

Bologna process and neurohype: Current challenges to critical psychology in Germany

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Abstract

Reports on ‘critical psychology’ in Germany usually start with the 1970s, the ‘Golden Era’ of critical thinking in German psychology departments, and tell a story of decline and defeat. Two events recently added another chapter to this story: The so called Bologna process initiated by the European Union to make academic standards and degrees more comparable throughout Europe and the institutionalization of experimental neuroscience. In the light of this story of decline the persistence of those who continued teaching and organizing critical psychological thinking over the years as well as the uncounted student activities on this behalf seem like a Quixotian endeavor. The author asks whether the notion of defeat is adequate according to recent events and useful regarding future developments. The impact of the Bologna process and the neurohype on the status of academic institutionalization of critical psychology in Germany is contrasted with observations from growing student activity. Finally, future prospects of critical psychology in the German context are discussed.

Keywords: Bologna process, reductionism, neuroscience

Reports on ‘critical psychology’ in Germany usually start with the 1970s, and the years following the student uprising of 1967/68 are spoken of as the ‘Golden Era’ of critical thinking in German psychology departments. Within this narrative, for any following decade –starting with the late 1980s– a story of decline and defeat is told (see, for example, Mattes, 1988, p. 58; Held, 2006; Rexilius, 2008). By framing the history in this manner an implicit understanding of ‘critical psychology’ is transported, which connects critical thinking in psychology to the critique of fascism, authoritarianism and capitalism developed by the student movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s (see Markard, 2009, pp. 22f.; Rexilius, 1988b, pp. 7f.). During this time the societal role of Psychology, its practices and its conceptual foundations got intensely scrutinized. The story line also emphasizes biographical experiences of those who were involved in the critical psychology movement and the struggle for its institutionalization: In their personal stories the protagonists –although most of them are far from romanticizing the 1970s– unanimously single out the revolutionary atmosphere of this period (see, for example, Rexilius, 2008). According to these testimonials, in the late 1960s and early 1970s debates on political and sexual liberation met an unprecedented enthusiasm to contribute to human emancipation with every tool at hand. Critical theory became just one of those tools. In the 1980s, most of these protagonists of the early years made the experience of being excluded from academic careers or their works being ignored by their established peers. Finally, in the 1990s a feeling of defeat started to spread.

In correspondence with these personal experiences the conceptual and political opposition of critical psychology to academic psychology and neoliberal politics is also central to this narrative: Initiated and conducted by students and young scholars, only a handful of established scientists supported the endeavor of a critical revision of psychology in the 1970s.

In an analysis on the impact of the student movement on German academic psychology Peter Mattes names Klaus Holzkamp and Peter Brückner as the most influential established psychologists who joined in with the students' critique. But critical psychology always remained in a marginalized position in academic psychology in Germany (Mattes, 1985, pp. 307f.). From the point when the student movement declined, it immediately faced a series of attempts to shut down their institutional basis. In the 1970s and 1980s these attacks were dominated by anticommunist propaganda and occupational bans for the public service sector (for the situation at the Free University Berlin see Mattes, 1988, p. 58). Towards the end of the 1980s and during the 1990s and 2000s financial arguments replaced the political ones. Under the neoliberal doctrine, which reached West German politics on higher education around the mid 1980s and continued to dominate it after the 1990s all over Germany, funding cuts were enforced. In the departments of psychology the institutional basis of critical approaches was hit first and almost exclusively (see Held, 2006).¹ Retiring academic personal was not replaced, and without post-doc opportunities young scholars faced additional obstacles to pursue an academic career. In addition, since the late 1990s new funding regulations favored those who were able to attract private funding, forcing researchers into projects with high potential for commercialization. In the light of this story of decline the mere existence of critical approaches in academic psychology as well as in psychological practice today seems like a miracle. And the amazing persistence of those who continued teaching and organizing critical psychological thinking over the years as well as the uncounted student activities on this behalf seems like a Quixotian endeavor.

