Polish republic existing till 1989, economically and politically dependent on the Soviet Union.

An extremely strong and emotional relationship with her grandmother and elderly people in her family is evidenced by the passage in which the narrator talks about the traumatic period in her life related to primary school (further on) and says:

when I look at my life now, the most, the most important was uh the most the most [...] the most difficult time was the time of primary school between '95-'96 when my grandma died. Uhm my grandpa died. And five months later my grandma died and five months later my uncle died. He was the only man with whom I had close relations. And the loss of these three people made my relations with people weren't so deep any longer [...] Actually, I stopped mourning my grandma [...] oh, wait, I think, I haven't yet. And I stopped mourning my uncle last year. And it's strange that their deaths affected the whole family, because it was, you know, like a set [she snaps her fingers], wasn't it? When you get / the only granddad, the only grandma who raised us all and the uncle who was a part of our family.

It should also be mentioned that at that time Julia's parents were building a house for which they "didn't get a loan, but they had to build [it] with the money they had earned. They didn't have time for their children. And later they had to earn money for every renovation of the house." In spite of significantly different political and economic conditions, Julia always tried to keep to the principle that all goods should be bought with the savings, not the money borrowed from the bank.<sup>44</sup> Let us note that the narrator does not problematize, firstly, that obtaining credit in the period of the PRL in the form in which it is presently possible was unrealistic and, secondly, that the work involved parents to such an extent that "they didn't have time for their children."

The first issue – especially in the light of later narrator's decisions – seems particularly interesting, as it is the proof that (leaving aside any assessment) a certain fixed pattern of acting and understanding how the economy works did not undergo profound changes, as the symbolic elites of political system transformation wished for. Let us add that this is just one of several areas in Julia's experience, in which she almost "stiffly" refers to principles internalized in the family which order the world, when she has to face the contemporary free-market reality and the pressure of capitalist rationality.

Let us look at the way the narrator talks about her primary school experience and difficult relations with her peer group, which contributed to the sense of inferiority, lack of recognition, and a sense of isolation. She talks about this period: "and primary school is not easy when you are a good student. I remember I didn't have many friends." This theoretical-argumentative commentary is often repeated

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<sup>44</sup> It is interesting to compare the argumentation of Robert whose case is analyzed in the book (See Chapter XII).

by her as the explanation of a lack of sympathy among classmates and reproduces the simple condition that being considered “nerdy” is associated with lack of acceptance among peers. But, when the narrator mentions enigmatically “in the fifth grade, when there were/ there were strange relations between the girls in my class,” she adds: “some of them laughed at other people’s clothes, that they are poorer which eventually cost her a nervous breakdown.” This suggests another, though not yet under reflection, account of the existing state of affairs. In other words, Julia sees, but does not notice (or does not want to notice) (Garfinkel 2002) other or additional reasons for being disliked and postponed. However, looking at her biography as a whole and applying the procedure of pragmatic refraction<sup>45</sup> these imperceptible conditions can be (partially) uncovered. We already know that the family was large, the mother worked “in budgets,” Julia’s father struggled with an alcohol problem, which probably (as the narrator admits herself) was the reason of his dismissal,<sup>46</sup> he had a tendency to give money away; and when Julia was born, the family moved to a newly built, but not fully finished house. Undoubtedly all this contributed to the significant impoverishment of the family. Julia portrays her parents as those who didn’t spend money on rubbish and the children wore clothes one after another, but perhaps they were just poor at that time. In this perspective, we should look further at Julia’s relationship, in which her desire to be recognized and accepted was devastated in a dramatic way. It is reflected in the analytically significant linguistic phenomena that interrupts the flow of narration – the background construction.<sup>47</sup> It contains a story about her 10th birthday party, at which none of the invited guests showed up. This distant in time event has an unusual emotional charge – recalling it during the interview the narrator begins to cry:<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Mięczysław Marciniak writes: “It means the necessity of analytically binding these formally separate units of expression with those reproduced on the basis of “proper narration” with biographical processes. This allows us to better understand the biographical process itself and sometimes penetrate what is consciously and unconsciously obscured by the narrator, which created deeper sources of tension in the biography – and thus makes it easier to penetrate into the biographical process” (Marciniak 2016: 192).

<sup>46</sup> He was working as a plumber-installer on the construction site which was *strongly allied with alcohol*.

<sup>47</sup> In this passage, a background construction takes the form of a documentary (Belegerzählung), which is to justify the narrator’s claim that *she remembers every purchase of a new thing* (cf., Schütze 1983). In order to do this, the narrator must go back in the chronology of the presented experiences and recall the traumatic event related to the purchase of shoes that she originally wanted to neglect.

<sup>48</sup> Apart from crying, detailed recapitulation, accumulation of pauses, and finally the reconstruction of internal dialogue are the formal markers of the significance of the mentioned event for the overall *Gestalt* of her biography (cf., Schütze 2008a: 206–208).

I remember, I still remember [...] When I was in the fourth grade of primary school my mum let me have a birthday party. [...] And it was the first time I could invite my friends to the party. [...] But, it is such a strong memory, because [...] nobody came (she cries). Mum took me in a car/ [...] we were waiting in front of the school. Nobody came to my party. [...] (she cries) And mum went with me to buy shoes for me and I remember till today what the shoes looked like. [...] But, it is such a memory which, you see, which hurts even today. [...] But, it was a bit like this: it was the fourth grade, I was a good student, so nobody liked me. It was clear and obvious. I was able to say to myself: OK, I can't help it [...] I've got my first new shoes then. They were bought in a very exclusive shop in a sense, you know, it was a shoe shop opposite my primary school. So, I said it was exclusive, because it was. I guess it was in '96. Yeah, it should be? My fourth grade, '95-'96, more or less. And I remember this feeling: "new shoes," Well, you know [...] later I/ you know, I don't have nice memories from primary school. No warm feelings. It was a normal, mainstream school, where you got rejected if you were a good student. You just got rejected. And I couldn't share it at home, imagine what could I say? – that my friends didn't like me?

Let us concentrate on what happened then (her friends didn't come to her birthday party, she was disliked by them) the narrator again explains it referring to the common sense rule: "I was a good student, so nobody liked me." However, we should ask once again if this is the only possible explanation of this situation and whether there were any other reasons for which the classmates disliked Julia. The most likely seems to be, as we have already mentioned above, the negative image of her family in the local community. We can deal here with "the tendency of stigma to spread" (Goffman 1986: 30–31), a situation in which people avoid relationships or completely break up not only with stigma bearers (the parents), but also people from their closest surroundings (Julia) (Goffman 1986: 30–31). However, we can only speculate whether this stigma was related only to poverty, alcoholism, or other factors. Another intriguing issue in the above quotation is how her mother compensates Julia for what had happened. She did not make any attempt to explain this difficult situation of humiliation to her daughter, nor did she suggest how to deal with it emotionally, but she bought her the first in her life new pair of shoes. It will later become Julia's only acceptable form of justifying spending money on new things: a kind of substantive compensation for moral and emotional losses (buying a flat for example would be a reward for the hardships of writing a PhD).

