Within the polyphony of Critical Psychologies, *Kritische Psychologie* represents a substantial and distinct voice. It has its origins in Germany, especially at the Free University Berlin, and developed over the years to a tradition of thought flourishing at various places around the world. This special issue of the *Annual Review of Critical Psychology* brings together current research of *Kritische Psychologie* as well as work inspired by or developed in response to it. Scholars are presenting in 63 articles how they are working in and with this tradition of thought. They describe, how they explore the problems people are confronted with in their everyday world, they share how they rethink and expand psychological theory, methodology and empirical research, and they are discussing, applying, criticizing, elaborating, linking or comparing *Kritische Psychologie* with other theoretical and geopolitical approaches, often going beyond disciplinary boundaries of psychology.
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Introduction
Introduction

Kritische Psychologie: Refining theory, methodology and empirical research

Sertan Batur, Shose Kessi, Athanasios Marvakis, Desmond Painter, Ernst Schraube, Eva Strohm Bowler and Sofia Triliva

Since the beginning of modern psychology, a variety of different and sometimes even conflicting scientific visions of psychology have co-existed. This co-existence has not always been harmonious. It has initiated fruitful critical debates as well as struggles for influence and dominance within the scientific community. The question of who acquires dominance in a certain time depends not only on the relevance and quality of knowledge and insight, but also on the societal and historical situation. Before World War II, for example, a multiplicity of visions of psychology claimed dominance in various intellectual centers in Europe and North America and forced other conceptions to cooperate, tried to push them into marginal positions, or even tried to exclude them entirely. After World War II, European traditions of psychology lost their influence in favor of North American functionalism. In the late 1960s, critical psychologies emerged in opposition to the dominance of functionalist and instrumentalist psychologies, integrating critique as a fundamental dimension of scientific psychology. In recent years, these approaches have developed from rather local initiatives to more systematic interconnected dialogues around the world. Several special journal issues have collected and traced the development of critical psychologies in countries around the globe, invite mutual collaboration, and elaborate on the fundamental significance of critique in the development of psychological knowledge (e.g., the ARCP issues of 2006 and 2013, the recently published,
voluminous *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology* [Teo, 2014] as well as the *Handbook of Critical Psychology* [Parker, 2015]).

*Kritische Psychologie* represents a substantial and distinct voice in this polyphony. It has its origins in Germany, especially at the Free University Berlin and has developed over the years into a tradition of thought that flourishes in various places around the world. This special issue brings together current research of Kritische Psychologie as well as work inspired by or developed in response to it. In these 63 articles, younger and established scholars from universities or other contexts present how they work in and with this tradition of thought. They describe how they explore the problems people encounter in their everyday world, they share how they rethink and expand psychological theory, methodology and empirical research, and they discuss, apply, criticize, elaborate, link, and compare Kritische Psychologie with other theoretical and geopolitical approaches, often going beyond the disciplinary boundaries of psychology.

The idea of this issue is not so much to substantiate a particular tradition of thought; it is more about using its legacies to continue an open and collective project of an emancipatory psychology and social science. To that effect, the point is not the engagement in a particular interpretation of Kritische Psychologie; rather, it is to present that and how one can use Kritische Psychologie in one’s work – affirmative, critically, linking it with/to other approaches, showing overlapping fields, identifying shortfalls and omissions etc. Therefore, this special issue includes not only work “from within” Kritische Psychologie, but also work “from outside” – discussing it, identifying links and potential overlaps, and thereby shedding more light on Kritische Psychologie. The project of an emancipatory psychology and social science is necessarily much broader than Kritische Psychologie or any other singular approach. We hope this special issue invites new links, networks and dialogues between scholars within Kritische Psychologie, but also between the polyphony of critical psychologies and other critical voices within the social and human sciences. Ultimately, it is our hope that it will facilitate a constructive debate to rethink psychology for our future societies.

**The development of Kritische Psychologie in the contexts of other critical psychologies**

A vital catalyst for the development of critical psychologies in the late sixties of the past century was the lack of relevance of traditionally generated psychological knowledge. During that time, significant psychological research
was based on experimental laboratory studies, in which very specific and isolated hypotheses were tested with a quantitative, especially experimental-statistical methodology. However, within this paradigm, the actual reality of human life in the everyday world and the complexity of psychological phenomena in their internal relations and contexts could not be adequately addressed. A debate about the relevance of psychological knowledge emerged, and scholars realized that the lack of relevance was connected to the applied theoretical and methodological apparatus. This apparatus had been copied, without reflection, from the natural sciences and was thus based on a scientific vision of dissection and de-contextualization. To be clear, such a vision has its strengths. However, it adopts a methodology first—understood as a fixed procedure—instead of generating, out of the phenomena, a decisive psychological research vocabulary. Such “methodolatry,” as David Bakan (1967) termed this confusion, reduces the relationship between humans and the world to measurable cause-and-effect relationships. Moreover, it systematically excludes subjectivity: the experiencing and acting dimensions of human life and the societal world, in and through which psychological phenomena emerge and develop. The reduction of entangled social relations to isolated and external stimuli, and the rupture of the dialectics between individual and society responded to the ideology of neo-liberal capitalism: The individual is responsible for his/her own misery or fortune, while the psychologist’s task is to transform the individual, rather than the social relations and practice of everyday living. The lack of relevance combined with such a radically disembodied and individualizing research practice resulted in substantial critiques of dominant approaches of modern psychology and initiated the development of critical psychologies in various countries around the globe. (For more detailed descriptions of the historical development of critical psychologies, see, e.g., Dafermos & Marvakis, 2006, Holzkamp, 1972; Parker, 1999; Teo, 2005; 2015). Within the multitude of initiatives, three major and interrelated visions of critical psychology emerged; they still resonate in the discussions today.

One line of critique was directed at psychology as a whole: a specific kind of anti-psychology. Through critical studies of the role of psychology in society, scholars came to realize that the production of psychological knowledge is by no means value-neutral. Instead, it is intimately connected with ruling relations in capitalist society; the knowledge that is developed directly serves capitalist interests. The only adequate solution appeared to be the dissolution of academic psychology as a whole. “Smash psychology” became the motto of the day. In May 1969, for example, at the University Hannover, Germany, the final declaration to one of the most significant critical psychology conferences during the student movement described psychology as a lost cause, a hopelessly un-
political discipline that served people in power and eliminated or integrated system-induced contradictions. The declaration ended with a call to disband psychological departments, to, effectively, “Smash psychology!” (declaration reprinted in Rexilius, 1988, p. 408). As crucial as this vision might have been in placing the societal mediation of the production of scientific knowledge on the agenda and questioning the social relevance and knowledge interest of psychological research, it nevertheless remains an abstract perspective, unable to turn its critique into the development of a critical psychology that actively addresses and transforms the conflictuality of life in contemporary society.

In response, a second primary vision of critical psychology centered on this very conflictuality of the social world by developing critical psychology as a critique of society. The focus of psychological critique here is on the critical analysis of societal conditions such as ideology and discourse in an attempt to uncover and provide evidence for the social, ideological and discursive character of psychological theory and methodology and their legitimization of ruling relations. Moreover, this critique contributed critical knowledge to the understanding of the specific situations and contexts in which human subjects live their everyday life. However, to a certain extent, this line of thought also remains abstract: it is still partly caught in an external, socially disembodied perspective because it leaves psychology itself untouched and fails to engage in the renewal and conceptual rebuilding of psychological theory and methodology. Given this lack of re-conceptualization, the critical investigation of social conditions has to draw on already existing psychological frameworks, including their de-contextualizing and disembodying research practices.

A third major vision of critical psychology tries to address this limitation by focusing not solely on a critique of society, but also on a critique of psychology. In so doing, it seeks to fundamentally rethink and rebuild psychological theory, methodology and research practice. The critique here does not reject psychology, but aspires to a unity of critique and further development capable of contributing to a new, critical, situated, and socially embodied conception of psychology.

**Major phases of Kritische Psychologie and the structure of the special issue**

*Kritische Psychologie* is particularly inscribed in this third vision of developing critical psychologies. Although fundamentally collective in its orientation, the work of Klaus Holzkamp has played a pivotal role in the development of Kritische Psychologie (Osterkamp & Schraube, 2013). Up until now, its body of
work can be differentiated into two major phases. In the first, scholars were engaged in fundamentally re-thinking the theoretical and methodological language of psychology. Drawing on cultural-historical activity theory, Kritische Psychologie tried to renew the psychological vocabulary, not only by critically redefining singular concepts (for example, perception, emotion, or motivation), but also by developing a systematically founded and integrated theory of human subjectivity, including its various psychological dimensions. The aim was not just to develop a new theoretical framework for critical psychology, but to contribute to the development of psychology in general through a seminal renewal of its conceptual foundation. As a result, a detailed Psychology from the Standpoint of the Subject redefined psychology as a historically developed theory about subjects as societal beings and re-constituted it as a science for and about these subjects. (The most in-depth presentation of this period can be found in Holzkamp, 1983; summaries of the discussions of this period, e.g. Dreier, 2020; Holzkamp, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c; Tolman, 1994; Tolman & Maiers, 1991).

The second major period of the development of Kritische Psychologie is characterized by work with this newly developed psychological vocabulary, by the refinement and expansion of specific theoretical and methodological concepts and by their substantiation in empirical explorations of human life in various fields of everyday practice. The body of work presented in this special issue is located mostly in this second period of Kritische Psychologie. All articles are engaged in the critical rethinking of theoretical, methodological or empirical matters. Collectively, the contributions integrate these three dimensions; however, individually, they tend to place particular emphasis on one of them. Therefore, we have grouped the papers as follows:

Part I: Refining Theoretical Concepts
Part II: Refining Methodology and Research Practice
Part III: Empirical Investigations of Human Life

The question of the societal relevance of scientific knowledge as well as the commitment to taking seriously the problems of human life in contemporary society represent constitutive principles of critical psychologies. We know that the world today is hanging by a thread. Scientists around the globe realize the danger and are warning that “time is running out” (Ripple, et al. 2017, p. 1027). The problems we encounter—both as individuals and as collectives—have intensified. The old ways of disembodied psychological thinking—where the complexity and connectedness of human life are out of sight—will not help to overcome the problem: they are part of it. In contrast, critical psychologies employ detailed analytical conceptions to examine the internal relationship between humans and the world in its conflictuality. In doing so, they offer new
ways of embodied thought, vital elements in the development of a possible future society.

References


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Part I: Refining Theoretical Concepts
Society, agency, and the good:  
*Kritische Psychologie* as a moral science

Charles W. Tolman

Abstract

In recent years it has been widely and correctly recognized that science is not value-free, that is, it is not morally neutral. While it is not the aim of the social sciences to produce theories of what is morally good, they stand subject to the judgement of such theories which lie in the province of philosophy. In what follows, a theory of the morally good is sketched. *Kritische Psychologie*, as developed by Klaus Holzkamp, is then accordingly evaluated. It will be shown that this psychology is far superior to traditional behavioural and cognitive psychologies in meeting the requirements of moral theory. Among reasons for this are its emphasis on societal-historical relations and its focus on the agency (Handlungsfähigkeit) of human subjects within those relations.

Keywords

critical psychology, moral theory, moral imperative

It will be obvious to most of us, all but the most isolated, that the world we currently live in is a mess. Wherever we are, wherever we look, we see murder, hunger, poverty, despair, etc. In his recent book, *The Wages of Rebellion: The Moral Imperative of Revolt* (2015), Chris Hedges describes the current global situation (optimistically, in my view) as a “revolutionary moment.” In his words:

The disastrous economic and political experiment that attempted to organize human behavior around the dictates of the global marketplace has failed. The promised prosperity that was to have raised the living standards of workers through trickle down economics has been exposed as a lie. A tiny global oligarchy has amassed obscene wealth, while the engine of unfettered corporate capitalism plunders resources; exploits cheap
unorganized labor; and creates pliable, corrupt governments that abandon the common good to serve corporate profit. The relentless drive by the fossil fuel industry for profits is destroying the ecosystem, threatening the viability of the human species. And no mechanisms to institute genuine reform or halt the corporate assault are left within the structures of power, which have surrendered to corporate control. The citizen has become irrelevant. He or she can participate in heavily choreographed elections, but the demands of corporations and banks are paramount. (p. 1)

The symptoms of this global societal dysfunction are no more evident than in the world’s wealthiest and most politically powerful country, the United States of America, which has been trumpeting the advantages of capitalism to the rest of the world for at least the last 250 years. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 47 million Americans lived in poverty in 2014; 15.5 million children live in poverty (about 1 in 5); 1.6 million children experienced homelessness at some point during the year. This misery is not evenly distributed: the rates are much higher for people of colour. Moreover, 21 million live in “deep poverty” (at less than half of the official poverty level), while another 105 million live close to poverty at less than twice the official poverty level. (http://www.povertyusa.org/)

In part, this poverty is related to the unemployment rate. Official sources and the media proudly point out that this rate dropped from 6.6 percent in January 2014 by a full percentage point to 5.6 in December. But the statisticians at Forbes point out that this is the official rate; the real rate is estimated to be 15.8 percent,\(^1\) which amounts to approximately 40 million people without jobs. Furthermore, amongst the employed, there are those who are part-time or otherwise insecurely employed.

People get angry and potentially violent when they are forced into poverty and excluded from the job market, or otherwise mistreated. In the first eleven months of 2015, there were 48,331 gun incidents in the United States in which 12,226 people were killed. Of these incidents 353 qualified as “mass shootings” (four or more killed or injured) which took 462 lives, leaving 1,316 injured. These incidents have, in short, become so common that the media pay attention only to the very worst, which means that we only hear of about two or so incidents per month, while in fact they average more than one per day.\(^2\) (http://www.gunviolencearchive.org/ and http://www.shootingtracker.com/)

Can we imagine a different world; a society that is organized around the preservation of the common good; a world of people fully and gainfully

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\(^1\)http://www.forbes.com/sites/dandimicco/2015/02/13/jobs-the-real-unemployment-rate-please-anyone/#2715e4857a0b3e355965423d

\(^2\)http://www.gunviolencearchive.org/ and http://www.shootingtracker.com/
employed, with all basic needs met, and living without the threat of poverty and untimely death? It would seem that humans have always been capable of such imagination when things got rough. The Hebrews imagined a better life after escaping from the Egyptians, and the itinerant preacher Jesus responded to the oppression of Roman rule by preaching the coming of the kingdom of God on earth. Thomas More imagined Utopia in the 16th century. In our own era, Marx and Engels saw the source of a troubled society in capitalism and imagined its self-destruction and replacement with something more amenable to human needs. They were joined in the last two centuries by numerous socialists, anarchists, and utopians. We are today not short of visions. The problem will be, as ever, to distinguish the realistic wheat from the impossible chaff, and of course to muster the power to effect change.

In my view, there is no question that radical societal transformation is needed and, just as importantly, that it is possible. But, as we all know, there are many things that stand in the way of transformation. The forces that seek to preserve this dysfunctional world and those who benefit enormously from it are powerful, influential, and often invisible. To use Gramsci’s term, they are hegemonic. Their ideological aspect literally invades, indeed pervades, our thinking. Even social scientists who are otherwise aware of the problems and support transformation, continue to develop and adhere to theories that implicitly support oppression. But change cannot be brought about without a clear understanding of the problems that plague us and their solution. As Marx and Engels clearly understood, good theory may not be a sufficient condition for achieving transformation, but it is an absolutely necessary condition.

The psychological theories that were dominant in the 20th century, and still prevail in one form or another, either as such or as mutations, were behaviourism and cognitivism. Behaviorism is usually taken to have had its start in 1913 with the publication of John B. Watson’s “Psychology as the behaviorist sees it,” often referred to as the Behaviorist Manifesto. But Watson was running rats through mazes well before that (Watson, 1903). And it is not just coincidental that Fredrick W. Taylor published his Principles of Scientific Management in 1911. The tenor of the times called for control. Behaviorism took many forms over the following century, but none strayed from the focus on the control of behaviour (cf. Mills, 1998). The most extreme version came from B. F. Skinner who was proud to demonstrate that the shapes of the cumulative curves resulting from lever pressing on his specially designed recorder were the same for rats on fixed interval reinforcement schedules as for pigeons or humans. Indeed, it was impossible to tell the difference between any animal species subjected to his conditions. Yet he and his disciples claimed to be explaining “complex human behavior” (cf. Staats & Staats, 1963). This was a psychology more suited to
enslavement than to liberation, as Skinner surprisingly appeared to recognise in his novel, *Walden Two* (1948).

Cognitive psychology promised to restore that which was uniquely human, but it was inspired not by discoveries in human psychology but by the invention and development of computer technology. Once again, the human was cast in the role of a machine to be programmed by others. And this psychology in fact did not stray far from the behaviourism that it claimed to replace. The best evidence for this lies in the fact that the methodology did not change. It was still framed in terms of independent and dependent variables, which were simply sophisticated variants of the behaviourist’s stimulus and response.

And then of course there is the “neuromania” that has been promoted by the development of technology that can measure brain activity, encouraging the belief that once we figure the brain out, we will be able to explain everything, totally ignoring the obvious fact that the brain is a necessary, not a sufficient condition for human activity, whether mental or physical.

More recently, there has been the emergence of “positive” psychologies, purportedly “scientific” approaches to what makes people happy and thrive, and based on the assumption “that people want to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, to cultivate what is best within themselves, and to enhance their experiences of love, work, and play” (http://www.positivemood.org/). In his book, Chris Hedges writes about a participant in the Occupy Movement who was arrested and imprisoned for her protest activity, and was then exposed to some of this psychology as part of a rehabilitation programme. In her words:

... it is all about the power of positive thinking, about how they [the inmates] made mistakes and bad choices in life, and now they can correct those mistakes by taking another road, a Christian road, to a new life.... This focus on happy thoughts pervades the prison. There is little analysis of the structural causes for poverty and oppression. It is as if it was all about decisions we have made, not that were made for us. And this is how those in power want it. This kind of thinking induces passivity. (Hedges, 2015, pp. 141-2, emphasis added)

There is more to these kinds of psychology that suppresses movement toward social change than just emphasis on control, either of a direct sort or by inducing passivity. They also tend to focus on the isolated individual, treating the social environment as just another set of variables, rather than as constitutive of the individual. In short, despite progressive-sounding claims, they silently support the status quo. And while it is certainly true that good theory cannot bring about social change, that is, that theory alone cannot be sufficient in that respect, there is unlikely to be any social change without theory that supports it. Though not
sufficient, good theory is a necessary condition. What would such a theory need that is lacking in mainstream theories? There may be legitimately differing ways of expressing the answer to this question. My own is to identify four characteristics: the theory must be working with a set of thoroughly examined categories, such that it can be confident about that of which it speaks; it must acknowledge the essential nature of the historical and societal context as constitutive of individual existence; it must embrace the active nature of human subjectivity, which I identify as agency; and it must accommodate and reflect the fundamentally moral nature of the human species.

The first three of these characteristics are plainly evident in German Critical Psychology, and are summarized in Klaus Holzkamp’s *Grundlegung der Psychologie* (1983; see also Tolman, 1994), as well as in many subsequent works identified with Critical Psychology. What I propose to do here is to outline the basics of a moral theory and then demonstrate how Critical Psychology meets its demands and thus contributes to the necessary theoretical basis for social change. A good place to start is to look at Kant’s moral theory. There are many problems with Kant’s theory, and it can be argued that most, if not all, subsequent attempts to develop moral theory have begun by critiquing Kant or seeking solutions to problems in his theory, some of which even he acknowledged. But Kant is still useful for our purpose here, which is to sketch the task of a moral theory and what it is about.

Kant’s theory rests upon two “imperatives,” which will help us to make an important distinction, as well as to arrive at some central features of moral theory. The two imperatives were designated “hypothetical” and “categorical.” The hypothetical category he stated as follows: “Who wills the end, wills (so far as reason has decisive influence on his actions) also the means which are indispensably necessary and in his power” (Kant, 1785/1964, p. 84). In short, you must do what you need to do to achieve your end. What this identifies is *prudence*, not morality as such, as it focuses on the means without consideration of the end, other than that it exists. This is important, but we need a second imperative to assure that the end is worth pursuing. This is the categorical imperative: “Act only according to that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law” (ibid, p. 88). Later in the same text, Kant elaborates this in the following way: “Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as end” (ibid, p. 96).

What can be distilled from Kant’s imperatives is that what is genuinely good for me is also good for others, and vice versa. The individual good and the common good are ultimately identical. And we can see that this is so from findings of later social science that reveal the essential relationship between the
individual person, society, and the whole of humanity. I am who I am by virtue of my relation to others. Other more recent moral philosophers would express this in terms of the essential human requirement for love (*agape*), as in the “situation ethics” of Joseph Fletcher (1997), or of the need for community, as in the moral theory of John Macmurray (1961). However this is articulated, it implies *agency*: animals and robots do not distinguish between means and ends; that requires conscious *intention*; and love and community in the human sense are intentional acts.

A curious paradox peculiar to moral philosophising arises at this point. If we ask *why* we should treat humanity, both ourselves and others, as ends, the categorical imperative becomes hypothetical. Does this undermine the project? No, it merely shifts the task of explanation to the domain of the social sciences. What is retained by philosophy, however, is important: the categorical can always itself be hypothetical, but the hypothetical cannot always be categorical. Another and more accessible way of putting this is to say that the moral (i.e., the good) will always be prudent (at least in the long term), but the prudent is not always moral. To act in the interest of the other, or for humanity as a whole, may, in the short term and however wrongly, seem contrary to one’s own interests, or even those of particular others, but in the long run it’s the only genuine good. This is a point that is recognized by, and forms a leading theme, in Fletcher’s situation ethics. It is a matter of the greater good prevailing over the lesser.

It will be useful at this point to remind ourselves how this relates to the desire for social change, whether by reform or by revolution. Such desire can only be motivated by a conception of the good. We want change, because we image a better world, one in which the humanity of all people is respected, where love prevails over hate and fear, and where genuine community exists on the largest possible scale. In short, social change is fundamentally a moral issue. A theory that promotes or facilitates it can hardly be morally neutral. Social scientific theories that focus on control or happiness despite exploitation cannot fill that bill. Indeed, they may be morally objectionable.

How does German Critical Psychology fit the task? The short answer has two parts: first, it situates itself within the context of the social-historical development of the individual psyche, and, second, it focuses on the individual’s subjectivity, understood as agency. As might be expected, these two parts are intimately related. In dealing with the first point, it is important for English readers to know that the word “social” has two distinct expressions in German: *sozial* and *gesellschaftlich*. While both words are commonly translated as “social,” this obscures a significant distinction. By far the majority of animal species can be described as social, including humans. But social is a biological characteristic that is determined by its genetics and is therefore subject to
evolution. A species of wasps, for example, is social in a predictable way wherever it is found in the world. Moreover, it is social in probably much the same way now as it was perhaps thousands of years ago. In a broad sense, humans are also social in a way that transcends place and time, but we note as well that this characteristic differs significantly in different time periods and from place to place. We speak of this aspect of sociality as "culture." The cultures of people living now are very different from those living centuries ago. Indeed, we know that cultures can change radically within a single lifetime. In short, this aspect of the humanly social has history, and it is this historically determined sociality, or culture, that for humans has largely replaced biology (i.e. genes) as the storehouse of the information needed for us to become truly human. All this difference from the wasp is captured in the German term Gesellschaftlichkeit. The most adequate translation of its adjectival form, though seemingly awkward, is "societal." As Klaus Holzkamp spoke of it:

The springboard for all controversy about an adequate understanding of the problem of subjectivity and its ontogenesis is the set of questions concerning the definition of the relationship between subjectivity and the societal character of individuals: is individual subjectivity reducible to societal relations, or are these something that stand independent of and in opposition to it? If subjectivity is something independent, then how is its difference to be reconciled with the nevertheless existing connection between the individual’s societality and subjectivity? Or, more particularly, if the result of ontogenesis is in some sense the ‘societalized’ or ‘socialized’ subject, how then is the individual societalization that is achieved to be precisely defined? What is the initial state of early childhood from which the societalization process begins and what is the necessary course governing the ontogenetic transition from the initial state to the final result of individual societalization?" (1979, p.12., italics in original)

I cannot summarize all the pertinent aspects of German Critical Psychology in the short space allotted here, but three concepts can be mentioned that illustrate its recognition of Gesellschaftlichkeit. These are “action possibility” (Handlungsmöglichkeit), “agency” (Handlungsfähigkeit, sometimes translated as “action potence”), and “subjective situation” (subjektive Befindlichkeit). All three are based on the recognition that human individuals do not confront the world directly, but as a structure of meanings which creates for us what may be called an “epistemic distance” between ourselves and objects. Objects do not act directly upon us, but rather present us with possibilities for action that can only
be decided by the individual reflecting on a complex amalgam of cognitive, historical, and societal factors. In Holzkamp’s words:

The essential determinant of consciousness in its specifically human form is the emerging epistemic relation of the individual to world and self, materially based on the overall societal mediatedness of individual existential security, in which people are able to relate consciously to meaning structures as action possibilities, thus becoming free of the demands of immediate personal survival and able to understand the overarching connection between the existential and developmental problems of the individual and the overall societal process by which the means and conditions of providing for human life are created in a generalized way. (1983, p. 237)

Among the implications of this is that individuals come to relate to themselves as first-persons in societal relations with others, and subjectivity becomes seen as equivalent to intersubjectivity. This is important from the moral theoretical point of view, as it creates the morally necessary choice of relating to others as – to use Macmurray’s terms (1961) – *instruments* (means) or as *persons* (ends).

“Agency” (*Handlungsfähigkeit*) refers to the historically and societally determined degree of control that individuals have over their own conditions and possibilities for satisfying their needs. Clearly, there are circumstances under which such agency can be severely limited. This may or may not be obvious to the individuals affected. Those whom Marx called “wage slaves” in a capitalist economy have agency that is restricted, but they may accept such restriction as normal, thus remaining effectively unaware of their enslavement. Ideally, a society should be organized such that every individual has the possibility of realizing the potentials for satisfaction that are offered by the state of the society’s historical development. We all need to play a meaningful part in the control of the societal process (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 243), which brings us to the concept of “subjective situation” (*subjektive Befindlichkeit*). This is the individual’s personal awareness and assessment of his or her own possibilities and restrictions. As long as the wage slave is unaware of the restrictions that create wage-slavery, little is likely to be done about removing those restrictions. An important role of theory is to create that awareness.

I trust that I have said enough to show that we have here a psychological theory that is equipped with the kinds of concepts that readily mesh with moral theory and its concerns. The world in which we live is currently ruled by fear, destruction, and greed, that is, by anything but concern for the development and exercise of human possibilities and the development of individual awareness and
agency. To realize the latter, radical change is needed. As Chris Hedges (2015) writes, such change (or “revolt” as he puts it) is a moral imperative. No psychological theory will bring this about, but one with the right concepts can be part of the necessary apparatus of change. German Critical Psychology meets that requirement; it is prepared for the “revolutionary moment.”

References


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The neoliberal framing of (critical) psychology

Athanasios Marvakis

“Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul.”
Margaret Thatcher

“Neoliberalism is not Adam Smith; neoliberalism is not market society; neoliberalism is not the Gulag on the insidious scale of capitalism.”
M. Foucault

“Capitalism … has always been a regime of both destruction and liberation; that is where its historical uniqueness lies as well as its still operational attraction.”
Thomas Seibert

“We are witnessing a Great Experiment in the making of a new neoliberal humanity through the crisis. Will the neoliberal model of what it is to be a human being become definitive for the next fifty years?”
George Caffentzis

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1 Sunday Times, 3 May 1981: “What's irritated me about the whole direction of politics in the last 30 years is that it's always been towards the collectivist society. People have forgotten about the personal society. And they say: do I count, do I matter? To which the short answer is, yes. And therefore, it isn't that I set out on economic policies; it's that I set out really to change the approach, and changing the economics is the means of changing that approach. If you change the approach, you really are after the heart and soul of the nation. Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul.”
Abstract
We live in a transitional social period of historic proportions, in which the historical class compromise of Fordism has been revoked ‘from above.’ In response to what has been ‘achieved’ and based on their current strength, those ‘above’ are seeking a new model of social organization and are trying to push it through - let’s call this model ‘neoliberalism.’ Like its predecessor, Fordism, neoliberalism demands and enables a specific form of social organization, which ‘needs’ (both enables and presupposes) certain types of ‘average’ people. Let’s call these ‘forms of subjectivity,’ i.e. configurations of subjectivity and new templates for historical normality.
What prevailed in the 20th century as Psychology—and shapes our inherent understanding, whether approving or critical, of a normal person and his/her subjectivity—was just Fordist psychology, i.e. a psychology that had to help organize (i.e. develop and use) the productive force ‘individuality’ in a manner useful for Fordism. Psychology has/d to help get people to think and act ‘functionally’ - why else should bureaucracies or ruling classes invest in it?
The nascent neoliberalism involves other (normality) requirements - which are always simultaneously both hindrances and opportunities for the subjects! Today, the productive force ‘individuality’ is simply being organized differently and poured into more current efficiency/profit molds of subjectivity. The respective concepts of a person in Fordism and neoliberalism can be condensed in buzzwords: Fordist ‘homogeneous normality’ vs. neoliberal ‘differential normality’ from ‘above’—we are still and always dealing with a practice of normalization of (developing and exploited) individuals!
In Fordism, it was the task of the predominant social sciences (such as psychology) to homogenize people along specific socially produced patterns, social categories (both: to control and reorient them, to fix them): the right/normal man, the normal worker, normal sex ... Neoliberalism no longer needs homogeneity (that much). It ‘operates' with differentiality. Homogeneity is not as crucial and important, everyone can (but also must) be individually usable in his/her own way or prove (!) his/her usability individually. Individuality, idiosyncrasies, peculiarities are not only ok., but may effectively support one’s utility even better.
For neoliberalism, collectives are not only no longer ‘in,’ they even smell of homogeneity - yuck! And exactly here lie both the crux and the trap of 100 years of criticisms from and of dominant psychology: any critique of Fordist psychology boiled down to questioning homogeneity - and expounding individuality. However, homogeneity was not only submission to a ‘norm;’ at the same time it (also) meant or promised social protection - which had to be won, to be sure! It is exactly this social protection that is the original sin of the neoliberal religion! If criticism fails to reflect the dialectic of homogeneity and (the promise of) social protection by historicizing itself and its context, by becoming aware of its respective societal relativity, then its painful thorn against Fordist homogeneity will quickly become a knitting needle useful for the individual’s straitjacket in his/her struggle with neoliberal differential normalcy. Criticism is not some timeless rhetorical jewelry, nor an academic frock one puts on and carries around individually, but rather a social relationship with the historical
mainstream as the counterpart; it is a social relationship in which real subjects (must) form historical regimes of agency in and for their lives!

In addition, there are dynamics of ‘dis-simultaneity’ (*Ungleichzeitigkeit*) in the organization of our societies: neither Fordism nor neoliberalism were or are the same everywhere and for everyone! There never was, nor is there now, a single, possibly dominant, mode of working, mode of living or mode of desiring: neither intra-societally nor inter-nationally. Not all (social groups of) people live in the same historical Now - with the same opportunities and obstacles! There were and are structural contradictions - such as class, gender, ‘race'/colonialism, ... – and the relationships between these shape sociability (societality) historically. Any one, geo-politically specific, psychology depends on the confrontation with these structural contradictions: as scientific topic, as academic discipline, and as professional occupation.

**Keywords**
Fordist psychology, neoliberal psychology, NGOization of psychological labor, history of psychology, critique of psychology, forms of subjectivity, configurations of subjectivity, homogenous normality, differential normality.

**Introduction**

We live in a transitional social period of historic proportions, in which the historical class compromise of Fordism has been revoked ‘from above.’ In response to what has been ‘achieved' and based on their current strength, those ‘above' are seeking a new model of social organization and are trying to push it through. By no means does this new model aim only at economic changes in individual countries! Rather, what is at stake is a reconfiguration of society that involves all aspects of its organization: institutions, government, labor, individuals, needs, relationships, rights, etc. The way society looks (or has to look) is to be designed anew and radically differently.

Let us call this social movement ‘from above', this political project\(^2\) for the salvation and, at the same time, for the design of a capitalism appropriate for our times, *neoliberalism*.

Like its historical predecessor ‘Fordism,’ neoliberalism *demands* and, at the same time, *enables*, a certain, a concrete form of social organization; this social organization requires ‘modally’ (‘on average’) particular, very concrete types of people - and that means both: Neoliberalism *both* enables such new types of human beings *and* requires such types of human beings. I propose calling these

\(^2\) „The point for neoliberalism is not to make a model that is more adequate to the real world, but to make the real world more adequate to its model. This is not merely an intellectual fantasy, it is a very real political project ...” (S. Clarke)
http://homepages.warwick.ac.uk/~syrbe/pubs/Neoliberalism.pdf
human types configurations of subjectivity, historical normality matrices, or forms of subjectivity who (can) develop within historically determined regimes of agency.

‘Psychology’, as we have come to know it for more than 100 years, is a historical product the respective manifestation of which articulates certain forms of social organization, i.e., simultaneously requires and enables them. This implies that the epochal societal changes affect psychology as well and in a specific manner and that they demand a redefinition of its functions and its functionality for this new historical form of sociality.

With this text, I would like to initiate the largely neglected discussion (also within our Kritische Psychologie) about the social dimension of agency, of subjectivity, and of their real contradictions. The necessity of a continuous, historical-social contextualization of (critical) psychology assigns us many tasks for the coming decades… if we understand Critical Psychology as an open, collective project and do not want to limit it to a historically, geopolitically and theoretically fixed building of a few people.

I want to move forward in five steps. In doing so, I am aware that my concern can only be outlined here in the form of theses. The following text really sketches only the proposal of and the invitation to a large open project. I do hope that, despite the necessary schematic character, the outlines of the 'bigger picture' become somewhat discernible:

- The first step is about the different proliferating discourses, in which and with which the epochal changes are being addressed. These discourses oscillate mainly between unintentionally conservative discomfort, fairly helpless lamentation, and neoliberal complicity.

- The second step seeks a beginning, it names the germ cell, or the basic historical contradiction of concern here; and, in terms of psychology, this cannot be anything but the societal productive force ‘individuality’. Formulated as a catchphrase: No value appreciation (Wertschöpfung) of the productive force individuality is conceivable, let alone organizable, without a simultaneous appreciative evaluation (Wertschätzung) of and value adding to individuality. It is exactly here (and for this very purpose) that psychology steps onto the (social) stage: The dialectic of appreciated value and appreciative evaluation of the productive force individuality unfolds in and as psychology along (at least) three trajectories: as scientific subject matter, as academic discipline, and as (professionalized) labor.

- In the third step, I address two historical-societal models that have tried to organize profitably the productivity and creativity of individuals, and that means both: to develop and to exploit productivity:
  A. The first attempt is the historical class compromise of Fordism with its homogenous normality.
B. The second attempt is in the process of becoming and designates the (still) top-down dominated neoliberal transformation of sociality with its new differential normality.

- The fourth step brings us closer to the dialectics of 'individuality' and 'collectivity' and names the obligation to include our very criticisms of dominant psychology in a merciless historization. It is the only way to avoid turning the sharp thorn of our critique of Fordist subjectivity into a flexible knitting needle for its neoliberal corset.
- With the fifth and final step, I address the inner tension and dynamism in the organization of our societies. The focus here is on the multitude of social dis-simultaneities: Like Fordism thus far, neoliberalism is not same everywhere and for everyone.

1. Proliferating discourses oscillate between unintentionally conservative discomfort, lamentation, and neoliberal complicity

The societal upheavals are the subject of manifold, proliferating discourses. 'Subject' and 'subjectivity' are apparently experiencing a renaissance and are no longer just a 'disruptive factor.' But a quick glance at the now unmanageable literature reveals a series of dominant terminologies of mishits and confusions, the 'new-speak' flavor of which often tastes very much of marketing and communication agencies. Following are a few examples of typical ‘modes’ of speaking about the novelty in neoliberalism:

1. An old-new mode of speaking continues to transfer conflicts, problems and contradictions in the organization of activities, in the organization of work onto individual subjects, to translate them into problems for individual subjectivity and individual subjects (e.g., through the therapeutization of conflicts, through the interpretation of school-learning as an issue of individual motivation, etc.).

2. Another mode of speaking oscillates within a constructed dichotomy between freedom and the "domestication of subjects" (Michalitsch 2006). The descriptions and analyses get caught up too easily either in the web of implied conservatism, in an unspoken 'everything is getting worse' and 'things used to be better,' or tumble into the ostensible opposite. Subjects are either in for (total) submission, complete subsumption, or for a new freedom and the liberation from bonds, traditions, etc. However, such a dichotomous either-or is really more of a rhetorical phrase and simply impractical, since it imagines individuality, subjectivity as a genie, whom one (and who might that be?) is able to let out of the bottle and lock up again in there. Or, in a different simile, it is like the power
at home that can be switched on or off according at the (company’s) will. Such a perspective on liberation and submission makes them appear as abstract and unhistorical qualities, essences of individuals who are either oppressed or liberated; it articulates a certain theoretical-practical perspective on subjectivity and work. Vogelsang (2009) posits similarly, “It is not work that is being ‘subjectivized’: its subjects have always been those who work in the collective. Rather, it is a goal of management to transfer the new contradictions, which, themselves, are caused by automatization in the name of profit maximization, into the subjectivity of those working, and to do it with new forms of work that makes workers abdicate their solidarity because they manifest those contradiction as internal restrictions and as a commitment to compete with other workers” (115).