Two events recently added another chapter to this story: The first is the so called Bologna process initiated by the European Union to make academic standards and degrees more comparable and compatible throughout Europe; the second is the unprecedented fast institutionalization of experimental neuroscience and its spreading into departments of psychology (which I henceforth will refer to as 'neurohype'). Both of these events were experienced as a major threat by those who engage in critical psychology today.

In the following, I will discuss whether the notion of defeat is adequate according to recent events and useful regarding future developments. For this, I will first specify very shortly what I mean with critical psychology in the German context. Then, I will outline some of the impacts of the Bologna process and the neurohype on the status of *academic* institutionalization of critical psychology in Germany. I am aware that this focus excludes various forms of institutionalization in areas of psychological practice, in therapy training institutes or in non-academic research institutes. Psychologists outside the academic context may even shape most of the everyday life experiences with psychology and therefore has a huge impact in how psychology is perceived in society. But as the next generation of psychologists is always almost exclusively trained by those working in universities, academic institutionalization is an important indicator for future directions of the discipline. Finally, I will summarize some debates and observations concerning the future prospects of critical psychology in the German context.

What is 'critical psychology' in the German context?

When contributing to a second round of reports on critical psychology from all over the world, it is inevitable to revisit the first report on critical psychology in the German context

¹ A similar development took place in other disciplines, for example in the political sciences and in sociology. However, during the same period under the term "gender studies" feminist approaches at the intersections of sociology, political science, cultural studies and history expanded.

published in an earlier issue of this journal (see Held, 2006). In his article Josef Held outlined the development and state of the art of institutionalization of critical psychologies in Germany and Austria. He thereby used a wide definition of critical psychology assembling more or less all branches of psychology “beyond the mainstream.” By making the outsider position a main characteristic, the questions raised is: what is the common ground of all these ‘other’ psychologies?. In reference to the self-definition of mainstream psychology and its focus on experimental and statistical methods within a positivist framework, Held answers this question by referring to certain methods and the relationship critical psychology has towards them: Critical psychology, according to this definition, is characterized by its opposition to quantitative-experimental psychology and its affinity to qualitative and subject-oriented methods. This includes approaches which call themselves ‘critical’, so, for example, the Critical Psychology developed by Holzkamp and others (in German 'Kritische Psychologie' with a capital K, in the following referred to as ‘Critical Psychology’), and various branches of critical thinking in psychology influenced by the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, Freudo-Marxism, social constructivism, postmodernism, feminist and postcolonial theory, poststructuralist thinking and similar approaches (in German 'kritische Psychologie' with a small k). In addition, Held lists as well political psychology, activity psychology (the socio-historical school), action theory psychology, discursive psychology, phenomenological psychology and qualitative psychology.² One might add community psychology, feminist psychology, psychoanalysis, humanistic psychology and constructivist psychology to this list. This method oriented definition is useful to evaluate the coherence and status of institutionalization of quantitative-experimental psychology. It draws attention to the still unresolved subject matter of the discipline and the controversy surrounding its affiliation towards the natural sciences. But it is not specific enough to analyze the status of institutionalization of critical psychology itself. For example, this method oriented definition does not account for the link between some critical psychologies and the student movement which, as outlined above, is crucial in the historical self-description.

Another definition used in the German context emphasizes this link as a key aspect. According to this second definition ‘critical psychology’ is characterized by a combined opposition towards the quantitative-experimental psychology including its methodical reductionism and the current organization of society and the social disparities it produces (see Rexilius, 1988a, pp. 18f.; Markard, 2000). ‘Critical’ psychologies according to this definition always refer to a critical social theory or an explicit political standpoint as, for example, feminist psychologies. This is a more narrow definition. From those critical psychologies mentioned above it excludes most of the qualitative and phenomenological approaches and even some branches of community psychology or action research³ which, during the 1990s, have been distancing themselves actively from critical social theory and political debates.

As I will discuss in the following, both groups of critical psychologies face some common and some different prospects within psychology departments all over Germany. There are two major contributors to this development: the Bologna process and the neurohype.

² For an overview of the original development, state of institutionalization and historical and theoretical references of these different approaches up to 2006 see Held (2006), for the situation of feminist psychology see Schmerl (1998).