However, coming back to the school period: Julia was in the sports class (according to a quite controversial idea of gathering the best students in it) and she suffered constant failures in this field, which was associated with the incessant experience of humiliation and exclusion: "I was terribly bad and nobody wanted to play with me. They didn't choose me for their teams, and



you know, I couldn't catch the ball at all." She also took part in the mathematical group meetings (she gets there – as a result of the "experimental" educational policy of the early 90s – as a person who cannot cope with mathematics). Here again she was the worst one, but later she did very well in the competence test. Initially, these poignant feelings were reinforced by experience at the music school, to which her parents sent her, when their financial situation stabilized (it was around 1993). The first piano teacher was so horrible that Julia had nightmares and her sense of inferiority increased by being constantly repeated that she was "stupid and hopeless."<sup>49</sup> Fortunately, the next music teacher turned out to be nice, thanks to which the narrator stayed in this school. Today she is convinced that attending the music school allowed her to gain specific skills such as, for example, "the ability to share your attention, to share concentration between things, to do many things simultaneously" and general development in these classes that caused "stimulation of the brain." It is worth asking a question here: if she were not a diligent, hard-working person, with divided attention and managing her time skilfully would she be able to complete the music school? Julia is convinced that the acquired (or rather improved) competences constituted her present knowledge, which can be used to train people in neoliberal virtues such as: entrepreneurship, self-discipline, creativity, innovation, responsibility, or personal development.

The sequence of events in Julia's life brings us to the seventh grade of elementary school and the epicenter of the maturity process. At that time the narrator found a soul mate – a friend with whom she created a tandem as she recalls it: "We were mean bitches [...]. Everyone was afraid of us. And we did what we wanted, you know. I was very much concerned with what others thought of me. But, since they thought bad, I stopped being interested in their opinion. I just did what I did." It becomes clear to us that the main youthful concern of Julia (mitigated slightly only later) was her image in the eyes of others and the fear of failed performances (Riesman 1989, Goffman 1955, 1990, Gergen 2000). So, becoming an adolescent (as most teenagers) she decided to take a rebellious attitude, different from the role of a polite, good student assigned to her so far. Her new identity was first manifested in a vulgar judgmental commentary (we were mean bitches) and then with regard to more and more arrogant or aggressive actions which can be detected in the hints given by her interactive partners ("Everyone was afraid of us"). It was

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<sup>49</sup> She adds: "but, damn it, I've learned to play the piano. I've learned it from her anger [...] I've really learned. [...] And I was pretty good at it, although she kept on repeating I was hopeless." This excerpt is noteworthy because of the specific formal feature of Julia's story: whenever, due to the narrative dynamics, the narrator again experiences situations of humiliation and helplessness or extreme competence uncertainty, her language becomes vulgar.

also a period when Julia's situation in terms of establishing relationships with people began to change significantly: she joined the school's self-government (teachers appreciated her communication skills), prepared discos, fundraising, and she was engaged in voluntary work, because – as she emphasizes – “I liked when something was going on around.” She took part in the competitions in the Polish language, history, but also in physics – she never won any of them. As she comments now she had some successes in science: “didn't prevent me from choosing a class of humanistic profile.”

And that is how Julia went to high school, which she comments: “it was one of the most amazing periods in my life where she met people who wanted to develop, people who appreciated intelligence. People who had crazy ideas, and they realized them.” It seems that she finally found a group of friendly people with whom she shared an interest in rock music and liked (with mutuality) to spend her free time with. She became a member of the social world which was based on the sphere of her authentic inner spontaneity (Schütze 1984). It was only then that her desire “for securing a recognized, enviable, and advantageous social position” (Thomas 1969: 31) was fulfilled. She still went to music school<sup>50</sup> and she was active in volunteering, where she looked after elderly people. Since she was seventeen she spent weekends, holidays, and days off working at a guest house (she found this job herself). She was constantly busy. She was only worried about insufficient knowledge of English, which she realized during the competition organized for high school students from European Union candidate countries. She persuaded her parents to provide her with a very expensive English course.<sup>51</sup> As the narrator claims, education was “the only thing on which my parents didn't skimp money.” It is worth stopping here to pay attention to the parental pedagogy, which was based on a systematic message that education guarantees work, allows for achieving a certain and permanent social position, and thus guarantees stability in life. In its clues and instructions, this message was to prepare for middle class life. That is why they supported their children financially even if it was through a considerable effort. This theme repeats throughout Julia's story, starting from elementary school, when she explains that: “I was quite a good student, because my parents used to repeat education was important. That if I studied hard I'd get/ I'd get a good job. And I believed this illusion ((laughing));” till the time she completed doctoral studies (which we will look at further). Let us take a look at one more principle Julia learned in her family home and, what's important, the principle she mentions talking about the

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<sup>50</sup> Julia graduated from the second degree of music school, to which she had to commute 30km. While she was studying and working in Warsaw, she regularly commuted to her hometown, where she sang in the choir.

<sup>51</sup> Most probably it concerns widely advertised on the Polish market, at the turn of the century, sets (books and CDs) for home language learning.