3. In a third new mode of speaking, the ‘new’ is greeted with a bouquet of neologisms: the new labor force is showered ‘from above’ with many wonderful campaign slogans [Kampfbegriffe], which really serve as more of a perfidious mis-nomer [Entnennung] than an explanation of the dynamics of the new. Here is a basket of such neologisms from the last 20 years:

- "the I-brand" [die Marke Ich] (Seidl & Beutelmeyer 2006)
- "I-Stock" [ICH-Aktie] (Davis & Meyer 1999; Lanthaler & Zugmann 2000)
- "I-Entrepreneur" [ICH-Entrepreneur] (Lanthaler & Zugmann 2000)
- "Job-Nomads"; "Job-Mercenaries" [Jobnomaden; Job-Söldner] (English 2001)
- "Life-Entrepreneur" [Lebensunternehmer] (Lutz 2003)
- "Employee-Entrepreneur" [Mitarbeiter-Unternehmer] (Deutschmann et al., 1995, 445)
- "Co-Entrepreneur" [Mitunternehmer] (Kuhn 1997; Wunderer 1999)
- "Network Entrepreneur" (Burt 1997, 2000)
- "Self-Employed" [Selbstangestellte] (Faust et al. 1999)
- "Sole proprietor-LLC" [Selbst-GmbH] Fischer et al. 1999)
- "Entrepreneurial Employees" [unternehmerische Angestellte] (Franzpötter 2000)

The proposed new terms - such as "I-Corporation" - are not somehow misguided linguistic lapses; rather, they are partisan and highly biased. Through terminological splitting, the ‘new’ such concepts attempt to describe is effectively being mis-nomed [entnommt]. To put it another way: since such terms do not clearly name their particular, concrete epistemological-political concept of the subject, but rather imply it to be a general perspective, their strategic splitting
does not illuminate the ‘new’, but obfuscates it further. The darkness of such concepts emanates from their ostensible spotlight!

Even the newspapers offer more differentiated and reasonable analyses of this issue, for instance in an interview with former federal judge Thomas Fischer in Freitag (23/08/2017):

“Does the individual emerge as an entrepreneurial self?
Well, he believes as much or he’s talked into believing it, or he doesn’t have a choice.

*Which of these is the best solution—or the least of the three evils?*

The last. He doesn’t have a choice. That means he has an opportunity to accept it or not, to change it or not. The term ‘entrepreneurial self’ is sheer euphemism. Obviously, not every day-laborer turns into an I-Corporation just because he was suddenly declared to be ‘in season.’ Anyone can be told: You are now a self-employed entrepreneur, you don’t have any protections anymore, no guarantees for your life, and we just can’t know what tomorrow brings. Of course, that’s pure ideology. The world does not consist of an infinite number of powerful I-Corporations, but of ever-fewer powerful corporations and ever-more disempowered individuals.”

To wield terms like, for instance, ‘homo economicus,’ implies a very specific, limited and weird notion of economics, not only with regard to the *individual* (‘homo’), but especially with regard to *economics* (‘economicus’), which initially meant nothing more than ‘householding’. What could be the novelty of a ‘householding’ or ‘housekeeping individual’, a literal 'homo economicus,' and what could be said against such a 'householding individual'? Spontaneously perhaps: ‘great, but c/old coffee’. The uniqueness, which is presented here as something ostensibly new, emerges only from an implied limitation: It is only when ‘homo’ and ‘economicus’ are understood as something special, and especially limited, that the term gains meaning at all—even if it still does not create anything new. If ‘homo’ does not mean more than the bourgeois private individual and ‘economicus’ simply a microeconomic unit—run in a style reminiscent of that of the notorious Swabian housewife—then the term dissolves and leaves nothing of much novelty. With this limitation, nothing much has been explained, neither in terms of the individual nor in terms of keeping or managing a household! But the Latin verbiage is probably meant to suggest something very important and new!

As Jan Rehmann (2007) points out, such a mode of speaking rehearses a “managerial point of view," which "regards followers from the perspective of

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their leaders" (p. 85). Governmentality-Studies, for example, made do “for the most part” with “immanent-empathic retellings” (p. 85) of “statements by entrepreneurs, management literature, governmental statements” and the “mainstream press” (p. 82). Through the terminological split, the practice of a restricted perspective - the particular point of view of management, corporation, capital, of those in power - is presented as being universal. With this restriction, the perspective of those in power is perceived as the only one and is thereby reified. The 'wishes' and prerequisites of entrepreneurs, managers, and the 'market' are repeated blindly and theorized as effectively inevitable-divine orders, as predetermined.

Such an uncritical analysis practices a kind of analogy, a deductive logic of human behavior: requirements posited by those in power for subjects are misinterpreted automatically as behaviors adopted by subjects. Human behavior is thereby reduced to the execution of behavior; within such a framework, psychology limits itself to blind functionalism: human behavior can be conceptualized solely as functioning within predetermined and unchangeable circumstances. Theory already sees the subject and subjectivity as not autonomous nor as existing in relation to (dominant) social requirements; rather, they exist only as a function of these requirements. The ultimate question can therefore only be how well they function and (are able to) reproduce specific requirements: successfully or unsuccessfully. Autonomy vis-à-vis the dominant requirements can only appear, and be articulated, as a dysfunction of the subject – not as a dysfunction of the social order. In such a (theoretical) framework, concrete subjects and their behaviors are reduced to a pre-game show - the main event is their final submission.

However, if we do not want to reduce subjectivity to an individual quirk, an already existing essence, but to comprehend it as a historically concrete social relationship, which must first be produced as well, then we must speak about historical formations of subjectivity, which are enabled by, or based on, different forms of how labor is organized. The reconstruction of actions by real subjects does not require dichotomy and terminological splitting, but the historicization and dialectics of power and subjectivity; the historicization of concrete social organization and the development and emancipation of subjects. The autonomy of subjectivity cannot be dissolved in the (dominant) requirements for subjects; human action cannot be reduced solely to functioning and the execution of tasks. The focus must be on the real dialectics of restriction and development, of exploitation and the realization of subjectivity. Expanded liberation of subjects is not achievable without more extensive usurpation - and vice versa: no increase in usurpation without expanded liberation! The goal is new configurations of subjectivity - a “‘re-assembly’ of humans” (“Um-Montage” - R. Misik) - in the
process of social upheaval, during which new modes of working, living and desiring are (to be) created as well.

2. Productive force ‘individuality’: No appreciation of value without appreciative evaluation

In the second step, we search for a beginning, for the essential historical contradiction; for our discussion, this cannot be anything but the societal productive force ‘individuality.’ Individuality and subjectivity are not abstract, complete, ahistorical (and ostensibly internal) essences, which are brought out in the historical present, graciously to be allowed to unfold or to be exploited more effectively. Individuality or subjectivity are not a desk lamp that can be switched on or off by a specific historical organization of soci(ality). The dialectic of recognition and exploitation means that the organizational form of society provides frameworks for historical configurations of subjectivity (‘regimes of agency’); that it creates spaces in which, and for which, individuality is created and able to unfold. It is the (re)organization of society that requires and enables individuality in the first place, and in the process requires and enables its differentiation, its cultivation. For Marx, formed, developed individuality is the pivot point of material conditions: “Forces of production and social relations – two different sides of the development of the social individual – appear to capital as mere means, and are merely means for it to produce on its limited foundation. In fact, however, they are the material conditions to blow this foundation sky-high.” (1857/1973, p. 706)

Individuality and subjectivity are a socially evolving product! The 'appreciation' of individuality is not a noble act of grace; it is a necessary practice!

The profitable organization of actions by and of real subjects between autonomy and heteronomy constitutes a real contradiction, a real problem for those in power as they organize societal work. Formulated as a question, this contradiction could be: How can individual productivity and creativity be developed and exploited (or even developed to be exploited)? Or, as a slogan: No

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4 Which are related to the state and level of class struggle!
5 ‘Cultivation’ of individuality also comprises its qualification, education, ‘reparation,’ freedom, self-actualization (where both components, ‘self’ and ‘actualization’ are contested fields); on the other hand, it also refers to the social ‘dissemination’ of the ‘cultivation’ beyond aristocracy and bourgeoisie.
value appreciation (Wertschöpfung) of the productive force ‘individuality,’ without its simultaneous appreciative evaluation (Wertschätzung).

The cornerstones of capitalist development have always been the formation and discipline of individual bodies (Federici 2013), i.e., the focus is on the ‘(in)capacity’ of individuals, which must be transformed into productive labor through various ‘measures’ (such as terror, law/criminalization, discipline, organization of work, reparation, ...). While, in the beginning, the goals was to fight the passions of one’s own body, to eliminate, discipline, subjugate, ‘postpone’, spatially restrict or marginalize them, the point was not the supposed switching on or off of subjectivity, but rather its historically specific – productive – formation/forming, which includes the education/formation and reparation of subjectivity.

Heretofore, all known forms of social organization have been contradictory and based on a hierarchy of ruling power. Thus, the historical ‘upgrading’ of individuality and subjectivity can neither (have) be(en) a harmonious affair nor can it be understood as somehow additive-quantitative. In our societies - based on a hierarchy of access to ruling power -, the real, concrete constitution of the ability to act cannot be anything but contradictory. Critical Psychology, too, understands agency as double-sided: it is described as both restricted and generalized (e.g. Holzkamp 1983). Specific ‘moments’ do not occur in a pure sense—either restrictive or generalized—rather, they manifest as contradictory hybrids, as relationships within the respective historical regime of action potential (cf. PAQ 1987, 204).

However, the productive force ‘individuality,’ is not only an ‘opportunity’ for those in power, but - as such - also represents a danger for them. The ‘problem’ for those in power is less the issue of ‘autonomy: yes or no’; rather, it is the concrete and practical question of the quantity and quality of necessary and subjugated autonomy, and therefore also of the scope and quality of participation by the subjects:

- What quantity and quality of autonomy is needed in, and for, any specific form of work organization? What quantity and quality could become dangerous?

The recognition and development of the productive force ‘individuality’ and the profitable organization of the labor of productive and creative individuals has always been, and still is, prerequisite for, and core of, the existence and

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6 These are the simple processes in ‘the making of the working class’ (including its internal partitions along of gender, ‘race’, …).
7 This does not mean that an actual ‘turning off’ of subjects (through their elimination) did and does not exist! Witch hunts, colonial genocides, or mass starvation due to so-called ‘structural adjustment programs’ of the IMF at the end of the 20th century are only a few examples.
development of psychology. The *elevated significance* of individuality and subjectivity is a structural element for the development of so-called modern - industrial-capitalistic - societies. An increased importance of individuality (if only to be used and exploited) presupposes and fosters its recognition, its cultivation - and that cannot happen without the appropriate and adequate allocation of societal resources - for instance, to the field of psychology.

**Three lines of psychology**

The existence of capitalism presupposes, and simultaneously enables, a historical re-orientation and re-formation of the relationship between individual and society. And this is exactly the moment when - and for which - psychology joins the (societal) game. The special framing of psychology in, and through, a specific societal organization, the dialectics of value appreciation (*Wertschöpfung*) and appreciative evaluation (*Wertschätzung*) of the productive force ‘individuality’ unfolds in psychology along (at least) three trajectories:

- as scientific subject matter,
- as academic discipline and
- as (professionalized) work.

1. **Psychology as a scientific subject matter**

As emphasized previously, individuality and subjectivity are not ahistorical essences; they are not genies that are allowed out of the bottle only on occasion, only when it pleases those in power. Rather, individuality and subjectivity are, themselves, a developing social relationship, in which the respective historical relationship between the individual and society is articulated and developed. The *historical transformation* of the psychic – the focus of psychology – compels us to reflect on the historical-concrete *formations* of this relationship, which, in turn, are enabled, and demanded, in and by historically-specific organizational forms of work. The *regimes of agency* with their historical *normality matrices*, their *configurations of subjectivity*, depend on the specific manifestation of the class struggle and the productive forces and, in our contradictory societal circumstances, are themselves necessarily contradictory.

2. **Psychology as (scientific) discipline**

The emergence of psychology (the social sciences as a whole) – in its mainstream as well as its critical variations – is based on social changes of a historical magnitude. In the twentieth century, we have come to know modern psychology as ‘normal’ and powerful and we operationalize it to an ever-greater
extent; however, this praxis field, this social practice received its social relevance and power only with and for ‘Fordism.’ Our seemingly obvious understanding of the ‘normal,’ the ‘average’ human being and her/his subjectivity are those of a Fordist psychology, which has/d to contribute to turning the productive force ‘individuality’ into something fit and useful for Fordism – which means both: to develop/cultivate and to exploit it.

By necessity, the organizational changes in societability affected also the societal organization of knowledge production and knowledge operationalization (Wallerstein 1996). Thus far, the thing we were able (and/or forced) to draw on as dominant psychology (or social science) has been nothing but the respectively victorious variation of a (class)struggle in the production and operationalization of knowledge, which sold itself as producer and vendor of useful knowledge and skill, primarily to national-governmental bureaucracies and administrations (as well as to other well-heeled elites). It has been only via an alignment with the bureaucratic-hegemonic pre-requisites for governing the population (‘gouvernment’ in Foucault’s sense) that questions and answers would be acknowledged at all for research and/or policies. Consequently, without such an alignment (utility), any questioning and knowing, any ability and solution are, in the most literal sense, worth-less; with all implications of such worth-lessness even for the social (re)production by psychologists (and social scientists)!

As will be developed later, this technocratic and ostensibly neutral-objective division of labor in the production of knowledge is nothing but the application Tayloristic-Fordistic principles for the organization of labor onto the scientific industry. The goal and promise of the Tayloristic organization of labor is to increase the efficiency of work and, simultaneously, to neutralize the workers’ power over the production process. What is paradoxically apparent here is the fact that, in the dominant social sciences, exactly the same mechanism of a neutralization of power via the organization of labor emerges conceptually only as knowledge about supposedly deficient ‘objects’ of study (say, industrial workers) - if it is theorized at all.

It is only through the very involvement of the discipline ‘psychology’ in the formation of the psychic for the Fordist organization of work that a ‘societal need’ is delineated for which corresponding social resources are/were, in turn, then made available. It is precisely this ‘societal need’ and the involvement of psychology (as academic discipline) in the forming/formation of subjectivity in our contradictory societies that assigns psychology a dual function, a

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8 Very briefly we can say that – up to now - the social nation-state did not only need and create a ‘national Railway’ and ‘national Post’, but also a ‘national’ Psychology, Education, etc.
contradictory functionality: we can condense this dual function into the slogan, ‘support and control’ of subjects.

As part of the labor-divided chain of the productive force ‘science’, psychology, itself, is a specific component (a tool, an apparatus, a discipline) in the fragmented, but also fragmenting, treatment of the social question in capitalism. Since the beginning of the 20th century, the historical ‘deal’ between those in power and the social sciences has been not to negotiate (let alone, solve) the social question as an issue of the social (dis)order, but solely to address it (in research and policies) via the development and repair, via the ‘improvement,’ adaptation, and marginalization of individuals and (small) groups. Formulated as a slogan, the ‘deal’ consists in a subserviency, a servitude in exchange for (the promise of) wage labor and funds.

After more than 100 years of societal recognition with real effects, ‘psychology’ by now represents a very powerful design factor in and for this societal order, with tremendous impact on human life. If we choose not to ignore, for harmony’s sake, the contradictions in our societies, we have to acknowledge that the societal production factor ‘psychology’ offers not only supposed solutions (benign or good) to societal problems. As a productive force in contradictory societies, psychology, itself, remains contradictory: the more ‘efficient’ it becomes, the more it becomes an integral part of the very problems it feels called to help resolve.

As victorious variations in the (class)struggle for the production and operationalization of knowledge, the contradictory functionality of the (dominant) social sciences in the service of bureaucracies and the powerful face, from the start, another set of policies around knowledge. Historically, the original competitor to authoritarian or liberal variations of a science of population-government or bio-politics was the perspective of a production of questions and knowledge that would originate ‘from below’: in and for social movements. This perspective remained very under-developed; it is only marginally visible - if at all; and has even been suppressed as ‘un-scientific’ or ‘ideological,’ among others. Often, the political-epistemological perspective of social movements - the historical, the ideological counter-model to the dominant social sciences of the 20th century - survived (only) as a ‘critique of the mainstream,’ as the illegitimate half-sister of the discipline’s most current mainstream. With this, it was framed (aligned to as well as limited by) by the wiggle room the mainstream, itself, was privy to! In other words, it was the mainstream that posed the tasks and asked the questions - and it, in turn, had received them from those in power at any given point, from the contractors of the respective departments in the Faculties of population government. And thus, the historical-hegemonic division of labor in the production of knowledge could be reproduced: In this technocratic design,
the bureaucracy comes up with topically worth-y questions and possibly offers resources; certain experts apply their scientific tools and deliver ostensibly ‘neutral’ results to these customers; they, in turn, disseminate the results to third (specialized) parties for further usage.

The perspective of social movements ‘from below,’ on the other side, starts with the autonomy of subjectivity and aims at transcending subjects’ mere functionality; it aims also at participation in policies around knowledge. Therefore, the investigative focus can turn not only to ‘functional’ aspects of action and be limited to those; it must be able to also include resistant, “useless” (Wolf 1999), divergent, transgressive, unconventional, non-conformist aspects of action. The subversive appropriation of reality by subjects, which - by necessity - includes not only the adaption to, but also the alteration of reality, must not be excluded conceptually and a priori. It is the commitment of a policy of knowledge ‘from below’ not to remove the emancipatory ‘teleology’ of human action already at the conceptual stage.

3. Psychology as work

The redefinition of functions and functionality of psychology for the new historical form of societability refers to all three psychological trajectories: scientific topic, academic discipline, and professionalized work. Without any doubt, the social upheaval (of neoliberalism) includes the work of psychologists as well (Marvakis & Triliva & Tourtouras 2016) … and definitely not only with regard to working conditions. Rather, the transformation also aims at all requirements and opportunities for activities we have come to accept as concrete occupations or professions in the Fordist regime. In neoliberalism, the historically created professions of psychologist, social worker, sociologist etc. are themselves up for debate and, potentially, for elimination.

An important lever for the transformation of psychological work is the process of the NGO-ization of (the organization of) work and social policy. This NGO-ization functions as a prototype of neoliberal (psychological) work and creates new spaces, contents, and even subjects of work. The NGOization of (psychological) work designates not simply the eventual substitution of the public with the private; rather, it describes the creation of a new regime of relationships between the public and the private in work and social policy.

It is more helpful and more realistic to frame the NGOization of psychological work as a methodology, a technology, a procedural method, which transform and re-configures the functions of all participating actors and constituents of work and social policy: the NGOs themselves, the government, the individual subjects (the workers and customers, clients, beneficiaries) as well
as their respective relationships. The new embattled practices and infrastructures of work demand and create therefore new subjectivities (professional subjects and ‘clients’) and new forms of practice.

Reflected psychological work remains a necessarily practical balancing act between control and support, between emancipation and functioning of the ‘clients’ - but also between the own emancipation and functioning of the psychological (employed) wage laborer, of the private ‘service provider’ – by now also of the psychological NGO-precariat. However, given the neoliberal upheaval, the new questions confronting psychological workers now are:

- Support and control, adaptation to which social order? Functioning in and for which social structures?
- Which assumptions of the norm does psychological work support now? Which normality does it serve?
- Will Fordism remain the (only) societal frame of reference for work around normality?

3. Historical attempts

In the third step, I briefly discuss the two extant historical-social attempts at organizing individuals’ productivity and creativity in a profitable manner: The first attempt is the historical class compromise we have come to know as ‘Fordism’, with its ‘homogeneous normality.’ The second attempt refers to the emerging neoliberal transformation of society, still dominated ‘from above,’ with its new, its differential normality.

A. Class compromise of Fordism - homogeneous normality

Historically, in capitalism, the first profitable organization of actions by actual subjects happens in the very configuration Gramsci termed Fordism. Fordism enabled and, at the same time, demanded a new “type of work” and a new “type of human” (Gramsci), who, in turn, required an appropriate approach to psychology - as academic topic, as ‘national’ discipline of social science, and as professional practice. This concrete form of organization tends to try to submit all relevant expressions of life to the capitalist interest in utility: from ideas about normality, to the rhythms of everyday life, to the expectations held by subjects. For the purpose of describing the articulation of this historical configuration onto the organization of action, it is helpful to distinguish between at least three ‘levels’ or ‘fields’: the mode of work, the mode of life, and the mode of desire.
Total authority over the productivity and creativity of the population defines a core of capitalistic class rule. While it may sound banal and well-worn: the goal of the Fordist organization of work is the maximal exploitation of the developing human labor, the increase of productivity, and the decrease of production costs. In the previous organization of labor, workers could control the process of production to a much greater extent thanks to their knowledge and skills. The new ‘problem’ that emerged from this for capitalists concerned the manner in which control over workers could be expanded - for instance, with crew leaders and foremen. For Taylorism - a promising product of the new social sciences that had emerged at the end of the 19th century - the solution to the capitalists’ problem was to replace the old mode of work with a new one. At the core of “scientific management,” the term vendor Frederick W. Taylor (1911) chose for his product, are a few general principles, which have to be adapted to the specific conditions at any one location. This set of interwoven modifications significantly increased workers’ productivity and the overall efficiency of factory work. Taylor’s organizational principles are:

   a) **Technical fragmentation** – i.e., the break-down of complex tasks into discrete, easily quantifiable and measurable activities.\(^9\)

   b) **Social division of labor** – i.e., allocation of sub-activities to special group of workers and a rigid structure of reporting lines.

   c) **Psychological splitting** of the total action (**Handlungsgesamt**) into separate components for, respectively, planning, execution and controlling/supervision: the 'what,' the 'why' and the 'how' of the action.

Through these organizational principles, the workers’ authority over their work (as process and as content) is reduced, while management gains increased control over the workers. Practically, this means that the workers are dispossessed and disempowered by the sheer organization of work - any ‘manipulation’ of the workers' ‘goodwill’ is therefore completely unnecessary. Cognitive, intellectual elements of work are reduced as much as possible; increasingly, work means only implementation. ‘Action’ increasingly describes only the ‘execution’ of ‘orders’ placed by others. The worker has been tied into a process s/he cannot control; s/he participates in a structure s/he cannot control - s/he is a cog in a greater machine and this cog’s only job is to function.

Essentially, the epochal restructuring brought about by Fordism concerned the role of work in society: Fordism affected changes in its content, form, and organization. However, work - i.e. valued and value-creating human activity for the (re)production of life - can never be reduced simply to wage-earning.

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9 This principle paves the way for future ‘automation.’ It is only a question of time until a robot will be able to execute the clear-cut, delineated, and repetitive parts of a particular work process.
industrial factory work. That would mean swallowing the logic held by capital - hook, line, and sinker! Work never concerns only ‘material goods’ (likely industrial), but also dignity, joy of life (and desire), belonging, sociability etc. The specific development and control of subjectivity and the actions by subjects must refer to more than industrial work and its organization.

This explains why the mode of work in Fordism is not limited to the industrial production process. Rather, this particular mode of organizing work also places very particular demands on all other realms of life; certain organizational configurations become possible and are even presupposed as ‘functional.’ The way industrial work is organized emanates as a prototype onto other arenas of life in society. That is why Gramsci posits a new “type of human,” which is both necessary for, and generated especially by, Fordism. “Gramsci conceptualizes a complex developmental connection. Certain requirements of work necessitate a certain type of human, without it - what will later be called the ‘subjective factor’ - they are difficult to execute. However, his type does not emerge simply as a response to these new work requirements; rather, it is the product of strategic cultural programming by industrialists and entrepreneurs, among others” (Haug 1998).

Consequently, Gramsci suggests the notion of a more comprehensive mode of life, which is both supported and required by the Tayloristic mode of work. This Fordistic mode of life is based on homogeneous conceptualizations of life paths; keywords here are, for instance, seriality and biographical homogeneity.

The repetitive and intense type of work inherent in Fordism cannot be sustained solely through force; what is needed is a balanced ratio of compulsion (self-discipline) and conviction (including pay raises). Alcoholism and sex threaten to undermine workers’ self-discipline and, with it, their willingness to function at work. Referring to the 1920’s, Gramsci writes, “The new industrialism wants monogamy, it does not want the worker to waste his mental energy on the urgent and chaotic quest for sexual satisfaction” (Gramsci, Prison Notebook 4, § 52, 531; Gramsci 1999). Therefore, Gramsci elaborates, “moral functions become a matter of public policy” and “the campaign against alcoholism, the most dangerous factor affecting the labor force, turns into a “state function”” (p. 530). Now we can name the third area onto which Fordism radiates and both enables and creates its particular type of human: the mode in which subjects desire. Fordism both supports and demands that subjects adhere to rigid collective norms; to this end, it provides a comprehensive ‘national morality’: family, sexual morals, behaviors around health and learning, regularity, order, discipline etc. I mentioned earlier that, in Fordism, the individual does not possess an ostensibly a-historical characteristic ‘individuality.’ Rather, the social phenomenon and the concept we call individuality is the product of a specific
historic context, the result of social processes of both individualization and homogenization. From a social perspective ‘from above,’ these processes of individualization and homogenization may only concern the (practices of) normalization of (developing and exploited) individuals! From this perspective ‘from above,’ the dual functionality of the dominant psychology and of the social sciences in general, as socially effective institutions for the support and control of subjects, would be limited to the formation of Fordistic subjectivity; its task would be the ‘presentation’ of a concept of the human as one of homogenous normality. The adaptation of its clients, its ‘beneficiaries,’ would then mean only their formation and restauration for Fordism and its templates of normality.

B. Neoliberal transformation, emerging and dominated ‘from above’ – differential normality

To address the second social attempt at organizing the productivity and creativity of individuals in a profitable manner, we transport ourselves into the historical now: to the emerging neoliberal transformation of sociality, which is dominated ‘from above.’ A different set of requirements (for normality) dominates in this neoliberal attempt at organizing profitably the subjects’ constant shifts between autonomy and heteronomy; and, for those subjects, these requirements always present as both obstacle and opportunity! The productive force ‘individuality’ is now being organized differently and with the intention of pouring it into efficient and profitable molds of subjectivity - the key concept here is ‘differential normality.’

Just to make sure there are no misconceptions, though: Fordism does not, in any way, ‘disappear’ from the world stage! Rather, the new form of neoliberal organization is additive and brings with it new modes of work, new modes of life, and new modes of desire. (For examples of such congruences and dis-simultaneities, see below in step five.)

The ‘point’ of the Tayloristic-Fordistic organization of work was to ‘expropriate’ the workers’ power, which was inherently connected to their competencies for the work process, by means of organizational modifications such as the social division of labor and the psychological splitting of action into planning, executing, and controlling/supervisory aspects of work. It is exactly the Fordistic model of organizing work that is called into question by this new project of those in power - and it does so in the most radical way imaginable. The neoliberal organization of work changes the Fordistic mode of division of labor; it even reverses it to a certain extent. How could a more expansive sense of responsibility on the part of participating individuals be realized otherwise, given
the rigid division of labor and tight chain of command that characterize Taylorism/Fordism?

Therefore, the neoliberal project is a re-action, the bourgeoisie’s creative, active response, which aims at a new, historically specific, manifestation of the “balance of power” (N. Elias). The neoliberal project proposes to re-unite the planning, executing, and controlling aspects of work within the same person - and it is enabled in this endeavor by technological and social advancements. This strategy ‘enriches’ the experience of work by those who, heretofore, merely executed it; their subjective, self-reliant participation becomes easier to realize and it elevates the appreciative evaluation of this developed, differential individuality.

However, this enrichment in and of work also jeopardizes the maintenance of the (pre)dominant order, since workers (re)gain more power to control the work process and could, conceivably, use this power for their class struggle. And just like that, an old contradiction inherent in capitalism is back on the agenda and urgently demands a historically new solution:

- How to avoid having an ‘outdated’ mode of dividing labor (of organizing work) impede (or even preclude) increases in efficiency?
- How to delegate more responsibility - which also means more control - for work processes to ‘lower levels’ without losing control of the ‘demands’ and ‘desires’ - by those who are ‘below’ - for ever more comprehensive authority?
- How can technically and socially new opportunities for an increase in efficiency be organized without losing the helm, i.e. the control of work, to the producers?

For those in power, therefore, the new, expanded individuality and subjects’ additional opportunities for power over work processes represent the self-inflicted exposure to an old-new explosive, one that Taylorism had already aimed to defuse by means of “scientific management”. The carrot of the expanded appreciation of individuality now demands an appropriate stick to be wielded by those in power to prevent the horse from ever leaving the barn. Within Fordistic homogeneity, the collective organization of structures of solidarity by those ‘down below’ had been the exceedingly dangerous thorn that had to be dulled ‘from above’. In neoliberalism, this urgency becomes even more acute for those in power: Apparently, now there is nothing more dangerous than an assembly of subjects who have even been fitted with expanded individuality (knowledge, skills, and tools). It does not take much of a leap to get from mere social assembly to the demand for control over not only (work) execution, but also work content (which, up to now, is still determined by capital). A quick mental sparkler shall suffice here! How can individuals take on more control over social
processes (and do so independently) without landing on the ‘stupid’ idea of wanting (to be able) to take over the whole shebang?

Neoliberalism is the very political project ‘from above’ that seeks to resolve this historical contradiction to the benefit of those in power.

As delineated above, a core component of capitalistic class rule is the comprehensive authority over people’s productivity and creativity. Within the framework of neoliberal transformation processes, those in power cannot stop at optimizing only the structural exploitation in the workplace. To secure their claim to power, they must work continuously at establishing and stabilize their dominant influence on society as a whole. The “balance of power” (N. Elias) between capital and labor must be changed permanently and social conditions must be aligned accordingly. Institutionally, it must be ensured that performance potentials - not only in work processes - are (able to be) utilized fully. Neoliberalism is not only an ‘economic arrangement’; rather, it requires comprehensive social and cultural re-configuration. The necessary propulsion energy for this is being ensured through the creation of ubiquitous and constant pressure or threat, both as mental scenario and as concrete reality. Thus far, brutalization has been shown to be inherent in neoliberalism. Politically, too, brute force ‘from above’ has generally been necessary to realize neoliberal changes - despite grand promises to the contrary. Over the past 40-50 years, the neoliberal menu included dictatorship, debt crisis, “shock strategies” (N. Klein), war, state terror etc.

The neoliberal lever for the neutralization of any jeopardy to the dominant order, its most ‘convincing’ stick, is the intentional-artificial generalization of precarity, especially since the wealth that is produced would suffice to do away with precarity altogether! “This is a context where capital seeks not a social contract with labour but a contingent and provisional contract, a contract where nothing is guaranteed for the worker or would-be worker other than the hope or possibility of work but not necessarily a sustaining wage or a life that can be planned into the future” (Adkins 2016: 1). “Precarity as a form of rule” (P. Bourdieu) is characterized by the unleashing of the competitive mindset and by the isolation of workers, both of which are triggered by this generalized precarity: "Precarity is part of a new form of rule based on the establishment of an insecure condition that has become generally enduring, with the aim of forcing workers to submit, to accept their exploitation" (Bourdieu 1998: 100).

As a form of rule, neoliberalism does not (only) include 'economically rational' work organization (in terms of productivity), but also the 'preemptive management of insurgency': completely ‘senseless’ suffering, the deterioration and waste of human labor and resources, the destruction of perspectives as well as of lives. An 'army of reservists' that will never be ‘de/employed,’ simply to
prevent anyone from even raising their heads! Neoliberalism is a brutal religion! It is – as George Caffentzis remarked – a new "conditio humana," rather than just the solution to a supposed economic crisis.

The Fordist organization of labor already struggles/d with the contradiction between the organization, the ‘unleashing,’ of human productivity and the simultaneous control and containment of subjectivity. Of course, the practical implementation of this contradiction, i.e., the 'unleashing' and concurrent containment of productivity always also includes/d, implies/d some (calculated or calculable) 'productivity los' due to 'productivity withheld' by active subjects.

However, the 'industrial terminology' used here should not mislead anyone into assuming the contradiction between 'unleashing' and 'containment' of subjectivity were limited to the realm of industrial factories. If 'work' is understood to denote ‘creative and productive activity,’ the concept cannot be limited to industrial wage labor. Consequently, if developing and (to be) developed human productivity and subjectivity are not limited to industrial wage labor, it is easy to see that the contradiction between the unleashing and containment of subjectivity exists just as much within other relevant social contexts - and that it is being organized and put into practice there as well. The process of learning within socially organized learning contexts (key word: ‘school’) is one example. Socially organized learning is both the development and the containment of individuality and subjectivity through those concrete forms in which learning is organized to assume dual social function(ality) in our contradictory society. The dynamic unfolds along both axes: through the individual-centeredness in dominant learning theories and through the practice of confining the organization of learning to 'interpersonal acts' between students and teachers in a concrete space (Marvakis 2014; Marvakis 2019 - this issue).

The new neoliberal model of social organization restructures and recontextualizes all three trajectories of psychology; the dual functionality of psychology (support and control) re-emerge more clearly; the historically created divisions of labor are being 'reorganized.' This reorganization refers, of course, also to the fragmented ‘treatment’ of the social question in and by separate disciplines within the social sciences, or to psychological practices via NGOization (qualification by de-specialization, instead of the previous qualification by specialization). Because of this reorganization, the allocation of resources in general is also up for debate again. For us ‘service providers’ within the psy-complex, this means that we have to prove again that/how we are useful as social scientists. Historically, a re-evaluation of our utility for the elites is again on the agenda.

If, during these radical societal changes, the social sciences (which includes psychology) do not want to jeopardize the social recognition they have enjoyed
to date, and, with it, their sustained social reproduction, they must re-legitimize it for the new form of sociality. The old-new 'basic virtue,' the 'transfer service' performed by psychology for the benefit of the neoliberal transformation, consists in contributing to the extended 'commodification of the psychic', its (re)definition as a marketable good. This means the reframing of social phenomena and societal problems as private commodities, which respond to individual, private demands...and, in the neoliberal logic, must be paid for privately as well.

In neoliberalism, the new function of the state does not accept any 'compensatory' duties - as was still the case in Fordism. The new, neoliberal role of the state focuses on providing opportunities for individual profit and organizing such opportunities as needed. Rather than the amelioration of poverty, or at least initiatives to fight it (even if it were just for social ‘appeasement’), the task of the state apparatus is the fight against the poor. One pertinent example is the huge 'prison-industrial-complex' in the U.S.A. and its extremely precarious integration of prisoners into the capitalist utilization machine.

In Fordism, the functionality of the dominant social sciences is to homogenize people along specific socially produced patterns, social categories. This means both control of and support for individuals (the normal worker, the normal sex, etc ...). In neoliberalism, this Fordist homogeneity is not (as) necessary. Neoliberalism 'operates' through differentiality. To 'be normal,' homogeneity is no longer as crucial and important. Everyone can (but also has to!) become usable according to his or her own fashion and also prove their usability individually (!). Individual 'quirks' are not only ok; they may even increase one’s usability.

Volker Woltersdoff describes this new dynamic very convincingly, “The neoliberal transformation of society encourages riskier sketches for one’s life, the kind that had been marginalized in the Fordistic welfare state with its rigid ideas about gender and sexuality. These sketches can now be instrumentalized as models of individual, private risk management. Those who can afford it are able to profit from the flexibilization and new precariousness of work and living conditions and to realize more unique designs for their lives. On the other hand, to some, the rigidity of heteronormative identities guarantees a sense of ostensible safety, while they experience their flexibilization only as the destabilization and loss of privileges. Accordingly, Christine Wimbauer, Mona Matakef, and Julia Teschlade (2015) observed that those who are affected or threatened by increasing precarity hold especially adverse attitudes towards the expansion of equality. This constellation favors the perception in broad strata of the population that tolerance towards sexual and gender-based diversity is a project promoted by neoliberal elites. In neoliberalism, diversity coopts
inequality and uncertainty; in other words, differences legitimize and naturalize unequal treatment.”

In neo-liberalism, too, those in power are concerned with ‘normality’ - just with a new form of normality that does not mind differences - as long as they do not impede one’s individual proof of utility. However, this also increases the ‘visibility’ (as a moment of ‘recognition’) of variations, the differentiations in ways of life and desire; simultaneously, the production of body, sexuality, gender becomes more ‘obvious’ and, therefore, more ‘negotiable.’ The neoliberal meat grinder devours divers, differentiated ways of working, living, and desiring – however, they have to be visible and present in the public discourse. This very ‘visibility’ is part of the dialectic of ‘recognition’ as both the prerequisite and the result of exploitation: “What does not, cannot, or may not exist is much harder to exploit.”

However, increased individuality around one’s proof of utility also includes a new ‘re-casting’ for acting subjects. ‘Belonging’ (via homogeneity) no longer appears to be ‘guaranteed,’ nor is it an unconditional and permanent source of ‘protection.’ The recent social practice in Germany of so-called ‘Greek-Bashing’ may serve as an example of how neoliberal interaction protocols are being rehearsed by the public. After several decades of co-existence, completely adapted - i.e. ‘integrated’ - Greek labor migrants had to answer for themselves in front of their German neighbors and to prove individually that they did not represent one of those lazy Greeks Mr. Schäuble and Mrs. Merkel had described. These Greek labor migrants - long-time locals in Germany - could no longer count on social/collective rights, resources, safety measures etc., but had to individually proof their utility to be able to retain traits such as ‘belonging’ (Marvakis 2012).

This rehearsal of neoliberal interaction protocols affects both sides: the ‘demanders,’ themselves, are impacted by the ‘demands’ they make - despite or because of their presentation as ‘protected perpetrators’ “they contribute to their own destabilization because they legitimize the very principles that will take hold of their own throats as well, just a little later. To limit one’s solidarity to only ‘oneself and one’s own’ ultimately means the total abdication of solidarity - even to oneself!” (Marvakis 2012).

The practice of ‘Greek-Bashing’ is not just an annoying ‘national(istic) game’; rather, it represents the rehearsal of the neoliberal formation of a regime of integration (cf. Marvakis 2010). During Fordism, the promise of integration made to the homogenized group of migrants was simple: ‘You can expect regular wages and social services; however, you’ll remain foreigners, no matter how
long you work and live here.’ Compared to this, what is the new neoliberal promise of integration? The new ‘integration compromise’ is two-fold: Firstly, it aims at the individualization of migrants and migrant groups, which implies their simultaneous hierarchization. In a series of classification initiatives, the total set of foreigners is being segmented and subjected to differentiated measures, which, in turn, are connected to differentiated promises. Secondly, more often than not, the promise of integration is no longer geared at groups, but at individuals, who, in turn, have to deliver the required services, regardless of where they acquired them, as their ticket to the social integration lottery. Consequently, ‘integration’ is less and less a social promise or advance; instead, integration becomes a requirement, for instance to attend integration courses, pass naturalization tests etc., which are designed to prove an individual’s capacity to be integrated. In other words: Collectively, migrants are suspected of being incapable of integration, so each one must present pieces of evidence of his/her individual suitedness for integration. The general right to hospitality (as formulated decades ago in a regulation by the immigration police) is being replaced by one’s individual, and perpetually suspect, capacity for integration. This development towards an individualized integration policy also renders obsolete the clear demarcation between citizens and foreigners that had supported the Fordistic paradigm of a ‘guest laborer.’ This includes the diminishing of any automatic priority for members of the majority society over immigrants. The notorious ‘elevator-effect’ (upward social mobility for certain wage-earning Germans due to the employment of migrant laborers in low-prestige jobs), for instance, has become largely a thing of the past. In the competitive battle of neoliberal societies, not even one’s status as a citizen can retain its functionality as ‘protective shield.’