³ A wide range of concepts formerly used by social movements to claim rights, for example, for users of the mental health system are now widely included in neoliberal discourses. One example is the concept of empowerment which originated in parts from the US black and feminist movement and is now reframed according to a neoliberal version of self-responsibility and accountability (see Vossebrecher & Jeschke, 2007). A similar development is seen for the concept of autonomy of the patient which in neoliberal discourses is interpreted as market radicalism (see Graumann, 2003).

The Bologna process and some of its consequences

The Bologna process is an initiative of the European Commission to increase compatibility and comparability of study programs and degrees of higher education throughout Europe. It was started in the 1990s to reduce bureaucratic hurdles for students studying abroad within the European Union (EU), to increase intra-European communication and to raise the number of college graduates within EU countries. With the latter goal the EU tries to meet the employment needs of the knowledge based economic sector which is part of the EU strategy for future economic growth. At first glance German students could have profited from this initiative. Germany holds lower ranks in the OECD rankings on higher education compared to other European countries. One would have expected political measures to increase the overall number of students and to improve learning conditions. But instead, the implementation of the Bologna process was carried out as a political project to enforce cuts in public funding and to create a private sector of higher education (see, for example, Zeuner, 2007). As often in neoliberal privatization politics, an obvious contradiction between two goals of the public sector –to raise the number of college graduates and to cut public spending at the same time– was used to create a ‘gold rush’ for private investors. Under the banner of the Bologna process, former restrictions for private schools and colleges with tuition fees were reduced. Students were to become self-paying clients, and universities were transformed in individual players on the global market of education and research. The amount of private funding a university or single researcher would acquire was made the gold standard for success. Other measures included threatening students with expulsion and fines to reduce the number of drop-outs and the average length of study, and giving public universities the possibility to charge tuition fees. Alternatively it is propagated to treat students as investments and to get them tested for their abilities to succeed. The German Psychological Society (in German: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Psychologie, short: DGPs) and some private test institutes already started to develop student ability tests for this purpose (see Lux, 2009). Finally, new rankings and benchmarks were created, linking the measures to funding regulations. The last round of these policies brought to light the so called excellence initiative launched to create a small group of elite universities consuming most of the public research funds.

One of the core pieces of the Bologna process was the implementation of new study programs and academic degrees. The German diploma and master degrees were transformed into the Anglo-American two-step system of Bachelor and Master. Together with this transformation, according to the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, all “unnecessary additions” should be eliminated from the programs (BMBF, o.J.). Again, the goal was to decrease the average length of studies, the age of graduates and the number of drop-outs. The implementation was delegated to the universities, and specialization was explicitly encouraged.

In psychology, the majority of departments first refused the new degrees and especially the idea of specialization, the main reason being the question of formal requirements for professional psychologists and licensed psychotherapist. So when the DGPs developed a standard format for Bachelor and Master study programs (see DGPs, 2005) to secure the value of the degrees the format was widely used as master plate. The DGPs represents the leading majority of psychologists in basic research and is currently dominated by the natural science oriented quantitative-experimental psychology. So naturally this was the kind of psychology favored in the curriculum descriptions. In addition, the German process of accreditation of study programs privileges mainstream approaches in general (Banscherus &

Staaack, 2007, pp. 38f.): Every program is evaluated by a group of leading experts of the respective discipline. To not jeopardize the process of accreditation –and perhaps delay the start of a new study program– the department commissions often copied the DGPs recommendations.