events of her teenage life: "In general, uh my parents taught me one more thing, namely [...] what you do actually depends on you. And it was/ uh they trusted me a lot." This principle has, however, a hidden implication (common with the rules of "governing through freedom"): it involves taking almost complete responsibility for one's own actions, or at least carries a sense of such necessity. Returning to the period of Julia's high school, we must mention two important issues that affected her whole life. Firstly, she went through a difficult experience with her boyfriend, future husband – Andrzej, who suffered from eating disorders, was emotionally unstable, and had suicide attempts. These problems were later subjected to therapy, but they still have influence on their life. Secondly, she was diagnosed with diabetes, for which she mainly blames stress related to the complicated relationship with Andrzej and extreme fatigue (she was still in a music school, worked in a guest house, volunteered, organized school events and trips). Her attitude of that time towards the disease is expressed by the following statement: "fuck you diabetes, I'm going to live my way anyway. I mean I'm going to do thousands of things, I'm going to be active, and I'll show you I can." As we can see, Julia expected a kind of disorder in everyday life (Riemann, Schütze 1991: 342), which, however, she did not intend to give in to. Most probably it was related to an attempt to trivialize or fade out the destroying trajectory potential (Riemann, Schütze 1991: 349), which increases the feeling of losing control over one's own life and intensifies the threat of exclusion from the normal world of everyday existence (Schütze 2012: 420). The above statement can be read as an attempt to preserve the narrator's active attitude towards her own life and identity, but the vulgarity of language she introduced ("fuck you diabetes") seems to reveal the trajectory of suffering. Vulgarity of the narrator's statements – which we have already noticed – always appears when the recapitulated memories "draw her back to the orientational principles and the emotional mood" (cf., Riemann, Schütze 1991: 342) related to the irritating sense of helplessness and irritability as a result of deepening alienation towards herself. Another empirical evidence for destabilizing trajectory potential of the disease will be obtained by looking at all of Julia's biographical experience. Then it turns out that diabetes forced a specific way of organizing everyday life (especially in terms of meal quality and regularity) or a hierarchy of importance in a modest student budget: (financially) "diabetes killed me, you know. I could spend the money on cigarettes and vodka or insulin. [...] You know, you can either go to a party, to the cinema, or buy insulin. And the strips." Moreover, whenever the narrator disregarded the constraints imposed by the disease and lost herself in stressful and manifold activities, she ended up in hospital "in a rather poor condition." Such a situation took place at the beginning of studies and when she started another commissioned job, this time for a large State-owned company P-Poland. We will come back to the latter situation later.

To sum up this part of the narrator's life course, we can say that from the family home, school, and out-of-school experiences connected with the need to combine activities in general and music school and other social activities, she mastered the ability to save (to manage money in a rational way), self-management, efficient and effective time organization, and the belief in the necessity of constant self-development and civic engagement. The disease increased her ability in self-discipline, resourcefulness and resilience, and – last but not least – awareness of the need to bear (biographical) costs and “optimize” the attitude to herself. At this point, attention should also be paid to seemingly minor details in her statements. Regarding the music school, Julia recalls: “I was a student who learns, but has no talent,” and about her Matura<sup>52</sup> exam (passed in 2003) she says: “one more form of an exam, which we were not prepared for, as it was based on reading texts and understanding them.” In fact these are strong signals related to the narrator's competence uncertainty, lack of self-confidence (evoked and sustained by the teachers), and an error caused by the education reform of that time, which subordinated the education system (in its assumption reflecting objectively the level of education and equalizing students' chances) to the test exams. Leaving aside the assessment of the education system and the direction of its change, we must take into account that Julia passed the Matura exam, and then went to university without being fully prepared to read the texts with understanding and we may risk an assumption she was not prepared for a more abstract way of thinking. The biographical situation of the narrator brings to mind the reflections of Basil Bernstein over the developed code and the restricted code and their relationship with the middle class and the working class respectively (1971).<sup>53</sup> And so, while Julia's origin would indicate a certain – conditioned by her parents' origin – form of the restricted code, in the cases of Hanna and Julia, used as a reference here, we would talk about the developed code. The question arises, how do these speech systems determine the way of understanding the complicated contemporary world of life and influence the way the individuals act? We must leave it unanswered here. However, we can question the reasonableness of such a direction of the reform of the education system, because, contrary to expectations, it still gives an advantage to middle class children (cf., also Zahorska 2009).

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<sup>52</sup> The secondary school exit exam in Poland that must be passed in order to apply to a university.

<sup>53</sup> As a result of harsh criticism (often emerging from misunderstanding), this concept has been repeatedly modified by Bernstein himself. The categories themselves: the restricted code and the developed code, considered mistakenly as evaluators, have become extremely controversial. However, Bernstein wanted to indicate the sources of failure of students with lower socio-economic status and to show why the school system still favors middle class children (Bokszański, Piotrowski, Ziółkowski 1977: 107 and on).

Let us look from this perspective at the sequence of events in the period when the narrator had to choose her studies. Julia talks about the process of making a decision on choosing the faculty:

I was a member of the [youth] Lublin voivodeship sejmik. And we had trips, workshops, meetings, voluntary work, et cetera. It was a great experience. Political studies graduates were our leaders. And I thought it must have been a cool faculty after which people have such a cool job, running these workshops.

Already at the starting point, the narrator shows that in choosing political science she primarily took into account the cool way of communication in the form of training and workshops, not the substantive content of the university's curriculum – “she did not know anything about politics” as she says, she “could learn it thanks to her studies.” Her choice of UKSW<sup>54</sup> reveals also a huge competence of uncertainty: “I was afraid to take entrance exams to UW (University of Warsaw). I thought I was too stupid to go there.” It may be a consequence of Julia's social origins – although her mother completed extra-mural studies after the birth of her first child and both she and her husband – which we have signalled repeatedly – supported the education of their children, they certainly lacked the (Bourdieu 1986, Zarycki 2009) insight in the field of the academy typical for intelligent culture capital. According to their view (at least partially transmitted on Julia), studying was first of all supposed to raise the professional qualifications (translated into life stability and better material situation), and only secondly, if at all, widen cognitive horizons, provide intellectual and moral development of the individual, teach deep reflection on one's own attitudes, and express a critical opinion on the existing social reality (cf., Czyżewski 2009b, Kaźmierska, Waniek, Zysiak 2015). The very way of choosing the field of study shows that for Julia much more important was the external form than substantive content, which could have its source in a variant of the restricted code. However, political science did not fully meet her expectations, and following her friend's advice after the second year of studies, she decided to apply for sociology. This time, having gained some knowledge in the logic of the university's world, she decided to study at the University of Warsaw, where she was admitted under the condition of making up for two years which meant twenty-seven subjects in a year. At that time, she made a strategically important decision: “I'm going to get a scholarship in Political Studies, and actually learn something in sociological studies.” Despite such an aggravating plan of duties, Julia continued to engage in the activities of many youth organizations associated with the idea of developing a democratic state

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<sup>54</sup> UKSW is an acronym for Uniwersytet Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego (Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University) – one of state universities in Warsaw.

(let us remember that these were the years just before and just after Poland's accession to the European Union) both in her home town and in Warsaw. At the end of high school, for example, she started to train for the association operating at the City Council, as she says: "I would say I absolutely don't know why." And she adds that she prepared the first training at the request of one of the officials:

about how to deal with stress. And seven people came to my first training. Among them there were six teachers. So, I had a very demanding group I'd say. I got a real brainwash at the start. But, I managed somehow. Other training I ran was about stress, managing oneself in time, because it was, I mean, it was something that fascinated me.