4. Thorn or knitting needle - Historization of criticism

I explained earlier that, in Fordism, the collective organization of structures of solidarity 'from below' is an extremely dangerous thorn – the tip of which must be dulled ‘from above’. In the fourth step of my presentation, I will address the dialectic of 'individuality' and 'collectivity.' The neoliberal transformation forces us to historicize our previous critique of the dominant psychology without reservations.

For the ideology of neoliberalism, collectives are not 'in'; on the contrary, they smell of homogeneity - yuck! In Le Monde Diplomatique (December 1998: 2), Bourdieu even calls the neoliberal project a “programme of the
methodological destruction of collectives".\textsuperscript{11} It is exactly in the shadow of this aversion of neoliberalism to collectives that we find the crux and pitfall of our 100 years of critiquing the dominant psychology. As Jens Bisky\textsuperscript{12} describes, to date, the “criticism has been aimed at the ‘social-bureaucratic construct with its standardizations, norms, and homogenizations. … [They] handicapped the individual in developing his autonomy, to live self-determined lives, accountable to himself.’ The unions took care of ‘vertical injustices,’ neoliberalism was accompanied by successes in the emancipation of women, gays, migrants, the ‘reduction of horizontal discrimination along cultural traits.’ The focus was on equality and identity, less on exploitation. \textit{Whoever does not want to talk about the gains in freedom made by neoliberal individualization can hardly understand their paradoxical effects.”} (ibid, emphasis A.M.)

Current neoliberal responses to 'uncertainties' and 'risks' show that the reduction of those risks (for instance through measures of prevention and precaution) and the protection of subjects are simply not the goal. Rather, these neoliberal exercises are - first and foremost - about strategic quantifying, about individualizing, so that opportunities for profit may be organized. As evidenced by various campaigns (smoking, nutrition, ...), neoliberal social policy does not forego the \textit{terror of virtues}. The (social, health, economic, ecological, ...) uncertainty, the risk has a right to exist only as a commodity; with ‘risk’ as commodity, it is possible to organize and generate individual profit.

To date, the critique of Fordist psychology has questioned \textit{homogeneity} – and promoted \textit{individuality}. But homogeneity was and is not only submission to a 'norm'; rather, it also means (or promises) \textit{social protection} – which was hard-won and should be transferred through the 'norm(ality)' of belonging! However, this social protection – even as a promise – represents precisely the original sin of neoliberalism as religion!

The neoliberal transformation confronts our critiques with old-new tasks, e.g.

- Reflecting the \textit{dialectic of homogeneity} and (the promise of) \textit{protection}
- Updating our relationship to the historically new quality of individuality; and, relatedly,
- Updating our understanding about the relationship between freedom \textit{and} security. The promise for development, for expansion of individuality must be decoupled from competitiveness; freedom and social security (protection, justice, and solidarity) must be thought of jointly.

\textsuperscript{11} https://mondediplo.com/1998/12/08bourdieu
\textsuperscript{12} In his book review of Oliver Nachtwey's \textit{Die Abstiegsgesellschaft} http://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/soziologie-abrutschen-aus-der-sicherheit-1.3055230
Without topical answers to these old-new tasks, we will not be able to prevent the thorn we hoped would be painful for Fordist homogeneity from – intended or not - becoming a very useful knitting needle for the corset, for the straitjacket subjects wear in their struggle with the differential normality of neoliberalism.

In this endeavor, it does not help at all to conceive of criticism explicitly or implicitly as an essence. Criticism is not a timeless piece of rhetorical jewelry; it is not an academic frock one dons once and carries around forevermore. Criticism, itself, is a battlefield; its epistemological-political counterpart at any given moment is the historically victorious mainstream of psychology. Criticism is a dynamic social relationship – even among the critics, themselves. It is exactly in such circumstances, that real subjects form new regimes of agency for their lives, which, then, must be discovered and grasped conceptually:

- How do concrete subjects subversively appropriate their new reality and how do they try to become and remain able to act within?
- Where, when, and how do subjects try to resist their reduction to just 'functioning'?
- Which emancipatory hopes do subjects connect to their everyday actions?

By no means, then, can Critical Psychology afford to focus solely on exposing and denouncing the 'conquest,' the 'colonization' of ever more 'backyards' of subjectivity by neoliberalism. Rather, what is needed are attempts to reconstruct the real dialectic between the exploitation of more (moments, aspects, possibilities, ... of) subjectivity in the context of the neoliberal transformation. However, this exploitation cannot be undertaken without the prior recognition, the realization and the development of such 'backyards' of subjectivity!

5. Social dis-simultaneities: Neoliberalism is not the same everywhere and for everyone

Thus far, we have not even woven the inequalities, the inner tensions and dynamics of our societies into our analysis of their organization. With the fifth and last step, this dynamic will now be sketched out. Here, we direct our gaze to the manifold social ‘dis-simultaneities’ (Ungleichzeitigkeit): Neither Fordism nor neoliberalism were and are the same everywhere and for everyone!

The capitalist ‘penetration’ of society, of the world, does not show its effects everywhere nor does it show them in the same way across the board. Never and nowhere has there been a single, dominant, mode of working, living,
and desiring - neither within one specific society nor inter-nationally. (Social groups of) People do not all live in the same historical present - contemporary subjects experience very different opportunities and handicaps! The question under scrutiny has to be: Which specific groups of people in which areas are affected, and in what manner, by specific modes of working, living and desiring?

Because of their international dynamic, capitalism and individual societies are neither static nor 'nationally' homogeneous. Capitalism is an international system. Consequently, the term ‘society’ must connotate more than a single country or nation. Rather, societies are geo-political spaces, which ‘enter into’ unequal international relationships (a “pecking order,” I. Wallerstein), which, in turn, have centers and peripheries. Neoliberalism therefore manifests differently in capitalistic ‘core countries’ than it does in ‘peripheries.’ Nota bene, though, that centrality and peripherality are not fixed GPS coordinates!

The capitalist dynamic subsumes geo-political and social spaces, people, resources, and modes of life under the framework of capitalist reproduction; it integrates them into the context of capitalist exploitation. In these new spaces, Tayloristic modes of work, life, and desire are being employed first and, eventually and initially, the class struggle is centered around Fordistic compromises. In these newly added geo-political spaces, the recognition and expansion of Fordistic-homogenized individuality is a historical achievement. Consequently, there is demand for ‘appropriate’ social sciences that can provide support and control to further the governmentality of the population.

Our societies, as we have come to know them to date, are veined by structural contradictions - along affiliations to class, gender, or ‘race’ (colonialism) etc. It would not make sense to expect those contradictions in our social reality not to encounter dis-simultaneities and contradictions in the individual consciousness. Structural contradictions generate multi-layered systems of power and diverse political subjects. Historically and geo-politically, sociality is shaped by the relationships between these political subjects. Any geo-politically specific psychology is contingent on the respective engagement with these structural contradictions as well, and along all three of its trajectories: as scientific subject matter, as academic discipline, and as professionalized work.

‘Emancipation,’ like mere ‘functioning,’ is not an a-historical constant; we must consider the historical-concrete opportunities and handicaps encountered by concrete subjects. Similarly, it is imperative that we historicize the specific geopolitical, cultural, etc. contexts of any criticism and pinpoint its respective social ‘relativity’; only then do we remain aware of the social frame of reference that undergirds all critique.

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(Critical) Psychology can exist only in the plural form - with several ‘psychological systems’ (in all three areas), both intra-societally and internationally. After more than 100 years of criticism, the desideratum consists of the same (old) questions, for which we must find specific-topical answers:

- Whose psychology are we reproducing?
- Psychological knowledge and competence for whom? For the bureaucracies or within social movements?
- Whose life experiences do social science theories reflect, perceive and appreciate as valuable?
- Which social group(s) and whose interests are articulated in the supposed 'solutions'?
- Which (epistemological, political and social) standpoints are embodied by the respective theory and practice?
- Which (collective) subjects strive to understand and change their reality - and, to that purpose, require access to different, better, knowledge and capacities?

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Bibliography


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On critique and its potential in research and politics

Frigga Haug

Abstract
Based on the claim to present the study of social sciences as a foundation for collective agency, this contribution works with own experiences with teaching, with research, with doubt and critique. The Feuerbach theses are read anew, as are Antonio Gramsci’s proposals for a philosophy of practice, and both brought into the context of own research on computerization, gender relations as well as memory work in the women’s movement.

Keywords
critique, practice research, memory work, learning and teaching

The question and problem-shifting
I was asked to share some thoughts and experiences on the potential and practice of critique in research and politics. This request irritated me at first and urged me to search further, to piece together as if sewing a quilt. Until then I had assumed that a historical-critical method was the only way of doing research and that it was also a necessary foundation for politics. But then I quickly remembered a puzzling experience with my students. I used to teach at a university for second chance education - an institution that mostly attracted people from working life. In other words, the students had not entered University by having attended a *gymnasium*, but through an examination after having had some professional experience. There, I made a plan for a seminar that departed from their experiences at work and the goal of which was to show the usefulness of abstraction and conceptual understanding as a new foundation of sustainable change. In short, it was my ambition to make science a tool for understanding their lives; a scientific approach as something useful, even necessary. This was
not learning by heart and through lots of abstractions, learning in order to climb the social ladder, but learning as a possibility to understand capitalist societies in such a way that an alternative society would become a new perspective. I wanted to do this in such a way that my students would see their working experiences as a valuable point of departure, not as inadequate or something to be scorned upon. In other words, sociology and social psychology were wholly conceived as education of the entire person. I wanted to use the critique of political economy to develop enthusiasm for science with these worker-students rather than with those from the gymnasium with no experience in real life and who, if successful, were meant to automatically enter the higher professional positions. In short, I wanted to realize the leftist dream of Rosa Luxemburg: that the constellation of the ruling who knew and the ruled who knew not could be shifted in such a way that “all would learn to take over the government”.

This was the end of the 1970s, more than 10 years after 1968, the symbol for students’ rebellion. At the universities there was an apolitical silence, the Marxist staff had mostly been cleansed and I remember the students being more or less bored and discontent. Those who taught there were left to compete with television, to make the seminars entertaining for the students; not to empower them to change society.

I was one of those Marxists who could no longer attain a position as professor at a regular university. Yet with the support of students and some staff I became an assistant at this university of second chance education that had been founded after the war in 1948 as an ‘academy of social economy’ by a joint effort by the state and the unions. I was strong-willed to use this situation as an opportunity to think of these very students as agents in changing the world, as students for whom the critique of political economy was especially fertile and who could simultaneously appropriate scientific work, a critique of social theory and an analysis of society. This was so self-evident, a conviction that doubt was an element of life, that I assumed every student would long for learning social criticism. And yet precisely at this early stage in the drama of learning-teaching, the flow of the movement was blocked. If I recall correctly, all students resisted in seeing critique as a weapon, as something constructive and productive, let alone in wanting to learn to practice it themselves. Some left the seminar, others just stayed expectantly. After a period of stupefaction and helplessness I had to recognize that I must start anew. I would have to put aside all my careful plans to include working experience in a way that would be fertile in supporting historical-critical work and therefore scientific advancement. It was critique itself that had to be put at the center of interrogation. But how to do so, if it was tainted as a taboo?
During that semester I learned much about myself from the students’ refusal; I learned about my thinking and its many unexamined presuppositions; about how to teach, and about learning itself. Above all, I got to survey the huge lacunae to be researched. It began with my self-evident prejudice that working was necessarily a positive experience, an advantage of the students at the workers’ university over those who came directly from the gymnasium. I had easily dismissed the fact that it was precisely the experiences with wage labor that make life unbearable in more than one way, that make people sick and shorten life. I had dismissed the fact that the experiences I wanted to depart from were nothing particularly fascinating for the students themselves, but rather something they wanted to leave behind. But a stinging thorn remained in that experience — sensuous practical activity — that should at the same time be a decisive departing point for creating knowledge.

My new approach was now not to take students’ experience with work — which I could stubbornly only conceive of as wage labor — as a point of departure, but to start from students’ experience with critique itself. The students wrote down their memories of their experiences with critique. This became the key for opening a treasure of lived and enduring experiences, of emotions, of suffering. Critique proved to be negatively connoted through and through; an act inflicted by someone else. Critique was devaluation, disrespect, destruction, affront, deprivation of love and friendship in all areas, whether the parental home, at school, in an apprenticeship, in everyday work. It was a weapon against the potential to feel at home in life, to be liked, supported, and wanted. All words at hand — and there were ever more, a stream of negative experiences — were written down. They showed that against such an arsenal of defense against critique it was impossible to even think of critique as a subject of teaching, as something to be used productively to destroy old habits, as a potential for something new, as an appealing alternative. I learned that in my initial approach I had even expected the students to become the actors of critique themselves and not just its victims. Probably it would have been easier and would have entailed far less effort to seduce them to cheat, to lie, to betray; to show them that the goal of learning was the art of selling themselves as expensively as possible on the market of social possibilities without much work.

The question had to shift a second time. I now looked for a positive experience with critique and approached this by appealing to the students’ commonsense understanding of the world (gesunder Menschenverstand), that is the worldview that people hold in spite of a twisting of ideas, superstitions and opinion. Yet, the discussion with the students only revealed a deeper abyss: In short, the students wanted no critique at all, neither to experience it nor to practice it. Instead, they sought praise, and in the context of wage work this
meant a working environment in which flowers and congratulations on their birthday were proof that they were acknowledged as part of the company staff. In other words, they proved receptive to cheap strategies in creating a feel-good atmosphere, a strategy sold at every corner and which I was used to teach against as a resource in class struggle. The experience-based approach was obviously not possible. If you find yourself in a dead-end-street, it is wise to choose another road.

**How did Marx use the workers’ experiences in his critique of political economy?**

I therefore changed gears and examined how Marx dealt with workers’ experiences in his *critique of political economy*. In the first volume of *Capital* there are lots of work-experiences – particularly in the footnotes to the chapters on *manufacture, machinery and large-scale industry*. Here, one finds detailed descriptions of work-activities and miserable conditions in factories, all of which are apt to sharpen the standpoint of critique. Yet they are not written from the standpoint of the workers, but instead look critically at these areas from the perspective of the development of the forces of production towards a society without exploitation. It remains obvious that Marx represents the standpoint of the workers, evaluating the reports of factory inspectors, carefully identifying resistance. But how are learning from experience and dealing with work experiences treated in his critique?

In fact, there is proof that Marx confronted this question using a well-known tool: *A Workers’ Inquiry* (1938/1880). The questionnaire encompasses 100 questions which workers should answer in written form and extensively. 25,000 copies were distributed in France as printed in the journal, *Revue Socialiste*, and later translated into English and German. It is not surprising that there was no huge response and no great evaluation of the survey to follow. Responding to the questions would have been excessively demanding and would have also demanded workers’ own research so that completing it could have taken many hours, days or even weeks. Yet it is remarkable that Marx breaks with typical social surveys — insofar as they even existed at the time — by calling upon the workers themselves as researchers in their own cause. Looking back, it is amusing to see how Marx puts together elements of his theory of surplus value and, step by step, seeks to translate it into the domain of conscious experience: Most of the questions are still appropriate at present for using them in contemporary seminars in which participants are not simply informed and taught, but their knowledge is recalled and collectively can be put to such
complicated concepts as the theory of surplus value (e.g., I, 15 and 16, 27, conditions at the working place, what belongs to it and its effects on health; II, 11, 14, 16 – time delays, children, school and learning content; III, 3 and 4, on justice - punishments if contracts are broken, 11, 12, 13, labor done in advance, 24, necessary objects and their cost, 27-29, 30 changes in economy without an effect on wage relations, 35 perspectives in retirement, IV strikes, servant of the wage master, participation in returns). The questionnaire is thus a careful explanation to Marx’ earlier famous sentence: “It will become obvious that the world has long owned a dream of something of which it must only become conscious in order to really own it” (Marx, 1843, p. 1). Dull suffering is replaced by consciousness of the situation as a precondition for agency; concrete knowledge regarding disturbance, lack of well-being or disease is a possibility to intervene.

After this ever-surprising approach in Marx in which one can also learn about his blind spots, about men at work and about forgetting women’s work altogether, I continued with Marx.

**Theses on Feuerbach**

In his famous writing on Feuerbach he sketches his whole project, his great *Critique of Political Economy*, presenting its main axes in a few pages. I include an excerpt of his text in original, a piece of his first and third thesis:

The main defect of all hitherto-existing materialism – that of Feuerbach included – is that the issue, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, praxis, not subjectively ... Hence, he does not grasp the significance of “revolutionary”, of “practical-critical”, activity. (Third thesis): The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice. (Marx, 1888)

My politicization in the first generation of students — who in the mid 1960s began to read Marx seriously — unfolded such that we understood the words in the *Feuerbach Theses* as if they had been written in a foreign language. Even where they seemed to be everyday words, we did not really grasp them, including all the essential ones: materialism, issue, reality, sensuousness, form of the object or contemplation, sensuous human activity, praxis, subjective, practical-critical activity, self-change, revolutionary praxis. Even today, 50 years later, I discover something new whenever I read them; entire worlds of unnoticed analysis and
critique. I assume that this is a general experience that merits carefully being taken apart, an autobiographical historical-critical approach of its own. But at the time, though I studied in an environment that felt drawn to Marx, the *Theses on Feuerbach* remained mute; we spoke differently with the same words.

I belonged to the first generation of sociology students at the Free university of Berlin where I learned that the fundamental question upholding a theory of society was this: How is society possible? Until then – as difficult as it may be for later generations to imagine – to even use the word “society” was negatively connoted, it was a term associated with communism and materialism and implied transgressing a border into a forbidden zone. The Free University, where I immediately became politically engaged, was founded on making the invisible fence around this zone higher and less permeable. In studying sociology, we dealt with abstractions, something that was both difficult and new. These abstractions included structure, institutions, classes, stratifications. Our politics were targeted against our fascist past and war and towards its prevention. The distance between the new field we had to learn, and our individual pasts, did not leave space for dealing with ourselves, at least not in public. Thus, issues to be avoided included the sensuous, the subjective and its special praxes, self-change, all of which went unnoticed. Revolutionary change, which drew our enthusiasm as students in a process of change, thus became an abstract and far-away goal; an act that either took place somewhere in the past or if at present, only in faraway countries. As the cult-films of the time (such as *Maria and Maria*) showed us, revolutionary change was only connected to ourselves if we became followers in bloody or dangerous acts. The key to our life, “The coincidence of changing the circumstances and of human activity or self-change [that] can be conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionary praxis*” could be filed away under a list of “things not understood,” one that became larger and larger in the course of our studies.

**Critique of capitalism, women’s history and research of everyday life**

We studied Marx’s *Capital* in reading groups close to the journal, *Das Argument*. Our critique of capitalism developed with a critique of fascism and war, it was part of proudly being part of the Left; of being socialists with a sense of belonging. And yet we lacked consciousness about how society, both past and present, was related to our own constitution and that of “others”. We did not even ask how the state, capitalism, or ideology — conceived as external relations — were related to each of us, or how we as humans became who we are today.
This was the end of the 1960s and the protest of the students seized everyday life, its habits, norms, morals, but leaving aside women’s inequality. The women’s movement therefore logically resisted by founding consciousness-raising groups. There were huge assemblies of several hundred women, who one after the other stood up and spoke out against oppression, disrespect or cruelty as she lived it personally. On the one hand, this praxis seemed correct and adequate – how else could women’s history could come from the unseen and into general consciousness? On the other hand, it also seemed inadequate because many wanted to speak out, but the many others who waited for their turn to speak were needed as listeners, not as speakers. Moreover, there the process was full of repetitions which made the process a dull one and did not improve our comprehension.

Over time the study of women’s history took hold in many countries and universities, obtaining a dignified place as a discipline and faculty of its own. But in this redemption, the promise of the 3rd thesis on Feuerbach was lacking, namely that self-change and change of the conditions should coincide in revolutionary praxis. In the context of changing society through critical, revolutionary praxis, being concerned with oneself got from the smell, to be something for luxurious ladies, who have time and money and nothing else to do, in the context of changing society in critical, in revolutionary praxis. The exclusion of the one by the other, the either-or of studying oneself or the relations of production had, by a narrow uniting of those who exclude one another, becomes a movement forward. In a revolutionary praxis of change both sides are in movement, the critical individuals and the relations to be changed; this calls for continuous critical work, for self-reflection, for the study of the relations of forces wholly engaged in the direction of change. The demand to change oneself was no longer a moral demand for obedience and docility but, just the opposite, one that seemed to call for disobedience and permanent rebellion against various authorities. Antiauthoritarian education was the demand of the hour for some; restlessly, others understood this as a call to passionately join revolutions somewhere in the world, or to begin one in one’s own city. The term “revolution” was understood as a sort of strange religion whose faith one must profess in order to become active against an outside enemy. This approach gained all the attention in the media and as a result acquired many new followers. In the meantime, the searching Marxist feminists in a process of change could not and did not seek to swim alongside mainstream feminists.
Women also make their history themselves

The Marxist feminists of the student movement began to analyze how the subjection of the female gender (“their worldwide defeat”, as Engels (1884) puts it) was not simply to be understood as an overpowering force set into motion through a male conspiracy. They asked how disposing over the female body (through labor and sexuality) took place via the agreement of the oppressed who tend to produce and reproduce it throughout their life. The title of an early book in the women’s movement, *We are not born as women, we are made into women* (Scheu, 1977) rightly protested against the idea of an *a priori* female nature, but remains trapped in the idea that men are enemies and women their victims. The “*Victim or actor*”-debate (Haug, 1985) urged us to look for the “enemies” within ourselves; that is, to analyze the active role we play in co-producing our own oppression within the capitalist relations of production. Marx and Lassalle, each with different emphasis held as fundamental that people make their own history, even if not out of their free will. Rosa Luxemburg underlines: “At a first glance, all good and evil, the fortunes and the poverty of the peoples are the creation of single emperors or great men. In reality, it is the peoples themselves, the nameless masses, who create their fortune and pain” (1987, p. 206).

This insight was necessary for developing Memory Work — which most of you here might know as it was the most convincing approach during my teaching and talks in Denmark and Roskilde. It was convincing because it is a method engaging all participants — regardless of whether they are teachers or students — directly into doing research on themselves yet without embarrassing self-exposure and still simultaneously creating knowledge relevant to the issue at hand. As Marx does in his questionnaire for workers, Memory Work departs from the experiences of individuals’ own past (or present), assuming that each knows more about herself than she thinks. It is this knowledge that is brought forward and be conceptualized, liberated from dull, heavy and painful forgetting and brought into a form of conscious knowledge at the disposal of all participants. An analysis of societal relations is complemented by the microscopic analysis of individual autobiographies. The historical-critical method is Memory Work (Haug, 1992, 1999, 2016) and takes Brecht’s demand “to live in the third person” seriously. Among others, this entails overcoming the vain moralism in the discourse on self-change, an imperative towards self-reflection that demands reporting on oneself while remembering and writing as if one were a stranger to whom one shall be introduced. This sharpens the eye, rendering an account as to what is essential and what is not necessary. It avoids bribery and can detect complicity with domination and negate it.
The study of Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* (1991) was essential for the elaboration and continuous development of Memory Work. There, Gramsci makes a series of proposals that seem to be directly invented for Memory Work, giving, for each worldview, advice within a *philosophy of praxis*: “Immersed in the relations, at home in different and even opposite cultures; with modes of thinking filled with superstition and prejudice, they must work on themselves coherently, creating an inventory of oneself, working on oneself to gain social agency. This is a process that has no end.” In a dense analysis, Gramsci puts forth that as a social being, “humans” (der Mensch) cannot appropriate this very being if they do not continuously promote their own self-change. This task is not only a psychological one, but above all a political one, because it necessarily includes the shaping of society. “Therefore, one can say, that each becomes different and changes himself by making the totality of the relations of which he is the center of entanglement (*Verknüpfungszentrum*), to become different by [actively] changing them” (Gramsci, 1991, book 10, § 54). This presupposes, “genetically recognizing [the relations] in the flux of their formation, for each individual is not only the synthesis of existing relations, but also the history of these relations. Thus, she is the summary of the entire past” (ibid.). In his *Introduction into the study of philosophy* (book 11) Gramsci returns to these thoughts and simultaneously summarizes other elements that serve towards further orientation. It is important to note that Gramsci writes in a certain emancipatory perspective and therefore begins “negatively” in the special sense of departing from an existing state of “not yet” being: “If a worldview is not critical and coherent, but haphazard and incoherent, . . . one’s own personality comes together in a bizarre manner, including elements of the cave-dweller and principles of the most modern and advanced science; prejudices of all pasts, local, narrow-minded historical phases and intuitions of a future philosophy, belonging to human race united worldwide. To criticize one’s own worldview is therefore to make it consistent and coherent, elevating it up to the point in which the most advanced thinking of the world is reached. It therefore also means criticizing the totality of philosophy insofar as it has left pieces that are stuck in popular philosophy. The beginning of a critical elaboration is consciousness of that which is real, meaning a ‘Recognize yourself’ as a product of the historical process until now that has left an eternity of traces, accepted without condition in the inventory. Such an inventory must be put together from the beginning” (book 11, § 12, note 1).

It should be noted that Gramsci’s proposals were made eight decades ago already, but remained unheard and forgotten in spite of excellent translations in the 1980s. Then, in post- Marxist gender research it was proclaimed as brand new that women were a construction. In turn, this was used to disarticulate
Feminist-Marxist research, diverging from women as a solidary subject and also repudiating work on one’s own coherence in favor of an acknowledgement of multiplicity and diversity in the inner self.

Back to memory work. Its goal is solidary agency in a political as well as in an epistemological sense. It focuses on collective self-determination, on learning based on presupposing a politics from below, a desire of self-development and of affirming oneself. In struggling to bring into consciousness that which is known — as does Marx in his questionnaire for workers — Memory Work works with language and meaning. It struggles continuously with everyday language, with its occupation by dominating ideologies and opinion, by habits, by that which is taken for granted. It strives for the good life where it has long gotten a bad taste and been occupied. It counts on the solidary reason of each individuals’ common sense; its self-improvement in a collective striving towards the same goal and striving towards substituting generally avoidable misfortune with a possible good fortune.

**Self-criticism**

Self-criticism is an elementary dimension of insights produced through Memory Work. A person guides the process, but as all others she is researcher and researched, subject as well as object. Like the others, she knows her experience in such detail that comparison is possible, mistakes and errors can be discussed. Prejudices can become visible to the politically correct person that would not have expected them as her own. In searching for how the relations in question reproduce themselves and are actively reproduced by all, it becomes possible and also imperative that doubt becomes productive critique, self-criticism a source of further knowledge (see in my latest book on Marxism-feminism, 2015, the chapters “The misunderstood emancipation” and “Defense of the women’s movement” under the Gramscian motto of the inventory without condition).

As a confident researcher from below, there was the disquieting question as to whether one could at all justify a leader in collective memory. Moreover, this doubt had to be extended to us as teachers. We had criticized school up to the point of repudiating it as an institution that blocked the learning process (see Holzkamp’s 1995 book on learning). Learning through curricula was rejected, and it was asked whether only an autonomous individual could be a source of further learning. I went as far as radicalizing the question: Why do students need teachers at all? Following more enduring doubts, I then came back to the paradigm at the point of departure, to experience. Teachers are necessary for leading experiences into a process of crisis, in order to begin a process of
unlearning, of disrupting the continuous reproduction of domination through habits. Until today, this argument is contested within Critical Psychology and must be further elaborated. This was a lesson from Brecht who speaks of bringing views into crisis (1967, p. 153). In numerous notes and elaborated prose (e.g., writings on politics and society), one can distill his procedure, which we can call scientific, as follows: a concept, a worldview, a conviction or opinion, even if “flattened out”, is not to be proved wrong or to be contradicted. Rather, one must study how it is generated, asking what experiences allow the judgments made; looking for counter-experiences, whether on the same level, whether analytical and abstract; and thus, calling for a crisis in which it imperative to study on its own, to think it over again, to come to a new judgment. “Good has a bad aftertaste”, “don’t moan that the fish is caught in the net, but study how the net has been thrown”, “look for your issue in the flow of the movement in the direction of where things change, start there”, etc. In short, Brecht gives advice for permanent self-reflection.

To perceive self-critically in the world liberates imagination as well as learning processes. But what exactly does critique mean, or what do we mean when we speak about critique? Until here it was assumed that a critique that builds on incrimination, accusation, denunciation — which obviously elicited resistance by the students as they embarked on their scholarly studies — and whose productivity was to be shown for research and recognition, was not productive for research and praxis. Here is not the place to discuss in depth the concept of critique, its language, origin, epistemology etc. (see Haug et al, 2012). For our questions in carrying out research on labor, pedagogy, gender research or psychology here we ruthlessly reached into the pool of historical knowledge, seeking for pieces we deemed fertile for further work. I briefly mentioned some ideas as I developed by working with Marx for involving the workers as researchers; with Gramsci for memory work; and discussed some more of our praxes.

**Contradicting oneself**

On critique there is much more to learn from Marx than his questionnaires. He criticizes subjects, relations, ideas, science, theories, and behavior. Above all, he studies inverses, effects that take on the status of objects through the active involvement of actors; how work comes to be part of the value form; how the things that people do confront them as something that can be bought and traded on the market; and how this practice structures society as if the workers had nothing to do with the process. How other human practices unfold, such as how
humans sustain themselves – in scarcity or with pleasure; how they procreate – without conscience and with pleasure or need, how they organize the upbringing of children in specific forms (e.g., family), how all of this comes into the form of religion (the holy family), of morals and values. Our own activities become foreign powers that determine our actions as we in turn subject ourselves. In other words, Marx studies the practice of contradicting oneself in different forms. He does not study a single phenomenon by looking at its opposite — friends and enemies; good and evil — but looks for the genesis of a praxis. He looks at what form a particular practice assumes and how the form determines a particular view. The entire undertaking is one of critique that studies the issues in their connection, differentiates among them, judges them, puts them into a new correlation with the goal of gaining clarity about human relationships and relations so that the possibility of a perspective without domination can be a guide for action.

Critique is interesting here as tool for detection. Socrates had suggested something similar with his proposal for talking through things that got stuck, using dialogue for loosening concepts that had become rigid in order to finally reach an immanent resolution. In our research group on automation (PAQ) we made use of this well-known method and invented the group interview led by contradictions. We looked for practical experiences in learning the use of new technologies about which we already knew that the introductory courses were mostly taken by males, while the women who were the majority in administration and public service immediately took on tasks such as making the workplace comfortable, making coffee and running all sorts of errands. We also knew that it would not be easy to start learning “as equals”, as long as the new equipment was perceived mainly as technical in nature and not just as a typewriting machine. We foresaw that all prejudices on technical giftedness in contrast to the natural orderly diligence of women would all at once take the floor. But we also knew that the acceptance of the old division of labor in new relations also needed workers’ own consent. In the group conversation nothing exciting happened for some time; tenaciously, each repeated why they had taken up which task as if it had been done out of their free will. This was where self-contradictions come in. It is best to choose a contradiction that is commonly experienced but is not seen central source of insight. In the workplace — and almost everywhere else — these are the gender relations. It is a general consensus in our industrialized capitalist countries that the different sexes should have equal rights and duties, acknowledgement, even wages. Possible inequalities are seen as non-simultaneous and in need of reform. At the same time, everybody knows that in practice, things look different. In the case of learning new technologies, it would suffice as a contradiction to invoke equality; and against it, insist that there
already was the equality in the learning process. In our case, the otherwise harmonious conversation was immediately interrupted by wild discussion in which one sex accused the other of numerous mistakes, omissions, disregarding, pushing aside etc. In this situation, we could how clearly elaborate on how learning took or did not place in practice and what disturbances came up. One can also find out how many crises are necessary to bring about real changes in the old division of labor and their respective habits.

**Gender relations and the four-in-one-perspective**

Although I do not know whether rapidly changing technology will continue to reproduce of old divisions of labor, I choose the example of computerization in the office to underline the strategic relevance of gender relations — dealt with by Marx but without receiving careful explanation in order to be fruitful in discussing critique, recognition, politics.

I summarized my analytical approach to gender relations as such: “The concept should be suitable for critically investigating the structural role that genders play in social relations in their totality. It presupposes that which is a result of the relations to be investigated: the existence of ‘genders’ in the sense of historically given men and women. Complementarity in procreation is the natural basis upon which what has come to be regarded as ‘natural’ has been socially constituted in the historical process. In this way, genders emerge from the social process as unequal. Their inequality then becomes the foundation for further transformations, and gender relations become fundamental regulating relations in all social formations. No field can be investigated meaningfully without complementary research into the ways in which gender relations shape and are shaped” (Haug, 2001, p. 493).

Thus, we can say that women’s oppression as well as the use and incorporation of traditional modes of production are embedded in the fundament of capitalist modes of production. These relations of production are extremely prone to crises that deepen divisions in society, produce armies of the superfluous and exhaust resources. Capitalism developed by knotting together major divisions of labor (town and country; head and hand; men’s and women’s work). In order to overcome it, a dissolution of this collusion is required, as well as an analysis and processing of its defeat in the spheres of culture, politics, in wage labor and in reproduction. For this process I proposed a project that should serve as political orientation and should support knowledge creation. I call it the *four-in-one perspective* (Haug, 2009, 2011). After years of unsuccessful fighting for including women’s unpaid labor in home and family in the critique of political economy and to rupture the spontaneous hierarchy of what is important
or unimportant, I outlined a model in which the equality of the spheres of
everyday life are presumed and at the same time opens up a perspective of the
own political project. It starts to realize the disposal over time as a foundation of
all domination and suggests therefore another regime of time. Each sphere of
activity should be on equal footing as the others. Each should be carried through
by all. Each should be granted as a right and each should be in responsibility of
each. With this new junction the different sorts of activities change in their
meaning for the social whole as well as for each. Changing the conditions of life
and self-change coincide such that the demand that everybody participates in
shaping society is no longer a mere phrase but becomes socially necessary.

As a precondition and at the same time as part of its always new result,
critical thinking cannot unfold in simple negation, by mere opposition, by
substituting obedience through disobedience, by replacing subjection through
taking over power, by striving for being superior, but by unravelling self-
contradiction. As obstacles grow, there are conscious resistances, crises, wars.
Counterforces are to be found in existing structures and economic interests
supported by the state, as they are also to be found in the interior of each. This is
especially true of women in their natural division of labor as in the respective
ideologies, values, morals, the structures of protection-dependence as backed up
by the state. A continuous study of the relations of forces is a major task of
critical thinking including, the investigation of thought and language-politics. To
confront the different forces that shape domination individually would create
ever stronger fetters. It is necessary to wrestle with them simultaneously,
something that presupposes a different division of labor, including that between
men and women and also demands the responsibility of others in producing time
for self-development and for shaping politics.

I refer to this as the knot of domination, woven together by different threads
that support and maintain one another. Some are not visible, but together they
nonetheless keep the capitalist economy running. Braided in this knot is the
profit-driven operation of capital, which assimilates living labor in the form of
wage labor, thereby always further developing the productive forces, so that
labor — its source — is cut back and dries out. This already is a complicated
dialectical context in which are interwoven invisible unspoken actions without
history, all of which are necessary to reproduce the life of humans und their
external nature. These form a special thread, they have a different temporal logic
in that they are not easily rationalized or optimized in order to bear profit: In their
different forms, these include the loving mother, the heroic nurse, the volunteer,
the protector of the environment. These are as well-known as are the catastrophes
that attack the people from behind, from the brutalization and the deprivation of
entire generations and peoples to the end of the habitability of the earth. Many of
these activities remain invisible and many have taken the form of labor in the developed capitalist countries where they are tolerated in poorly-seen and poorly-paid prestige.

In this context the neglect of people as humans goes unnoticed – individual development is branded as luxury, something that only the rich can afford, whereas the impulse to unfold human potential is suffocated in the intoxication of consumption which at the same time is the basis for economic growth, etc. Unnoticed is also that humans are kept in subaltern immaturity with respect to the shaping of society – that which we call the political. The four strings are woven in many ways, secured, embellished, they can be found in our habits, our actions, morals, in hope and desire, in the commonsensical. Taken together, these actions which are necessary for change are the revolutionary praxis that appeared as foreign in the Theses on Feuerbach. In spite of all uncertainty regarding the further development of the social forces of production through the natural sciences, including biology, and through new technologies, the categorical imperative remains to continuously improve the conditions of life for all, to use critique as a driving force for change.

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References


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Klaus Holzkamp’s contribution to the unity of psychology

Wolfgang Maiers

How can there be one science about two absolutely different kinds of phenomena, which evidently require two different methods, two different explanatory principles, etc.? After all, the unity of a science is guaranteed by unity of the viewpoint on the subject. How then can we build a science with two viewpoints? Once again a contradiction in terms corresponds to a contradiction in principles.

(L. Vygotsky, 1927/1997, p. 284)

Abstract
Down to the present day, traditional psychology is lacking a coherent categorial-methodological definition of its subject matter. Common endeavours to overcome this critical state tend to continue in the traditional dichotomy of nature versus history and in the corresponding disjunction of epistemologies, thus perpetuating psychology’s foundational crisis. Starting from this critical assessment, I hold the opinion that Klaus Holzkamp’s works—from his early constructivist philosophy of science studies through to his elaboration of a critical-psychological science of the subject—were committed to a coherent—materialist-monistic—solution of this fundamental problem. In this connection, the integrative power of Holzkamp’s focal category of “subjectively grounded action” is being scrutinised.

1 Restatement of my eulogy in memoriam of Klaus Holzkamp on occasion of his passing November 01, 1995 (German orig. Maiers, 1995).
Keywords
constructivist epistemology; crisis of psychology; dualism in psychology; groundedness vs. conditionality; historical-empirical analysis; nomothetic variable-psychology; definition of psychological subject matter; subject-scientific psychology; unified science; unity of psychology.