The program for the Bachelor of Science in Psychology at the Free University Berlin –a psychology department where various critical psychologies were established in the 1970s and until the late 1990s– clearly illustrates this tendency towards a quantitative-experimental framework: Regarding research methods the course handbook for the Bachelor program only lists statistics and experimental psychology, but claims that these cover the “central techniques of psychological research” (Fachbereich Erziehungswissenschaften und Psychologie der Freien Universität Berlin, 2007, p. 15). In addition, psychological assessment is interpreted as the construction and administration of standardized tests with the course descriptions focusing on stochastic foundations of test theory as the main topic (Fachbereich Erziehungswissenschaften und Psychologie der Freien Universität Berlin, 2007, p. 25). Peter Mattes points out that the same reductionism in favor of the quantitative-experimental paradigm is also applied to the field of general psychology (Mattes, 2008). And Jarg Bergold stresses that psychological practices and the everyday work of psychologists as well as its scientific evaluation is completely eliminated from these study programs leaving, once again, the translation of theoretical knowledge to the practical field to the students (Bergold, 2008). But the most important symbolic act in favor of a natural science oriented psychology was the undisputed adoption of the “Bachelor of Science” (B.Sc.) and the “Master of Science” (M.Sc.) degree from the Anglo-American academic system. In the German context this can not be interpreted as simple concession towards comparability and compatibility of degrees within the EU as psychology departments have been and sometimes still are positioned within the arts and humanities. The doctorate in psychology in most cases is still a doctorate in philosophy. So, as the DGPs stated in their recommendations the adoption of the B.Sc. degree and the M.Sc. degree underlines the affiliation of psychology with the natural sciences (DGPs, 2005, p. 2). This orientation towards the natural science is supported by the neurohype.

The neurohype and its conceptual reductionism

In Germany, neuroscientists positioned themselves at first in opposition to psychology. In 2004, a group of eleven leading German neuroscientists published a widely debated manifesto on the future of neuroscience in the 21st century in which they stated that neuroscience with its new imagining techniques (e.g. PET, fMRI) will uncover the interplay between neurobiology, the senso-motor system and psychological dimensions of the human consciousness and therefore replace ordinary psychological research (see Monyer et al., 2004). German psychologists opposed this attack which questioned their professional competence and disciplinary integrity by framing the psychological perspective as integrative and holistic and in contrast to the conceptual reductionism of neuroscience (Fiedler et al., 2005). Meanwhile, reality outdated this former debate. The promise of getting a glance into active brains of living human beings was too tempting. Thus, neuro-imaging methods were quickly integrated into psychological research settings. While incorporating the methods neuroscience has to offer, psychology as a discipline participates in and profits from the neurohype. In the last five years psychology departments expanded: Millions of Euros were provided for fMRI research infrastructure and technical staff. Professorships in general psychology were dedicated to neuro-cognitive research and additional professorships for neuro-cognitive research in various fields of psychology were created. The discipline has

become a vital actor in the field of neuroscience. But neuro-cognitive psychology did not only become a new sub-discipline of psychology. At the Ludwig-Maximilian University in Munich Bachelor and Master study programs in neuro-cognitive psychology were installed, and a Master program in neuro-cognitive psychology started only recently at the University of Oldenburg.

By adopting the neuroscientific framework, its conceptual reductionism is adopted as well. With the methods focusing on the physiological structures underlying cognition, emotion, motivation or learning an individualized and naturalized perspective and a physiological determinism in dimensions unheard of since the cognitive turn is reinstated in psychology. Once more in the history of psychology, the individual is conceptualized as biological carrier of psychological features. Similar to the constellation during the constitution of psychological medicine in the late 19th century or during the rise of behaviorism in the 1950s and 1960s, this psychological phenomena are individualized and naturalized, subjectivity is eliminated and the social interconnectedness of human existence is ignored (see Staeuble, 1985, p. 41; see also Rose, 1985; Danziger, 1990). It is not surprising that behavioristic concepts and theories experience a remarkable revival. Critical comments on the lack of social and developmental perspectives within this methodological individualism already start to pop up in leading psychological journals (see, for example, Mausfeld, 2010). Once again, the self-*mis*understanding of the discipline as natural science (see Maiers, 1992) has become its trade mark; and, once again, it stays not undisputed.