For our further inquiries, two pieces of information from this part of her autobiographical account seem valuable. First of all, that the beginning of her experience in the field of "selling" so-called soft skills took place without any professional preparation, but most probably on the basis of imitations of training in which she had previously participated in and in relation to the knowledge acquired thanks to pop-psychological tutorials giving the illusion of being an expert. This is an interesting point, because later Julia clearly stigmatized such an attitude, that is, running training based on a minimum knowledge and maximum "art of impression management" (Goffman 1990). Secondly, this event was a turning point, in which the narrator became convinced that she could make a confession, which resulted in (re)creating a sense of personal independence and positive self-identity (Strauss 1969: 89–118).

Coming back to studying, it seems that in sociology the narrator could finally spread her wings: she began to cooperate with a scientific group, she was fascinated by qualitative research, she began to participate in scientific projects that later translated into marketing and image strategies of the university, she was delighted to be working with the team, which she was training in "*soft skills, time management, and knowledge verification*." She also dealt with training of project teams, ran workshops to activate the civic attitude of young people, including the ability to write European projects, and finally she was involved in the Youth Democracy and Self-Government project for a few years. Her understanding of social sciences (political science and sociology) was in line with the dynamics of transformations that Marek Czyżewski follows with concern. He says that contemporary cultural, economic, and political changes are supported by:

A compliant and opportunistic transformation of sociological discourse, which does not focus on a critical analysis of reality, but tries to serve it. In sociology, but also in economics, pedagogy, and many related sciences, there is an avalanche spread of research projects, theoretical considerations, expert recommendations,



and directions of education regarding creativity, responsibility, trust, flexibility, innovation, autonomy, and the like (Czyżewski 2013: 16).

Talking about her educational career again, Julia decided to undertake doctoral studies in political science, which she considered “humiliating and withdrawing in development,” and in her work she intended to combine qualitative sociological research with political science issues. At the same time, she began a two-year work in a research project based on qualitative research. Julia considered the group analysis of the data obtained in it as “a big plus, which in a sense combines quality with training, research with running workshops.” Again, we meet the motive of combining or mixing orders (or, in other words, social worlds, intersecting with all the consequences of this process): the teaching method typical of a traditional “dusty” and “old-fashioned” university and “modern” strategies taken from the field of organization and management when the narrator talks about the possibility, accepted with joy, of running political thought classes as a substitute teacher with students at UKSW:

For me [i.e., a former student] these classes were like this: the seventh page of the eighth text of the thought this and that, you know. So, I said to myself: wait, you’ve got the whole training workshop at hand. Let’s take it and use it in the classes. So, I started group work uh many types of cases. There was work based on Oxford discussions or debates. And uh preparing drafts, schemas, fitting various thoughts in schemas. Sometimes, we worked on a chosen article and we analyzed it on the basis of political thought. And we did other things, you know, what came to my mind.

Again, we deal not only with – in no way problematized – the colonizing of the scientific research language by the language of entrepreneurship and human resource management, but also with admitting uniqueness and priority to certain, in fact, transformed, but developed at universities, forms of education such as debates or workshops. However, she states this experience was of great importance: she was convinced that if she could work at the university and thus fully engage in the world of science, “it would have been like a fairytale and her PhD thesis would be much better then.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Julia was ultimately very disappointed with the supervision of her doctorate: initially her doctoral advisor had only comments on typing and punctuation errors and in no way referred to the content of the thesis. Later, in an almost complete thesis, he noticed only the lack of reference to his publications from the 90s. The narrator assesses it this way: “on the one hand, it was just funny, but on the other hand it was tragic.” And embittered, she adds: “I have a wild impression that nobody – except a friend who made her language correction – read it. I mean, you know, there are many controversial points. My whole professional work. I feel that nobody read it.”

However, it did not happen. Julia, like thousands of doctoral students in Poland, had to work to be able to maintain herself. She carried out commissioned research, conducted various types of trainings, was a research project evaluator at the Warsaw University of Technology, had a small position at the University of Warsaw, in the summer she left for Germany<sup>56</sup> to work as a carer of elderly people, but only in primary school near Warsaw, where she worked for one-third of the full time teacher of social studies, she had an employment contract. In this sense, Julia became the victim of an external structural lack of possibility of full, long-term, and stabilizing employment. In this sense, she suffers from precarity (Standing 2011). Jan Sowa defines it as:

the state of uncertainty, consistency, and stability is the chronic impossibility of predicting the future and constant fear that it will bring only a worsening of the current situation. It is the condition of the fragile and uncertain existence which is experienced by a large part of the world's population, also in the countries of the capitalist center. It concerns people who are temporarily unemployed, living on casual or undeclared employment, employed for short-term contracts, migrating in search of income, working part-time or forced to sign in blanco a notice of termination together with a contract of employment (a practice quite common in large corporations). It means a life full of uncertainty and difficult to plan, a life in which you have to change not only your workplace, but also your profession, and even the best position can be lost from day to day (Sowa 2010).

This situation – contrary to what the narrator's parents assumed – also affects people, such as Julia, young and of high educational resources (Mrozowicki 2017: 42). This unstable and precarious condition – which Adam Mrozowicki pays special attention to – is surprisingly often normalized, that is, considered obvious and not subject to problematization, or not always consciously, rationalized (cf., Mrozowicki 2016).

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<sup>56</sup> The comparison of the money earned by a physical laborer in Germany with the “scraped up,” very low income of a white-collar worker in Poland was a source of depression for Julia. She comments: “Thanks to the work in Germany I could save some money. When I came back I could buy a computer. It was quite interesting, you know, the difference between how much you could earn in Poland for hard intellectual work, where you really needed a lot of knowledge and experience, and how much you could earn in Germany cleaning floors and making dinners. / it was [...] I think I was in the second year of my PhD studies [...] So this difference shocked me.” This contributed to re-contesting the career path she had chosen. Luckily, later she took part in a conference in Great Britain and got to know another way of doing science, related to the fact that at the university “you just talk about the methodology of how to do science, and you do not actually talk about how you do it.” This restored the sense of her efforts in completing her doctorate studies.

Characteristics of work precarization, dynamics of its course, as well as the way of impacting the whole human life in its essence is extremely often the experience of the trajectory of suffering. It takes the form of a trap set by overwhelming external structural forces. Their impact paralyzes the individual's actions to undertake or implement long-term biographical plans, exhausts its physical and psychological forces, and finally makes it apathetic and unable to engage life energy in any counteracting of cumulative disorder dynamics. In the case of Julia, firstly we deal with the phase of the trajectory of strong attempts to maintain the unstable balance and, secondly with a vicious circle of interaction of the trajectory resulting from a difficult position on the labor market and her and her husband's chronic illnesses, which significantly worsens her life situation.