The chosen topic may come as a surprise. First, with regard to Klaus Holzkamp’s many-faceted oeuvre: On the one hand, he repeatedly felt compelled as a scientist to take a stand on political issues across the most diverse fields of societal praxis. On the other hand, his basic scientific research endeavour was centred on substantiating his own conception of a unique subject-scientific psychology, for which he had laid the foundation in his magnum opus of 1983, the Grundlegung der Psychologie. With his last monography (Holzkamp, 1993)—and in line with this—he provided a reformulation of human learning as an enhancement of the personal horizon of experience, action ability, and enjoyment of life [Erweiterung subjektiver Erfahrungs- und Lebensmöglichkeiten]. Lastly, he concerned himself with the problematic case and the (sociological) concept of conduct of everyday life (Holzkamp, 2013). In this context he, together with Ute Osterkamp, considered to revise the traditional psychological issue of personality, which he assumed to be distorted by personalising (i.e., naturalising) objectifications [Vereigenschaftungen] by both common sense and the mainstream-psychological preconception. Apart from his systematic preoccupation, Klaus Holzkamp always took time to study topics on the sidelines—if he did not get involved in them involuntarily, as in the case of the subject of pain.3 I am not sure whether Klaus would have found it appropriate to rate his various matters as more or less significant desiderata of subject-scientific theorising. (In the exemplary case mentioned, this might be in doubt not only since physical pain had taken possession of him.) What I am trying to say is this: During his lifetime, many

2 Contrary to the theoretical elimination of the meaningful world and human agency in the mainstream-psychological discourse of conditionality, and the consequent misapprehension of learning as externally controlled behaviour, the author conceptualised human learning as some kind of subjectively grounded action. Due to its focus on the learners’ intentionality, this approach omits accidental as well as unconscious modes of learning—their well-known omnipresence in our conduct of life notwithstanding. While Klaus assumed to rectify this omission on a later occasion, the theoretical integration of the practically intertwined intentional, incidental, and implicit learning processes has remained a desideratum of critical-psychological research to this day. (See on this issue Maiers, 2019.)

3 At an advanced stage of his cancer, he delved into Elaine Scarry’s book The Body in Pain, and was deeply impressed by her analysis of pain’s inexpressibility (personal note).
unfinished topics occupied Klaus’ research agenda, and his interest in them was hardly dictated by an abstract concern about the missing *unity of psychology*.

Second, the topic may irritate also in another respect: Unity of psychology—that sounds like a dogmatic regimentation of the scientific quest for knowledge, since it immediately awakens memories of the (failed) logical-positivistic program of a (physicalistic) *unified science* and of its detrimental hegemony in the (behavioural-) psychological mainstream.

More specifically: Does unity of psychology not represent a guiding idea of scientific critique that has ultimately become discredited at least since the *postmodern deconstruction of the grand narratives* with their obsession of a rational knowledge of totality, their universalistic projects of realising truth, freedom, progress, and so forth (Lyotard, 1993)? I cannot elaborate on this issue here, but it seems to me that many an articulation of the postmodern *zeitgeist* all too easily tend to reduce the episteme of modernity to its (late-) bourgeois expression in a positivistically degraded, de-historicised and hence affirmative rationality, and to incorrectly confound with it the counter-type of a radical social criticism and critique of knowledge that adequately reflect upon their own historical genesis and conditions of validity. Be that as it may: As a matter of fact, Klaus Holzkamp, by drawing on Marx’ foundation of a political subject theory, was committed to the socio-critical, emancipatory perspective in the tradition of the Enlightenment claim of rationality—that is, to substantiate the possibility of a rational appropriation of nature and an active shaping of a humane society through scientific evidence. In this spirit, Klaus Holzkamp was no doubt a *modern scholar*.

Now, what way does the problem of a lack of unity appear within psychology? The fact of a “plurality of psychological studies” (Koch, 1969) would be hardly objectionable, did it not prove to be an undecidable coexistence and rather arbitrary succession of conceptually and methodologically incompatible research programs referring to one and the same objective domain. In this sense, complaints about a defective conceptual consistency in contemporary psychology accompanied by a considerable lack of practical relevance of its issues and findings have been legion. The underlying difficulty is commonly discerned in the historical failure of psychology to develop a distinctive conception of science and scientific nature. Its scientistic imitation of the (natural) sciences is said to have led psychology to its theoretical denial of the subject (human agent) and of subjectivity (agency).

In this pattern of criticism, classical controversies in the philosophy of science about the proper position of the psychological form of cognition in relation to the mathematical-experimental analytics of hard science, on the one hand, and to the hermeneutics of the human sciences, on the other, are readily
recognisable. Take, for example, the debate on Dilthey’s (1894) diametrical opposition of an explanatory-constructive psychology and a descriptive and analytic psychology, which understands the nexus of meanings in mental life; likewise Bühler’s (1927) renowned diagnosis of a crisis of psychology.

If one takes seriously the mere fact and the particular contents of perennial discussions about the crisis in psychology (cf. Maiers, 1986; 1988; 1990), one cannot avoid the conclusion that they indicate the status of a pre-paradigmatic science (in the sense of Kuhn’s initial view of 1962). Such a precarious situation would not characterise a problem that could be resolved on the basis of a formal logic of science. Rather, and in the last analysis, it signifies the unsettled issue of the proper subject matter of psychology as a science sui generis. Such an assessment of the situation has not found unreserved approval (cf. Herrmann, 1990). However, does this meta-dissent for its part not confirm the very diagnosis of a crisis?

How does Klaus Holzkamp’s work correspond with the delineated problematic situation? According to his opinion, the constructive solution of the foundational problem has been inescapably blocked by critical counter-projects that undiscriminatingly suspect any attempt at a monistic categorial-methodological definition of subject-matter of a relapse into scientism and hence into a naturalistic misconstruction of the societal-historical constitution of subjectivity. As a consequence, these alternatives remain locked in the traditional dichotomy of nature versus history and the correspondent epistemological framework of disjunctive forms of knowledge.

It is radically unjustified to retain, side by side, two psychological methodologies relating to one and the same object. Instead, there can exist only one psychological methodology as procedural aspect of the conceptual analysis [Kategorialanalyse] of the psychological subject matter. Within this methodology, which is committed to one claim of truth, methodical differentiations derive from different issues/objective aspects. Hence, if a new level of psychological object appropriateness is actually accomplished by the subject-scientific conceptualisation, one will next have to put the entire psychology on a new methodological basis in the name of scientific reliability. (Holzkamp, 1985, 60; my emphasis—emphases in the original partly removed)

This is by no means an ephemeral statement—quite the contrary: It epitomises the motif pervading Klaus’ critique of the self-understanding of academic psychology, namely his intention to establish a scientific rationale for determining the psychological subject matter. Even when he changed over to Marxist positions in the course of the 1968 student movement, the concomitant
epistemological break in his work did not interfere at all with the continuity of this ambition.

Thus, his early constructivist studies had been a reaction to the deficiency of psychology in ascertaining the representativeness between empirical definitions and theoretical statements and to assess the epistemic value of the latter. Taking this flaw as a starting point, Holzkamp’s analyses amounted to an attempt at overcoming the underlying flaws of empiricism through a new theory of science. Following non-empiricist philosophers of science, among them—and most notably—Hugo Dingler, his conception countered the sensualistic principle of an unequivocal empirical determinacy [Erfahrungsdeterminiertheit] of both the construction of scientific theory and the justification of its validity by the argument that science needs to be understood as an active doing—a particular manner of human productivity. Not just scientific theory, but in a certain manner also the empirical domain of science [wissenschaftliche Empirie] are generated by human action to a greater degree than commonly assumed (Holzkamp, 1967, p. 7).

It would certainly be undue to reinterpret in retrospect Klaus Holzkamp’s initial constructivist epistemology in terms of the dialectical-materialistic theory of reflection, which he later adopted, since his earlier conception hypostatised the acting researcher as an abstract-isolated subject of cognition vis-à-vis an indeterminate reality, which by itself was conceived as a mere substrate for the practical implementation [Realisation] of subjective theoretical constructions.

By that time he had not yet reached the (self-) critical insight (cf. 1972, pp. 274ff.), that constructivism and the positivist logic of science alike miss the historical possibility conditions of human cognition, since both are equally abstract ahistorical explications of scientific methodology from an allegedly distanced standpoint [Standort außerhalb]. Hence it escaped him, that in order to overcome the aforementioned problems, one needs to determine the essential dimensions of reality that lie beyond the traditional-psychological system of individuo-centred variables—namely, to reconstruct, in an independent systematic approach, the natural- and societal-historically evolved human-world relationship, that precedes and informs any acts of (scientific) cognition. By implication, Holzkamp’s positive definition of the psychological subject matter and of appropriate methods of apprehension clung to the traditional view in that it primarily addressed the behaviour of the other ones in their environment from a third person external perspective, leaving room only for supplementary modalities of the subject matter. Thus, the occasionally expressed realisation of the uncircumventable reflexivity of acting and the intersubjective interconnection of perspectives that underlie human communication and need to be acknowledged in scientific epistemology got bogged down halfway. His critique
of the inability of behaviourism to apply its own object theory to itself (Holzkamp, 1964, pp. 61-68) may serve as an example of such inconsistency.

And yet, Holzkamp’s action theoretical view of the constitutive feature of science, connecting all its heterogeneous forms: viz., cognition as a practical act, provided a novel intellectual approach, capable of becoming productive in an alternative understanding of psychological science once this view became historicised.

As the elaboration of Critical Psychology as a particular approach of action research advanced, human action (and the development of agency) took centre stage in the endeavour of theoretical-methodological integration also with regard to the object-side of the epistemic subject-object relationship—now, however, fully aware of the overarching context of societal practice, which frames both everyday and scientific practice and to which the psychological understanding of the grounds and backgrounds of individual acting must be imparted again, if psychology is ever to attain practical relevance. This would imply that the level of intersubjective understanding inherent in lifeworld-social practice be sublated in the research settings of psychology—contrary to the doubts from traditional philosophy of science quarters on whether “the human active-reflexive subjectivity needs to be assumed as a background for one’s psychological acting” (Herrmann, 1990, p. 30). This new conception had been preceded by epistemological and methodological studies in the years of upheaval 1967-71, during which Klaus (cf. Holzkamp, 1972) was getting things straight concerning the interdependence between the interest relatedness, the substance and epistemic value of knowledge, and the societal practical relevance of scientific research.

Based upon a materialist ideology critique, traditional psychology with its dominant thought forms of privacy of individual existence in a natural environment was characterised as a bourgeois science. Unveiling its ideological bias entailed the conclusion that one could escape from this limited rationality only by a critical revision of the present psychological concepts, based on a “comprehending thinking” [begreifendes Denken] (Marx, 1857/1983), which transcends the pseudo-naturalness of the historical forms of alienated societal praxis (cf. Haug, 1977).

The question arose what perception, thinking, feeling, motivation, etc. may possibly mean, if understood as functional aspects of a historically produced subjectivity—a subjectivity hallmarked by its formation-specific contradictoriness of a (painful) subjection of human individuals to (restrictive) societal conditions, on the one hand, and their basic power to actively shape those circumstances, on the other? Such a “turn from a critique of bourgeois psychology to a critical psychology” (Holzkamp, 1972, p. 288), however, could not be realised without devising a procedure for concept formation as such.
Marx’ logical-historical method, carried out in his *Capital* (1867/1990), offered an apt paradigm for this task—waiting to be methodically concretised for the particular historical-empirical domain of the psychological subject matter.

As is widely known, the critical-psychological categorial definitions [Kategorialbestimmungen], as presented since 1973, are geared towards a differentiated substantial concept of human subjectivity by use of a historical reconstruction of the connection between individual life activity and societal sustainment of life—with the inclusion of the natural history of the psychical in general (psychophylogenesis) and the evolution of the human species (anthropogenesis) in particular. In this reconstruction, the entity of *subjective grounds for action* appeared as a central mediational level: Human action is not determined (causally conditioned) by the circumstances of life, since societal meaning structures represent opportunities for action. From an individual’s standpoint, actions are grounded in the circumstances as objective premises of acting in accordance with respective subjective life interests. The performance of human life activity in its specificity includes the discursive medium of giving reasons for one’s acting that are *first person singular* and negotiable only from respectively my [je mein] point of view. By implication, this *standpoint of the subject* needs to be asserted as the vantage point of scientific cognition. In other words, (human) psychology must follow the pertinent *discourse of groundedness* both in its theoretical language and, practically, in its actual-empirical research [aktualempirische Forschung]. The topic of the latter is the (inter-) subjective experience of action necessities, possibilities, and restrictions, and the persons concerned, being the subjects of such experience, can in principle only appear as active *co-researchers*, not as passive objects of investigations.

If we concretise the problem of unity in psychology as the issue of the objective entity of the research and theory construction process, Klaus Holzkamp’s solution lies in his focus on *subjectively grounded action as analytical unit and unifying key category*. Does, however, this angle not evoke the risk of neglecting classes of phenomena that unquestionably belong to the body of psychological topics, so that one would lapse back anew into a duplication of psychology: a *psychology of groundedness* conformable to the meaningfulness of human acting on the one hand, and a *psychology of conditionality* describing acting from a distanced observer’s perspective as a causally determined occurrence? Not at all.

A properly understood concept of grounded action cannot be bound to criteria of a fully aware goal intention and pursuit, but articulates restrictive forms of coping with life, including conflicts, ambivalences, (self-imposed) denials of interests, and such. Only when it incorporates the dynamic interdependency between the volitional and conscious elements of activity and its
unintentional, unconscious aspects, as well as efficient causalities and befalling events not under one’s own control, is such a concept psychologically viable. Understood in this way, the (tentative) explication of acting not just permits one to define, within the scope of action teleonomy, possible shortfalls of intentionality and objective causal effects. Taking this higher level of specificity as the point of departure also allows one to specify the interface with the legitimate domain of the non-intentional, behavioural theoretical descriptive pattern, which relates to an elementary determination level of natural lawful functioning (e.g., psycho-physiological regulation mechanisms). I cannot see how a comprehensive theory framework, admitting of a consistent, non-reductionist mediation between the different levels of specificity of acting, could be possibly established from within the unspecific discourse of conditionality. By contrast, the category of grounded action enables one to achieve theoretical unity for the core area of human psychology and, beyond that, to specify the respective applicability of the intentional and non-intentional theory languages. It constitutes therefore the more powerful category—also with regard to the quest for a monistic synthesis (cf. Maiers, 1996; 2019).

The true reason for the methodological dualism in psychology have been solipsism and indeterminism in the conceptualisation of the psychical. Both invariably provoke, in the name of scientific objectivity, a turnaround to the opposite standpoint of an other-directedness of acting, leading to a reification of subjectivity. Holzkamp counters this antinomy with a—decidedly transdisciplinary—program of a historical-empirical analysis of the development of the psychical as a subject-bound active reflection of the objective reality. This reconstruction, ranging from psychogenesis through to the reflective world- and self-experience of societally situated human agents, pulls the carpet out from under the idealistic sublimation of the immediate subjective givenness of conscious phenomena to a mere inwardness, separated from the practical mediatedness between the corporeal subjects and their outside world. As a result, the schismatic position is overcome which prompts the objectivistic disavowal of subjective relations of meaningfulness [Sinnbezüge] as an allegedly methodically inaccessible object of scientific knowledge, and at the same time tacitly informs those subject-psychological antitheses that consider the subjective as amenable to a scientific analysis only at the expense of standards of scientific objectivisation.

Consequently, one has to repudiate compromises that may concede a heuristic function to the standpoint of the subject as an epistemological standpoint prior to nomological explanation. Such compromise proposals leave the (causal) explanation and generalisation of theoretical laws to the traditional nomothetic variable-psychology (which has claimed either achievement exclusively for itself) instead of reconceptualising them in a new subject-
scientific perspective. Holzkamp’s (1985, esp. pp. 58ff.) critique of the interpretive approach to psychoanalysis and its radicalisation towards a hermeneutical reflective science is quite instructive in this context. He takes this as an example of the self-contradictoriness of attempts to claim an epistemological special status as against academic psychology, which as such is left unchanged: as a factual, observational, nomological science [Fakten-, Beobachtungs- und Gesetzeswissenschaft].

Contesting the central notion of distinct psychologies thus does not mean at all to hypostatise a new universal methodology opposed to the positivistic unitary science. The assertion of a unity of the psychological science needs to be substantiated by developing a methodology in accordance with the categorially revealed nature of the object of knowledge. In the context of such an integrative methodology, methodical specialisations—not disjunctions!—are accounted for by different aspects of the subject matter and of different research concerns.

To cite once again:

Hence, if a new level of psychological object appropriateness is actually accomplished by the subject-scientific conceptualisation, one will next have to put the entire psychology on a new methodological basis in the name of scientific reliability. (Holzkamp, 1985, 60; emphasis in the original)

Klaus Holzkamp was taking up nothing less than this demanding challenge.

References


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A dialogue with Holzkamp on the matter of subjectivity

Fernando González Rey

Abstract
Holzkamp was the only psychologist of his time, sharing his cultural, political and historical representation of psychology, who considered the topic of subjectivity as central for his work. He did not understand subjectivity by using only an intra-psychical definition, but as continuously interwoven between the inner resources of individuals and the societal conditions within which human existence takes place. Holzkamp was a pioneer in exploring the close relationship between subject and subjectivity. The definition of the subjective character of action was advanced through this relationship, taking the opposite direction to the consideration of action as a purely instrumental function. Nonetheless, defining subjectivity as specific to human beings, Holzkamp did not advance a specific ontological definition that permits the differentiation of subjectivity from psychological processes as such. This paper will discuss the difference between Holzkamp and other critical authors that have used culture and symbolic processes as their flag while omitting individuals and subjectivity. Finally, there is discussion of the gaps in Holzkamp’s work, through which, in the opinion of the author, it is important to advance Holzkamp’s legacy.

Keywords
subjectivity, Holzkamp and Critical Psychology, Soviet Psychology, cultural-historical theory, subjective sense

Introduction
The topic of subjectivity is one of unsettled significance for philosophy and the social sciences. In fact, it has been indistinctly used as self, as consciousness, as well as to refer to internal universal essences of human beings (Harre, 1995; Shotter, 1993). Frequently subjectivity has appeared associated with subjectivism, specifically as a result of the modern philosophy of consciousness
that has departed from Descartes’s “pensée as the indubitable certainty”, subordinating the feeling of existence to the capacity of thinking.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the huge advances in natural sciences and technology found their philosophical expression in positivism, sharing a notion of knowledge as objective, predictable and subject to systems of laws. This representation of knowledge, closely related to the dominant method of doing science, prevailed until the beginning of the twentieth century, and strongly influenced the social sciences as well. Nonetheless, a crude empirical version of doing science has prevailed in psychology until the present day (Danziger, 1990; Koch, 1999).

In the social sciences positivism exerted a strong influence through the work of Comte and Durkheim. This influence led to a split in the social sciences on basis of their objectives, leading to the concept of discipline, as is presently the case. Due to this split between sciences on the basis of a narrow definition of their object, two very interrelated domains, society and human psychology, have remained separated up until the present. As a result, the representation of the human psyche was individualized and the representation of social processes depersonalized. However, the relevance of sociologists such as Max Weber and Norbert Elias was that they, from the beginning of this discipline, gave an important place to subjective processes and to individuals in their accounts of society (Elias, 2000; Weber, 1992).

In philosophy, the concept of experience, as treated by Dewey, highlighted the subjective side of human beings, transcending the illusion created by the objectivism that reality could be apprehended in its own terms (Dewey, 1920, 2016).

Marxism significantly contributed towards overcoming the representation of human beings as carriers of a universal nature. Marx’s postulate, in his Theses on Feuerbach, about human essence as “the ensemble of social relations”, was a key theoretical resource in transcending naturalism in the comprehension of human being. Furthermore, in the same work, Marx advanced an important premise for considering subjectivity: “The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism – that of Feuerbach included – is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively” (Marx, 1976, p. 6). This statement was not properly developed by Marx or advanced within Marxist philosophy, which is one reason why it was overlooked by the different theories that are grouped within a Marxist framework.

The more serious efforts to develop a Marxist psychology in the twentieth century were conducted by Soviet psychology. Nonetheless, those efforts were monopolized by the dominant official versions that characterized Soviet
psychology at the different stages of its development, namely Pavlovian reflexology, Kornilov’s reactology and Leontiev’s activity theory. These three approaches were determinist, reductionist and objectivist. However, these trends did not exhaust the legacy of Soviet psychology, which was first and foremost a cultural-historical psychology. Soviet psychology repeated the defect stressed by Marx in regards to preexisting forms of materialism.

One of the serious mistakes that, in my opinion, has been made in Western interpretations of and assumptions about either Vygotskian or Soviet psychology, has been to discuss its main contributions while omitting the political and historical contexts within which the different stages of that psychology took place (González Rey, 2014). The Soviet consolidation of political power on the basis of Marxism, transformed it into an ideology that led to a non-dialectical materialism that considered consciousness as a result of the objective reality, without giving room to the matter of subjectivity.

Holzkamp, despite his dialogue with Soviet psychologists, was critical in relation to the individualistic and deterministic character of that psychology. Critical psychology, which he founded, even though it was highly influenced by Marxism, was critical of the path taken by Marxist concepts within these philosophical, sociological and psychological traditions. Nonetheless, as Brockmeier has stated, “Holzkamp’s theoretical trajectory was grounded in a view of the human subject as ultimately societal and historical, that is, a cultural subject” (Brockmeier, 2009, p. 217). The ignorance of Holzkamp within Soviet psychology is noteworthy, as well as more recently within the cultural historical activity tradition, as Soviet psychology has been caricatured in the West for some decades (Roth & Lee, 2007; Stetsenko, 2004).

Holzkamp, in his theoretical proposal, had the merit of advancing topics that were completely ignored by the cultural-historical approach, as developed by Soviet psychology, and, at the same time, progressing on the topics of subject and subjectivity as inseparable. His work was creative and original, opening a new way of doing psychology that advanced, simultaneously with many others, within some of the key topics of psychology, as well as on the methodological and practical implication of his proposal.

This paper discusses Holzkamp’s achievements and the limitations of his approach to subjectivity. Through dialogue with Holzkamp an alternative path to the answers for some of the questions he raised will be introduced on the basis of our proposal of subjectivity from a cultural-historical standpoint.
Holzkamp’s contributions to advancing a critical cultural-historical approach in psychology

Holzkamp decisively advanced beyond three of the main failures of the cultural-historical psychology, as developed by Soviet psychology: 1. – a narrow representation of culture and of social life, with the latter referring more often than not to the immediate social environment; 2. – the omission of subjectivity in Soviet psychology; 3. – the individualistic approach of Soviet psychology. These three failures limited the critical potential of Soviet psychology, since its institutions, policies and social practices mostly remained beyond the scope of the problems that it dealt with; the only exceptions were V.N. Miasichev, who critically studied labor institutions, and L.I. Bozhovich and her group in their works concerning school.

I want to make explicit the differences stressed above between Holzkamp and Soviet psychology, because they are very illustrative of some of the gaps that, up until the present day, characterize the cultural-historical or cultural historical activity theories in Western psychology.

One position that allowed Holzkamp to transcend the borders within which Soviet psychology remained confined, was his position in relation to Marxism. As with any philosophy, Marxism took the form of a dominant interpretation that froze Marx’s legacy as a number of principles, which, based on Marx’s own assumptions, ignored other possible interpretations of that legacy that could be addressed toward new interpretations and theoretical paths in relation to the human psyche.

Holzkamp sharply draws a picture of the dominant lenses through which Marxism was used in psychology. In this regard, he stated:

As many futile attempts have shown, progress in this direction cannot be made by starting with the Marxist “anatomy of bourgeois society” and expecting to arrive at a conception of the individual from the dissection and specification of the mode of production in particular capitalistic societies. No matter how precise and detailed such an analysis may be, the “individuals as such” remains somehow out of reach. (Holzkamp, 1991, p. 51)

Soviet psychology, in its attempt to be a materialistic psychology, departed from a comprehension of the naive and very mechanistic materialist interpretation of Marx, based on the politically irreconcilable contradiction between idealism and materialism. This way of vindicating the Marxist character of psychology was shared both by official political official spheres and by politically dominant circles within psychology throughout its different stages of development.
Distancing himself from this position, Holzkamp argued: “The choice remaining appears to be either to ‘economize’ the individual, such that social relations are substituted for it, and wrongly understanding the Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach, the ‘individual’ is looked upon as the ‘ensemble of social relations’” (1991, p. 51).

The difficulty pointed out by Holzkamp was, to a great extent, responsible for the impossibility of Soviet psychology advancing towards an ontological definition of subjectivity as a new kind of phenomenon characteristic of human processes and realities, whether social or individual. The dominant way in which Marxism influenced Soviet psychology was clearly expressed in the next statement:

[All the richness of the ideas expressed by Marxist classical authors concerning subjective experience were not adequately interpreted by Soviet philosophers; we did not create a Marxist philosophical anthropology. (Consequently) the concept of subjective experience found no place in the language system of our philosophy. Precisely for this reason, the transition from Marxist philosophy to psychological theory was very complex. (Radzijovsky, 1988, p. 126)]

As seen from Radzijovsky’s statement, Soviet psychology not only disregarded subjectivity, but it also had a very narrow comprehension of culture and of social reality. The narrow comprehension of symbolic realities, mostly reduced in function to sign mediation of psychological functions in Vygotsky’s work, and to language, led to the symbolical character of social life itself being overlooked. This fact was present in the individual character of Soviet psychology.

Holzkamp seriously advanced theory with regard to the comprehension of the specific character of human social realities through two important and very interrelated concepts: his definition of the societal character of human realities and his concept of everyday life. Whereas his definition of the societal character of human realities led to a new representation of social processes as inseparable from their subjective side, through which social and individual appear as constituents of human social realities, his concept of everyday life located the human being within the set of changeable and simultaneous processes that characterize human social life.

On the societal character of human life, Holzkamp wrote:

When we say that humans, in contrast to all other living beings, must by virtue of their inner nature, be capable of socialization because they would otherwise be unable to develop into the societal life production process, and, accordingly, that with the historical emergence of the societal – economic life production for “societal nature” must have developed as the
subjective side of the economy, that is only a postulate, albeit a reasonable one. (Holzkamp, 1991, pp. 52-53)

Holzkamp is sensitive to the need to consider the subjective side of human processes and realities, and though this subjective aspect of human processes is introduced in his definition of societal realities, he understood social-economic life production as being possible only through the subjective nature of these processes. His emphasis on the subjective side of human processes led to a new comprehension of the specific economic-social productive character of human beings. These attributes, taken together, defined the main qualitative distinction between animals and human beings. Holzkamp was very concerned to advance with respect to an ontological definition of human beings that clearly allows us to be differentiated from other living species.

Even though Holzkamp took an important step forward in considering the subjective side of socio-economic processes, he conceptualized those subjective processes related to societal life through the concept of collective subjectivity, the heuristic value of which is limited in treating social subjective processes. The concept of social subjectivity in our proposal integrates collective processes, moving forward in terms of social subjective processes and events that are not collective.

Holzkamp’s collective subjectivity is closely related to the vagueness of his comprehension of subjectivity as such, on which we will focus below. Holzkamp said in this regard:

On the side of societal relations, the psychoanalytic idea that these are solely limiting and repressing is overcome by elaborating the connection between the development of subjective quality of life and the individual’s participation in societal control over the conditions of life, that is, by the integration of the individual and collective subjectivity. (Holzkamp, 1991, p. 101)

Regardless of my critique of the concept of collective subjectivity, the fact of defining the subjective nature of social spaces, even if reduced to the collective, was an important step forward in transcending the individualistic view of subjectivity.

Holzkamp’s later concept of everyday life complemented his definition of societal processes, highlighting the complex networks of activities and situations within which individuals are simultaneously involved in their social life. Dreier (2016) stresses the difference between situation and everyday life and, in my opinion, also turns this concept into a very important methodological device:
The foundation for the formation of subjectivity and experience is her everyday life and not a situation. This insight expands our analytic gaze from an immediate situation to an everyday life that is going on from day to day in a particular, subjectively and socially grounded and arranged way. Furthermore, everyday life contains many different situations in different places and spheres of activity. So it is not adequate to analyze a subject’s situation in the singular in general terms. Situations must be grasped in the plural as different across the diverse contexts of a subject’s everyday life. (Dreier, 2016, p.17)

Dreier’s call to center on everyday life as a cosmos of situations located in different places and within different networks of social relations, implies different subjective resources. It also implies that an individual’s positions demand a system of highly malleable and dynamic concepts to advance on a new proposal on subjectivity capable of answering such a theoretical advance in the comprehension of social life. A theoretical proposal capable of fulfilling this requirement will be advanced below.

Most of the research done in psychology today, whether qualitative or quantitative, is still performed on the basis of episodic moments formally planned as part of the research process, separating the course of research from the flux of everyday life, within which participants in the research live, and within which the matter being researched occurs. We have given special attention to this fact in our most recent works related to our constructive-interpretative methodological proposal (González Rey, 2000, 2005; González Rey & Mitjans Martínez, 2016, 2017). We propose (Gonzalez Rey & Mitjans, 2017a,b) that the researcher should be “immersed” within the social arena within which the participants’ activities and social relations are organized in their daily lives (Gonzalez Rey, Goulart & Bezerra, 2016; Gonzalez Rey & Mitjans, 2017 a, b).

Summarizing this topic, I think that Holzkamp advanced the positions of Soviet psychology and the way in which its legacy has been developed by Western psychology in relation to the following three points: (a) the relationship between individual and society, understanding societal processes as inseparable from subjectivity; (b) the inclusion of the subjective side of human experiences, whether social or individual; (c) the transcendence of the social determinism that has prevailed up until now in most of the theoretical positions within the so called cultural, historical and activity theory. Phenomenology and hermeneutics as two important traditions in the German philosophy also tangentially influenced his methodological proposal in comparison with the empirical experimentalism dominant in the official Soviet psychological trends.
Dialogue on subjectivity with Holzkamp’s proposal

Subjectivity, as considered by me elsewhere (González Rey, 2002, 2005, 2009, 2014, 2015), is a departure from a new ontological definition of human processes as inseparable from culture, and is historically located, something that has a social existence. In fact, subjectivity was only specified as an ontological definition by the modern philosophy of the subject, which identified subjectivity with consciousness and with rational individual productions. Since that time onward, the concept has been inappropriately used as synonymous with self, consciousness, inner psychical structure etc. Holzkamp highlighted subjectivity as a phenomenon; however, he did not advance a new ontological proposal about it from which a new theoretical system could emerge. His definition of subjectivity was constrained by some tendencies and concepts; nonetheless, he did not consider the important and promissory precedence within German psychology of the definition of dynamic units for the study of psyche, particularly the ideas advanced by T. Dembo, part of K. Lewin’s team (Dembo, 1993).

Holzkamp treated subjectivity as one more psychological concept within the broad taxonomy of psychological concepts that he continued to use in his theoretical proposal. Moreover, Holzkamp’s definition of subjectivity is also vague; he referred to some terms as having subjective significance, such as subjective situation, subjective necessity, subjective aspect of the action etc. Nonetheless, in any of these concepts it remains clear what the author understood by subjectivity.

Holzkamp explicitly defined human subjectivity “as the possibility of conscious control over one’s own life conditions, always and necessarily moving beyond individuality toward participation in the collective determination of the societal processes” (Holzkamp, 1991, p. 58). There are many references by Holzkamp to “subjective” as an adjective, always complementing other concepts, such as emotions, action, motivation, but he never specified the meaning of “subjectivity”. Subjectivity seems to be mainly represented by two specific and vaguely defined concepts – action potency and productive needs.

Through action potency Holzkamp seemed to be interested in advancing a broad concept capable of explaining an integral capacity of individuals to expand

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1 I use the ontological definition to define a specific quality of the phenomenon under study that becomes a new intelligible phenomenon, through a new theoretical construction that can be developed through research and professional practice, opening a new path toward intelligibility in one domain of knowledge. When one phenomenon does not specify its ontological nature, the concept used to specify it runs the risk of being distorted when attempting to theoretically reveal it through old-fashioned traditional concepts, through which the new ontological quality cannot be expressed.
themselves over obstacles to social development. However, its definition is highly undetermined. Holzkamp and his followers have described this concept mainly by its function.

The surface appearances of individual courses of development that are ordinarily encountered can thus be analyzed in terms of the relationships they express between the generalized action potency and the developmental restrictions through which they are canalized and deformed. Thus it is necessary to understand not only social developmental obstacles by which action potency is concretely restricted, but also the subjective levels of mediation, modes of assimilation, and mechanism of defense by which the subjective necessity to control conditions appears in possibly unrecognizable, perverted ways. (Holzkamp, 1991, p. 61)

The above quotation reveals the main gaps in, and imprecision of, the use of the term subjectivity by Holzkamp. The generalized action potency appears here to be a capacity to transcend social developmental obstacles, an important attribute to be considered by any new approach to the matter of subjectivity. In any case, it is not clear how the term action potency is defined, because here action potency appears separated from what he defines as subjective levels of mediation, which appear together with modes of assimilation and a mechanism of defense, a combination of concepts that is difficult to understand. At the same time, these concepts are understood as the way in which the necessity to control conditions appears. Is action potency a subjective formation in itself, or does subjectivity only appear through the concept introduced by Holzkamp? Once again, subjective appears here to be one side of other processes, but its nature is not specified.

The definition of action potency embodies the rational character oriented towards control, as characterized by Holzkamp’s more general definition of subjectivity quoted above, in which consciousness and orientation are the two main functions of subjectivity, as is clearly revealed in the next statement: “Thus, generally speaking, the development of human subjectivity, as the possibility of conscious control over one’s own life conditions, always and necessarily requires moving beyond individuality (stressed in the original) toward participation in the collective determination (stressed in the original) of the societal processes” (Holzkamp, 1991, p. 58).

The relevance of Holzkamp’s contribution in not reducing subjectivity to an individual phenomenon becomes opaque due to this statement, from which an important doubt could arise about what Holzkamp defined as subjectivity; are individuals carriers of subjective processes, aside from the fact that they are
always engaged within social plots? We address this question in our definition of subjectivity, understanding levels of social and individual subjectivity which are reciprocally configured, one within the other, through the subjective senses that they each produce.

The vagueness of the definition of the concept of action potency is evident in the many different and non-precise attributes used by different authors in the definition of this concept. So Tolman, one of the important followers and interpreters of Holzkamp’s work, states:

The first implication yields one of Critical Psychology’s more central categories, action potency (Handlungsfähigkeit). This is the focal category that embraces everything that has been said up to now. It reflects the need for psychology to consider the individual’s ability to do the things that he or she feels are necessary to satisfy his or her needs; that is, to ensure an acceptable quality of life. It has a subjective side, which is how one feels about oneself and one’s relation with the world… Action potency is what mediates individual reproduction and societal reproduction. (Tolman, 1991, p. 16)

The concept of action potency is represented for both Holzkamp and Tolman as an additive concept formed by different elements, modes and processes. Moreover, instead of being a main concept for Holzkamp’s definition of subjectivity, subjectivity appears as an aspect of action potency. While in Holzkamp’s definition, action potency seems to be a generative concept, capable of explaining how individuals transcend the objective social limitation of their development, Tolman presents the concept as a mediator between individual reproduction and societal reproduction. What does it mean to be a mediator in this case? Both definitions, as the reader can perceive, are different in some respects, stressing the vagueness of the concept, and together with this, the vagueness of Holzkamp’s own definition of subjectivity.

As stated above, subjectivity is treated by Holzkamp as an aspect of other processes and functions without specifying its own nature. As a result, subjectivity, rather than a new qualitative and distinctive feature of human realities, is treated as one more concept within the fragmentary taxonomy of psychological concepts. Holzkamp continues to refer to cognition, emotion and motivation as three different processes, and his attempts to advance the unity between them falls into a rationalist reductionism.

The rationalism of Holzkamp’s definition of emotions is clearly expressed by Tolman:
The critical psychological reconstruction of emotion revealed it as an essential component of the knowing processes. It orients knowledge by appraising environmental factors. It tells us when knowledge is adequate and when it is inadequate. Contrary to the traditional view, it is an adjunct to cognition, not its opponent. (Tolman, 1991, p. 20)

Several constraints could be pointed out due to this way of understanding emotion: (a) the preservation of the traditional split between cognitive processes and emotions, through the presentation of the latter as an “adjunct” to cognition, deriving from (b) how the emotions are presented as a secondary process oriented towards qualifying the adequacy of knowledge by appraising environmental factors. This definition of emotions corroborates Holzkamp’s rationalistic and cognitivist reductionism in his treatment of emotions, and consequently of motivation and subjectivity.

In Holzkamp’s own words:

Whereas an adequate theoretical reconstruction of the connections between cognition, emotions, and action requires that we take negative emotional subjective states seriously as expressions of the unsatisfactoriness of objective living conditions, and emotionality must therefore be seen as serving as a subjective guide for the improvement of environmental relations. (Holzkamp, 1991, p. 123)

Once again, subjectivity appears as complement, in this case as a function of emotionality as a “subjective guide”. What does this mean? Are emotions not subjective productions? Holzkamp only understood emotions as serving rational purposes to define the adequacy or inadequacy of knowledge. Where is subjectivity in relation to these processes? While Holzkamp, at some points, appeared as a critic of the fragmentation of psychology, he in fact perpetuated the traditional fragmenting taxonomy of psychological concepts. The rationalism that is the basis of his attempt to explain psychological processes and subjectivity as consciously oriented toward control is evident in his treatment of emotions and motives. Rather than a theory capable of theoretically reconstructing the relation between cognition, emotions and action, what is necessary is a new comprehension of how emotions, cognition and actions are simultaneously configured with new concepts assembled within a new theoretical system, carrying on a new ontological definition of human mind. This is the only path through which it would be possible to overcome the fragmentary taxonomy of concepts that characterizes psychology today. Subjectivity, as understood by us, does not represent an addition of concepts nor their interrelations, but a system assembled through symbolic-emotional units, whose self-organization is in
process, and within which different functions and psychological processes appear as subjectively configured.