Should I stay or should I go? – Critical psychology between institutional dry-out and vibrant movement

The Bologna process and the neurohype had a huge impact on the status of academic institutionalization of critical psychology in Germany. Job appointments for those who don't follow experimental-quantitative or neuro-cognitive approaches in psychology have become even rarer than before. Within the streamlined Bachelor and Master programs, there is no need to fulfill certain teaching responsibilities, e.g. in qualitative methodology (see Mey, 2008). In addition, most of the academic staff that has been teaching critical psychology recently retired or will be retiring in a few years, and they leave the academic institutions without replacements. This currently applies to all branches of critical psychology according to the first, method oriented definition mentioned above: the whole spectrum of qualitative approaches, from action research to grounded theory and ethnographic methods; Critical Psychology as well as postmodern, poststructuralist, discursive, constructionist or constructivist approaches; feminist psychology as well as phenomenological or dialectical psychology; finally, the different psychoanalytic branches present at German universities are also concerned. They all are weakened in their institutional position because of their opposition to the quantitative-experimental, neuro-cognitive framework dominating the discipline. In addition, client-oriented and participatory research projects in clinical psychology were reduced to bystanders of gigantic brain scanning projects or clinical trials. Or they are pushed out of the academia and into therapeutic training institutes and other private professional training programs. The interconnection between practical projects and research, which was, for example, constitutive for practice research according to Critical Psychology (Holzkamp, 1988) or Community Psychology (Bergold, 2008) is either shut down or is depending on precarious and short-term funding. Although, practice research may have a future in some Master programs, its prospects are not very promising at the moment.

According to these consequent dry-out policies the Bologna process is analyzed as a campaign against the various forms of critical psychology (Mey, 2008; Bergold, 2008; Mattes, 2008; Strasser & Mattes, 2008; Kiefer, 2007). However, there are still some small institutional outposts: At the University of Applied Sciences Magdeburg-Stendal Critical Psychology and qualitative research methods are part of the regular curriculum in the Bachelor and Master program in “Rehabilitation Psychology”. At the Free University Berlin, a few courses on methodology and practice research according to Critical Psychology are still taught. Also, at the Free University Berlin, the successful Berlin Meeting of Qualitative Research takes place regularly attracting a growing amount of national and even international scholars every year.⁴ Single seminars or lectures on the various branches of critical psychology can be found occasionally at other psychology departments. In addition, there are a small number of people in the social sciences and the educational sciences teaching different approaches of critical psychology, for example, at the Leibniz University Hannover, the Ruhr University Bochum, the Eberhard Karls University Tübingen, the University of Applied Sciences Munich and the University of Applied Sciences Ludwigshafen and, beyond the boarder but with close ties to the German debates in critical psychology, the Universtiy of Wien. Here, the common experience of marginalization has become an important unifying factor which makes new collaborations between different approaches of critical psychology possible. Even those who were hopelessly divided in the past started to communicate again.⁵ Also, a new generation of psychologists who recently finished or are finishing their PhD has engaged in efforts to further preserve and develop critical psychology in Germany. One obvious sign for this is, that the journals *Forum Kritische Psychologie* and *Psychologie & Gesellschaftskritik*⁶ both acquired a new generation of editorial board members. But this next generation of critical psychologists usually has to leave the discipline when interested in pursuing an academic career. Some of them found jobs in sociology, public health, educational sciences, political sciences or cultural studies – with only very loose connections to psychology. In addition, due to another feature of the Bologna process – the implementation of graduate study programs and graduate schools – chances to realize PhD projects with a critical psychology topic have become very limited.

Within this context, a debate has emerged whether there is still some space for critical psychology in the psychology departments or whether it is time to change institutional affiliations and, for example, collaborate with the cultural studies (see Mattes, 2008) or the humanities (see Weilnböck, 2007). Some members of this new generation even argue that one should actively propagate leaving the discipline as a programmatic and collective step (see Allolio-Näcke, 2008). The ongoing boom of subject theory in sociology and educational studies, the up-rise of social philosophy and cultural anthropology, and the psychological turn in cultural and media studies may propose a fruitful ground for critical psychology. In addition, critical psychology could play an active role in interdisciplinary research programs and new emerging cross-disciplines such as gender studies, disability studies or public health studies. Although this might be a promising strategy for individual careers, it will lead to further fragmentation of the institutional basis of critical psychology.