Let us note the narrator's experience when the only mainstay that gave her a sense of stability, supporting the fragile construction of life (an employment contract in a primary school) was shaken. However, it is necessary to mention that for Julia the work at school was a huge organizational effort: first of all she had to commute 20km, and secondly she had to write it into her busy schedule. At first, she treated this job too idealistically and she collided with a disappointing reality, as many beginner teachers do:

I always had such an idea / because as I was writing a thesis in political science, it turned out that it is really bad to teach social studies and kids knowledge about how the country and the society function, their own role in society is none. And I had such a fixed idea to be a great teacher, and that I would prepare people for being active. And it turned out that I won't, because there's the school curriculum the head teacher watches me. And I, the kids don't want to do anything. And all my attempts to encourage them to be active, maybe not all, many of my attempts to encourage them to be active failed.

Despite the difficulties mentioned above and the initial disappointment, Julia worked as a passionate, loved-by- her- students, and respected-by-their- parents teacher for three years – that is, till the headmaster indiscriminately decided to change her employment contract to a commissioned work contract. In this way he destroyed her biographical action scheme,<sup>57</sup> made just after her

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<sup>57</sup> The biographical action scheme (or plan) is one of the ways of experiencing events in life in Schütze's concept. It takes its origin in impulses from the inner sphere of the spontaneity of an individual and takes the form of a long-term plan in which both the goal and the manner of its implementation are of an autonomous nature. This structure is expressed by the systematic and active attitude of an individual to his/her own identity of the "I" and the world of life (Schütze 1981, 1983, 1984, 2008a, 2008b, Prawda 1989, Kaźmierska 2016).

marriage to Andrzej (which took place a few months earlier) – namely becoming a mother. The narrator herself says: “I really needed to plan my life somehow, you know.” She felt not only cheated, but also extremely aggrieved: just after leaving the headmaster’s office she just burst into tears. Again, without her fault, she had to revise the concept of her life and postpone her motherhood for later. Admittedly, Julia’s decision coincides with the strategies of Polish women described, for example, by Anna Matysiak, which in general may be expressed by the formula “job position comes first and only then a baby” (2009),<sup>58</sup> however – as we have already mentioned – an additional aspect that must be taken into account while considering the temporary suspension of parenthood by Julia (made by the narrator herself), and that is the trajectory of her (and her husband’s) illness intensifying the feeling of uncertainty and anxiety. It should be also mentioned that since the beginning of studies in Warsaw, after a short episode of renting a flat with friends, until the time of completing her doctorate, Julia lived in a dormitory. Every now and then she shared it with her partner Andrzej, who overcoming some obstacles (related to his psychological state at that time) eventually graduated from ethnology, and later – basing on skills springing from his passion and not knowledge – he got a job in a company that sells professional music equipment. In the segment preceding the coda (pre-coda segment), the narrator speaks about the purchase of a flat (of course without a bank loan, but thanks to the huge effort of long-term systematic savings supported by loans from family and friends) which stabilized her biographical situation and set her in a positive, optimistic mood typical of a biographical action scheme, here in the form of a “nest building” (see excerpt below). If we make the life course of their acquaintances a reference frame, the decision that ended her and her husband’s long-term “wandering” was made relatively late. Julia says: “And you know, all friends of mine already had flats. All of them. It was so depressing, a lack of the feeling of safety and comfort, fucking shit.” This prolonged the terrible period of living in a dormitory, however, the narrator rationalizes referring to the current situation of many of her colleagues who “took credits in the boom [...] and now have credits amounting to 600–800,000. In euros or in Swiss francs.” First of all, Julia states that they are not jealous of this situation, and secondly, she is glad Andrzej decided to “wait for

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<sup>58</sup> To determine how much these strategies result from the imposed institutional pattern of expectations, and how much the intentional plan of action or the mutual interactions of both of these process structures a subtle and sophisticated analysis would be required. Ryszard Szarfenberg is right in stating that there are many hypotheses that recognize a decrease in fertility of women in precarious work conditions (2016: 11). However, it should not be forgotten that the family planning, so strongly subordinated to the work was possible when the issues subjected mainly to fate began to be controlled.

a while.” Eventually, as she emphasizes: “We didn’t get into debt like idiots. We had our own contribution and we could have some loans on quite good conditions [...], but I’ve got the feeling of safety, I mean, you know, nobody will take the flat away from me.”<sup>59</sup> This balance, however, has an incomplete or shaky character conditioned by work instability, illness, and above all the need of suspending a strong desire to become a mother. Let’s look at the narrator’s statement:

And you know, I’m happy that I could buy a flat. It’s essential. And here further problems appear concerning having a baby with not being permanently employed. I’m 30, I’ve got diabetes, and I should have had a baby three years ago. I finally have the place to raise it in. But, I have no physical possibility to do so because I don’t have a private business, only a start-up. So, in fact nobody would pay ZUS<sup>60</sup> premiums for me. I’d be happy to pay them by myself, but I can’t. According to our law I may be self-employed, but I’m not sure if I want to do that.

In light of this statement, it is worth looking at a certain event in Julia’s life, which illustrates – as it was pointed out earlier – the unexpected necessity of undergoing the dynamics of diabetes. It seems, it took control of her life, especially when she ceased to look after herself when she had too much work and too many duties. Such a situation happened shortly after Julia had received a job as a trainer at P-Poland:

When I started working for P-Poland, at the end of May I felt terribly bad. We had a lot of work. Actually, I worked 12–16 hours a day. And at that time I was finishing writing my PhD thesis, doing three projects, you know, I needed to earn money to pay for the refurbishing of the flat. We had already bought the flat in April. And I had a health breakdown. I had food poisoning. It destabilized the sugar levels and as a result of this my kidneys stopped functioning. I realized that after five days. It was a free day so we went to a GP. She said: Don’t worry, it’s only food poisoning. Take this and that and it will be better. It wasn’t, I went to hospital for an emergency, they kept me for 6 hours. I had my tests done, et cetera. And the doctor said: Your kidneys aren’t working, you have to go to a nephrologist. The next day he let me go home with some medicine. I went home. My mother-in-law is a nurse and when she saw me she said: Julia you look bad. It turned out I was all swollen and I weighed eight kilos more. Eight kilos of water. My kidneys stopped working and I was taken to hospital in Lublin. I didn’t go to work. When I didn’t work there was no money. And they didn’t pay me for the whole month. I mean they paid me only for two days. And I didn’t get a bonus.

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<sup>59</sup> To some extent they represent an anti-consumption attitude and the minimalist lifestyle (Dopierała 2017).

<sup>60</sup> The Polish Social Insurance Institution.