These gaps in the definition of emotions and motivations turn Holzkamp’s definition of subjectivity into a partial and unclear term exhausted by its rational-adaptive character. This evaluation gains support in the following statement by Holzkamp-Osterkamp: “The neglect of subjectivity (the authors are referring here to Pribram’s theory of emotion), that is, the concrete meaning of objective environmental conditions for the individual, is expressed by the fact that it is not the goal and their subjective meanings that are taken to be at issue, but the plan alone” (Holzkamp-Osterkamp, 1991, p. 117).

This rational orientation of Holzkamp’s theory is criticized by Teo in the following terms:

However, I suggest that Holzkamp provided only a first-order solution to the relationship between society and the individual, and, more importantly, that he provided only a partial solution to the problem of how critical psychology should consider the mediation between social structure and the conduct of everyday life… By a partial solution I refer to a program that draws on local traditions that are embedded in philosophies of consciousness without an awareness of critical traditions focusing on the body. In suggesting adding body-based critical concepts, I imply that Holzkamp’s (1983) critical psychology is a progressive research program that is able to assimilate and accommodate critical traditions from inside and outside the West, and that psychologists need to “move with Holzkamp beyond Holzkamp.” (Teo, 2016, p. 112)

Teo’s comments are important, not only because of the critical points he raises with respect to Holzkamp, but also because of the way he made his criticism and the positivity he stressed in relation to Holzkamp’s proposal. Today, it is important not only to “move with Holzkamp beyond Holzkamp” but to “move with Foucault beyond Foucault” and to “move with Vygotsky beyond Vygotsky” etc. Teo postulates an interesting principle that must guide our relation to theory, recognizing its values and limits. The best theories are those which bring to light new theoretical representations of the subject under study, and that also allow progress on scientific research and social practices, as inseparable from stages in their continuous development.

Moreover, Teo pointed out two important ideas: first, the need to transcend the approaches based on the philosophy of consciousness, which was preserved by Holzkamp in his approach to subjectivity; and second, the understanding of Holzkamp’s proposal as a progressive program. Theories are not closed systems, but progressive long-lasting programs that should be continuously developed. In
one of our more recent works, we have identified this need through the concept of lines of research (González Rey & Mitjans, 2017a, 2017b).

The rationalism of Holzkamp’s theoretical proposal is also expressed by some of his closer followers and interpreters. Thus, for example, Brockmeier claims:

Subjectivity, intentions, agency, participation, decision-making, action possibilities, reasons for action and *Handlungsfähigkeit* are all terms that belong to what Rom Harre (1995) has described as “agentive discourse”. For Harre the study of human agency cannot be separated from the study of the language of agency, that is, “the discursive practices in which our agentive power are manifested or, to put it more candidly, in which we present ourselves as agents” (p.112). (Brockmeier, 2009, p. 224)

Brockmeier’s proposal to reduce that broad range of concepts to an “agentive discourse” reduces discourse, and terms related to it, to concepts monopolizing the ontological domain of psychology. This proposal deviates, in my view, from Holzkamp’s legacy. The relevance of discourse as a symbolical socially constructed process, the heuristic value of which allows a transcending of the individualistic-behavioral natural psychology, was that it was very seductive to critical psychologists, many of whom, at some stage, transformed discourse into a new metaphysical definition (Edward & Potter, 1992; Harre, 1995; Gergen, 1982, 1985; Shotter, 1993, 1995). Language, dialogue and discourse become the only ontological domain from which an alternative critical psychology could be constructed. New terms highlighted this new ontological domain, such as dialogical self, agentive discourse, discursive practices and deconstruction, among others. Subjectivity, at some stage, was completely banned from the psychological arena, as along with emotions and the active character of individuals and social instances as agents and subjects.

As a result of the overwhelming impact of the “discursive turn” in psychology, many psychologists question the existence of psychology itself as a domain of knowledge (Rose, Gergen), without reflecting that a different psychology is possible, one that does not center on the individual psyche as such, but on a new ontological definition capable of explaining human phenomena, whether social or individual, in new terms, departing from concepts that have characterized human realities as cultural, social and historical. One possible attempt at defining a new ontological domain, one capable of integrating social symbolical constructions and individuals and treating both as configured within the other instead of being engulfed by the other, is to reframe subjectivity from a cultural, social and historical standpoint.
Drawing a new picture of subjectivity from a cultural-historical psychology

On the basis of the appeal that has, for some decades, enchanted critical psychologists, many of whom have been involved in one way or another with social constructionism, discourse is looked on as the cornerstone for a new psychology capable of transcending the individualism, naturalism and empirical character of psychology. The theory outlined below has been discussed in detail in some of our more recent works (González Rey, 2016, 2017a, 2017b; González Rey & Mitjans, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c). Our aim in this paper is to focus on our differences and agreements with Holzkamp’s proposal and to extend this more recent work as a new option to explain a non-empirical, non-individualistic, non-naturalistic way of doing psychology that does not have discourse as its epicenter. Holzkamp, aside from the differences outlined above, is an important antecedent to our position due to the integrative character of his theory, which attempted to break down the fragmentation of psychology and attend to the new epistemological requirements that such an attempt demanded (Teo, 1998). Together with this, instead of rejecting psychology, he proposed a new kind of psychology, exactly as we have done. Unlike discourse and language, subjectivity, in our cultural-historical proposal, advanced a new comprehension of emotions, which appears to characterize subjective phenomena and form new qualitative units, within which emotions and symbolical processes are integrated into a new qualitative unit, representing a new ontological domain – subjectivity. Unlike Holzkamp’s treatment of the emotions, in our definition of subjectivity emotions have a generative character; the units of emotions and symbolical processes were coined by us as subjective senses (González Rey, 2000, 2002, 2007, 2014, 2015). Emotions, according to this definition, transcend their adaptive and control functions, oriented towards defining cognitive and other processes, which are traditionally defined as psychological, as subjectively configured processes, which appear simultaneously to be emotional and symbolical. In subjective senses, emotions and symbolical processes are two sides of the same coin; emotion obtains symbolic character, and symbolic processes appear through emotions.

Subjective senses form an endless and fluid dynamic within which one sense unfolds into others, in a process within which subjective configurations emerge. Subjective configurations always result from dominant subjective senses that have become integrated within new qualitative units, not as a sum, but as a new subjective unit capable of generating subjective senses, as new subjective productions that are not directly related to the objective facts that characterize experience. Behaviors are always subjectively configured and they are often
surprisingly perceived as completely unjustified by the concrete scene within which they emerge. Subjective configurations are never a direct expression of objective conditions; they always represent imaginary subjective productions. This is what defines the generative character of subjectivity in our proposal. Emotions are a cornerstone of the main function of subjectivity, the way in which individuals and social instances engage as motivational and social agents in their lived experiences. Whereas individual traditional psychology is based on concepts strictly restricted to individuals’ behaviors, motivations and other psychological processes, subjectivity highlights how the constellation of socio-cultural symbolic productions, including discourses, institutional orders, languages, socially coined processes like race, gender, age and illness, are lived by individuals and social instances through the subjective senses generated and developed by the subjective configurations of different events and experiences. I defined this complex relation as follows:

Any social experience becomes subjective through the emergence of subjective senses, which represent a subjective side of any living experience. Subjective senses always carry out an imaginary character. They do not reflect objective processes of experience; they are individual and social productions based on how social symbolic constructions are experienced by individuals, groups and institutions. (González Rey, 2017, p. 29)

Subjective senses, unlike meanings, allow the recognition of the generative character of emotions which, like subjective senses, always evoke symbolical processes that do not reduce to meanings. Meaning, as used by Bruner, Holzkamp and some of his disciples, such as Brockmeier, is embedded within a package of rational functions that overlook emotions. Arguing about meanings, Brockemeier wrote: “At least in principle, we can detach ourselves from meanings; we can step back and consider them, think about them, evaluate them, take a conscious and reflexive stance towards them” (Brockmeier, 2009, p. 222).

Different from meanings, subjective senses are not available to be grasped from conscious and intentional actions. Subjective senses appear indirectly through the ways in which individuals and social agencies organize and structure their speech, dialogues, performances, and even through the way in which daily routines are performed. The emotional engagements of all of these expressions do not specify themselves as pure emotional expressions, but through the more general way in which individual and social instances spontaneously express themselves in relation to their different experiences, and to the times and areas in which they have occurred. So, for example, it is not the same that a person tells of experiences related to their father, remembering times shared together through
personalized constructions, as to describe the father by his personal qualities without any personalized reference. This meaning, generated in specific and indirect ways to qualify personal or social expressions, is what is coined as an indicator in our methodological proposal; indicators are hypothetical meanings attributed by the researcher to indirect elements that are not consciously constructed through explicit meanings.

Subjective senses are not rationally and consciously identified meanings. On the contrary, subjective senses are taken as subjective productions that are embedded in the form of human thoughts, gestures and performances, but that are never directly explicit in the meanings or action through which these experiences appear. This is the reason why prejudices and “rational orders” are subjective productions rather than rational ones. They can never be recognizable by the rational arguments used to defend them. This subjective condition, to some extent, allows an explanation of why “rational” human beings have committed atrocities on behalf of reason since humankind has existed as such.

This subordination of reason to subjective plots was identified by Freud in his concepts of transference and rationalization. Rationalization is not a mechanism of defense; it reveals the subjective nature of any human construction. All human principles and institutions exist as subjective orders whose functioning is beyond the reasons for which those principles and institutions are explicitly founded. This is a point raised by Castoriadis through his definition of the social imaginary.

On the basis of the malleability and fluid character of subjective senses and subjective configurations, it is possible to understand subjectivity as a quality of human phenomena, whether social or individual, moving forward on the topic of the human mind. Subjective senses and subjective configuration are subjective productions that do not result from immediate and objective external influences. Subjective senses emerge within different plots of human social relations as a result of the subjective configurations that emerge from the ongoing activities and performances around which these plots are simultaneously organized. These subjective senses embody the social symbol constructions that characterize those social arenas as they are subjectively experienced by individuals and groups.

Our proposal on subjectivity is dialogical, understanding dialogue as a shared social configuration that is inseparable from the agents or subjects in dialogue. Dialogue is not only inter-subjective; it is a social subjective configured process that creates a space for social subjectivity shared by its participants. At the same time, the actions and the singular subjective configurations of the participants appear as subjective senses generated by the subjective configuration of the dialogue. Both individuals and dialogue are configured, one within the other, through subjective senses, which, embodying
the other level of subjectivity, are themselves produced by the subjective configurations generated by each of these subjectivities. Dialogue cannot be separated as subjective production from the agents involved in this process, as has been proposed by social constructionism (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Gergen, 1982, 1991; Harre, 1995; Shotter, 1993, 1995).

Subjectivity opens new paths towards topics that have remained under a shadow in psychology for the last two decades, topics such as emotions, taken in its generative and foundational character, motivation and individuals as subjects and agents of social processes. For discursive psychologies, human motivation is overlooked, and all human processes are explained by discursive and dialogical devices. Subjectivity is mainly a motivational system (González Rey, 2014), the functioning of which occurs through subjective configurations of human experiences. Only as subjectively configured processes do social realities and experiences have the capacity to engage individuals and groups as motivated and active actors. Overlooking subjectivity in the explanation of social processes has historically led to the exclusion of individuals, as if they could not be part of social realities, and also to the ignoring of social realities as also being subjective by their own nature.

Subjectivity and individuals are inseparable from social processes, as has been defended in classical sociology, such as by M. Weber, N. Elias and Alan Touraine, among others. More recently, the topic of subjectivity as a constituent of social realities has been brought to light in other areas of the social sciences. M.J. Graham, a professor of social work, has stated: “What we see and understand in a situation is influenced by our “subjectivity”, including our embodiment – for example, gender, ethnicity, social location, age, sexual orientation and ability” (Graham, 2017, p. 4). Regardless that subjectivity appears between quotation marks, the author has to appeal to the term to explain how different social symbolical constructions are simultaneously present in our actions. There is not another concept in psychology capable of explaining this as a singular process that includes our embodiment; embodiment is always a subjective process, while emotions are the link between body and subjectivity.

Nonetheless, those social attributes enumerated by Graham are not present in a standardized way in every person or social group. They will appear as subjective senses that express the singular way in which those attributes are produced by individuals and groups within the complex plot of their everyday lives. Social symbolical constructions are not internalized; they are subjectively produced by individuals and groups in a singular way. The attempt to draw internal, properly individual subjective processes as simple echoes of other processes is clear, such as that embodied by the concept of a “dialogical self”; the self could never be exhausted by dialogical processes.
The definition of subjectivity from a cultural-historical standpoint, as defended in this paper, allows the body to be considered as being part of subjective productions. Our body is subjective and our subjectivity is embodiment. The body is a permanent source of sensations, emotions and states that appear as subjective senses within subjective configurations. The subjective configurations are temporally and locally situated, and our body is part of the sense of being in the world from a given place.

The way that body appears as a subjective process does not differ from the way in which other social symbolic constructions also appear as subjective. Even Merleau-Ponty, who very seriously advanced the idea of the incarnate subject in philosophy, recognized that the body is inseparable from many other social facts for the comprehension of individuals and society. The fact of the matter here is to advance toward a new ontological definition of human phenomena that makes possible the integration of those multiple social facts and the body as inseparable within a new theoretical system. In our opinion, this is one of the challenges which a theory of subjectivity with new theoretical bases should answer.

Merleau-Ponty (1964) reveals one of the relevant challenges that must be faced by the study of subjectivity from a cultural-historical point of view; the way in which the diverse and simultaneous facts and processes of social life become a subjective production, qualitatively different from the processes involved in its genesis. Two main ideas are stressed by Merleau-Ponty. The first has to do with the importance of psychological and social theories not reducing their subjects to a single fact taken as determinant of human phenomena in whatever domain of human life; the second is the emphasis on the contradictory character of human and social functioning, complex systems that never reach equilibrium.

Holzkamp took an important step forward in considering subjectivity as part of individuals and social phenomena, drawing a non-reductionist picture of subjectivity as a human phenomenon. Nonetheless, he did not advance a theory of subjectivity, in part due to his rationalistic representation of human beings.

Some final remarks

It is difficult to understand why Holzkamp’s proposal has, in fact, been restricted to a relatively small group of authors that have identified themselves with the critical psychology proposed by him. However, neither critical social psychology, as it has developed in the last three decades, nor the historic cultural approach inspired by the legacy of Soviet psychology in the West, have been, in fact, interested in Holzkamp’s proposal. In my opinion, the disregard of
Holzkamp’s proposal results from two very interrelated facts. For critical social psychology, mainly inspired by the legacy of post-structuralism, the active role attributed by Holzkamp to individuals and subjectivity does not appear attractive, whereas for the latter, enclosed in a narrow definition of what cultural-historical psychology means, neither Holzkamp’s ideas on subjectivity and subject, nor his criticisms of Marxism and the Soviet authors, are acceptable. The “progressive research program”, as it was qualified by T. Thomas, was one more reason for the rejection of Holzkamp’s position by a psychology mainly oriented by theories in fashion.

No matter its historical relevance, this paper moves beyond Holzkamp on the topic of subjectivity, advancing a proposal that shares Holzkamp’s position of a non-deterministic approach to subjectivity, but that differs from his proposal by making explicit an ontological definition of subjectivity, on which a new theory of subjectivity stands. This ontological definition is based on the understanding of the human phenomenon as a unit formed by symbolical processes and emotions, within which one evokes the other without being its cause. This formulation of subjectivity has challenged simplistic formulations of homogenous ethical, gender or whatever socially constructed realities as determined human behaviors. It is not these constructions in themselves, nor the discourses on individuals and social behaviors, but the subjective senses configured by individuals and social instances living such experiences, which would define the way those social symbolical constructions will be experienced by individuals and social institutions.

The units of subjectivity, as a theoretical system, are the subjective senses and subjective configurations, cultural, social and historical character of which is given because of their capacity, as a system, to define the singular way that individuals and groups experience their cultural and social realities, historically located. The culture and its symbolic systems are not a direct trigger of human actions; actions are subjectively configured within subjective systems, whether social or individuals. The redefinition of emotions as inseparable from subjective processes, leads to their generative and active character, which has been completely ignored by rationalistic approaches in psychology.

Subjectivity, as discussed in this paper, transcends the fragmentary taxonomy of categories on which psychology has historically been developed as a field of knowledge. At a subjective level, the different psychological processes and functions appear as subjectively configured processes, becoming the motive for their own operations. Motivation is understood as the subjective configurations of different psychological functions, experiences, performances and activities. It is through the subjective configurations of social and individual subjectivity that each of them is configured into the other, making possible social
changes through individual subjective engagements in social events and processes. Without individual and social subjective engagements, change does not occur. This is one of the richer aspects of Holzkamp’s legacy, from which we intend to continue advancing our proposal on subjectivity.

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Diffraction when standing on the shoulders of giants: With and beyond Holzkamp

Thomas Teo

Abstract
Foucault once articulated his relationship with Marxist theory, suggesting that he uses the master without authenticating, lauding or eulogizing his significance and that, if an intellectual pioneer is important, his or her ideas should be integrated into current work. I suggest that we adapt Holzkamp for current intellectual and practical purposes, interfering with and diffracting traditional ways of understanding his work. Using examples from different phases of Holzkamp’s work, I show how pre-critical, critical, and subject-scientific ideas have been incorporated into my own psychological thinking without submitting to a standard interpretation of his work. I show the ways in which Holzkamp’s analyses on the relationship between experiment and theory have inspired my work on epistemological violence; how his discussion of the relevance of psychology needs to be extended; and how his subject-scientific studies can be used as a starting- and counterpoint for current reflections on subjectivity. I argue that Holzkamp’s theory remains an important tool for critical, theoretical, and philosophical psychology.

Keywords
epistemological violence, relevance, nature, subjectivity.

Some aspects of Marxist theory and practice have been caught within a cult of (male) personality, instead of focusing on the innovation of ideas. Arguably, theoretical advances should not be accomplished for the sake of novelty, but because they do more justice to (psycho)social reality. Ironically, the focus on persons and calcified ideas runs counter to the statements of the masters themselves. Marx and Engels rejected their own thoughts as doctrine, dogma, or...
credo. Engels argued that the analyses of Marx do not present “final dogmas, but pointers for further investigation” (MEW 39, p. 428).\(^1\) Further, Engels considered their “theory to be a theory that develops, not a dogma that one learns by heart, and reproduces mechanically” (MEW 36, p. 597). He criticized Marxist groups that turn into cults (MEW 38, p. 422) and that interpret Marxist theory as orthodoxy (MEW 39, p. 245).

Foucault (1980) advanced this argument: “I often quote concepts, texts and phrases from Marx, but without feeling obliged to add the authenticating label of a footnote with a laudatory phrase to accompany the quotation” (p. 52). He criticized the habit of Marxist journals and intellectuals to revere Marx, while he himself used “Marx without saying so, without quotation marks” (p. 52). He compared his practice to a physicist who does not feel obliged to quote Newton or Einstein and does not need a “eulogistic comment to prove how completely he is being faithful to the master’s thought” (p. 52). Foucault identified a form of secular religiosity that has taken over certain intellectual circles, which is not limited to Marxism, but must be overcome if one conceives of truth as dialectical.

20\(^{th}\) century critical theory accepted the historical nature of knowledge. Horkheimer (1937/1992) argued that objects, methods and books have a historical character and that it would be absurd within critical theory to assume a trans-historical Truth (including the truths found within critical theory) (see also Horkheimer & Adorno, 1982). Holzkamp understood this as well: When I interviewed Holzkamp in the late 1980s (see also Teo, 1989), and asked him about a passage in his book *Laying the Foundations of Psychology* (Holzkamp, 1983), he told me that some of the ideas in the book were several years old, and that therefore some parts would be outdated. The answer itself surprised me. Today I do not remember what part of the book I was referring to, or the specific question I posed, but I strongly recollect his attitude towards his own work (it was not part of the interview). If one looks at the whole oeuvre of Holzkamp, this attitude is not surprising, given that he has undergone radical shifts in his own intellectual development. What is then the best usage of Holzkamp’s ideas? I submit that the best practice is not to reproduce mechanically what is written in *Laying the Foundation for Psychology*, or in other books and articles, but to use, adapt and modify the ideas of Holzkamp (or Marx, or any other great thinker) as stepping stones for further investigations. Ideas need to be contextualized, and turning historically constituted knowledge into dogma does not serve knowledge, or praxis, for that matter, well.

\(^1\) MEW refers to Marx Engels Werke (Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels Werke, 43 volumes, edited by the Institut für Maxismus-Leninismus, published by Dietz Verlag in Berlin). Translation into English by the author.
Feminist epistemologists have provided perhaps the clearest articulations of this idea. In applying terms such as interference and diffraction, Barad (2006) promotes a methodology beyond reflection that includes, in my reading, an ethical, respectful, and engaged understanding, but not a submissive or deferential understanding – but an understanding that is based on visible entanglements, that acknowledges relevant differences, and from which new ideas can emerge. Geerts and van der Tuin (2013) (drawing on Barad and Haraway) reject the inherent representationalism of identity politics, which in my view extend to scientific identities (such as critical psychology) and recommend instead *interference* in structures that define such categories. Holzkamp’s theory in that sense can be understood as both hindering and enabling, as allowing for the possibility of agentic diffraction in the development of critical psychology. In my own work, I have tried to advance Holzkamp, not by being faithful, but by critically incorporating and modifying his ideas into my work.

In the following, I articulate how I have used works from different phases of Holzkamp’s work in my own thinking. My ideas were sometimes closer to, and sometimes more remote from, his ideas. Holzkamp’s works can be divided for heuristic purposes into different phases that indicate intellectual shifts in orientation (Teo, 1998, 2013). The pre-critical period began with his first experimental and theoretical writings and continued until 1968, the year in which he published the final monograph of this period on *Science as Action* (Holzkamp, 1968), but in which he also began to write his first critical-theoretical articles. The critical-emancipatory period lasted from 1968 to 1972, the year in which he published *Critical Psychology: Preparatory Works* (Holzkamp, 1972). The critical-conceptual period dates from 1973 to 1983, from the publication of *Sensory Knowledge* (Holzkamp, 1973) to *Laying the Foundation of Psychology* (Holzkamp, 1983). Since 1984 and until his death in 1995 one can characterize the subject-scientific period of Klaus Holzkamp, which focused on a psychology from the standpoint of the subject.

**Underrepresentation and the concept of epistemological violence**

In 1964, Klaus Holzkamp (1964/1981) published the book *Theory and Experiment in Psychology*, in which he discussed the relationship between experimental arrangements and theoretical conceptualizations and demonstrated that theoretical statements are not determined by experimental data. He further argued that the theoretical interpretation of experimental results is not binding, and that psychology does not provide criteria for deciding whether a particular theoretical interpretation is correct. This problematic relationship between theory
and experiment in psychology was understood as a problem of representation, in that it referred to the ways in which experimental statements are representative (or not) of theoretical statements (and vice versa).

For any given experimental result, theoretical statements can be developed through interpretations, and because each experimental result has many theoretical meanings, there can be no one-to-one relationship between experimental result and theoretical interpretation. Psychology provides no methodological principles that force a researcher to interpret a specific experimental result in a particular way. Conversely, theoretical statements allow for a variety of experimental designs. Thus, the connection between theoretical and experimental statements is to a certain degree arbitrary, or must always be selective, as both elements in the research process have plural meanings. Holzkamp clarified the issue: Subject-representation refers to the problem of whether participants in an experiment are representative for making theoretical statements about humanity (this is not a sampling but a theoretical problem); environmental representation refers to the problem of whether the environment in an experiment is representative for making theoretical statements about the world; and behavioral and experiential representation refers to the issue of whether experimental statements regarding a psychological topic represent the problem in the real world of persons. Holzkamp’s argument was that these problems are completely ignored in psychology, leading to a gap between theory and experiment. Holzkamp provided a set of recommendations for achieving a higher degree of representation of experimental and theoretical statements (see also Holzkamp, 1968), from which he distanced himself in his later writings, arguing that the solution cannot be found within experimental psychology.

Holzkamp’s arguments are attributed in the English-speaking world to Pierre-Maurice-Marie Duhem (1861-1916), who had suggested that experiments in physics always contain observations and theoretical interpretations, and to Quine’s (1969) underdetermination thesis that theory is underdetermined by data. Later, Holzkamp (1978) would describe the research process as a circle between theory and empirical research: Theories lead to empirical research, the results of which are interpreted within the original theory. The problem is that results are not explained outside the original theory, although alternative theories might be better candidates for explaining phenomena. This leads to stagnation in the body of knowledge of psychology. Traditional psychology, even to this day, offers no solution for overcoming the problem of underdetermination, although it has remained obsessed with methodology and method.

My work on epistemological violence is partially based on this stream of thought (Teo, 2008; 2011a, 2011b). Holzkamp understood that experimental and empirical psychologists cannot operate without theoretical backgrounds and
interpretations, which are based on understandings of the meanings of results, but he did not discuss the ethical consequences of this epistemological problem. The history of psychology has shown that a wide range of ideas – theoretical interpretations of empirical data – that are racist, sexist, classist, homophobic, ableist, and so on, are presented as facts or knowledge to the scientific community or public. The fact that empirical statements about race differences, for instance, contain speculations and theoretical interpretations is not conveyed to the public. An empirical result regarding race differences in psychological characteristics depends on the questions asked, the instruments and methods used, and the assumptions made, but also on the meaning that is given to those differences, and whether they are attributed to an essence, nature, or culture. The discussion of the results is not determined by data and requires a hermeneutic process that is undervalued and not taught in the discipline of psychology.

Moreover, if a researcher chooses an interpretation of empirical results that is detrimental to a group or person, thus constructing them as a problem, inferior, or difficult, then a context of interpretation emerges that I have named epistemological violence. The term was also inspired by the postcolonial thinker Spivak (1988) who suggested that Western works on the colonial Other has the quality of epistemic violence. I suggested that for an empirical science such as psychology, this term, although not inaccurate, was too unspecific and would likely not convince psychologists who work within naïve empiricism (Teo, 2010). The violence needs to be located at the core of the empirical enterprise itself – not within the context of discovery (what questions are asked), but within the context of the interpretation of data, which is considered an important issue within traditional methodology.

Given that empirical data do not determine interpretations, if “I” choose an interpretation of data that is harmful to a group of persons, knowing that equally valid alternative theoretical interpretations are possible, and if “I” present that interpretation as fact or as knowledge, then a form of epistemological violence has been committed. For instance, if a researcher finds differences in IQ scores between two groups, X and Y, and suggests that group X is by nature less intelligent than group Y, without debating the constraints of the concept of intelligence, without problematizing the marginalization and exclusion of particular groups, or without providing alternative interpretations of that empirical result – and if this researcher presents the interpretation as a fact – then a form of violence, epistemological violence, harmful to groups and individuals, has been committed. Historical studies make the case that harm has been done based on interpretative speculations. The concept of epistemological violence is an example of how one can move with Holzkamp beyond Holzkamp, taking international streams of critical thought into account.
Rethinking the relevance of (critical) psychology

In the critical-emancipatory period (1968-1972), Holzkamp, who was influenced by German critical theory, attempted solutions to psychology’s problems by articulating an emancipatory psychology that included critical reflection on traditional psychology. In 1972 he published the book *Critical Psychology: Preparatory Works* (Holzkamp, 1972) that included previously published journal articles and laid the groundwork for an emancipatory project. Among the topics, Holzkamp questioned the relevance of psychology for practice in arguing that advances in experimental methodology and statistics in research had led to a particularization and reduction of reality in which practitioners had to act. In contrast, the real world of psychologists working in practice consisted of a complexity of problems that emerged when individuals lived their actual social lives. Holzkamp argued that the variables that had been controlled in the laboratory came into play in this real world. Consequently, psychology could hardly achieve technical relevance (in working for the powerful in society), but certainly not emancipatory relevance, which would mean that psychologists collaborate with persons to obtain knowledge about their societal dependencies (alienation, capital, humiliation, anxiety, etc.). Holzkamp (1972) also questioned whether the traditional research model in psychology, borrowed from physics, was applicable or relevant to psychology. He identified a basic ontological difference between the subject matter of physics and psychology: Whereas physics operates based on a *subject-object* relationship in research, where it is clear who takes on the role of the researcher, research in psychology must be understood in terms of a *subject-subject* relationship, where the role of experimenter is reversible. The experiment depends on a willing and cooperative subject. Thus, in Holzkamp’s view, the conceptualization of psychology as a natural science was misguided.

Although Holzkamp challenged the relevance of experimental psychology for an understanding of human mental life taking place in concrete societies, and challenged the relevance of experimental psychology for practice, he did not challenge the relevance of European or German critical psychology for other regions of the world. In addition, his argument regarding the relevance of psychology has been contradicted by developments in North America, where psychology has become one of the most successful academic disciplines. Though psychology began with a small number of individuals, it has become one of the most popular majors at universities with large departments. In fact, psychology has been very adaptive and relevant to the varying demands of society (e.g., Ward, 2002). Although its critical-emancipatory relevance may be missing, and although part of its success may have been based on unfulfilled promises, it has
produced a great deal of subjective relevance for powerful, but also powerless, groups.

The personal relevance that psychology has achieved is based on the psychologization of American and Western culture, to the degree that psychology has been expanding around the world. Modernization is associated with a renewed focus on the mental life of the subject. Psychology, and the psydisciplines more generally, have become (or are made) relevant to many people, and although societal dimensions are lacking within modern psychology, the promise of personal emancipation has made psychology attractive. Elias (1978) pointed out that the process of civilization works on inner psychological processes, and that psychology has been available to focus on those inner workings, and has provided conceptual frameworks that grasp the interior, seemingly better than seminars about societal liberation. Holzkamp, in my view, did not focus on the dialectics of freedom and restriction when, for instance, an individual is diagnosed and labeled with a clinical category, which gives voice to their problems, and allows them to work with their inner life, public or private insurance agencies, and employers, while at the same time, productive engagement with the societal dimensions of their problems is stifled.

My argument is not about the role of psychologization and the power associated with it (see De Vos, 2012). Rather, it is about rethinking the global relevance of psychology and critical psychology (see also Long, 2016). Holzkamp was not aware of indigenous psychologies, postcolonial theory, or cultural studies as we know them today. The abstract subject in an experiment or in an empirical study is not only abstracted from its societal but also its cultural contexts. When Holzkamp began his emancipatory analyses, critical psychologists from the periphery began to challenge the dominance of European and American thought styles in psychology (Enriquez, 1992, Martin-Baro, 1994). These critical psychologists outside of the North rejected the idea of a psychology imported from the colonizer or the West.

Martin-Baro (1994), for instance, rejected the notion of a primacy of theory, which still highlighted Holzkamp’s work, because of the immediate needs of action in Latin America. Enriquez (1992) rejected the idea that American psychology can be imported to the Philippines without radical changes. Liberation psychology meant for him the liberation of an indigenous culture from the yoke of American imperialist psychology. An important argument centered around the idea that American psychology itself is an indigenous psychology that cannot be exported without questions or significant modification to the rest of the world, a sentiment also shared by some German critical psychologists. But does this argument hold true for critical psychologies as well? How indigenous are critical psychologies and is there an indigenous dimension to Holzkamp’s work?
In my analyses (Teo, 2013), I have tried to reconstruct the indigenous moments in German critical psychology from an historical point of view. Indigenous studies of psychology need not only point to the indigenization of psychology, as occurred at the beginning of the 20th century, when German psychology was indigenized in the United States, after students returned home from their training in Wundt’s laboratory, or as occurred during the latter part of the 20th century, when Piaget was indigenized to fit an American research landscape. Rather, indigenous studies of psychology also need to identify the indigenous character of any psychology. This does not apply only to sampling and organizational issues, but also to the forms of intuition and psychological categories that are used in each context, which have historical as well as cultural dimensions (Teo & Febbraro, 2003).

How could concepts on human mental life, developed by concrete humans, not reflect cultural and historical traditions? Why is epistemic subjectivity not assumed to play a role in the research context when it comes to critical psychology? I understand that power needs to be incorporated into such an argument, given that the determination of which psychological concepts become recognized is not a random process. Indeed, I often ask my students what kind of psychology we would have if Germany or Japan had won WWII, or what kind of psychology we would have if all psychologists in the past had been women (e.g., if all men had died at the age of 18). Multicultural students, which represent a substantial proportion of the student population at my university, tend to have a sensitivity and a pre-knowledge that one’s culture influences one’s categories. Moreover, academics that have lived and worked in more than one cultural context have identified indigenous dimensions in other’s but also in their own work (Bhatia, 2017; Danziger, 1997).

Such studies imply that one’s own psychological publications need epistemic reflexivity, diffraction, modesty, and sensitivity—qualities that are rarely found within Holzkamp’s work or that seem out of step with the foundational character of most of his books. The need for theoretical foundations stems from a modern as well as a German tradition (Teo, 2013). In contrast, I have reconstructed the contexts, intellectual sources, traditions, expressions, and historical and personal trajectories of German critical psychology under the historical reality of a dominance of American psychology. My analysis of the indigenous character of Holzkamp’s psychology has included a reconstruction of the decline of the role of German psychology after WWII, when German psychology moved from the center to the periphery. Thus, German critical psychology can be understood as an indigenous response to the Americanization of German psychology.
In doing so, I have intended to go beyond analyses of theory development that traditionally address the post-WWII German experience, the Cold War, the isolation of West Berlin, the enduring class system that survived the war, the “Wirtschaftswunder,” the partitioning of Germany, and the politicizing of the university system, to consider indigenous dimensions in Holzkamp’s ideas that are embedded in unique German intellectual histories and cultures. This indigenous nexus made Holzkamp’s critical psychology immediately relevant for a local subculture, such as the student movement, and for psychologists dissatisfied with psychology, but not relevant in a North American context that has largely ignored this psychology, with a few exceptions.

**Dialectics of nature and society**

Already during his critical-emancipatory period, Holzkamp (1972) pointed out that traditional psychology falsely detaches the individual from society, resulting in a bourgeois ideology of the individual. From a Marxist perspective, however, the notion of an individual is not at all *concrete* but is highly *abstract*, especially when traditional psychology removes the individual from her or his historical-societal contexts and positions. This point was further developed in Holzkamp’s critical-conceptual period, in which he attempted to develop scientifically qualified categories for psychology by reconstructing the evolutionary, natural, and social histories of the psychological, following the reconstructions of the cultural-historical psychologist, A. N. Leontjew.

The conceptual period began with Holzkamp’s (1973) book on perception, which demonstrated that a thorough understanding of a psychological concept requires natural, social, and psychological (historical) reconstructions. The interdisciplinary and multilateral works that developed in a group of German critical psychologists, tracing the development of psychological functions, were integrated in Holzkamp’s (1983) book, in which he tried to lay the foundations, not of critical psychology, but of psychology in general. Without describing all the outcomes of this book, I suggest that one of the most important reconstructions led to the notion of a societal nature of humans. Humans are by nature equipped to live, to participate in, but also to change societies and to transform the societal structure over time. An individual existence is mediated by the whole of society. This understanding goes beyond the idea that humans are social, which is a long-established idea, as well as beyond the idea that humans are determined by the environment, because human beings have the ability to change their lifeworlds and societies.
Holzkamp justified, from evolutionary, cultural-historical, and political-economic points of view, what is means to be human. Critical psychologists fundamentally agree that human mental life is culturally, historically and socially embedded. This means that the construction of society as an external environment or an external variable is conceptually incorrect, and that we must conceive of contexts not as outside mental life, but rather as historically changing structures that co-constitute mental life. Even more, the distinction between outside and inside is not helpful. Humans are not determined by social structures but can relate, act, and change them. Holzkamp provided a clear articulation of the relationship between society and individual life and the degree to which history and society enable human beings to engage with their faculties (i.e., the ways in which human consciousness is sublated in these contexts). He also pointed out that unsocialized subjectivity is a false imagination. Yet, he did not specify sufficiently what it means to live in a concrete and particular society.

In short, critical psychologists need theories of society in order to understand human subjectivities. Holzkamp gave primacy to a Marxist theory of society that puts “labor” (political economy) at the center of its analyses. While not disagreeing with that idea in principle, in my view this classical theory is too unspecific to understand the varieties and complexities of human mental life taking place in the world (see Teo, 2016), because of the intricacies that societies exhibit. Since the 19th century the social sciences have accumulated a plethora of theories on society, culture and history, and it is insufficient to describe a society as capitalist or bourgeois when there exists several other worthy theoretical descriptions of society, including neoliberal, multicultural, patriarchal, neocolonial, communicative, information-based, technological, and postmodern analyses. In the Marxist tradition alone one finds a set of new theories that would elucidate subjectivity-in-context (current examples include: Boltanski, 2012; Hardt & Negri, 2009; Karatani, 2014). Psychological analyses and an understanding of mental life, motivation, cognition and emotion will differ, as will visions for resistance, based on social and political theories.

Holzkamp also left out the socially-constructive nature of concepts (see Teo, 2010b), looping effects, and the power that comes with concepts (Hacking 1994). In short, Holzkamp operated within a mirror-metaphor of knowledge and a representational notion of language, both of which would have benefited from social constructionist insights on the language of psychology (Danziger, 1997), without requiring the abandonment of a realist perspective (see also Bhaskar, 1998; Barad, 2006). I am not suggesting that one abandon a realist position, but rather demanding that we need to account for the real cultural-historical nature of psychological concepts. Not doing so made *Laying the Foundation for Psychology* an easy target as an example of an outdated grand theory. Yet, I
agree with Holzkamp that not all descriptions and not all concepts are equally valid. It should be epistemologically obvious to critical psychologists that we need to include some of the more recent critical debates in the social sciences and humanities from around the world in constructing counter-concepts in psychology. I believe that Holzkamp would have agreed with this statement.

**Subjectivity and the standpoint of the subject**

Holzkamp’s (2013) final phase focused on the development of a psychology from the standpoint of the subject. He moved subjectivity back into the center of psychology, provided an important analysis on learning (Holzkamp, 1993), and developed the idea that we need to analyze psychological processes and contents in the conduct of one’s own life. Accordingly, one’s life is lived in concrete societies and individuals have locations and positions in this society, from which they act and engage their agency. Sharing this premise, I suggest that Holzkamp’s concept of the standpoint of the subject is overly mentalistic, as it is focused on consciousness and reasons. I agree that the idea of a *standpoint* does more justice to subjectivity than the idea of a *perspective* as expressed in phenomenology (Teo, 2016), but what about move-points and do-points? Sometimes we have no standpoint but only an unarticulated, pre-conceptual, pre-cognitive, pre-linguistic embodied feeling.