In contrast to this institutional decline, student activism in the field of critical psychology has not declined. On the contrary: in the last years a rising number of students from all over the country initiated student groups on critical psychology, so for example in Berlin, Hamburg,

⁴ See <http://www.qualitative-forschung.de/methodentreffen/index.html> (11-29-2011).

⁵ This is also the case for most of the examples given in the following paragraphs.

⁶ Both journals played an important role in the development of critical psychology in Germany (see Held, 2006).

Frankfurt(M), Marburg, Trier etc. They meet in book clubs and autonomous seminars to read critical psychology text books, they organize lectures, workshops, conferences and summer schools – all despite the diminished free time and the rising pressure in the Bachelor and Master programs. In 2010, the Critical Psychology Summer School in Berlin, organized by the Gesellschaft für Subjektwissenschaftliche Forschung und Praxis e.V. (Society for Subject-oriented Research and Practice), the Assoziation Kritische Psychologie Berlin (a Berlin-based association of Critical Psychologists), Critical Psychology student groups from Trier and Marburg and a number of individual supporters, attracted about 500 participants from all over Germany and Austria. The summer school lasted five days, with workshops, lectures and panel discussions on a wide range of topics including genetics and neuroscience, social theory and philosophy, therapy, psychological and educational practice, and political education. Although the main focus of the debates was on the current state and future prospects of Critical Psychology, debates were also organized with representatives from other critical psychologies, with practitioners from different fields of practice and different schools of therapy, and with intellectuals from other disciplines such as biology, philosophy, sociology, political sciences and educational sciences. The event not only brought together four generations of critical psychologists. Among the participants also were a large number of undergraduate students, most of them never heard about any of the critical psychologies before. Their interest may be explained by mere curiosity, but it may also be a sign for a growing discontent with the Bachelor programs in psychology. The next summer school is planned for 2012, preparations already started.⁷

In 2011, a small student group from Frankfurt(M) organized a four-day student conference on qualitative and subject-oriented methods in psychology which attracted 200 participants. The organizers managed to bring together a colorful spectrum of critical approaches in psychology including constructionist and social constructivist, post-modern, psychoanalytic and hermeneutic approaches, grounded theory, queer-feminist theory and postcolonial theory, discourse psychology, the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory and Critical Psychology. The students at the meeting interpreted the current interest in critical psychology as a result of the exclusion of qualitative and subject-oriented methods from the study programs. After the conference, the organizers stated that the unexpected number of participants shows a fresh and lively interest in critical psychology and qualitative research methods.⁸ The debates on the conference also indicated that the neurohype may be another reason for the growing interest in critical psychology. Besides some general and introductory lectures on the history of critical psychology, the only special topic beyond methods was the question whether critical neuroscience (as propagated by a group of critical neuroscientists, see Choudhury & Slaby, 2012) makes sense.

The growing student activities not only reflect a new and growing popularity of critical psychology. They also proof wrong some earlier hypotheses to explain a certain decrease in student activism since the late 1980s. The most common explanation among German intellectuals and students themselves was the rising pressure from study programs and the job market. It was assumed that this pressure forces students to reduce their work load and to quit extra curricular reading and student body politics. In addition to the time argument, it was often assumed that the pressure of an insecure future regarding job opportunities supports opportunism and marginalizes critical thinking in general (see, for example, Köhler, 2006). The current development shows that these interpretations were superficial. With the Bachelor and Master programs the numbers of tests and exams have risen and students have even less

⁷ See <http://www.ferienuni.de/> (01-12-2011).

⁸ See <http://unberechenbarkeit.wordpress.com/> (11-29-2011).

choices than before. Nevertheless, the overall domination of this streamlined version of experimental psychology somehow creates a need for alternative approaches⁹, or as some participants of the student congress in Frankfurt(M) put it: “Mainstream psychology is just boring”.

A new story line for the future?

To evaluate the future prospects of critical psychology in Germany, both developments – the further institutional decline and fragmentation and the growing student activism – have to be taken into account. While the former nicely fits into the old story of decline and defeat due to the dominance of quantitative-experimental psychology and neoliberal politics the latter does not and therefore warrants a closer look.