Because it is granted on the basis of questionnaires results. And I didn't have any questionnaires because I didn't do any training. So, I didn't get a bonus as well. I really have nothing against paying ZUS premiums. If somebody would like to employ me on a permanent contract I would start up a business, because as I say if we want to have a baby we have no other option taking into account the character of my work, the way I function, my diabetes.

This passage shows clearly that – in addition to employment instability and, consequently, income – in her plans to have children, Julia had to take into account many interrelated factors, in particular the disease that could unexpectedly disorganize her routines of everyday life. It can be assumed that given the current situation, the narrator very cautiously tried to keep a minimum of social and financial security. She took into account all “for” and “against” in a manner typical for implementation of the biographical scheme of action, considered alternative paths, and possible biographical consequences. To sum up, the narrator's life is a continuous, often parallel interaction of two process structures: an intentional biographical action scheme and a paralyzing (double) trajectory. Admittedly, the dynamics of suffering had a recessive, receding character, but its destabilizing potential constantly influenced the organization of everyday reality.

It should be stressed again that the period of Julia's studies and subsequent entry into the labor market fell in the period of a dynamic transition from the socialist social formation to the capitalist free market economy, which is based on principles other than those internalized in the family ordering the world of everyday experience, other life orientation models or other personal patterns (Schütze 2012: 440–441, see footnote 22). Although, the narrator was familiar with neoliberal values in her thinking, the conviction persisted that, even in work based on communicative skills and interactive work knowledge is most important, and techniques of presenting yourself and manipulating impressions remain in the background (Goffman 1990). Her conviction – repeated consistently (rooted by her parents) at many points of the rendering – expressed by the formula: “if I learn well, I'll gain knowledge, then I'll get a good job” has been severely verified by the mechanisms of the capitalist economy. At first, Julia did not understand the rule according to which “knowledge,” in her opinion – still insufficient, can be sold. An idea suggested by a friend to earn from training is commented as follows: “I always thought I didn't know enough... I still had to learn, I had to [...]. And he showed me I didn't. People take money even if they can't do something, they just devote their time, so they work.” This excerpt shows not only other “recognition” rules that exist in the field of training and projects, but once again, Julia's enormous competence uncertainty. The narrator talks about this issue again in the coda ending her biographical recapitulation (we will return to it in a while), which shows the importance of this problem in



her life and her personal identity. Analyzing the principles of the contemporary Polish labor market in the theoretical commentary she reveals that: it favors not so much those who have knowledge (but who are also aware of its shortage), as those of great confidence. As she says: “unaware incompetence is worth much more than aware incompetence” (see also the excerpt of the coda cited below). On the other hand, promotion of attitudes and skills required by the capitalist free market economy gave Julia great satisfaction, especially when – as in the passage quoted below regarding the trainings for P-Poland – she felt that as an “engineer of souls” she put someone’s life on the right track:

But, the work is amazing. I work with people from the tool-room, people from the roundhouse, with people who have never had any training, ever. At my last training a man with 35 years of working experience in telecommunications came and he said with tears in his eyes: Julka, I’ve been working here for 35 years now, and it’s the first time in my life somebody’s taught me something. I realized a few things which have always influenced my work. And I’ve learnt it here with you. Thank you very much for this. I’m sure I’ll call you and I’ll want to meet you again. Thank you very much you’ve let me develop.

This excerpt seems to confirm Julia’s thoughtless, even missionary faith in the content and sense of coaching and training in the field of communication. However, we already know that she assessed very critically the behavior of many people working in this industry. This leads us to the conclusion that she saw fiction and deception in the way of “selling” knowledge of specific competences necessary in a free market economy, but its essence, functions, or usefulness have never been questioned by her – quite the contrary, she treated them as an inalienable element of contemporary people. In this part of Julia’s story, we find many symptomatic terms typical of the institutional pattern of action, which, on the one hand, seduces thanks to the opportunities offered, and on the other hand imposes the obligation to give it energy, mind, and soul. In other words, her criticism and resentment never concerned “what” she sells, but only “how” it is sold; for example, not that the content of “knowledge” about stress management is a banal commercial “releasing” of common sense knowledge, but that it is conveyed by people with poor knowledge while being full of faith in themselves and their presentation (Goffman 1990). It is not possible to decide whether it is due to their carelessness or cynicism, but we should ask whether a contemporary (postmodern) world does not just sell one illusion after another illusion, appearance after appearance, or fraud after fraud? (cf., Baudrillard 2005).

Again, what Julia sees and evaluates, and what she does not notice and what she regards as obvious makes us perceive her biography as an intense process of clashing values and attitudes socialized in childhood (and in the system of

real socialism) with neoliberal virtues (Czyżewski 2009a). Looking at it in this way, one may risk the statement that what was defined in the public discourse – recalling the words of Andrzej Piotrowski – as the abolition of anti-order and restoration of order, in individual life history (or certain areas of experience) could be perceived conversely: as a transition from values to anti-values. In the case discussed here and in the narrator's opinion it would be a transition from solid, deepened knowledge to theatrical ignorance cover, or in other words, from a game that goes according to certain rules known to all participants, in which every player can use the instructions he needs. To sum up, in the course of biographical work during the interview, the narrator discovers that the knowledge and acquired life orientations in fact became counterproductive to the requirements of the contemporary complex world of work, which largely limited the possibility of giving personal meaning to her professional experience and became a life trap.

This issue is particularly visible in the coda, which is one of the key cognitive figures of autobiographical narrative interview, where the informant usually summarizes and evaluates the course of his/her own life history and tries to determine whether the decisions made by him/her and which follows the chosen development path were correct. Most often, it closes the biographical work, the key element of which is not only to think about the past, but also a prudent look into the future (cf., Schütze 1984, 2008a, 2008b). In Julia's case – what should be noted – this closure does not take place, and the coda looks like this:

The joy of having your own flat is incredible. You sit on the floor. When we moved in there was nothing there, only the bathroom, nothing else. You sit on the floor and you think: God, at last I've got the place I may come back to, where I can come and sit down. And I don't have to move every year. Change places, apply for students' hostels, wait to get the room, move from one room to another, you know. The good thing was we didn't have many belongings. We were moving constantly, so there were not many things left. We haven't bought a lot. We've got eight plates, we've got all the mugs as gifts. We use the cutlery used by the people who used to live here before us. [...] My parents say that for them my life seems to be very difficult. They can't understand it. They want to make our life easier, so my mum brings all the lamps and sheets, and she always brings some food. She says for her everything was easy. She graduated from school, went to work in the meantime she got married, she got pregnant, started her studies, had a baby, then she had the second baby, she completed her studies, they started building the house. And you know, everything was easy then. They had work and the feeling of safety. And when she hears what I tell her, that I don't have a job, that nobody will sign a permanent work contract with me, that everything I do is on the basis of a deal, I mean, now you do this and that and we'll pay you this much. Such a system promotes people who are self-confident about their

skills and knowledge. In fact, not necessarily they really can do something, but they think they can, and that's enough. And they will earn more than those who are aware of their incompetence. If you know you're not an expert yet you are in a worse position than a person who is unaware of his incompetence. Unaware incompetence is worth much more than aware incompetence. You know, I mean this conviction: I can do it, I am able to do everything, why not? OK. That's it. Enough. Isn't it too much. I've talked too long.