Holzkamp positioned “meaning structures” and “reason discourses” as mediating between social structure and the conduct of everyday life. I have suggested that laying out the problem in this way is indebted to a philosophy of consciousness, and that perhaps “subjective reasons” are not final and that the body and embodiment are equally important. In order to make this argument, I have suggested incorporating the concepts of habitus (Bourdieu, 1984), gender performativity (Butler, 1990), and privilege (McIntosh, 2014) into a theory of subjectivity. Holzkamp did not focus on such categories but I believe that his theory can accommodate them. The idea that subjectivity can be body-based and “is” not in the mind may be counter-intuitive. But embodying classed distinctions, gender, and privilege makes the case that something pre-conscious is part of our subjectivity. We live our subjectivity not only as conscious and practical but also as feeling and embodied entities. The experience of sublime art, dancing, or experiencing nature provides us with remnants of what it means to conduct life in a pre-linguistic, pre-conceptual, and pre-cognitive context. I believe that Holzkamp would have been open to this argument.

In order to understand the vast literature on subjectivity, it might be helpful to distinguish among socio-subjectivity, inter-subjectivity and intra-subjectivity
and reflect on how they are related. *Socio-subjectivity* is contextually embedded in the world, cultural-historical, socio-economic; *inter-subjectivity* is relational, dialogical, empathetic; and *intra-subjectivity* refers to internal and personal psychological processes. Socio-subjectivity and intra-subjectivity may be mediated through inter-subjectivity (e.g., language). I suggest that we need not give primacy to any of these three concepts (see Teo, 2017). In addition, we need to focus on contexts of subjectivity, such as working, interacting, and practices of the self. We also need to clarify the degree to which a theory of subjectivity needs to include not only what happens in human mental life but also what is possible. Holzkamp (1983) implicitly made that point when he distinguished between generalized and restrictive agency, but he did not articulate the ontic status of this category in a theory of subjectivity.

Although I use Holzkamp’s concept of a generalized agency in my own work (Teo, 2017), it is not apparent that Holzkamp understood the historical, social and relational shifts of agency. Agency has a historical dimension that needs to be studied: How has agency changed in the last 50 years? It seems to me that agency has not increased but rather has been constrained one-dimensionally in the past few decades of neoliberalism (e.g., as seen in the rise of precarious work). Agency has turned into its opposite, namely, requirements that are internalized, while individuals might rationalize the decline of their freedom as free choice. Some of Foucault’s work on subjectification, governmentality, and responsibilization is relevant to this point (Holzkamp included Foucault in his book of learning), as are the many ways power works on subjectivity – not only in the political-economic sphere but also in interactions and in processes of the self (see Papadopoulos, 2008). Holzkamp’s theory of subjectivity is a starting point but not an end-point, for further investigations. This theory may also provide the basis for a general theory of subjectivity that does not exhaustively include all the intricacies of mental life, but studies the (Kantian) conditions for the possibility of a theory of subjectivity.

**Conclusion**

It is important to take Holzkamp seriously; but no theory or theorist is without entanglements, which would otherwise make it unnecessary to continue critical research. There is no end to history (unless there is an end to the world) and there is no end in critical psychology. I am convinced that we need to incorporate more, different, and recent traditions in critical as well as regular work, including critical thought from the periphery. Traditions in feminist theory, critical race theory, critical disability studies, queer theory, the humanities, the concept-driven
social sciences, post-human theories, and the arts, all have the potential to enhance our conceptualizations and understanding of human subjectivity. The conceptual sensitivity and attitude that Holzkamp demonstrated is a shoulder on which all critical psychologists can stand; but we need to look beyond such giants and into the next generations, acknowledging and engaging with interferences and diffractions.

References


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Natorp, Holzkamp and the role of subjectivity in psychology

Martin Dege

Abstract
This paper examines the meaning and sources of Klaus Holzkamp’s concept of doppelte Möglichkeit which he attests to every human being as the principal enabling device for Handlungsfähigkeit, the ability to act; or simply agency. In a second step, this paper shows how the neo-Kantian philosopher Paul Natorp had a very similar understanding of human agency and aimed at a reinvention of psychology reminiscent of Holzkamp’s Kritische Psychologie. In concluding I discuss if and how Natorp’s ideas can potentially enrich critical psychology today.

Keywords
critical psychology, agency, Natorp, Holzkamp, Neo-Kantianism, history of psychology, subjectivity, objectivity

Introduction

In the following sections I discuss one of the central concepts of Kritische Psychologie as developed by Klaus Holzkamp. In Grundlegung der Psychologie (1983), Holzkamp speaks of a doppelte Möglichkeit (pronounced: doːppɛlɛː møːɡlɪçkait), a twofold possibility for human action as the basis of human agency: humans can act within the social framework while at the same time they are able to go beyond this framework and thereby modify it. This doppelte Möglichkeit implies that every restriction given by a certain framework also generates new forms of agency that point beyond its own limits. Human beings, as Holzkamp would say, always have the option to act differently, thereby manipulating the restrictions or even overcoming them.

While this concept has traditionally been interpreted as part of the larger Marxist basis of Holzkamp’s Kritische Psychologie, I want to suggest that there
is another potential source for this concept in early psychological writings, namely the thoughts of the neo-Kantian theorist, Paul Natorp. In criticizing Associationism as one of the central approaches in the discipline of psychology in his time, Natorp suggests that psychology will never be able to develop objective laws of human behavior. However, other than many of the phenomenologically oriented psychologists of his time or the proponents of psychologism, Natorp does not exclude objectivity from psychology altogether. He rather understands objectivity as the empirical basis of any psychological approach: Objectivity as it is enacted, established, and reproduced through subjective understandings as the raw material of psychological theorizing. For Natorp then, the goal is to (re)construct subjective experience from what we describe as objective facts. I believe there are good reasons to argue that - based on this conception - Natorp develops a more elaborate understanding of what Holzkamp describes as *doppelte Möglichkeit*. He anchors the concept in the philosophical discourse rather than in an ideological meta-framework which can - potentially - be dismissed based on a disagreement with its normative components. With the support of Natorp, I suggest to reorient the concept of *doppelte Möglichkeit*, and consider a different conceptual tradition which may help to further conceptualize the underpinnings of Klaus Holzkamp’s thought and critical psychology in general.

**Klaus Holzkamp, Kritische Psychologie and the meaning of *Doppelte Möglichkeit***

In this section, I am introducing several core concepts of *Kritische Psychologie* as spelled out by Klaus Holzkamp. Rather than giving a general overview, however, I want to focus on and underline the centrality of a *doppelte Möglichkeit*. My essential argument is this: Usually, the concept of agency and its variations (*Handlungsfähigkeit*, *Handlungsbeschränkung*, *Bedingungsverfügung*, etc.) in conjunction with the concept of *gesamtgesellschaftliche Vermitteltheit individueller Existenz* (referring to the societal mediation process of individual existence) is given the main attention in *Kritische Psychologie*. Generally speaking, this set of concepts is understood as the major theoretical contribution to discourses within and about (critical) psychology (Markard, 2009; Tolman & Maiers, 1991; Tolman, 1994). However, specifically the concept of agency rests, so I argue, on the idea of *doppelte Möglichkeit* without which any *Erweiterung der Bedingungsverfügungen*, that is a gradual increase of control over external conditions that shape our lives, would not be possible. Yet, *doppelte Möglichkeit*, understood as the ability to act in
accord with external and internal conditions of one’s personal life while being able to always transform the conditions and restrictions - to go beyond them, so to speak - lacks the theoretical depth Holzkamp so diligently provides for his concept of agency.¹

The concept doppelte Möglichkeit - as so many Holzkampian terms - cannot easily be translated into English. The terms twofold possibility or dual possibility² could work. However, in my reading, Möglichkeit does not refer so much to what is actually possible as to an idea of potentiality. It designates a restricted but expandable space in the social world that guides our actions and defines our agency. It denominates our ability to act in certain foreseeable ways most of the time during our everyday interactions. At the same time however, doppelte Möglichkeit also refers to our ability to turn these implicit rules and guidelines for action into explicit statements. We can be conscious of these guiding forces in our lives. By making these rules and regulations explicit, we are transgressing into a new space of agency, a space in which we not so much break the rules, as we are applying them ‘creatively’. We enter a continuous process of questioning - either cognitively or behaviourally - existing rules and transform them. Doppelte Möglichkeit as apotentiality thus refers to the human ability to understand how the world is shaped around us and to manipulate this worldly shape according to our needs.³ I read doppelte Möglichkeit as one of Holzkamp’s central concepts precisely because of this: It describes how human beings act within a certain set of rules in a society and by doing so transform these rules. Doppelte Möglichkeit is the major building block of emancipatory action: By transforming the world according to our needs, we increase our agency, that is we gain more freedom and more choices for our actions.

Holzkamp rests doppelte Möglichkeit on Immanuel Kant and his concept of Enlightenment as the

…human being’s emancipation from its self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to make use of one’s intellect without the direction of another. This immaturity is self-incurred when its cause does not lie in a lack of intellect, but rather in a lack of resolve and courage to make use of one’s intellect without the direction of another. (Kant, 1784)

¹ I am not touching the historical development of Kritische Psychologie in this paper. Such accounts can be found, for example, in Papadopoulos (2009) or Markard (2009).
² “Dual Possibility” is the translation Ernst Schraube and Ute Osterkamp chose in the introduction to a translation of some of Holzkamp’s articles in 2013 (Schraube & Osterkamp, 2013, p. 4)
³ For a similar reading of the term see also Dreier (2003 &2008) and Chimirri (2014, p. 133).
Following Kant, Holzkamp affirms that concrete life conditions are self-made and can be transformed by one’s own actions.

_Doppelte Möglichkeit_ in this sense refers to a primary (or more manifest) set of restrictions inflicted upon us by external circumstances (as for example the necessity of a certain educational degree to apply for certain jobs) or restrictions due to our biological outfit (as for example the inaccessibility of the Paris Metro for people with disabilities). It also refers to restrictions we have placed upon ourselves (as for example not applying for a certain job because of self-assumed inability/incompetence or a principal disapproval of public transport due to assumed inaccessibility). While it seems relatively easy to overcome the second set of restrictions (namely by applying for that job or giving public transport a try) the first set seems - on the outset - to be a little trickier. Holzkamp would however argue that such restrictions may appear to be naturalized conditions - i.e. external conditions one cannot influence - yet, they are in reality self-made or at least co-constructed by affirmation.

For Holzkamp then, it is the primary task of psychology to uncover these restrictions (Holzkamp, 2009, p. 39) as human-made, and by doing so unfolding emancipatory potential.

The centrality of emancipation in Holzkamp’s concept of _doppelte Möglichkeit_ reveals another important intellectual source to the endeavour of _Kritische Psychologie_: Holzkamp insists on a historical reading of his theory, i.e. not ‘naturally given’; he emphasizes historical contingency, a conviction that it could have also been different, and that indeed everything can be different. He shares this conviction with Natorp which precludes naturalized forms of explanation for both. Holzkamps understanding of ‘critique’ is based on Critical Theory concepts: _It does not accept the status quo as the standard, it does not expunge the possible from what exists_ (Markard, 2009, pp. 67, translation MD).

The Holzkampian endeavor to create a new psychology rests partly on the belief that there is ‘more’ to being human than what is expressed and visible in everyday life and what can be explained by our mere biological outfit. This reflects the belief, moreover, that it is possible to realize this ‘more’ through concrete, psychological interventions. Psychology in Holzkamp’s understanding is not so much concerned with finding objective facts about human life as it is about how human beings deal with and shape our objective reality. Holzkamp calls this interaction _Mensch-Welt-Zusammenhang_, or human-world-interconnection (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 187).

To discern this human-world-interconnection, Holzkamp follows a dialectical approach. His work is deeply rooted in Marxism and the analytical method follows historical materialism: Starting from the ‘manifest surface’, the _Erscheinungsoberfläche_, also called the ‘imagined concrete’, the
Vorstellungskonkretum (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 51), he investigates the historical emergence of common analytical terms and describes them as ‘preliminary terms’ (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 50). A term in dialectical materialist thinking can only be understood if properly worked through. Such a course of action seems complicated, at first sight maybe even unnecessary, especially if it adds up to a book of 600 pages (Holzkamp, 1983). However, in order to show that certain restrictions which appear to be given by nature or at least exhibit an aura of being unchangeable, are in fact human-made, Holzkamp chooses to bring the sublated processes buried in familiar terms to the fore. The analysis needs to show the terminological form of a historicity which is concealed in the present (Holzkamp, 1983, pp. 51, translation MD). A look at Marx’s treatment of the term ‘population’ exemplifies Holzkamp’s logic:

The population is an abstraction, if I leave out, for example, the classes of which it is composed. These classes are in turn an empty phrase if I am not familiar with the elements on which they rest. E.g. wage labour, capital, etc. These latter in turn presuppose exchange, division of labour, prices, etc. For example, capital is nothing without wage labour, without value, money, price etc. Thus, if I were to begin with the population, this would be a chaotic conception [Vorstellung] of the whole, and I would then, by means of further determination, move analytically towards ever more simple concepts [Begriff], from the imagined concrete towards ever thinner abstractions until I had arrived at the simplest determinations. From there the journey would have to be retraced until I had finally arrived at the population again, but this time not as the chaotic conception of a whole, but as a rich totality of many determinations and relations. (Marx & Engels, 1978, p. 237)

In working through several terms in this kind of fashion, Holzkamp comes to an understanding that captures the human being from two analytical angles: the objective position within the reproduction process of society and the subjective life-circumstances which determine how this objective position is enacted. Holzkamp depicts two sides of the same coin: life as determined by concrete and objective circumstances and life as concretely lived and thus partially liberated from objective restrictions through processes of interpretation and circumvention. Position and life-circumstances thus reflect doppelte Möglichkeit: objective determination meets subjective interpretation and personal meaning-making. The relationship between individual and society becomes a possibility-relationship, a Möglichkeitsbeziehung, as Holzkamp calls it, in which societal necessities become subjective possibilities. Again, for Holzkamp this ability to relate to one’s own situation consciously – the bewußte Verhalten-Zu (Holzkamp, 1983, p.
is not a mere accident or a God-given feature of all human beings. Instead it is a necessary consequence of the socialization of humankind (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 352) since socialization means labor division and labor division is the backbone of a gradual development of individual choice, that is a reflection about one’s own position within the societal framework and a realization that this position can (and will), in principle, be modified and changed.

For Holzkamp, the relationship of objective restrictions and subjective interpretation/circumvention is mediated by what he calls Prämissen or premises. The position of a person (i.e. with a job, without a job, high salary, low salary, family father, single parent, etc.) does not define the person in full. Rather this concrete position allows for certain premises upon which subjective actions take place. Not to have a job can devastate a person (and create the premise ‘to find a new job’), while for another person being without a job can unfold ‘freedom’ (creating a premise of ‘finally doing what I always wanted to do’ etc.). Concrete actions of an individual cannot be understood from the perspective of the position of the person within society because the position is not a determining factor for actions. However, the position is obviously not irrelevant. Rather it creates specific premises and plateaus that ground the subjective meaning making of a concrete situation. Premises provide the source of subjective reasons for concrete actions: The different and often contradicting manifestations of the psychic life thus stem from the difference or contradiction of the premises on which the individual reasoning rests (Holzkamp, 1983, pp. 352, translation MD). Premises are the subjective interpretation of objective possibilities or restrictions of action on the societal level. They take into account the individuelle Befindlichkeit, the personal sensitivities (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 353) of the subject from which the net of personal meaning unfolds.

With these remarks in mind, Holzkamp’s concept of Handlungsfähigkeit, ‘the ability to act’ or simply ‘agency’ seems less opaque: If societal restrictions are not determining, the subject can consciously relate to those restrictions by forming personal premises for action. If the premises are not mere subjective interpretations of objective restrictions of a person’s position, then the person must also have the Handlungsfähigkeitsbedingungen, the conditions of the possibilities for action (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 354) at their disposal. Human beings inherently manifest the doppelte Möglichkeit.

Let me bring in another example to drive this point home: On some American airports, you can read a warning sign at the security check: All remarks concerning bombs and weapons will be taken seriously. Obviously, the sign is put up to prevent people from making jokes like I have a bomb in my shoe.

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4 About the concept of ‘premises’ in Kritische Psychologie see also Sieland & Chimirri, (2018)
thus restricting the possibility to ‘make fun’ of the security check idea which should, so it seems, instead be taken seriously. However, a statement like If I were to remark I had a bomb in my shoe, you would have to take that remark seriously, wouldn't you? would again ridicule the whole security check process while circumventing, that is disabling, the concrete restriction of action because a conversation about ‘bombs’ would have effectively taken place. Jonathan Culler, who is the originator of this example, explains:

A metasign, ‘All remarks about bombs and weapons, including remarks about remarks about bombs and weapons, will be taken seriously’ would escalate the struggle without arresting it, engendering the possibility of obnoxious remarks about this sign about remarks. (Culler, 1982, p. 125)

In realizing that the ability to act and to make sense of such actions is the driving ability for human beings to shape their world, Holzkamp concludes that it is not ‘labor’ as such [as Marx would have it; M.D.] as the first life-need (Lebensbedürfnis), but ‘labor’ only in so far as it secures the participation of the individual in the determination (Verfügung) of the societal process, that is enabling ‘agency’ (handlungsfähig). Hence, not ‘labor’ but ‘agency’ (Handlungsfähigkeit) is the primary human life-need—this is the case because agency is the most general framework-quality (Rahmenqualität) of a human and humane Dasein while a lack of agency (Handlungsunfähigkeit) represents the most general quality of human misery and dependence (Ausgeliefertheit) on concrete circumstances, anxiety, bondage, and degradation. (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 234, translation MD)

**Paul Natorp and the inversion of objectivity and subjectivity**

The name Paul Natorp rarely rings too much of a bell even among academics. The people who know of him usually work in the continental section of philosophy departments. It might be surprising then that the situation in the 1920’s in Germany – and also elsewhere in Europe – was very different. Back then Natorp was professor of philosophy and pedagogy at the prestigious University in Marburg and – together with Hermann Cohen and others – a member of the so called neo-Kantian movement.5

5 More about neo-Kantianism can be found in Beiser (2015). The most compelling account of Paul Natorp’s body of work can be found in Jegelka (1992) (German only).
He was one of the leading public intellectuals of his time. Beyond his academic publications, he wrote articles in regular newspapers and commented on education policy (Natorp, 1920a; 1919; 1920b) and Germany’s foreign politics (Natorp, 1915a & 1915b).

His academic publications cover three broad areas beyond the Neo-Kantian school (Natorp, 1958): He was an expert in the history of philosophy, specifically the ancient Greeks (Natorp, 1903), he published in pedagogy about the works of educational reformer Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (Natorp, 1909), and he was concerned with psychology (Natorp, 1893; Natorp, 1888; Natorp, 1904). His attempts to tackle the problems of the discipline as he identified them amount to over 330 pages in a book entitled *Allgemeine Psychologie nach kritischer Methode* or ‘General Psychology from the Perspective of Critical Methodology,’ originally published in 1912 (Natorp, 1912) and reprinted for the first time only recently (Natorp, 2013).

In many ways Holzkamp’s and Natorp’s starting positions for their quest to develop a new psychology share common grounds. Holzkamp faced an Americanized psychology shaped by associationism, behaviorism, and cognitivism. He diagnosed a lack of *Wissenschaftlichkeit* or scientific rigor (Holzkamp, 1985) and warned of pseudo-scientific methods (Holzkamp, 1995) within the discipline. He therefore envisioned a new, truly scientific – or rather *wissenschaftliche* – psychology.

Natorp and the Marburg School of neo-Kantianism on the other hand had to handle a loss in reputation and importance of philosophy as a discipline in comparison to the natural sciences which increasingly came to predominate every aspect of life. Left with the choices to either side with *Weltanschauungsphilosophie* (Dilthey, 1957; Jaspers, 1960) or to join the choir of *The Decline of the West* (Spengler, 1991), they turned philosophy towards the natural sciences seeking to become their validating instrument. The goal was a critique of reason (in the Kantian sense) within the modern natural sciences. This critique does not mainly concern discoveries and how they should be produced (i.e. a positive critique of epistemology) but discoveries and the ways they are currently produced in actual scientific practice (i.e. a regressive critique). If the scientist was in the business of making discoveries, the Marburg School believed the philosopher to be in the role of checking the procedures of those research processes for accuracy and logical stringency. For the Marburg school, the process of collecting data represented only the first half of scientific discoveries. The second, more important part of the research process took place at the desk, or rather in the mind of the researcher where logical theories are constructed that make sense of the data. Whenever this sense making process comes to a halt and is captured in a logical theory, objective knowledge emerges out of the subjective
impressions and discoveries made by the researchers. It is in this framework that the title of Natorp’s book is to be understood: *Allgemeine Psychologie nach Kritischer Methode* (Natorp, 2013), “critical methodology” obviously referring to the Kantian critique of reason.

To this respect, Natorp’s analysis starts with the same argument as Holzkamp’s: to show how existing attempts in psychology to explain the psychic life are unscientific or pseudo-science, that is, they are not reasonable. Moreover, Natorp and Holzkamp agree in their diagnosis that traditional psychology (that is associationism in Natorp’s case and behaviorism/cognitivism with Holzkamp) does not capture the subject matter at which psychology should aim. Traditional psychology in their view cannot make scientific statements about higher psychological functions. Holzkamp proofs his point by looking at the methods which traditional psychology – or *Variablenpsychologie*, the psychology of variables, as he calls it (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 522) – applies. For Holzkamp the central problem is that psychological experiments reduce the premises for the participants to an extent that only certain forms of behavior remain possible, namely the kinds of behavior already expected by the researcher. He claims that the subject in such experiments exhibits relatively primitive behavior because it leaves them no choice since the purpose of an experimental setting remains hidden to them; all they can do is *herumprobieren* – behavior based on trial and error (Holzkamp, 1995, p. 112).

Natorp, on the other hand, argues on an epistemological level. He shows a principal dilemma at the foundations of psychology as a discipline, that is as a *Wissenschaft*. The argument goes something like this: A scientific discipline aims at finding objective truths in form of natural laws or at least certain regularities in the world. If psychology is the science of the human mind (if it has the human mind as its *Gegenstand*) then its goal would be to establish objective facts about the workings of such a mind. This mind however is subjective. Now, if we turn the mind as inherently subjective into something objective (that is, we describe it objectively) we are changing the subject matter in an unacceptable way, we are turning the mind into something else in order to study it. If we do that however, any (objective) statement made about such a subject matter does not pertain to our original *Gegenstand*; it describes something else. Natorp in his own words elaborates on this ‘something else’ as follows:

> Description is abstraction: […] description is conveying. […] Hence it is also distancing from the immediateness of the experience. And there is something else connected to this: Description brings a standstill to the stream of experience, it is assassination of consciousness. […] The moment one has realized that, one cannot get rid of the impression that reading psychology books is like walking through dissecting rooms: one
can see corpse after corpse and a hundred busy hands to take away the last signs of life, even the most distant memory of it. [...] One does not subsume the living organism of the psyche, but subsumes the dead limbs wrested from it under completely dead, rigid and motionless terms. (Natorp, 2013, pp. 176, translation MD)

If psychology proceeds the way it does in Natorp’s analysis, it examines dead phenomena and takes them for the real thing:

One is not really researching the psyche. Instead one researches something different, something beyond the psyche as if we already knew what the psyche was. This is what all objectifying Wissenschaft does, and it is the right procedure. Doing so however is not psychology but the opposite: Objectification. (Natorp, 2013, pp. 176, translation MD)

I cannot overstate the consequences of such a dilemma: Traditional psychologists as scientists principally adhere to the same methodology like every other discipline: researchers collect data in the field and try to make sense of these data by establishing logical connections between the data points. Those connections are eventually spelled out in a scientific law and thus become objective facts until they are challenged by some new logic deriving from new data points. However, this procedure, that from the perspective of the Neo-Kantians works so well for the rest of science, fails psychology for it turns its subject matter, namely subjective experience, into its opposite, dead objective terms.

Before I can try to elaborate on Natorp’s solution to this dilemma, I want to throw a brief flashlight on a debate that predates Natorp’s thoughts. At the beginnings of psychology, many of the famous founding fathers of the academic discipline where actively discussing where psychology belongs. And the Methodenstreit in the social sciences offered two main alternatives: psychology could be regarded as Naturwissenschaft, or natural science (Dilthey, 1989), that follows nomothetic methods (Windelband, 1913), or it could be regarded as Geisteswissenschaft, or part of the humanities (Dilthey, 1989), that follows idiographic methods (Windelband, 1913).

The difference between the two might be summarized as follows: The task to look at inner processes, how they emerge and how they combine and react to external conditions and influence those, is a very different task compared to the analysis of every single moment of (psychological) existence as a form of consciousness with the intent to describe those in distinct terms.

Windelband – a neo-Kantian himself and member of the Heidelberg school – was convinced that psychology belonged to the natural sciences and defined the task of psychology accordingly:
The natural sciences [Naturwissenschaft] parse experience along its elements and isolate them by division. The method is experiment or the analysis of the behavior of each individual according to scientific law. This happens in physics, chemistry and psychology according to the rules of the particular discipline. Because of this, experience in all these disciplines is reconstructed according to the principle of mechanical causality; which means that the complex physiological and psychological entities are understood in a way that the whole is the result of its parts and through and through defined by them. (Windelband, 1913, p. 44, translation MD)

And Hugo Münsterberg reads in the same vein when he attests that psychology can only successfully complete its task if everything conscious is the sum of its parts (Münsterberg, 1900, p. 332, translation MD).

In contrast, Wilhelm Wundt hoped for psychology to be the Wissenschaft of immediate experience. He attests a principal difference of psychological and natural sciences’ methods regarding how they present their results (Wundt, 1922, § 1-2, translation MD).

It is perhaps noteworthy that this debate was not simply a matter of choice of one school against the other. For example, Hugo Münsterberg who – as we have seen above – argued for psychology as a natural science, was deeply versed in philosophy. Indeed, he taught both psychology and philosophy at Harvard University where he was hired by William James to create the first psychology laboratory in the United States. Münsterberg’s argument for psychology as hard science was not mere conviction, it was philosophically grounded. Interestingly, his argument is Kantian:

Natural science may assume that the world is causally explainable. In fact, natural science molds the world with its terms that it becomes explainable nature instead of finding causalities that already exist. Psychology operates in the exact same way. (Münsterberg, 1900, p. 332, translation MD)

The reason why Münsterberg believed psychology had to operate in the exact same way is rather simple: It’s the success of physics despite the polemic against, for example, the theory of atoms which meets the same scepticism that atoms don’t have color and don’t smell and make no sounds and therefore couldn’t be real. The physics professor has failed his job as long as the atoms still smell and sound. Only once their reality-behavior is stripped off can the world of physics come into being. In the same vein must the psychological will stop wanting something. The psychological fact needs to be true but not real. The psychological will that
still wants something is not better than the physical atom that still smells and gleams (Münsterberg, 1900, p. 332, translation MD)

It is within this debate that tries to push psychology in one or the other direction that Natorp’s argument is situated and it is Natorp’s attempt to overcome the dualism presented by Dilthey and Windelband. To do this, the first step for Natorp is to declare that *Naturwissenschaft* and *Geisteswissenschaft* are indeed different in many respects. However, they do not differ in their main goal, which is *objectification*. And since objectification is not the business of psychology, it cannot be part of either one of them:

The historical orientation created a specific problem which can only be dealt with in a separate discipline (Wissenschaft), namely psychology. The problem is that of consciousness or subjectivity as such. Everything that is an object in any way or that demands objective validity is covered by other disciplines: The natural sciences or the cultural sciences (Naturwissenschaften and Kulturwissenschaften) because they are thoroughly objectifying. (Natorp, 2013, p. 25, translation MD)

In effect, Natorp claims the need for a new discipline called psychology, a discipline that yet needs to be conceptualized and that requires a new set of methods beyond *Naturwissenschaft* and *Geisteswissenschaft*, a discipline that researches an object which turns out to be a subject. This claim is similar to Klaus Holzkamp’s attempt in the late 1970s to the mid 1990s to develop a new psychology with the subject at its center: a *Subjektwissenschaft*. As we have seen, Holzkamp relies on dialectical materialism, rigorous analysis of the historical emergence of the psyche and a substitution of his newly conceived concept of *Handlungsfähigkeit* for *labor* as the central category.

Natorp takes a different route. The problem of consciousness - which for him is equal to the problem of subjectivity - stands at the beginning of psychology. And his first analytical step consists in identifying different, yet intertwined components of consciousness:

It is three moments which the term ‘consciousness’ entails. They are closely connected but can be held separately for analytical purposes: 1. the thing (das Etwas) which I am conscious of; 2. that which is conscious of something; 3. the connection of both: that something is conscious in someone. I call […] the first ‘Content’, the second ‘I’, and the third ‘Self-Consciousness’ [Natorp introduces the German neologism ‘Bewußtheit’ here to differentiate the term from Bewußtsein, M.D.] (Natorp, 2013, p. 27, translation MD)
It is within this third component that the inherently subjective lies. The relationship of something being conscious in someone cannot be objectified. While the ‘Content’ of consciousness can be an object, indeed something that can be objectively described and the ‘I’ as well represents an object describable in the real world, it is their relationship that marks an inherently subjective interplay.

From here, the next step in Natorp’s thinking follows the neo-Kantian tradition and at the same time transcends it. For the neo-Kantians, objective knowledge is the consequence of an objectification of subjective theories about the world generated by science based on data. If this is so, why not go the other way round? That is: Why not pose as the challenge of psychology the reconstruction of what is objective? How does self-consciousness deal with the objectified facts of the world? As a result, we can identify two different analytical directions: Objectification and Subjectification. For Natorp, the relationship of objectification and subjectification is identical to a scale we can walk back and forth:

The subjective […] is not relevant for the realization of the object. It is the basis of objective knowledge, but it is put aside once it has done its duty. But precisely because of that it remains possible to go back to the subjective; it is always possible and always implied to raise the question about the subjective experience from which the objective emerged. (Natorp, 2013, p. 67, translation MD)

For Natorp, it is essential to move away from an understanding of subjective experience which leads (through rigorous thought) to objective knowledge as a one-way street. For him it is always equally important to be able to go back, and indeed, to actually go back and revisit the subjectivities that have led to forms of objective truth. In essence, this is what Natorp considers the central task of psychology: To reconstruct subjective experiences from what has been established as objective fact; to recognize and acknowledge the totality of subjective experience as the central driving force from which everything emerges. Everything objectified must be reconstructable to its original subjective content which is the primordially concrete, the Urkonkrete (Natorp, 2013, p. 39). This Urkonkrete for Natorp resembles a potency, a Dynamis of all the objectifications that stemmed from it and can potentially derive from it in the future.

It is in this respect that Natorp’s psychology becomes emancipatory: it privileges the subjective over the objective as the primary source of creativity, development and the inception of something new. It underlines the task of a continuous reconstruction of subjective reasons behind objective facts. It relieves
psychology as a discipline from finding natural laws by describing the core of its subject matter as inherently subjective.

Conclusion

In this paper I underlined the importance of the concept of *doppelte Möglichkeit* in Klaus Holzkamp’s body of work. I argued for the fundamental significance of the concept for *Kritische Psychologie* in general and the category *Handlungsfähigkeit*, or ‘agency,’ in particular. The human ability to always act differently (which includes not to act at all) is central to the concept of *Subjektwissenschaft* that aims at considering each and every individual human being and their personal sensitivities (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 353).

I also elaborated on the works of the neo-Kantian Paul Natorp, who - similarly to Holzkamp - thought it necessary to reinvent psychology in its entirety and allow for subjectivity to take center stage within the discipline. For both Holzkamp and Natorp, traditional psychology does not describe the richness of human consciousness and the human psyche. While for Holzkamp traditional psychology, or *Variablenpsychologie* (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 522) lacks a sufficient set of methods to capture the richness of human experience, for Natorp the problem goes deeper: It concerns the fundamental question of how science, or *Wissenschaft* operates. For Holzkamp, psychological methods and psychological experiments are constructed in ways that reduce available premises for the participants to an extent that leaves them with basic trial-and-error behavior, effectively foreclosing actual human behavior along the lines of a *doppelte Möglichkeit*. Natorp on the other hand criticizes how traditional psychology objectifies psychic life such that it takes away the last signs of life, even the most distant memory of it until psychology can effectively only speak about dead corpses (Natorp, 2013, p. 176, translation MD).

For Holzkamp, *doppelte Möglichkeit* is engrossed in the concepts of *life circumstances* and *position*, where *position* represents the objective conditions under which life is formed. *Life circumstances*, in contrast, is conceived more broadly. It encompasses the concept of *position* but from the standpoint of the subject. It thus analyses the subjective meaning-making processes of an individual existence; how human beings make sense of the world they live in.

In a similar vein, Natorp describes a movement from subjectivity to objectivity. In line with a neo-Kantian understanding of scientific progress he describes the emergence of new knowledge as rationality that forms subjective interpretations into objective facts. The crucial argument for him with psychology however is this: It is a mistake, he attests, to think of the subjectivity-
objectivity movement as a one-way street. It is a mistake to think of objectivity as privileged over subjective thought. In many ways - and specifically for psychology - the opposite is true: objectivity becomes tantamount to a halt in the stream of thought, a coagulation of something that used to be in motion. Subjectivity on the other hand represents that stream of thought, a continuing process of creation of something new, a never-ending creative endeavor. Natorp understands the subjectivity/objectivity relationship as a *dynamis* and turns the task of psychology – to reconstruct the subjectivities from which our objective world emerges – into a normative endeavor.

I argue that we can learn from both Holzkamp and Natorp that psychology lies beyond a discussion of hard versus soft science, *Naturwissenschaft* versus *Geisteswissenschaft*, qualitative versus quantitative methods. In addition to their deep appreciation of subjectivity as the central category of psychology, both provide the grounds to reconceptualize psychology as a discipline of its own. It aims to capture a subject matter, a *Gegenstand*, like no other: the rich, ever changing and evolving, ever different phenomenon of human experience.

**References**


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Klaus Holzkamp & Ignacio Martín-Baró: Emancipatory practices for constructing a psychology against oppression

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Abstract
The purpose of this article is to build a closer relationship between Klaus Holzkamp’s Science of the Subject and Ignacio Martín-Baró’s Liberation Psychology. The main goal is to build a psychology that aims at strengthening historical subjects to face life conditions under capitalism. Important theoretical concepts formulated by the two authors, such as the capacity for action, deideologization processes and horizon for liberation, constitute essential tools for the employment of psychology for the oppressed population.

Keywords
Klaus Holzkamp, Martín-Baró, Critical Psychology, oppression, Liberation Psychology

Introduction
Life under capitalism is constituted by a process of social organization based on what Marx called relations of production, which refers to those social relations that are established as a function of the production of life. The founding condition of creating life and livelihoods, as a way of relating to and in the world, is a human being who coexists with others. In this sense, the present social aspect of the human essence is evidenced by the necessity to make a life, or a living, for himself and for others. In a country like Brazil, the impact on this is felt in the
lives of the majority of people who sell their labor force or who are currently unemployed, eager to enter the market at any price and under any condition of work. Faria and Guzzo (2016) observed the presence of conformist attitudes and naturalization with life under capitalism among professors of a university institution that trains future professionals of Psychology, showing a reproduction of conforming standards. In this way, the cognitive foundations that underlie practices that naturalize human beings in the world of capital and that contribute very little to the formation of students, who integrate themselves into the labor market and transform work into merchandise, are reproduced.

To make it clear, especially to those who know Brazil only by the appeal of its natural strengths and beauties, it is important to have data that will reveal another face of this country, where inequality and exclusion remain determining elements in social and economic relations. This is necessary for the construction of a Psychology that could respond to this dimension and, in fact, would commit itself to coping with and overcoming these problems. The objective of this chapter, therefore, is to present some dimensions of Holzkamp’s Science of the Subject and Martín-Baró’s Liberation Psychology, which serve as grounds for a Psychology aimed at the strengthening of historical subjects in the face of the conditions of life under capitalism. It is a critical perspective in Psychology that aims to strengthen a science and a professional practice capable of contributing to changing reality.

Brazil, a characterization of indicators

In order to situate Brazil in the globalized and capitalist world, it is necessary to go beyond the framework presented by official discourses and statistics, which do not represent the reality of the daily life of the majority of people. Economic (GDP) and social development (HDI) indicators, for example, hide the inequalities, difficulties and daily suffering that a large part of the population encounter. We need to become aware of what goes unnoticed in everyday life in an effort to understand the game of economic power and the policies that define the direction and use of public resources.

In the document *Synthesis of Social Indicators – An Analysis of the Living Conditions of the Brazilian Population*, published by IBGE in 2015, several dimensions are reported in tables that indicate changes in recent years, based on consultation by domicile. It draws attention to the importance given especially to education as an essential instrument for full social insertion, promoting different health habits, salary levels, religious choices, opportunities for social mobility and political participation. Despite this, Brazil still has 17.4% of five-year-old
children who do not attend Early Childhood Education. While there has been an effort to make improvements in educational policies, the current government has dismantled all development planning for 20 proposed Education Goals in 2014 (MEC / SASE, 2014).

Social inequality, poverty and exploitation are still the main determinants of the daily life of the majority of the Brazilian population and Psychology needs to respond to these demands, especially its impacts on the formation of the subject and its psychosocial processes of development. Some indicators show that the national poverty rate – a percentage of the population living below the national poverty line – is still high and tends to increase in those years of crisis experienced in the country. The latest IBGE report on summaries of social indicators, published in 2015, has shown that the poverty rate has drastically reduced over the previous ten years. In 2014, it reached 7.3% of the population, representing a fall of almost 70% compared to 2004. Despite this drop, inequality remains high (GINI = 0.490) and the outlook is not good for the current crisis forecast in the country. In 2015, Brazil occupied the 79th ranking among 188 countries in relation to the HDI (Human Development Index) ranking, which takes into account indicators of education, income and health, but plunged 19 positions in the ranking corresponding to the difference between rich and poor.