It is not entirely clear where this new interest in critical psychology comes from. However, three parallel developments may come into play here: First, the elimination of the subject in psychology and especially within neuro-cognitive research produces, once again, a conceptual gap. Confronted with the popular debate on neuroscience, e.g. regarding the existence of free will, the students may experience the totality of the neuro-reductionism and especially the notion of measurability of individuality portrayed in this debate as problematic. Hence, the topic of methods and, especially, the division between qualitative and quantitative approaches is very present among student activists in psychology. This experience may be even stronger when contrasted to the popularity qualitative research has gained in neighboring disciplines, so, for example, in sociology, educational sciences, social work or gender studies. And finally, the students’ critique of neuro-cognitive reductionism falls on fruitful ground in the psychology departments themselves. A significant part of the teaching personal is more or less critical regarding the neurohype, especially in the branches of applied psychology such as psychological assessment, educational psychology or clinical psychology.

Second, the gap between theory and practice has widened under current conditions and therefore is experienced even stronger. Most people who study psychology plan to work as counselors or therapists to help those who suffer from psychological pain. The focus on basic research and the lack of practice in undergraduate studies produces alienating experiences in every generation of psychology students. In Bachelor programs practice seminars are very rare and, if they exist, are organized as colorful potpourris of counseling techniques, association games and meditation methods without any conceptual contextualization. Taught as ‘soft skills’ these techniques may not only not meet the students’ needs for practical guidelines. The contradiction between those warm and fuzzy practical tutorials and the conceptual exclusion of subjectivity in the rest of the study program may also add to the alienation experience.

Finally, and most importantly, there is a revival of critical social theory among students in Germany in general. This revival is related to continuously growing social protests. In the last few years social conflicts have been sharpened in Germany in part due to the economic crisis and the continuous decline of real wages which led to a widening gap between rich and poor. In addition, ecological issues as well as issues concerning citizen participation in democratic decision-making are raised in several local conflicts, for example in Stuttgart, Gorleben and

⁹ Peter Mattes sees one of the main reasons of this rising opposition not so much in the exclusion of certain topics or perspectives but in the process of homogenization of psychology itself and in the search for closed frameworks (see Mattes, 2008).

Berlin.¹⁰ Looking at the bigger picture, the mass protests in a number of other European countries, especially in Greece, Spain, France, UK, Italy, and even on an international level also contribute to this atmosphere of change. Regarding higher education neoliberal politics under the banner of the Bologna process caused a series of student protests. Student organization mobilized against the introduction of tuition fees and the new Bachelor and Master degrees. While discussing alternatives to the neoliberal program, a significant fraction of the current generation of students turned to Marxism, Critical Theory (Frankfurt School), postcolonial theory, queer and feminist theory, and other versions of critical social theory. The growing interest in critical approaches in psychology which combine social critical theory and the critique of the societal role of psychology results, in part, from this constellation. The development is explicitly strengthening feminist, postcolonial and Marxist psychologies, but also – in the tradition of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory – psychoanalysis as well as the works, for example, of Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan. As Fried et al. (Fried, Kaindl, & Markard, 1995) discussed, facing an earlier attempt to undermine the institutional basis of Critical Psychology (in the 1990s), critical thinking spreads through social movements while its continuity depends on whether a community or network exists which is able to secure institutionalization.

The potential lying in the current process is illustrated by a handful of small initiatives which try to establish professional practice projects based on critical psychology. The most successful example is a Berlin-based project on intersubjective communication regarding drug use (see Vandreier, 2011).¹¹ In addition, a group of graduated psychologists who are in process of becoming therapists started to organize regular meetings to discuss their role as therapists in relation to a critical psychology perspective. Furthermore, the current generation of activists debates an interdisciplinary organization. This call for critical psychology to become interdisciplinary does not mean interdisciplinarity in regard to the subject matter (as debated, for example, by Graumann, 2001; Maiers, 2001; Lux, 2008). Interdisciplinarity here is seen merely as organizational goal, to create a multi-disciplinary network which can assure academic career perspectives. Such a network would in fact facilitate institutional alliances with other disciplines, and it would give an answer to the already ongoing migration towards neighboring disciplines. One important task of critical psychology regarding the social sciences is to reflect the role of psychology in the theory of neoliberalism (see Kaindl, 2008) and in relation to the possibility of a post-neoliberal constellation. Another important field of analysis is the topic of biological determinism inscribed in the quantitative-experimental framework in psychology. Here, alliances with approaches such as Critical Neuroscience, Science & Technology Studies, and feminist approaches may be not only institutionally helpful but also conceptually fruitful.