Bringing her story to an end, the narrator talks about stabilizing and emotionally positive experiences connected with having her own "place on earth" (the flat) being in fact, the only factor stabilizing her unstable life situation. But having in the head a "fresh" overall picture of her biographical experience, not so optimistic in all dimensions, the narrator must place an additional comment that breaks the coda.<sup>61</sup> Interestingly, she evaluates her life looking at it from the outside – from the point of view of her parents, who (especially mother) compare their own biography (linear predictable career based on well-defined achieved identities) with their daughter's life history ("ragged" professional career simultaneously interweaving many paths of various temporary jobs, filled with uncertainty and anxiety caused by a vague identity). Let us note that this "mediated" reference to her whole life means that the narrator is not able to directly summarize and assess the course of her own biography – and thus carry out (looking into the future) a full biographical work. She would have to refer to problematic areas of her life and admit to the interviewer and, above all, to herself that she is unable to cope with difficulties in establishing and implementing future life plans in a cognitive and emotional sense and, therefore, she has been placed in a destabilizing situation of suspension (limbo). To say it in other words: Julia makes an effort to push back from herself the need to work on the destructive potential of an unstable career, which determines and limits her decisions in the private sphere. Since

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<sup>61</sup> An autobiographical recapitulation should end with a sequence that puts off the narrator's memories and leads him/her to the "here and now" of the interview and then a closing statement "and that would be all" usually occur. However, if his/her experiences were extremely difficult or painful, then before the final expression, a theoretical and argumentative commentary (in which the biographical manager attempts to close his biographical work) appears (it is often extensive). In such a case we talk about a split-coda, which is an important interpretation indicator. It provides the empirical evidence that, firstly, one of the process structures in the narrator's whole life was the trajectory of suffering and, secondly, that he/she either got over it and tries to present his/her own attempts to go through its dynamics theoretically and practically, or – if the explanations, assessments, or justifications appearing in it have a chaotic, foggy, ambiguous character – reveals an inability to close the biographical work, and thus still strong in his/her current life situation suffering experience.

making the forced abandonment of motherhood plans, the object of reflection could be too painful and considering that existing opportunities would expose the overwhelming situation of the trap.

Finally, once again the concept of social worlds should be considered as an alternative to multi-jobbing and precarious work approach or to the discourse of late modernity prevailing in social sciences (e.g., Beck 2005, Castells 1996, 1999, Giddens 1991). It is worth looking at Julia's biography and trying to consider her life situation from the perspective of belonging to different social worlds, which are competing, conflicted (but demanding loyalty of those involved), have different sources of meaning, use different logic and the criteria of authenticity. In the contemporary complex world, as Schütze writes, the biographical horizon of the sense takes the form of bricolage, which can lead to many important problems resulting from discrepancies, contradictions, or mutual devaluation of meanings related thematically to fragmentary biographical orientations and a lack of credibility of the general structure consisting of these fragmentary thematic orientations: which means it can lead to chaos in biographical work (Schütze 2002). He also adds that disputes about the authenticity of actions or moral standards, collisions of interests, constant processes of segmentation, and budding, struggle for symbolic and material resources within the social world itself, as well as external disputes make them lose their approximate power and the function of making sense of an individual's biography.

Julia – a political scientist and sociologist has (unconsciously) become an expert orientated to “producing disciplined – and even self-disciplining – subordinates” (Scott 2016). Her work was about “producing” creative individuals capable of managing themselves and their time, controlling stress, working in a team, and writing and evaluating projects. To put it briefly, being herself a product of the discourses of governmentality, she reproduced them and – thanks to her missionary activity (as a trainer running trainings and courses, but also as a university lecturer) – she contributed to their strengthening and development. However, she herself fell victim to this form of exercising power, whose external conditions, interweaved with the internal dynamics of her life, significantly began to limit further positive development of her life history. Many of Julia's experiences – as shown by the analysis of her autobiographical statement – bear the trajectory traits: being overwhelmed by many diverse professional duties, chronic instability, and uncertainty of the current life situation, a feeling of pressure from employers and dependence on their “goodwill,” or finally the necessity of suspension her life plans (motherhood). Her education was acquired at the expense of hard work, for which she paid with a lack of acceptance (at least at the elementary school level) and many sacrifices does not translate into the expected social status, prestige,

or – last but not least – financial profit. The promise of stabilization becomes an illusion. The biographical scheme of the narrator's work is constantly being suspended, which leads her to abandoning biographical work – if she consciously takes it up it would be a threat the ominous truth could confirm, and that every year it becomes more and more complicated or even unrealistic. Biographical structures in the current life situation do not guarantee a fully positive development of the biography and are in fact a trap threatening the autonomous development of identity.

Actually, Julia's story shows growing uncertainty and confusion resulting from the overwhelming arrangement of various social worlds, where participation, it should be noted, is the consequence of either institutional expectation patterns (e.g., various only money-making job worlds), biographical action plans (e.g., the social world of academy, non-governmental organizations, the world of trainers and coaches), and the trajectory of suffering (e.g., the social world of medicine). It can also be said that an increasingly intense feeling accompanying the narrator of being pushed as a consequence of both precarian and precarious life situations (Scharfenberg 2016) resulting from the special configuration of her own and her husband's trajectory of illness (Riemann, Schütze 1991, Schütze 2012) and unstable, multi-format employment forms. Thus, her autobiographical account is not a story about the path to success, but about continuous efforts to maintain the state of unstable equilibrium (Riemann, Schütze 1991, Schütze 2012 [1995]), controlling (often excluding) logic and moral standards of different social worlds and attempts to remain (at least to a minimal extent) loyal to each of them, as well as the constant necessity to suspend her own biographical plans, which require huge amounts of physical and emotional work, and bring the potential of an unexpected breakdown of an everyday life organization (Riemann, Schütze 1991, Schütze 2012 [1995]).