**Brazilian psychology, ideological tool of capitalism**

A brief summary of the history of Psychology in Brazil may point to the relationship between the regulation of the profession and the maintenance of order. The profession was regulated in 1962, the pre-dictatorship period during which popular movements organized for the conquest of rights in a popular government with libertarian horizons. The idea was that the profession of regulated psychology would ensure the psychotherapeutic care of those who were treated by Psychiatrists, as well as other areas such as education, focused primarily on teacher training and career guidance. With the military civilian dictatorship installed in 1964, the profession took on its current liberal characteristics with predominant training for clinical, individual and therapeutic care. Soares (2010) retraced the movement carried out by Psychology before it came to be considered an independent profession in Brazil as a science that had its genesis in the medical schools influenced by the European movements in the early nineteenth century. Brazilian psychology, therefore, constituted itself as a science and a profession with a colonized physiognomy, that during its current 55 years, and in the face of a social and economic conjuncture characteristic of a peripheral capitalist country, wouldn’t much change its essence despite great
evolutions and significant advances in its practical insertion in the public policies, mainly of Health and Assistance.

Today, more critical analyses of this profession and its training at undergraduate and postgraduate levels present backing for policies aimed at meeting urgent and major social and educational demands, such as those presented by Borges-Andrade, Bastos, Andery, Guzzo and Trinity (2015). Despite the numbers that indicate an exponential increase of training courses and professionals throughout these years, the predominant profile is still that of the one that stops to attend disturbances in traditional fields of action, such as Health and Clinic spaces. Commitment to strengthening communities, organizations and social movements, and the advancement of working-class consciousness in the face of attacks on their rights and worsening living conditions is still a horizon to be achieved by the profession – which did not offer answers to address the social issue. The scientific development of Psychology is linked to the emergence and development of the bourgeoisie and, therefore, the choice and definition of the professional performance by traditional fields is determined by this condition.

Critical Psychology and Latin American experiences: proposals and dialogues

In the diversity of Psychology, Critical Psychology is, mainly, the recognition and exercise of an ethical position for the promotion of the well-being of people (Fox, Prilleltensky & Austin, 2009) or, more incisively, Critical psychologists are those who emphasize a critical position to hegemonic psychology and/or have a form of approach and practices that are critical in their ethos (Parker, 2015).

Critical Psychology is thus consolidated as an attempt to respond to certain problems posed by the subfield of Psychology in order to mobilize theoretical and methodological resources adapted to each specific problem (Parker, 2015). Initially, it is recognized that there is a profound problem in the way in which the relationships between the “within” of Psychology are separated from those seen as being “outside”. This separation leads to an extreme dehumanization of subjects – who are reduced to “object-beings” – capable of determining a false place of existence and a false understanding of supposed psychological processes (Parker, 2015, p. 3). On the one hand, when psychology reduces psychological phenomena exclusively to the individual level, this reduction is not only at the level of physiological functions but at the level of the social processes involved in everyday life. Thus, Critical Psychology refuses to adhere to the ways traditional psychologists defend their own specific domain of study. On the other hand, debates in sociology are seen as resources rather than a threat from a
neighboring discipline that offers a mistaken or only partially-correct understanding of societal phenomena (Parker, 2015, p. 5).

By focusing on the individual, rather than on a group or society as a whole, psychology not only overestimates individualistic values, hiding the actions of mutuality, it also legitimizes injustices. Thus, by adhering to institutional assumptions and alliances disproportionately, hegemonic psychology collaborates even more with the oppression of marginalized groups (Fox et al., 2009). In addition, Critical Psychology also seeks to combat the old belief that the work of psychologists is apolitical and dismantle the old excuse that they are just trying to “help people”.

Indeed, most really are trying to help people. The problem is that their work often embraces assumptions they haven’t fully considered, so that the kind of help they offer disproportionately encourages people to adapt to difficult circumstances rather than challenge them. As a consequence, millions of people learn to see systemic problems as merely “individual.” (Fox, 2012, p. 14)

There is also, at the heart of this criticism, a rejection of the positivist foundations dominant in Psychology throughout its history. In this sense, the idea that a realistic science necessarily requires an experimental investigation and/or a quantitative analysis, is considered superficial and narrow. Qualitative methods, then, such as reflective or open interviews and action-participation research, have become a hallmark of critical work. However, while qualitative research remains the primary method of critical research, there is now a recognition that not all qualitative research advances on critical assumptions. There is, on the other hand, a similar awareness of the converse: despite the risk of reinforcing the underlying positivist framework, not all quantitative research prevents critical analysis. In this sense, the methodological division overlaps a political gap that has not yet been so well resolved and clarified (Fox, 2011, p. 14).

Critical Psychology in Latin America has a singular importance, considering that this continent still lives with marks of the process of colonization not yet overcome which are also revealed in the science and professional practice consolidated during the history of its constitution (Guzzo, 2015). Gradually, Latin American authors started presenting ideas and foundations for a psychology committed to the population of Central and South America, making evident the need to reveal the issues and challenges of Psychology with the reality of the Latin American population. Gonzalez Rey, for example, in 2009, discussed the critical moments of the development of Psychology in Latin America. According to this author, the history of Psychology is often presented with a focus centered on facts, people and
moments, focused on a region or country without taking into account movements of Psychology, or in which Psychology participated, present in these geographical spaces. According to this author, at the end of the 1970s and during the 1980s psychologists from different Latin American countries were integrated to rescue the critical perspective in Latin America, in the sense of breaking with the mimicry of dominant theories. Still, according to Gonzalez Rey, some movements were pioneers in the critique of Psychology, as was the case of the critique of Psychoanalysis by Argentine authors such as Enrique Pichon Riviere and José Bleger, of Social Psychology by Silvia Lane in Brazil and Ignacio Martín-Baró in El Salvador and Community Psychology by Maritza Montero in Venezuela. Many psychologists have participated in this process of constructing an anti-hegemonic psychology in different fields of action and theoretical and methodological approaches. Among them, pioneers and others who continue to strengthen this critical movement, are: Ignácio Martín-Baró from El Salvador, Maritza Montero from Venezuela, Bernardo Jiménez, Jorge Mario Flores and David Pavón Cuellar from Mexico, Silvia Lane from Brazil, Fernando Gonzalez Rey and Albertina Mitjans from Cuba and Brazil, Ignácio Dobles from Costa Rica, Irma Serrano from Puerto Rico and Tod Sloan from the United States. Many other professionals and researchers of Latin American Psychology have drawn attention to the need to break this science and practice of its North American and European roots. In the book edited by Parker (2015), *Handbook of Critical Psychology*, it is possible to discern the movements that have impacted on solving the crisis in hegemonic Psychology in favor of another Psychology committed to the demands of reality and the Latin American peoples.

In the context of the critical Latin American experiences in Psychology, we will highlight the Liberation Psychology of Ignacio Martín-Baró Psychology and the recent dialogue with German Critical Psychology, mainly in the ideas proposed by Klaus Holzkamp and his collaborators.

**Liberation Psychology**

The Psychology of Liberation comprises the set of Psychologies emerging as a paradigmatic response to the crisis of Psychology in Latin America, mainly related to the reality of violence and war in El Salvador (Martin-Baró, 1996). The crisis in psychology in the period between the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s of the last century was a phenomenon that was widespread in Europe and the United States and also affected Latin America. The reality on this continent, during that time, was marked by underdevelopment, social inequality, violence, poverty, exploitation, repression and a kind of modern neocolonialism. These conditions
derived from the process of instituting military coups, culminating in dictatorships overthrowing democratically elected governments that did not conform to Washington dictates. These military coups financed by the United States, in what was called Operation Condor, drew the scene of Cold War dispute, whose main American goal was to bar the advance of egalitarian and humanized governments.

El Salvador in the 1980s – the scene and time of Liberation Psychology’s emergence – is the site of a violent civil war between the state apparatus commanded by local and military elites versus popular insurgent groups that were organized in the Frente Revolucionaria Democrática (FRD) and the Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation (FMLN), the latter which had strong support from sectors of the Catholic Church – more precisely those involved with the Liberation Theology movement (Boff, 1985). In this context, in response to the production of suffering derived from these conditions and with the desire for liberation of them, is the political-intellectual production of Martín-Baró, synthesized in what he called the Psychology of Liberation (Martín-Baró, 2011).

The Psychology of Liberation, as a science derived from some principles of Liberation Theology, is also defined by its opting for the interest of poor people. However, it is a Psychology that places itself at the opposite pole of power in the dynamics of the class struggle, a place that hegemonic psychology has traditionally never posed. On the contrary, Psychology, since its birth and throughout its history, has always constituted itself as a tool of capitalist domination. Thus, the Psychology of Liberation sought to shake up the structures of power historically instituted and, above all, to revolutionize them (Osorio, 2011).

For this, Martín-Baró points to awareness as what to do about the Latin American psychologist who commits himself to the liberation of the oppressed peoples. Martín-Baró (1990b) proposes that Psychology helps people overcome the conditions of oppression and fatalism, towards personal and social liberation. This liberation necessarily announces the indispensability of resistance to the structures of power (Prilleltensky, 2003). Thus, the process of becoming conscious, referred to by Paulo Freire as awareness, assumes a central role in the proposal of Martín-Baró about psychological science. He says:

Consciousness is not simply the private sphere of subjective knowledge and feeling of individuals, but above all, that sphere where each person finds the reflected impact of his being and his doing in society, where he assumes and elaborates a knowledge about himself and about the reality that allows you to be someone, have a personal and social identity. Consciousness is knowledge, or not knowing about oneself, about one's
own world and about others, a praxical knowledge rather than a mental one, since it is inscribed in the adequacy to the objective realities of all behavior... (Martin-Baró, 1996, p. 14)

It is understood that the process of awareness does not imply a mere change of opinion about something or only a subjective change (understood in an internalist way), but a change of the subjects in their modes of relation with the world and with other people, assuming a non-alienated social identity that allows people to be actors in their lives and stories.

The Psychology of Liberation, therefore, poses as a scientific proposal that is emphatically critical to Psychology until then, based on mere experimental observation, on the control of variables, on individualism, on the subject’s blame and on supposed scientific neutrality. But more than produce criticism of Psychology as a science, he also made notes and proposed actions against capitalist power structures, rejecting and fighting the different oppressions experienced in El Salvador, such as machismo, domestic violence, violence and psychosocial suffering derived from civil war, among others. After almost three decades since the assassination of Martín-Baró and his comrades of the UCA (Central American University José Simeón Canas), by the Salvadorean Army, the Psychology of Liberation lives on in Latin America, and every day is strengthened even more, and without abandoning the causes of those who mobilized. Martín-Baró, above all, proposed another way of sociability based on human dignity and equality between people (Oliveira, Guzzo, Tizzei & Neto, 2014).

The Marxist Psychology of Klaus Holzkamp

The crisis of Psychology was formalized at a time when, in the four corners of the world, movements broke out against oppression and exploitation in capitalism. This crisis led to a re-reading of the meaning of this science in the world. Thus, it was in Germany with Klaus Holzkamp and in other countries with researchers who questioned the role of Psychology as a tool of the dominant ideology (Parker, 2007).

From meetings, exchange of experiences and interlocutions between Critical psychologists from different countries in recent decades, Latin American psychologists secured greater access to the history and production of German Critical Psychology. Faced with this production, concepts such as “capacity for action” and “the point of view of the subject” informed research on the
possibilities of “human action” in capitalism, the possibilities of “emancipation” in the face of “oppression”.

German (or German / Scandinavian) Critical Psychology represents an attempt to rescue Psychology from itself, redefining it as a historically developed theory of subjects as social beings (based on the concept of the social nature of human existence) and rebuilding it as a Psychology about and for these subjects. The central message in Holzkamp’s (and his collaborators’) work is that traditional Psychology, by ignoring the capacity of human beings to transform their own conditions of existence, directly responds to the demands of relations of domination. It emerges in the context of the intellectual and political struggles at the Free University in ancient West Berlin during the 1960s and 1970s (Motzkau & Schraube, 2015) and has as its central figure Klaus Holzkamp. On the basis of historical and dialectical materialism or, to be more precise, the ideas developed by Marx’s social theory in Feuerbach’s Theses on subjectivity and human practices (thus coining a form of practical inquiry), as well as like the cultural-historical activity theory of Vygotsky and, above all, Leontiev, Holzkamp sought to redefine the field and forms of psychological research by criticizing, absorbing and reinventing aspects and presuppositions of phenomenology and psychoanalysis.

A scientific study of traditional psychology tends to expose an experimental subject, “who is treated as an abstract human individual, isolated ... exposed to the conditions of an environment which he himself has not produced, whose essential character and management are not transparent and that he accepts them as immutable and immovable” (Markard, 2016, p. 12). For the individual, however, as Holzkamp has formulated, there is a “double possibility”: on the one hand he can – in the case of a union with other individuals – extend or transform these possibilities into a “generalized capacity for action”; on the other hand, confronting the situation in a “restrictive way, may limit himself to using only the possibilities granted to him, reproducing the ways of thinking suggested in his immediate situation (behaving, for example, in a competitive way)” (Markard, 2016, p. 17). The conceptual pair “generalized ability vs. restrictive capacity for action” thus seeks to question from the point of view of each: “where, how, why, under what conditions or in what relations, in my attempts to face my life, attentive, at the same time, against my own interests in life-and of the rest?” (Markard, 2016, p. 18). In other words,

In this restrictive capacity for action, control and domination over other people comes into play, instead of common control over our social conditions of life. For by accepting submission to domination and by wanting to participate in them in order to secure their own possibilities of life, this oppression is actively and automatically transmitted to other, even
more dependent people. This moment of control over others - I “save myself”, trying to control others. (Holzkamp, 2016, p. 75)

From the “subject’s point of view and its methodological implications, individuals do not represent “objects” of psychological research, but they are themselves in partnership with the researcher. The object of the research is the world as the subject experiences it – feeling, thinking and acting. “A research, from the point of view of the subject, includes the existence of a more symmetrical relationship and with the greatest possible equality of rights among its participants” (Holzkamp, 2016). Thus,

[...] our exposition reaches a point where the object of analysis acquires an explicitly “subject-scientific” character: since human consciousness as a “positioning itself in relation to” is always “first person”, here the object forces a treatment from the point of view of the subjects in question. (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 305)

**Historical subjects and the role of psychology**

Starting from the history of colonization and domination faced by Latin America, we raise the question of how the psychologist can act from a critical and liberating perspective, favoring the awareness and expansion of the capacity of action of the population that suffers from being on the sidelines of the power and of the material and cultural resources necessary for their subsistence.

According to Quijano (2005), Latin American countries have not yet become nation-states. In these countries, marked by the colonizer-colonized relationship, the homogenization proposed by the Eurocentric model as a condition for the democratization of society did not imply the “decolonization of social, political and cultural relations between races, or rather between groups and elements of European social existence and not Europeans” (p.135), but the exclusion of the majority of the population, i.e., native South-Americans, Afro-descendants and mestizos. In this way, the entire power structure is organized around the colonial axis and to the detriment of the interests of the majority.

In Brazil, as in other Latin American countries, after decades of military dictatorships, we live in a supposed democracy. However, under capitalism, democracy is deprived of the way it was born in Athens – by the involvement and participation of citizens, and is organized by representatives. According to Wood (2003), “the way representative democracy has developed has widened the gap between the people and their representatives and has become the antithesis of democracy: it is not the exercise of political power but the renunciation of this
power, its transference to others, its alienation” (p. 189). As a consequence, Brazil is currently undergoing a serious political crisis, in view of the distancing of social control from the political class, the use of power to favor the interests of capitalist proprietors to the detriment of the needs of the population, and its aggravation from corruption scandals and misappropriation of public funds.

Given this scenario, the question we raise about the role of the psychologist cannot be answered from a hegemonic referential of Psychology. The authors presented in this text contributed, not only with an ethical horizon – the option for the popular majorities that suffer daily with the exclusion – but with a series of psychosocial foundations that point us ways. Martin-Baró (1990a, 1990b, 2015) presents a perspective that allows us to understand how this reality of exclusion is characterized as structural violence and what it means to grow and develop in the midst of a civil war situation. The fear and the threat of violence that lived the Salvadorans in the reality that based the writings of this author much resemble the reality of the Brazilian peripheries. Despite the fact that there is no declared war in Brazil, statistics on violence shows that over a period of four years (2008 to 2011), 206,005 people were murdered, while in the same period of time, the number of victims in the 12 largest conflicts in the world (countries such as Iraq, Sudan, Afghanistan, etc.), 169,574 people were killed (2004 to 2007) (Waiselfisz, 2013). If we take into account that this population is located in the Brazilian peripheries, and is mostly young and black, we have a picture that represents how these people are marked by constant threats and the contributions of Martin-Baró are important for understanding the impacts of these experiences on subjectivity.

In addition, Klaus Holzkamp and German Critical Psychology highlights the importance of building actions from the perspective of subjects (Holzkamp, 1983, 2016). This implies a decolonized and decolonizing action, as the knowledge and culture of the population with which we work becomes the foundation, and participation becomes a method for any action and referral of the problems that it experiences. From the concept of capacity for action, we can consider that all people have concrete possibilities of action, and can develop them in a restrictive or generalized way, as we explained in the previous topic. Faced with this, we return to the question of how Psychology can effectively build an action that is based on these foundations and within a liberating horizon.

We have sought this construction based on the daily work of Brazilian public schools (Moreira & Guzzo, 2014; Guzzo, Moreira, & Mezzalira, 2011; Sant'Ana, Costa, & Guzzo, 2008), considering that the school is one of the primary sites of development in the lives of children, and the public school is the place where about 80% of Brazilian children study (INEP, 2016). In Brazil schooling was universalized and inscribed as a right for every person only by the
Constitution of the United States of Brazil of 1934. The universalization of the right to school did not, however, amount to the universalization of education, so that even today the country suffers an “educational apartheid” based on the unequal treatment given to different social classes with regard to the quality of education. The private logic applied to the sphere of education through the process of commodification turns education into a mere product, reserving better quality to those who can afford to pay. Thus, educational assets are as unequally distributed as economic goods, so that from the physical structure to the valuation of the faculty or even the expectations about the students are different (Gentili, 2009).

In this way, school characterizes itself as a space of the reproduction of inequalities. In the Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil of 1988 [s.d.], education is the first to be listed among the social rights of Brazilians. According to Saviani (2011), this classification is based on Thomas Humphrey Marshall’s division in which civil rights (linked to the exercise of individual liberty), political rights (linked to participation in political power), and social rights (to the minimum level of well-being afforded by the current standard of civilization). However, the author states that, in addition to being a specific type of right, education is the basic (even though not sufficient) condition for all other rights to be exercised, since in modern societies this presupposes access to written codes. This condition does not materialize, however, when education is directed toward the domestication of popular majorities, as Freire (2016) points out. According to this author, the teaching relationship that is based on a “banking” conception of education, that is, that conceives students as custodians of the knowledge of a readymade world, is based on a comprehension of man as spectator, not recreator of the world. In constructing the curriculum and the daily practices considering the students as passive beings, the school goes against a formation for the active participation in the construction of the society.

The student arrives at the school and finds a ready curriculum, which disregards the community where it is inserted, the history of the subjects and groups and ethnic-racial differences: a curriculum that applies in any region of the country. However, the LDB (Education and Guidelines, 1996) guarantees the possibility of participation of students, communities and families in the collective construction of the curriculum and points to the need to democratize the school space. If, however, the school leads students to passivity from the outset of their formation, how can they appropriate this right and effectively participate in the construction of the curriculum? How can you become a conscious adult who exercises your citizenship, seeking to become involved in building a more democratic country?
In this sense, a critical perspective of Psychology, when standing next to the popular majorities, must return its work to the construction of spaces where participation is learned, so that not only the right of the democratization of the school materializes, but the school also becomes a place that promotes the culture of popular participation. Since 2014, through a project of university extension and research, called ECOAR (Spaces of Coexistence, Action and Reflection), we have built a psychosocial practice for coping with violence in public schools in the outskirts of the city of Campinas-SP. All the work of coping with violence is constructed from the perception of the school actors about it, and the referrals are constructed collectively and dialogically.

These spaces allow the exercise and learning of participation, the search for a joint reflection that builds the conditions for people to organize and use their capacity for action in a generalized way. We seek to both strengthen participation spaces already constituted in the school (such as School Councils and Student Councils) and to establish new spaces that foster the work of those who already exist. In this sense, one of the strategies we have used is the class assembly: the students (from elementary school) of each class meet once a month to discuss and address problems they face at school, or suggest some action (like sports and arts, for example) for everyday school life. In these spaces, students learn to think, listen, argue and choose the action that best fits the problem. They also learn to document discussions when writing minutes, which are signed by all students at the end of each meeting.

It is through these participatory spaces that we address the problems of violence, struggle for improvements in the physical conditions of the school, engage the entire school community in building a rich curriculum that respects their identity, demands decent working conditions for the teacher and the rest school workers. Thus, Psychology places itself at the service of the construction of an education that not only organizes itself for the accomplishment of tests, but forms the subjects, literacy them to, as proposed by Freire (2016), to be able to “read the world”. Education with an emancipatory horizon, which teaches them to participate, prepares them to break with the structures of oppression and to build a more humane society.

Final considerations

Two formulations of Psychology – Latin American and German – two continents – Europe and Central America – with different social and economic realities, and authors who responded to the demands of their political and social contexts – Martín-Baró and Klaus Holzkamp – awaken the importance of the criticism that
we must make to the dominant Psychology, as well as to the evidences of the subjectivity constructed in these social spaces conditioned by the capitalist way of life.

It is necessary that Psychology strengthens historical subjects in the knowledge and confrontation of their living conditions and move, organize themselves so that changes take place. In this sense, both Martín-Baró and Klaus Holzkamp provide tools for the ethical and political training of professionals to be the essence of their actions in different fields of activity.

It should be pointed out that social transformation does not take place instantaneously, even if it does not happen through the hands of a few. Historical conditions are the resource for this change. However, they are subjects, ordinary people, who operate on the world and make the transformations. Hence the action that is expected to take place within each of us, in the group of our close relations and also in what we call social, which is the light that splendens under the rift of so many relationships. What traditional psychology has done is to oppose subject and society as contiguous, distant elements. Here is the mission of Critical Psychology: to reconcile with the real subject the complex web of relations between subjects (the social in the subject) and possibilities of transformation of the relationships that are demanded of them (the subject in the social).

It is the change of the world as such. This is undoubtedly the basic element of the new subjectivity: the perception of historical change. It is this element that triggers the process of constitution of a new perspective on time and history. The perception of change leads to the idea of the future, since it is the only territory of time in which changes can occur. The future is an open temporal territory. Time may be new, for it is not only the extension of the past. And in this way history can be perceived not only as something occurring either as something natural or produced by divine or mysterious decisions as destiny, but as something that can be produced by the action of people, by their calculations, their intentions, their decisions, therefore as something that can be projected and consequently felt. (Quijano, 2005, p. 124)

When we criticize Classical Psychology, dominant and impregnated in the relations of capitalist production, it is necessary to consider, as Politzer (1973) teaches us, that this work is precisely the dismantling, by piece, of principles and theoretical formulations to unveil the constitutive processes and implicit postulates. This is, therefore, the reason why criticism should not be presented by general statements, which merely condemn without executing. From the reading that subjects make of reality, and from the ethical commitment to the process of responding to the more complex situations of domination and exploitation, is that
the Psychology of Klaus Holzkamp and that of Ignácio Martín-Baró has its ontological foundations based on the same commitment to social change. For these authors, Psychology can favor the awareness of oppressed and violated populations in their fundamental rights and favor their self-organization for the struggle for a radically free and democratic society.

References


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The Other’s conduct of everyday life: A critical Lacanian approach to Klaus Holzkamp*

David Pavón-Cuéllar

Abstract
Lacan helps me apply Holzkamp’s critique of psychology to Holzkamp’s psychology itself. To be more precise, I try to draw on some of Holzkamp’s critical ideas in order to enrich and expand a Lacanian critique of Holzkamp’s alternative psychology as it is presented in the text “Psychology: Social Self-Understanding on the Reasons for Action in the Conduct of Everyday Life”. This reveals some promising junctions and irreducible contradictions between the Lacanian and Holzkampian critical psychological traditions. Unfortunately, as a Lacanian, I am only able to consider these junctions and contradictions from my Lacanian perspective. It is from this perspective that Holzkampian psychology is shown to be partly unsatisfactory because it cannot entirely rid itself of some of the problems that Lacan and Holzkamp himself perceived in psychology, namely, psychologism, dyadic mirroring, individual-social dualism, individualism, structure blindness, abstraction, mechanistic rationality, and worldlessness. These problems can only be overcome, from my Lacanian perspective, by going beyond psychology, beyond Holzkamp’s Psychology of the Subject’s Conduct of Everyday Life, towards a kind of Metapsychology of the Big Other’s Conduct of Life.

Keywords

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Introduction

In what sense might Klaus Holzkamp’s psychological ideas be of interest to the theoretical perspective inaugurated by the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan? We cannot answer this question without considering some important points. First of all, one must recall that the Lacanian orientation defines itself by its opposition to psychology and psychological deviations from psychoanalysis (Parker, 2001, 2003; Pavón-Cuéllar, 2013). Lacan and Lacanians break with the psychological discipline. They do not want to have anything to do with psychologists. Given this, it seems strange that they would be interested in Holzkamp’s psychology. But this psychology is not like those that have been rejected in the Lacanian tradition. Unlike them, Holzkamp’s psychology is a critical psychology. It is, in fact, the paradigm of German *Kritische Psychologie*, which is based precisely on a critique of many of the traditional psychological ideas that Lacan and Lacanians oppose (Holzkamp, 1992; Tolman, 2013). Moreover, the critique that Lacan and Lacanians have developed against those ideas is often consistent with Holzkamp’s. Indeed, at certain junctures, the two critiques intersect, while at other times, one might be completed or deepened by the other. It is at this level that German *Kritische Psychologie* may be of great interest to those Lacanians who are committed to the critique of psychology and whose critical interventions may be enriched and expanded by Holzkamp’s ideas.

If we confine our vision to the critique of mainstream traditional psychological models, Holzkamp’s psychology and Lacanian psychoanalysis offer ideas that are coincident, compatible and complementary. The convergence between the two perspectives becomes even more important when Lacanians present themselves as critical psychologists and place their ideas in the Marxist tradition of critical theory. This is the case of my own work, as well as that of other critical psychologists, the best known among them being Ian Parker.

When we realize the importance of the convergence between our Lacanian critique and that offered by Holzkamp and his followers, we are surprised by the lack of contact and interaction between them. This may be circumstantially explained by the fact that the two critiques belong to different critical psychological traditions that have developed in a parallel way, without ever really crossing paths with one another. But such circumstance, in turn, can be explained by the irreducible contradictions and incompatibilities between the methods and the broader theoretical projects of the two critical psychological traditions. A decisive discrepancy lies precisely in the position of critique in relation to what is criticized. While Holzkamp’s critique tends to be situated inside of psychology, the other is developed rather on the outside or at least on the margins, *in and against the discipline* (Parker, 1999). This difference is what
made Parker (2009) deplore the way in which Holzkamp’s critical psychology “at best ended up leading to something approaching good psychology” (p. 74).

The contradiction between the inner and outer positions of critique is particularly clear when we contrast German *Kritische Psychologie* with the radically anti-psychological questioning inspired by Lacan. Unlike the Lacanian critiques of psychology, Holzkamp’s approach does not break with psychology in its entirety. In fact, Holzkamp’s critique results in the proposal of an alternative psychology from the standpoint of the subject. It is precisely this alternative psychology that I wish to examine from a Lacanian critical perspective, yet supported and complemented by Holzkamp’s critique of psychology.

Lacan will help me apply Holzkamp’s critique of psychology to Holzkamp’s psychology itself. To be more precise, I will try to draw on some of Holzkamp’s critical ideas in order to enrich and expand a Lacanian critique of Holzkamp’s alternative psychology as it is presented in the text “Psychology: Social Self-Understanding on the Reasons for Action in the Conduct of Everyday Life” (Holzkamp, 1996/2013a). This should reveal some promising junctions and irreducible contradictions between the Lacanian and Holzkampian critical psychological traditions. Unfortunately, as a follower of Lacan and not of Holzkamp, I will only be able to consider these junctions and contradictions from my rather Lacanian perspective.

My perspective will lead to an unavoidable misinterpretation of Holzkamp. This misunderstanding may be comparable to the unescapable misunderstanding of Lacan by those who have a good understanding of Holzkamp (e.g. Rehmann, 2013). It could be that we have two languages here that cannot translate to each other. Maybe there is no way to avoid misunderstanding.

In any case, my perspective will be rather Lacanian, and it is from this perspective that Holzkampian psychology will be shown to be partly unsatisfactory because it cannot entirely rid itself of some of the problems that Lacan and Holzkamp himself perceived in psychology, namely, *worldlessness, mechanistic rationality, abstraction, structure blindness, individualism, individual-social dualism, dyadic mirroring,* and *psychologism*. These problems can only be overcome, from my Lacanian perspective, by going beyond psychology, beyond Holzkamp’s *Psychology of the Subject’s Conduct of Everyday Life*, towards a kind of *Metapsychology of the Big Other’s Conduct of Life*. For the moment, and before considering this possibility, I will examine separately each one of the eight problems I find in Holzkamp’s psychology.
Worldlessness

Holzkamp (1996/2013a) is right in denouncing diverse psychological models for “irrealizing the world”, for conceptually excluding “the real world ‘in’ which the individuals act and gain their experiences”, for not allowing “integration with the world ‘in’ which we all live into the theory construction” (pp. 244-259). The real world disappears behind the inner world, behind the stimulus, behind the input of an information processing system, behind the interactions between individuals. This was true of traditional, gestalt, behavioural, cognitive and alternative psychologies, and it is still true of current mainstream psychology in general, which “remains a psychology without ‘being’ because it has not been able to address adequately the reality that we ‘are’ in the world” (Teo, 2016, p. 113).

Holzkamp explains the worldlessness of mainstream psychology as an implication of a standard experimental design. This “standard design”, which “identifies psychology as psychology and no other discipline”, replaces the real world with an experimental scenario that “comprises only three entities”, namely, the “test subject”, the “constellation” of stimulus, inputs and other independent variables, and the dependent variables, the test subject’s “answer, reaction, response or the like, registered by the experimenter as data” (Holzkamp, 1996/2013a, pp. 234-235). The goal here is “to represent the relationship between the conditions introduced and the behaviours to be ‘predicted’ (‘independent’ and ‘dependent’ variables) in as pure a form as possible” (Holzkamp, 1995/2016, p. 73).

According to Holzkamp (1996/2013a), in studying the standard design instead of everything else in the world, psychology loses sight of “the real, everyday world, which is located in comprehensive meaning contexts and ‘in’ which we all live” (1996/2013a, p. 244). But do we all really live in these meaning contexts? Personally, I do not feel as though I live there. Objects around me do not seem to be objectified meanings or meanings incorporated in things [Gegenstandsbedeutungen].¹ They do not mean their use value, but simply refer to it as another signifier. I only see signifiers that connect with other signifiers, which connect with others, and so on (Pavón-Cuéllar, 2010). By deciphering something, there is always something new to be deciphered. There is always another signifier. Meanings, for me, are purely imaginary. They are produced by the imaginarization of the symbolic, the idealization of words and other material things, the ideologization and psychologization of actual facts.

From the standpoint of the subject I am, even if I were to accept Holzkamp’s definition of “meanings” as “action possibilities for individuals”, I would still feel that my world is meaningless, as I do not see these “possibilities

¹ I thank Jan Rehmann for helping me to think about this concept.
to act” but, rather, in Holzkamp’s terms, “obstacles to, and restrictions upon, these possibilities” (Holzkamp, 1996/2013a, p. 280). I only see what Holzkamp describes as “dead conditions” that “cannot be transformed into meanings or possibilities to act”, amidst which “one is simply powerless” and “totally subjected” to “these conditions” (p. 302). So, I am convinced that it is impossible to conduct or live one’s life, while Holzkamp is persuaded that “it is impossible not to conduct or live one’s life” (p. 299). In his own way, Holzkamp believes in Sartre’s idea that “man is condemned to be free” and “responsible for everything he does” (Sartre, 1945/1996, p. 39). I think, rather, that man is condemned, and that this is precisely why he is not free. Instead of being free, one is responsible for everything that is done.\(^2\) One cannot decide, or live, for oneself.

I would say that there is no possibility to act for oneself. When I might see a possibility, I perceive only one, “only one possibility of acting under existing conditions”, so that is no longer a possibility, for there is no “possibility of an extension of the scope of action” (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 355), and, therefore, no choice between different “possibilities to act” (1996/2013a, p. 284). Finally, I do not see a possibility, for I am convinced, in my fatalistic Lacanian perspective, that every possibility is nothing but an imaginary possibility that conceals a system in which there are only symbolic necessities and real impossibilities. The deceiving consciousness of such an unconscious system can make me feel that I am free. But this freedom is just “necessity made conscious” (Plekhanov, 1898/2006, p. 12). It is the real impossibility that disappears behind an imaginary possibility.

Lacan (1964/1990) would say that “the path of the subject passes between the two walls of the impossible” (p. 187). Between these two walls of “the real”, there is the “hallucination” of “possibilities” (p. 188). Actually Holzkamp (1996/2013a) himself recognizes this when he conceives us as “individuals swimming in a fictitious free space between real walls” (p. 281). If the walls of impossibilities are something real, and the free space of possibilities is something fictitious, then why insist upon possibilities? Why insist upon that which is fictitious?

Holzkamp acknowledges the fictitious character of the free space of possibilities. In this I agree with him, as I also think that possibilities are fictitious, hallucinatory or imaginary. One may say that this imaginary character is precisely the meaning of the possibility for me, and therefore my world is not as meaningless as I think. However, if that were said, I would consider that I was not being taken seriously.

If I am taken seriously, then my right to discard Holzkamp’s “phenographic circumscription” – restriction to the subject’s experience – as not “applying to

\(^2\) I thank Jan De Vos for pointing this out to me.
myself” – to my experience – must be respected (Holzkamp, 1996/2013a, p. 290), and I must be allowed to indicate, in Holzkamp’s words, that “I experience the circumscribed phenomenon differently” (p. 291), that I do not see the possibilities of which you speak, and that there are no possibilities in my real, everyday world. Therefore, this world is a meaningless world. If this is the world for me, then Holzkamp’s “world-containing psychology” (p. 259) would be a worldless psychology for me, as it would only offer its alternative design in terms of meanings and reasons, instead of my real meaningless and reasonless world. From this standpoint, Holzkamp’s psychology may be seen as a new way of “irrealizing the world” for me as “a ‘psychological’ individual involved” (p. 254).

It is true that my assumption that Holzkamp offers a worldless psychology goes against everything he and his followers argue for. Nevertheless, at least from the standpoint of the subject that I am, the world and my relation to the world have no place in Holzkamp’s design. This is a matter of fact, based upon the content of my experience, and does not need to be demonstrated.

I certainly agree with Holzkamp when he says that the standard design does not provide a “language to talk of the individual’s relations to the world” (Holzkamp, 1996/2013a, p. 245); however, concerning my relations to the world as I experience it, Holzkamp’s alternative design provides no language to speak of them either. I cannot be satisfied with the translation of “conditioning statements into the reason discourse” (p. 339), nor do I feel that reasons and meanings can describe my relations to the world, which is elsewhere, beyond them, behind them, in the social structure.

When I read Holzkamp, I feel that the social structure vanishes behind the meaning structure. And the meaning structure, the structure of possibilities to act, vanishes behind the subjective reasons for action. In my Marxist and Freudian perspective, these subjective reasons are not completely reliable, as they may just be “pretexts”, excuses, ideological rationalizations of the “real causes” or “unconscious motivations” (Bernfeld, 1926/1972, p. 18; Fenichel, 1934/1972, p. 172). The problem here, as Holzkamp (1996/2013a) pointed out, is that we can only denounce these motivations from the “standpoint” of the observers of the subject, and not from the “standpoint of the subject” (p. 284). It is as if the subject could not observe himself/herself, be his/her own observer, and try to clarify the causes of his/her reasons. It is true that this is very difficult, but then why deprive the subject of our help? Why not allow us to work together with him/her and help him/her see what maybe only collectively, we with him/her, we can see? What is wrong with this? Why should we avoid taking a stance on the subject’s motivations?
Why should we try again to neutralise our standpoint, our theoretical-political stance, and pretend neutrality and objectivity in our account of the subject’s reasons? Is this not falling back into naïve empiricism? Or perhaps is it the even more naïve illusion of being able to put oneself in the place of the other? In any case, why should I stick to the reasons from the standpoint of the subject? Why should these reasons always explain actions just as stimulus always explained responses in the standard design? Why do psychologists, however critical they are, always offer this kind of mechanical generalizations?

**Mechanistic rationality**

I think Holzkamp (1996/2013a) is completely correct when he denounces an ideological “mystic metamorphosis” through which the standard design transforms the subject into the “stimulus-response mechanism” (p. 271). But I am afraid that Holzkamp is also transforming the subject into a mechanism, a reason-action mechanism, in which an action is always preceded by a reason that is always preceded in turn by a meaning understood as possibility for action. In this mechanistic rationality, there is no place for the inexplicable and the incomprehensible, for mysteries and surprises (Lacan, 1956/1981), and, most importantly, no place for non-linear time and retroactive causalities in which the action precedes its reason and thus creates its meaning afterwards, *après-coup*, *nachträglich* (Lacan, 1969/2006). In my opinion, if we do not consider this reverse logic of the event, which is so important in the Marxist and Freudian perspectives, we simply cannot avoid falling into mechanistic explanations of human behaviour.

In order to avoid falling into mechanicism, Holzkamp (1996/2013a) explicitly replaces the “stimulus/response” mechanistic connection with the “meanings/reasons” non-mechanistic relationship (p. 306). In this relationship meanings are conceived as “social possibilities for action given to the individual” (1985, p. 236). Meanings belong to the “subject-facing side of the societal structure” of the world, so that this world would have a place in Holzkamp’s psychological approach (1996/2013a, p. 278). However, in this approach, according to Holzkamp himself, “the focus” is not on the level of meanings, as in sociology, but on the level of the “subjective reasons for action” (p. 297). Here I feel that the worldless and mechanistic reasons/actions relationship, and not the meanings/reasons relationship, is that which really replaces the stimulus/responses connection.