Within the academic institutions of psychology itself, there might be a future for critical psychology in some universities of applied sciences. Especially practice research and

¹⁰ In Stuttgart, the costs for the new train station in the city center caused ongoing protests for nearly a year with participants coming from all kinds of social backgrounds. Gorleben is famous for its widely supported protests against the planned nuclear waste repository situated there which is filled up with nuclear waste even so the functionality of the site has not been proofed. While in earlier years fewer and fewer people joined the yearly protests, this trend changed in 2010 and 2011. The new generation of protesters also demands influence in future decisions on energy politics in general through direct democracy. In Berlin, a petition to unveil secret parts of a public private partnership contract between the City of Berlin and the privatized water company was endorsed by a significant number of citizens forcing the Berlin senate to follow the claim. Surprising in this process was the number of people who participated in the ballot vote and the role the direct democracy element got in the campaign.

¹¹ See also <http://www.prosd.org/> (11-29-2011).

qualitative and subject-oriented methods already are or may easily become part of the study programs in applied psychologies. However, the study programs at universities of applied sciences are traditionally more oriented towards teaching practical skills. Students as well as professors are especially interested in know-how valuable on the job market. Critical reflections on, e.g., the role of science in society, methodological questions or the role of psychologists in society in general are often qualified as philosophical and not useful in practice. Those critical psychologists which, according to the second definition mentioned above, combine a critique of mainstream psychology and critical social theory will not always be able to meet this demand of practicality. In addition, in Germany universities of applied sciences do not have the right to grant PhD, so that this form of institutionalization is precarious and not sustainable. But there is a small possibility that this might change in the future. As part of the overall market liberalization of the system of higher education in the context of the Bologna process it is discussed that all university should have the right to offer PhD programs.

The insitutionalization of PhD programs at universities of applied sciences is not the only aspect of the Bologna process which might propose a future perspective for critical psychologies. At some universities the tuition fees are used to pay for special lectures for which the students decide the content and the lecturer. Here, the growing interest in critical psychologies already has lead to lectures on critical psychology being financed in this manner. Furthermore, a debate has started whether it would be possible to launch private colleges dedicated to critical approaches in psychology. One already successful example is the International Psychoanalytic University Berlin, which managed to establish a fully accredited Bachelor and Master program. Beyond the boarder, in Austria, the Sigmund Freud University Wien is a similar and also successful project. However, as these colleges depend on tuition fees, this strategy strengthens the privatization of higher education.

Initiatives in this direction do not fit into the story of decline and defeat of critical psychology under neoliberal politics. This narrative seems to be so strong that with the Bologna process and the neurohype the notion of decline of critical psychology is even broadened to a notion of decline of the academic part of the discipline (see, for example, Mattes, 2008). Although a splitting up into sub-fields serving other disciplines such as neuroscience, public health or economics might be possible in theory, the current developments do not point in this direction. The destruction of psychology which some student activists propagated in 1970 (see Mattes, 1985, p. 299) will neither be completed by the Bologna process nor by the neurohype.

The institutional decline of critical psychology is brutal. But the growing activism may have the possibility to change the prospects of critical psychology in Germany. It is definitely possible that the current popularity among student activists may turn into a new movement for an academic institutionalization. With all the contradictions produced by the Bologna process and the neurohype, opportunities may come up when they are least expected. But this strongly depends on how the situation at the universities in general and how the social movements will develop in Germany in the next years. For them to succeed, we must include the experiences of the current generation of psychology students in our story.

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