Finally, it is worth noting that in many life stories collected in the *Experience of the Process of the Transformation in Poland* project we will find different variants and modalities of a specific belief in the power of education and self-development as a necessary element (success-oriented) of managing one's biography. This belief is quite common, and although it is particularly clear among the narrators born in the 1980s, it can also be found in the stories of people from earlier decades. An example would be the narrative of Czesia (1964) a nurse by profession. The institutional pattern of activity imposed by the changes in the healthcare system has pushed her and, it seems, most people practising this profession, to a precarious situation.<sup>62</sup> The narrator, together with

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<sup>62</sup> It should be noted, however, that in this sector the situation is very dynamic and that maybe today (three years after the interview) Czesia's professional situation is much more stable and financially better.

a group of friends, used adaptive strategies, “anticipating,” efficiently preparing for subsequent restructuring in the healthcare system, which imposed on them the raising of professional qualifications. For this reason, she completed several post-graduate studies and successfully took up the model of life-long learning, thus inscribing herself in the framework of (post)modern society described here, requiring constant (self-)development and a sense of responsibility for her own career. When undertaking this game, Czesia became a “post-graduate collector” and, although she was open to education, at the same time she admitted that most of her studies were fictitious and in fact (with one exception) in no way enriched her knowledge. The way she tells the story (whose detailed analysis goes beyond the scope of this text) clearly shows that it is a kind of “game” in which the stake is to meet the institutional requirements, and the “reward,” on the one hand, are social relations (nice time with a peer group – friends with whom she enrolls on subsequent studies) and collective action (Czesia tells the story usually in the first person plural – we), and on the other, a sense of efficient “management of post-graduate studies” and the creation of a “culture” of postgraduate studying.

## Conclusions

Discussing the concept of trajectory, Fritz Schütze showed that it gives us “the possibility of analytical and systematic illumination of the night, the dark side of social reality” (Schütze 2012 [1995]: 452), which is disregarded and often even neglected in the area of sociology (also by the one related to the interpretative paradigm). Following this belief, the purpose of this chapter was to draw attention to and sensitize the reader to the “non-rationalist and not oriented on normative certainty of expectations concepts of interaction, situation, biography and identity, action [...] of social worlds, and processes of social change” (Schütze 2012 [1995]: 453).

The lifestories discussed above have shown that the resources of huge potentials of suffering are hidden behind the “incompatibility” of patterns of behavior offered by parents rooted in a certain system of values and setting specific biographical expectations for orientation systems typical of modern complex societies and the logic of the neoliberal labor market. Both of these sources of external pressure seem to block the biographical search lines and limit the autonomy of action. Paradoxically, however, the family is not only a force that determines a specific line of biographical development, but also a kind of “safety valve” that allows the easing of tensions resulting from the oppressive conditions of functioning on the free market thanks to emotional and financial support. The minimal difference in Julia’s experience is that while the institutional pattern of expectations directed Hanna and Inga’s actions to the continuation of the economic and social position of the parents, in her case it was about her improvement.



It is worth noting one more time how exceptionally fragile and brittle the arrangement of various “systems” and jobs seems to be in all three cases – in Inga’s it is primarily due to the “natural” precariousness of her profession, in Hanna’s resulting from the necessity of multiple forms of employment, and in Julia’s because of the need to combine a series of temporary and uncertain jobs to maintain a minimum of financial security. Maintaining both mental and physical balance seems extremely exhausting in this situation and can lead to uncontrolled biographical “shocks” (breakdown of self-orientation and organization of everyday life) (breakdown of self-orientation and organization of everyday life). Thus, analyzing the experiences of the narrators, we could see how neoliberal mechanisms promoting or even forcing continuous (self-) development, rationality and responsibility for one’s own actions systematically create a situation of a biographical trap and disorder in everyday life (see: Czyżewski 2013: 22). It became clear that within the defined social and biographical framework, the need to cope with the pressures of being efficient and creative can trigger the trajectory of the suffering process. As a result of its absolute dynamics, the neoliberal “values” take the form of “anti-virtues.” And thus, for example, the sense of agency turns into passivity, activity into apathy, creativity into powerlessness or paralysis, rationality into irrationality, resourcefulness, helplessness, autonomy into a sense of dependence on unspecified external forces, trust into fear and the feeling that you can no longer rely on yourself, flexibility into a sense of a shrinking world and limited possibilities of action, openness into isolation, et cetera.

Finally, when comparing the experiences of Inga, Hanna, and Julia referring to Europe as a certain mental space, it is worth paying attention to the different consequences they lead to. For Inga, connecting the Polish and Dutch art worlds seems to open new spaces for artistic cooperation and opportunities for action. Even if artists arriving from the West are attracted to the peripheral or cultural difference of Central Europe, there is still room for fruitful cooperation and, above all, liaison work (Hughes 1972: 303 et seq.). For Hanna, the civilizational achievements of the West in terms of care for the patient and the elderly (Denmark) or in terms of working conditions and a doctor’s remuneration (England) are an unattainable ideal contrasting with the belated modernization and social backwardness of Poland. Finally, for Julia, it is the possibility of a quick “injection of cash” (incomparable to any of her work in Poland), which her physical summer job consisting of taking care of seniors in Germany brings. Thus, as a mental space, Europe allows Inga to control the trajectory by initiating a biographical pattern of action and implementing her own life plans in the sense of “connecting worlds” in the artistic sphere. While for Hanna it is an example of a model health system, yet unattainable in Poland, which intensifies her frustration and bitterness. For

Julia, she is able to maintain a certain minimum standard of living which she cannot achieve as a well-educated woman in Poland.

It is also worth emphasizing that materials collected using the autobiographical narrative interview method as part of the *Transformation...* project showed multidimensionality and multilevelness of individual experiences of systemic transformation in Poland intertwined with rapid modernization and globalization processes. They proved that subjectively seen and experienced new or changing opportunity structures<sup>63</sup> offered both at micro and macro (including discursive) levels in individual experiences may not only have positive consequences, but also lead to a biographical disappointment or even a trap. Consequently, the analyzed life histories deny the common schematic and stereotyping distinctions, which entails discrediting those who – in the conditions of “governing through freedom” – have not become enterprising enough to face the necessity of “taking life into their own hands.” And as Ulrich Bröckling says: “Forcing people to develop their own individuality also means that ultimately they are to blame for their failures” (Bröckling 2016: 5). The three life histories discussed, however, show a certain and yet not that rare modality of the dynamics of experience based on the maximum use of biographical potential of an individual by the neoliberal labor market in its Polish version. This becomes possible due to the strong alluring embedded mechanisms that obscure (or expose it only to economic logic) other areas of the individual’s life, as well as thanks to the commonly promoted and accepted, by virtue of a taken-for-granted necessity for empowerment.

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<sup>63</sup> See the chapter on *Transforming opportunity structures...* in this book.