The new stimuli are subjective reasons, and the new responses are subjective actions. This is much better than before, of course, but it is not any
less mechanistic. And, what is worse, the world has once again been lost. The objective world does not really relate to the subject’s behaviour. Subjective actions are not understood on the basis of the social structure, but are explained by something clearly psychical, that is, the “subjective reasons for action”, which are clearly distinguished from the “objective living conditions” (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 344).

As in the standard design, in Holzkamp’s (1996/2013a) alternative design, the psychical is “explained by the psychical” (p. 245). Therefore, just as in the standard design, “there are no human beings acting ‘in’ their real world, but ‘psychological’ individuals caged in a merely private psychic world (‘quasi-world’) who, for conceptual reasons, are unable to ever find a way out” into the “outside world as it exists” (p. 251). This real world, at least as I see it, is composed of incomprehensible impossibilities and transindividual structural necessities, blind and impersonal economic forces, historical surprises and political absurdities, social dead-ends and edges of cultural precipices. For conceptual reasons, individuals cannot find a way out into this world when they are caged in the worldless psychological sphere described by Holzkamp, the merely private psychic domain of meanings and subjective reasons, perceived possibilities of action, and the realization of these possibilities.

Holzkamp’s concepts describe a psychological sphere where there is no place for the world as I understand it. I would say, therefore, that the psychological concepts offered by Holzkamp deserve his own denunciation of “the worldlessness of psychological concepts in alternative approaches” (Holzkamp, 1996/2013a, p. 254). As an alternative approach, Holzkamp’s psychology might be seen as a new kind of worldless psychology with a new surreptitious version of the standard design. After all, according to Holzkamp, “the standard design can be seen as the methodological framework of psychology in its entirety, its mainstream and sidelines” (p. 255). It is as if psychology in its entirety could not rid itself of the standard design; as if all psychologies, even Holzkamp’s, were condemned to the worldlessness inherent in the standard design. Holzkamp suggests this when he recognizes that this worldlessness “determines” the “professional identity of psychology” (p. 255). In this point of view, psychology would be worldless, or it would not be psychology. This is just one of the reasons why I reject psychology.

Abstraction

Holzkamp does not reject psychology, as he believes that worldlessness is not a general problem of psychology, but a specific problem of the abstraction that
characterizes the standard design. In reality, he wants to “remove the standard design from the sphere of constructing abstract stimulus-response relations or variable models and locate it where it actually belongs: in the real world ‘in’ which the researcher and test subject actually meet” (Holzkamp, 1996/2013a, p. 270). This is fine; however, when Holzkamp comes to describe this real world, I find his description very disappointing. Even though he avoids “trivialities” and is only interested in clarifying that which “cannot be clarified without scientific means” (p. 331), his description of the world is too simple, too obvious, too comprehensible. It is limited to a narrow, shallow framework of conscious relationships, either “cooperative” or “merely interactive”, between “individuals” (1985, p. 326). People know what they want and they also know how to play their part. Time is linear. Space is shared. There are no mysteries, no surprises, no paradoxes, no logical problems, no deadlocks of perspective, no social horizon, but only the walls surrounding interpersonal relationships. There is no place for the cultural complexity and historical density of actions. At least for me, this is not what the real world looks like from the point of view of any subject.

Even from the viewpoint of the simplest subject, the world is not as simple as it unfolds in Holzkamp’s description of the real world in which the researcher and test subject actually meet. This description seems rather to be an abstraction of this world with its unfathomable depth. Therefore, like the standard design, Holzkamp’s alternative design offers an abstraction of the real world instead of the concrete real world. Holzkamp (1996/2013a) points out that the “causal nexus” is “abstracted from the reason discourse” (p. 299), but is it not true that this reason discourse is abstracted from a concrete real world that includes not only reasons and causes but also many other connections, some rational, others irrational?

Holzkamp’s representation of the world surprises me with its abstraction and simplicity, but also for its narrowness. This narrowness can be observed clearly when he defines “the world” as “the sum of all localities accessible to and ‘passed through’ by the individuals” (Holzkamp, 1996/2013a, p. 277). This is the narrow world considered by Holzkamp and contained by his world-containing psychology. It is the worldless world of psychologism, solipsism, subjectivism, and Fichtean subjective idealism (Lacan, 1936/1999a, 1955/1999b). It is just the world from the perspective of individual subjects. It is the “visible” world on this side of the “horizon” (Holzkamp, 1996/2013a, p. 276). For Holzkamp, beyond the horizon, there is no world. There is nothing important for the individual there, only empty space.

Contrary to Holzkamp, I am convinced that there is a world beyond the horizon, outside the psychic sphere, behind the scenes of everyday life. So, I do
not think that “the ‘world’ is always present in scenes of everyday life conduct” (Holzkamp, 1996/2013a, p. 275). I would say, rather, that these scenes are always present somewhere in the world. The scenes of everyday life reveal a small place in the world, of course, but they do not reveal the world as such, and they do not reveal as much as they conceal. Most of the world disappears behind the scenes of everyday life. Most of the world is behind the “partial reality” of these scenes and can only be discovered by going beyond everyday life (Lefebvre, 1968, pp. 57-61).

When Holzkamp assumes that the world is present in scenes of everyday life, his assumption reminds me of the bourgeois aspiration to enclose the entire world into narrow domestic European environments of the nineteenth century. But those theatres of the world were nothing more than that: just theatres. They were part of the world, but the world was also outside them. What happened inside was only a continuation and a distorted echo of what happened outside.

**Structure blindness**

The Holzkampian vision of the world consists in the scenes of everyday life. These scenes are not the world in its entirety, but only a part of the world, a kind of theatre, a theatre of the world. We may say that they are a psychological theatre of the world. When Holzkamp takes this theatre for the real world in its entirety, he is taking a psychological representation of the world’s structure for the structure that is psychologically represented. Thus, he falls into the same psychologism that he definitely rejects.

Among Husserl’s objections to psychologism, Holzkamp (1996/2013a) underscores the argument that “individual thinking of a logical structure or law is not identical to the law or structure itself” (p. 262). Mainstream psychology, according to Holzkamp, denies this “difference between individual operations of thinking and the societal formation or structures as well as their discrete form of existence” (p. 263). But is it not true that structures also exist through our operations of thinking? These individual operations are structural operations. It is the structure that thinks through my thoughts. In a sense, I am like a thinking labour force of the economic, social, cultural and ideological structure, and my individual conscious thoughts are the thoughts of this transindividual structure of the unconscious (Pavón-Cuéllar, 2010a), this social and meaning structure that is, as Holzkamp (1996/2013a) acknowledges, “complex and opaque” (p. 312), as well as “ambiguous, contradictory, intransparent and blurred into impenetrability” (p. 315).
Consciousness remains unconscious for it cannot really penetrate into this unconscious structure that becomes un-conscious through each subject. Yet, in his psychological perspective, Holzkamp (1996/2013a) pretends that the unconscious is “nothing else than a special form of the conscious” (p. 295). In contrast to this, I may say, in my psychoanalytical perspective, that consciousness is nothing else than a special form of the unconscious (Pavón-Cuéllar, 2010a).

My individual conscious operations of thinking are not as individual and conscious as Holzkamp suggests. Rather, they are transindividual forms of existence of the economic, social, cultural and ideological structure of the unconscious, which is outside, in the material and perceptible world. And we can obviously recognize this without falling into psychologism. Actually, from my point of view, we must recognize this in order to avoid psychologism. What I call psychologism can also be at work in artificially giving existence to psychology through the categorical differentiation between the world and the theatre of the world, the structure and the psychological individual thinking of the structure. In Lacanian terms, this differentiation arbitrarily differentiates the structure of language and the psychological metalanguage of individual thinking (Lacan, 1971/2007). But “there is no metalanguage” (Lacan, 1960/1999e, p. 293). There is only the structure of language that thinks of itself when the so-called individual is thinking of the structure.

The structure does not think in the same way through different individuals, of course, but this does not mean that these different forms of thinking can be distinguished from the structure, since the structure consists precisely in these forms of thinking and the structural transindividual articulation between them. This is a Durkheimian idea that influences, especially, French social sciences and Lacanian psychoanalysis (Zafiropoulos, 2001), an idea that cannot be accepted in a Weberian methodological individualism like the one we find in most current social and human sciences, including perhaps Holzkamp’s psychology. It is because of this individualism that, I might suppose, Holzkampian psychology includes some echoes of mainstream psychology and its “structure blindness” (1996/2013a, p. 263), its “context blindness” (1985, p. 21), its “blindness to real connections and real contradictions” (p. 27). It seems to me that Holzkamp does not always see the transindividual structural character of what he conceives as individual psychological thinking.
Individualism

Holzkamp (1996/2013a) rightly criticizes social psychology for separating out “individual-related items” that “are assumed to impact upon the individual directly” (p. 256). Instead of this individualist reductionism, Holzkamp would like social psychology to attempt to “comprehend the individual’s actions in their relations to the structural context of the world” (p. 256). However, at least from my point of view, this assertion entails an individualist reductionism that reduces the object of social psychology to what Holzkamp describes as the individual’s actions. It does not matter if these actions are related to the structural context of the world. Fact is that we focus on the individual’s actions, on the individual, and not on the social itself. The actor is still not a group or a social class, but the individual. This is only one reason why I’m convinced that individualism still affects this social psychology sketched out by Holzkamp. As I have recently pointed out, “the Holzkampian psychological conception not only regresses to a moment that predates the Marxist relational human being”, but “goes back even further before Feuerbachian collective subjectivity”, and tends to “fall into erratic individualism” (Pavón-Cuéllar, 2017, p. 110).

Holzkamp’s own psychological individualism does not eclipse his brilliant opposition to other kinds of psychological individualism. In existing social psychology, as Holzkamp (1996/2013a) insightfully points out, “the individuals are merely turned towards one another, while they turn their backs to the real, meaningful world ‘in’ which they actually live and act” (p. 256). But would it change anything if the individuals turned to this real, meaningful world? After all, the world would still be on one side, and the individuals on the other, as if the world and individuals were different and separate things, as if we could see the world without seeing the individuals, as if the individuals were not the world, as if the world were not that which contemplates itself through the eyes of the individuals.

Holzkamp, despite his Marxism, does not avoid the representation of society as “an abstraction opposed to the individual” (Marx, 1844/1997, p. 146). He assumes that individuals are different from a world that thus appears as their environment. This is a typical psychological assumption that reveals the biological foundation and determination of psychology, as was noted, some time ago, first by Canguilhem (1958) and then by Foucault (1966).

Just like biology, psychology systematically separates individuals and the environment, as if the latter were a given and unchangeable “natural environment” to which individuals must “adapt” themselves (Braunstein, 2006, p. 367). It is as if the environment were not what it is, namely, a social and cultural world that cannot be distinguished from the individuals, a world that
cannot be contemplated by the individuals because it is not before the eyes of the individuals, but it is the individuals themselves who, therefore, instead of adapting to something that exists outside them, can transform the world by transforming themselves (Lacan, 1936/1999a). It is in this sense that psychoanalysis, despite Holzkamp’s (1988/2013b) accusation, does have a “concept of the human possibility of ending” the “suffering and entanglement of individual subjects” by “participating oneself in changing the conditions causing it” (p. 33). These conditions also lie in an individual, in an inner world, that should not be artificially differentiated from the outer world, from the environment, as that to which the individual must adapt.

Of course, instead of a passive and unilateral adaptation of individuals to their environment, Holzkamp (1996/2013a) clearly acknowledges that individuals’ conducts of life imply active and multilateral “interdependencies with other individuals’ conducts of life” (p. 272). Here we see a reason why “the concept of the conduct of everyday life might open a route to overcome the abstract individualism of psychology (and its accompanying wordlessness) that encloses subjects in isolated psychological special functions” (Højholt and Schraube, 2016, p. 3). It is true that Holzkamp left behind the traditional psychological individualist focus on the adaptive individual with his/her isolated psychological special functions and focused on the interdependencies between individuals’ conducts of life. Yet, despite these interdependencies, the conducts of life still are what Holzkamp describes as individuals’ conducts of life, and their “habituation” and “learning” within “meaning structures” are not so different from their “biological adaptation” to a natural environment (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 132). It is also true that Holzkamp (1996/2013a) himself, in the end, admits that “every conduct of life is both individual and collective”, places the “individual” and the “collective” in quotation marks, and recognizes that “this conceptual pairing has no analytical value at all” (p. 322). But this recognition comes too late. It only comes after a systematic use of the conceptual pairing that arbitrarily separates the individual and the social.

**Individual-social dualism**

Holzkamp’s starting point is the abstraction of the individual from the social, and the resulting “phenographic description” from “each individual’s particular standpoint” (Holzkamp, 1996/2013a, p. 340). Before reaching the “constructive level”, he begins at the “descriptive level” by describing conducts of life as “individuals’ conducts of life”, as accomplishments of individuals and not of groups, communities or social classes (pp. 272, 318-319). This is how Holzkamp
reproduces what he rejects, namely, “the bourgeois form of the abstract-isolated individual” (1985, p. 438). Psychological subjects, as conceived by Holzkamp, are primarily individuals abstracted from their transindividual concrete being, and deprived of the social forces, historical movements and cultural orientations that always underlie conduct of life. Without all this, subjects fall into the “worldlessness of the individual” that Holzkamp rightly denounces in the standard design (1996/2013a, p. 245).

Unlike the standard design, Holzkamp certainly considers the world. But initially, in his own words, he only considers the world from “the standpoint and perspective of the individual” (Holzkamp, 1996/2013a, p. 276). But is this perspective really that of the individual? Is it not, rather, and from the very beginning, the perspective of the Lacanian big Other; i.e., of culture, of ideology, of the system, of everything in which the individual is alienated? It is this cultural and ideological Other, in its individualistic liberal historical manifestation (Lacan, 1961/1991), that “restricts, curtails, impairs intersubjectivity”, creates the illusion of an individual perspective, and determines the “centring” and “irreversibility” of this perspective (Holzkamp, 1996/2013a, p. 332). Indeed, from the outset, the so-called individual perspective is already a transindividual perspective that can only be accounted for by a Copernican “reflexive” and “constructive” approach (pp. 322-323). I do not really understand why we should begin with a “descriptive” and “pre-reflexive” imaginary experience in a “Ptolemaic world view” that would “absolutize” the individual’s perspective (p. 322).

In my opinion, there is no such thing as the individual’s perspective. This perspective is always a transindividual perspective of the big Other, of ideology, of language, of the symbolic system of culture. It corresponds to what Holzkamp (1996/2013a) calls the “standpoint of multiple reciprocity” and “superordinated meta-perspective” (p. 326), but it is not exactly a meta-perspective, as there are no other perspectives, but only this perspective, this system, this “language” without “metalanguage”, this “Other” without “an Other of the Other” (Lacan, 1960/1999c, p. 293). So, we do not need to “construct or calculate a ‘meta-standpoint’ (as an orthogonal top view) outside the entire system” (Holzkamp, 1996/2013a, p. 323), since this meta-standpoint already exists inside the system. Yet it is not a meta-standpoint that would imply a kind of metalanguage, but rather the complex and multifaceted standpoint of a language without metalanguage. It is the many-sided standpoint of the system, of the big Other who sees many different things through the eyes of people, who are not isolated planets, each one with its own perspective.

Individuals are not “planets” floating in space (Lacan, 1955/2001, pp. 323-331). They do not have separate individual perspectives like those of planets.
What seems to be pre-reflexive is just a moment of the reflexivity of the system. This symbolic system of culture does not function as a planetary system, either Ptolemaic or Copernican, as it does not only extrinsically govern the places and displacements of its elements, but intrinsically constitutes the very being of these elements. Unlike planets, these elements are not distinct elements, but structural positions. What Holzkamp calls the individual is just something abstracted from the transindividual structure. Hence, why should we assign a perspective to this abstract individual that does not even have a concrete existence?

After giving existence and assigning a perspective to the individual, Holzkamp makes clear his theoretical-methodological individualism when he explains that “at the centre” of his analyses “are individual subjects within a particular scene of conduct of everyday life” (Holzkamp, 1996/2013a, p. 275). In my opinion, as long as individual subjects are at the centre of analyses, we cannot accomplish “the social self-understanding as the guideline of a subject science knowledge interest” (p. 330). This interest obliges us to put the social structures at the centre of our analyses. It is true that Holzkamp is also interested in the “relationship” of these “individual subjects” to “social structures” (pp. 275-276), but he can only be concerned with this relationship of the individual to the social insofar as he began with an individual-social dualism and its inherent abstraction of the individual from the social.

Dyadic mirroring

As usual in modern social and human sciences, after separating the individual from society, we need to find a way to relate the individual to society. We need to find, for instance, the “conduct of life” and conceive it as the “mediating link”, the “missing link” between the individual and the social (Holzkamp, 1996/2013a, p. 275). However, instead of finding the missing link, would it not be better not to have missed the link in the first place? Would it not be better not to have abstracted the individual from the social?

We should begin by recognizing that individual subjects are parts, points and effects of the social structure. Indeed, strictly speaking, they do not relate to the social structure, but are the same thing as the social structure. In Marxian terms, their essence is an “ensemble of social relations” (Marx, 1845/1969, pp. 14-15).

The so-called individual is always more than an individual. I am not only an individual, but a class, a nation, a gender position, a knot of groups and filiations, as well as the tensions, contradictions and conflicts between different social and cultural categories. I am inhabited by all this. I’m a “social being” (Marx,
There is not only the “social mediation of individual existence” (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 229), but my “individual existence” is itself a “social activity” (Marx, 1844/1997, p. 146). I am society that reaches “subjective existence” in the “particular individual” that I am (pp. 146-147).

I am an Other. I am not only who I am. I am never alone and I cannot relate to another individual in private. For these reasons, I cannot accept Holzkamp’s concept of the “research dyad” and the correlative individualist idea that “strictly simultaneously one can never contact more than one person at the same time” (Holzkamp, 1996/2013a, p. 267). I would say, rather, that strictly speaking, we cannot contact only one person, for when we contact one person, we are always contacting a group, a class, a mass of people. Moreover, we are not alone with them, as there is always someone else, a third party, the Lacanian big Other, the personification of language or culture, which always mediates in all interpersonal relationships, even in Holzkamp’s research dyad, which is therefore not exactly a dyad.

In my Lacanian perspective, even the ostensibly two-person relationship is not really a two person-relationship at all, but a specular imaginary relationship with my image in the mirror (Lacan, 1954/1998, 1936/1999d, 1955/2001). The only way to go beyond the mirror, transcend dyadic mirroring, get out of myself and really relate to someone else is to relate to the social structure, to the entirety of society, by relating to the big Other, to the symbolic system of culture, to the structure of language. Here everything relates to everything. But these relations do not exactly correspond to what Holzkamp calls the “intersubjective mode of relation” (Holzkamp, 1996/2013a, p. 325), since there are, strictly speaking, no relations between subjects, but only structural connections between positions, which Lacan (1971/2007) describes as “inter-signifying relationships” (p. 10). This is the object of a Lacanian meta-psychological mode of explanation, which is thus different from Holzkamp’s “meta-subjective mode of understanding” (Holzkamp, 1996/2013a, p. 325).

In sum, from a Lacanian point of view, there are two main problems with the Holzkampian mode of understanding. First, one can only discover intersubjective or interpersonal relationships by understanding too much, finding subjects and persons where there are only signifiers and structural positions. Second, one can only find research dyads and other two-person or two-subject relationships by abstracting them from the symbolic system in which each position relates to all other positions.
Holzkamp (1996/2013a) may say that he is not abstracting individuals from the structure, as he recognizes, in his own words, that “human beings are able to integrate the historically developed structure of the world into their experience and actions” (p. 264). But why should human beings need to integrate this structure into their experience and actions? This experience and these actions are indistinguishable from the structure. The structure is integrated into them from the beginning (Lacan, 1969/2006). Why should human beings need to make this integration? The answer is that they need to make this integration because Holzkamp, as a good psychologist, abstractly separated that which was integrated from the beginning. At least for me, this abstract separation involves psychologism, as it sticks to a pure abstract psychological reality in which the world disappears. Indeed, we cannot see the structure of the world in the subject’s experiences and actions that Holzkamp abstracts from the structure of the world. The structure is there, of course, but we cannot see it. This is precisely what Holzkamp (1996/2013a) calls “structure blindness” in the standard design (pp. 262-264).

It is true that Holzkamp (1996/2013a) engages in the theoretical enterprise of “overcoming” the “structure blindness” of the standard design in mainstream psychology, and considers two possible “starting points” for this enterprise (pp. 264-265). We may start either by dealing with the concept of structure, or by taking the standard design as the basis for further considerations. When facing this crossroads, Holzkamp has good reasons for choosing to begin with the standard design instead of the structure. He does not want to either “lose sight of the depicted standard design” or “neglect those contradictions and inconsistencies in traditional psychology” that he has “extensively discussed” (p. 265).

Holzkamp’s option brings us back to our starting point. As a psychologist who seems to be quite attached to psychology, Holzkamp prefers to begin with the critique of the contradictions and inconsistencies in traditional psychology and then propose an alternative psychological approach that would not be blind to the structure. As a Lacanian who is not really attached to psychology, I would prefer to begin with the conception of the structure in my alternative psychoanalytical approach, and then return to psychology in order to criticize its structure blindness on the basis of my approach. My aim is to develop a critique of psychology, even alternative psychology, and even Holzkamp’s psychology. To achieve this aim, I begin by breaking with psychology, while Holzkamp (1996/2013a), in contrast, begins by criticizing mainstream, traditional psychology for the purpose of proposing a new alternative psychology that
should also be a “meta-theory of psychology in its entirety” (p. 295). But is it possible for psychology to become a meta-theory of psychology? I would say rather that such a meta-theory cannot be a psychological theory, but something different, something “beyond psychology” (Lacan, 1954/1998, p. 259), that is, what Freud (1915/1984) calls “metapsychology”, which has nothing to do with what Stam, Rogers and Gergen (1987) understand by this term (see Orozco-Guzmán & Pavón-Cuéllar, 2014).

Instead of going beyond psychology, Holzkamp (1996/2013a) offers an alternative psychology conceived as an investigation of “scenes of conduct of everyday life” (p. 274). But I truly do not understand why we should need psychology to investigate such an object. This investigation is undertaken every day by each one of us!

Psychology may well deepen our everyday investigation of scenes of conduct of life, but would it not be better to go behind the scenes, beyond the ideological appearance of things, and investigate what is not evident in our everyday life? Why should I accept that “a science of the subject cannot leave the standpoint of the subject in everyday life to theorize about overall issues” (Dreier, 2016, p. 27)? Is it not precisely through this theorizing that science can elucidate the standpoint of the subject? This elucidation requires at least a “meta-subjective scientific understanding framework” (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 540).

What good is science if it only replicates what is evident from the standpoint of the subject in everyday life? As a Marxist and a Freudian, I am not only interested in that which is patent, but also, and especially, in that which is latent, that is, the metapsychological structure concealed by the patent ideological appearance that constitutes the object of psychology (Pavón-Cuéllar, 2015). I want to cross this appearance, and the only way to cross it, is through its theorizing and through its critique, which is also a critique of psychology (Althusser, 1965/2005; Pavón-Cuéllar, 2016, 2017).

I would criticize Holzkamp’s psychology, not only for all the reasons I have already mentioned but also, and simply, because it is still psychology. My problem is with psychology, not exactly with the standard design. Actually, I do not see how psychology could get rid of the standard design, since for me this design has been the psychological design by definition, one that always implies psychologism and psychologisation. The standard design has always been an integral part of the meaning of psychology. This is not to say that psychology has a fixed meaning once and for all. The idea of the essential connection between psychology and the standard design does not result from a linguistic essentialization and fetishization, but from the historical observation of what psychology has been up to now.
I agree with Holzkamp (1996/2013a) when he says that the psychological standard design “is not what it pretends to be”; it is not the “stimuli-constellation” or “operationalization of hypotheses as dependent of independent variables”, but, rather, “a segment of the real world” from which “psychology draws its professional identity” (p. 266). I completely agree with this, but I do not understand why Holzkamp clings to this identity, and finds it “reasonable not simply to brush” the standard design “as deficient”, but “to preserve its identity constituting function” (p. 266). As an identity constituting function, the standard design involves the social-political positioning of psychologism with its ideological functions. Holzkamp knows these functions very well and would probably agree with me that they are enough to justify the suppression of the standard design. By suppressing it, we would also put an end to psychology, of course. We would not be able to preserve psychology. But why should we need to preserve psychology? Just because it constitutes our professional identity as psychologists? But then, why should we need this identity? Just to earn our living?

Conclusion

It would be unfair and naive to pretend that the profitable professional identity of psychologists is the only reason that justifies the survival of psychology. I think there are deeper reasons for this survival, one of which has been unwillingly exposed by Holzkamp’s theory of conduct of life. In a sense, it is true that this theory involves a “meta-theory of psychology in its entirety” (Holzkamp, 1996/2013a, p. 295), since what we currently call “psychology”, as a basic device and not simply a superstructural supplement of liberalism, aspires in its entirety to the liberal ideal of liberty to conduct one’s own life (Mariátegui, 1930/1976, p. 146; Horkheimer, 1932/2008, pp. 33-34).

We cannot refute an ideal, of course, but we may ask ourselves if this ideal may be, or may become, real. Beyond the non-conclusive Kantian antinomy freedom-causality, or the modern undecidable duality agency-determination, is it really possible for me to conduct my everyday life? Is it possible to give meaning to reality and thus have a possibility to freely act despite the material structural determination? Holzkamp’s response is affirmative. But I would use his own words to say that his perspective (1988/2013b), like the one of interactionism, “neglects the material processes of economic reproduction and its inherent power structures (inaccessible to hermeneutical elucidation), which objectively determine, channel and limit the freedom of giving meaning to reality” (p. 33).
The power structures can easily exert their power and give their meaning to reality by convincing me that I’m freely giving this meaning to reality. My feeling of being free can be itself an effect of the structures (Marx, 1846/2014). When I feel that I am conducting my life, why should I be sure of my feeling? Is it not possible that my feeling deceives me? Could it not be that something or someone else conducts my life while I feel I am conducting it? But who or what might conduct my life instead of me? Actually the question is not only who might conduct my life, but who owns this life?

Whose life are we talking about? At first sight, it is my life, of course. Even on second thought, it may be considered my life, at least in the liberal perspective. But even in the Marxist representation of capitalism, life must belong to the workers who freely sell their life, their labour force, as a commodity, and this is what differentiates a proletarian from a slave, as we know that the slave’s life is owned and sold by his master, while the proletarian’s life is owned and sold by the proletarian himself. However, once the proletarian has sold his life, this life no longer belongs to him. It belongs to capital. It is absorbed by the vampire of capital, of dead labour, or dead life.

Life thus becomes capital, which from the Lacanian point of view is nothing more than a symbolic value. From this point of view, such a symbolisation, or transformation, of real life into the symbolic value of capital, may still be conceived as the basis of an alienation that affects everything in everyday life. Life would be alienated or taken by that which Lacan calls the big Other, the symbolic system of culture, which might thus own and conduct the subject’s life. This life would be the Other’s life.

The Other would thus be the subject of the human subject’s life, the reality of the human essence as Marx understands it, as the ensemble of social relations. Should we then conceive these relations as the subject itself? If we do so, the subject must not be reduced to either the traditional psychological individual subject in social relations, or the alternative subject offered by Holzkamp’s critical psychology, “the subject within the context of her/his conduct of everyday life” (Holzkamp, 1996/2013a, p. 314). After all, how can we distinguish this context from the subject within it? How can we separate this subject from the Other? And how can we disentangle the Other’s necessities of action from the subject’s possibilities to act? These imaginary possibilities might be just the psychological representation of those symbolic necessities and real impossibilities that can only be analysed through a metapsychology of the big Other’s conduct of our life. Such metapsychology was actually foreshadowed by Holzkamp. It precisely corresponds to psychoanalysis “interpreted from positions critical of society, as, for example, in Freudo-Marxism and its newer versions”, which “can be read perfectly well as a theory of suppressed, stunted subjectivity
under the pressures of social constraints and contradictions” (Holzkamp, 1988/2013b, p. 31). These constraints and contradictions are the blind spot of Holzkamp’s psychology of the subject’s conduct of everyday life.

References


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Duration and subjectivity: 
The impact of Bergson on Holzkamp

Martin J. Jandl

Abstract
The intention to link Bergson and Holzkamp may seem absurd, as Bergson's philosophy has been considered “irrational” since Cassirer’s and Horkheimer’s verdicts. If one discards long established misunderstandings though, a common theme emerges that is shared between both thinkers: the critique of quantifying psychology based on a finely-worded idea of man. This commonality is clearly accentuated in Holzkamp’s critique of the psychology of learning (1) and Bergson’s critique of psychophysics (2). Against the backdrop of Bergson’s conception of memory as an intermediary between perception and sensation and as a faculty of action (4), a closer reading of Holzkamp’s determinations of the learning subject and his replacement of the term “memory” with “retention-remembering” (3) raises the question whether Holzkamp was not an enthusiastic reader of Bergson’s. However, instead of focusing on this speculation in the conclusion (5), I will address the opportunity of a new “psycho-science” – specifically psychotherapy science.

Keywords
duration, intuition, subjectivity, critics of mainstream psychology, memory, retention-remembering
The confusion and barrenness of psychology is not to be explained by calling it a “young science”; its state is not comparable with that of physics, for instance, in its beginnings. [...] For in psychology there are experimental methods and conceptual confusion. [...] The existence of the experimental method makes us think we have the means of solving the problems which trouble us; though problem and method pass one another by.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations

1.

Klaus Holzkamp constructs his work dialectically – dialectically in the sense that every false theory contains a kernel of truth, which, after being secured through argumentation, must be preserved in a better synthesis obtained by determinate negation. Therefore, Learning, Holzkamp’s last work, is not a simple contradiction to the (conventional) psychology of learning, but the successful attempt at a reinterpretation.

To equate learning with the simple storage of information, which we receive in a more or less pronounced compulsory setting, constitutes such a gross reduction of the learning process that it barely avoids being a glaring misconception. In contrast, Holzkamp considers learning to be an opportunity for expanding one’s individual independence and thus preserving or even establishing one’s individual life interests (Holzkamp, 1995, p. 11). Of course, this thesis echoes emancipatory thinking, which, however, is found not only in the Marxist and socialist tradition but in the modern era as a whole. To put it drastically: the learning concepts of mainstream psychology use the oppressed pupil as a starting point. The externally determined circumstances of schooling, which are difficult for the pupils to understand, seamlessly continue in the experimental settings of psychological laboratories (Holzkamp, 2005, p. 13). The learner of mainstream psychology is by no means a free subject, but an organism responding to stimuli.

Holzkamp prefaces his reinterpretation with astonishment over the fact that the psychology of learning is still being mentioned at all. At the famous conference at the Swedish Umeå University in 1984, contributions about stimulus-response learning were summarily dismissed as “animal learning” and their representatives ridiculed as “animal psychologists”; by contrast, human learning is distinguished by “awareness”. To draw conclusions about human
learning through insights gained via animal experiments is quite simply inadmissible. Moreover, Holzkamp points to the well-known evidence base regarding the typal characteristics of learning mechanisms, which also disagrees with the idea of applying knowledge gained from animals to human learning processes or findings about one species to another. But, apparently, about 30 years of intensive animal experimentation in the service of human psychology are “not that easy to disregard” (Holzkamp, 2005, p. 45), since at the time the approach ensured psychology’s supposed ascent to the realm of natural sciences.

The reinterpretation of classical conditioning is achieved by a reformulation of the conventional *if-then* statement, which is aimed solely at the temporal proximity of CS and UCS. The conventional understanding of the conditioning process is defined as follows: “*If*, shortly before a certain stimulus (UCS), to which the test person consistently reacts in a specific manner (UCR), another stimulus is introduced which did not cause any reaction in the test person at first (CS), *then* the test person (after a certain number of repetitions) will react to the CS in the same (or a similar) manner as to the UCS, thus showing a conditional reaction (CR).” (Holzkamp, 2005, p. 47) Instead, this should read: “*If* a certain stimulus (CS) announces, signals, etc. the arrival of another stimulus (UCS), *then* the test person (after a number of repetitions) will respond to this (originally neutral) reference stimulus (CR) alone in a similar way as to the signalled stimulus (UCR).” (Holzkamp, 2005, p. 48) The latter definition of the conditioning process suggests that this is not a process with the characteristics of a natural law, but that the test persons interpret the laboratory situation and act accordingly: this does not constitute conditional behaviour but reasoned action. Even in restrictive situations, people act highly reasonably. It is imperative not to remove the situational embedding of the relationship between the signal and the signified from the premise – to do so means to be guilty of gross underdetermination (Holzkamp, 2005, p. 48). “*Classical conditioning* in humans [means] reasonable action in case of extremely limited access to reality – in particular, through situational and/or experimental withdrawal of insight into such factual and social discrepancies between the ‘unconditioned’ and the ‘conditioned stimulus constellation’ that would have made different resolutions ‘reasonable’”. (Holzkamp, 2005, p. 51)

If people in laboratory situations are thought of as acting, one realizes that the assumptions regarding UCS and CS are levelled and that alternatives to action implementation are extremely limited. Here, Holzkamp (2005, p. 52) points to the fact that Pavlov ensured the consistency of salivary secretion as UCR and CR by fastening the dog to a rack and thus taking away the dog's species-specific response to the food, namely to brush against the CS, whining and wagging its tail – meaning that even the original experiment, which became
the basis for a longstanding research tradition, was based on massive experimental restriction on the behaviour, which, unfortunately, will not improve subsequently in favour of the test animals (i.e., Devereux, 1988, pp. 25ff.).

Operational conditioning comes a little closer to the definition of learning as an extension of options, since it is the behaviour of the animals that leads to positive or negative reinforcement. Therefore, it is not difficult to find an if-then statement that, in the case of people, refers to actions under laboratory conditions: “If a person repeatedly has received a reward for a certain action, then they sensibly will repeat the action (in the absence of other premises) for the purpose of reintroducing the rewarding event.” (Holzkamp, 2005, p. 55). In this and in the case of cognitive learning theories, it is easy for Holzkamp to map out the patterns of rationale that test persons will follow in an experimental setting – which confirms that the supposedly scientific psychology does not earn this status on account of its subject matter, but at best because of the statistical methodology it uses, the result of which, however, is that the research subject, the human being, is treated as a thing, meaning that they are de-humanized and de-subjectivised.

Even this short outline shows that Holzkamp’s criticism of mainstream psychology lies in how its idea of man is flawed. This objection dates back to his early analyses, which mapped out the implicit idea of man in psychology (Holzkamp, 1972), which in turn likely was inspired by Martin T. Orne (1962): the human being or subject is reduced to a producer of behavioural data by exclusive examination from a third person perspective, and the theoretical connection of the data is either not provided at all (behaviourism) or by using AI models (cognitive psychology). This approach negates available lifeworld-related knowledge, but also non-scientific concepts of the human psyche or the subject, and dismisses them as pre-scientific nonsense in favour of a desperate striving for being considered a true science. In other words, Holzkamp vigorously opposes the reduction of human beings in psychological research and proposes a different idea of man, which requires a different psychology. Holzkamp’s idea of man highlights the person acting independently, or rather the person who acts highly reasonably. Action must be clearly distinguished from behaviour and must be preferred as a categorical principle.

Subject science, as Holzkamp envisions it, considers the subject a centre of intentionality which experiences other people as other centres of intentionality and uses the inter-subjective space thus created to constitute a reciprocal interlocking of perspectives: “With this standpoint, I am not neutral in the world, but relate to it as a sensory-physical, needy, interested subject. My objectives, plans, and intentions as characteristics of my intentionality are content statements and proposals for action from the standpoint of my life interests. Accordingly, I
perceive the other as the center of intentionality of their life interests, which relate to mine in certain ways.” (Holzkamp, 2005, p. 21) The intentional relation to the world should not be considered a cognitive or mental act, but includes the active realization of actions (Holzkamp, 2005, p. 23). People act freely because they act for good and “my own respective” reasons. Environmental circumstances are used as premises in the explanation of resolutions and represent the recalcitrant reality, so to speak. The realization of resolutions via actions constitutes a change of the premises, meaning the recalcitrant reality – wherein lies the hope that humans are creating a world in which they will feel at ease (Holzkamp, 2005, p. 24; also Holzkamp, 1985).

It would be exciting and tempting to break down all the philosophical thoughts Holzkamp processes – the list of inspirational sources ranges from Husserl to Sartre and Merleau-Ponty to Habermas; not to omit constructivist idea providers from Dingler and Lorenz to Janich. Still more tempting to question the coherence of Holzkamp’s theory of action itself; does he align the relation of cause and action too closely with the relation of cause and effect? I am going to push all this aside and ignore it. I am concerned with the identification of a thought-motif, not the meticulous description of possible influences – the motif, to be specific, that designed a psychological model to counter the deplorable state of mainstream psychology and on this basis called for a different approach to the psyche. Holzkamp is not simply about criticism but about counter-design, reconsideration, and different ways of research. This is a motif he shares with Bergson.

2.

Henri Bergson’s fight against the third person perspective in psychological research begins about 80 years before Holzkamp’s attack, and the opponent is not yet so powerful. In effect, it is the delicate bloom of psychophysics, which only carries the first hints of the quantification ambitions of psychology. Bergson, clearly Holzkamp’s precursor in this, does not criticize Weber and Fechner – whose theory he also calls “peculiar” (Bergson, 2008c, p. 237) – and a number of French psychophysicists, simply because of the triteness of their “findings”, but develops a model of the psyche that will have an ongoing impact on the 20th century. Bergson’s criticism is based on an independent design of the psyche, probably with the idea of providing a foundation for a different psychology.

Psychophysics assumes constant sensation when the stimulus remains unchanged. Only a change in the stimulus leads to a change in sensation. Bergson, like later his successor Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1974), is up in arms
about this assumption: a five-minute observation of an (immobile) vase differs at the beginning from any other moment of the observation. According to Bergson, this difference is due to memory, which builds up more and more with every second of observation and thus “pushes” something into the observation. Even the most monotonous observation cannot be compared to any physical system in a state of equilibrium. The fact that the observer knows how long they have been steadily looking at an unchanging object will constantly modify their gaze. Thus, boredom may develop or an ever-increasing interest in details – memory pushes recent moments or moments from some time ago into the observation, into the psychical event. Bergson postulates change even in the context of the most monotonous situation, featuring the best-known thing, namely ourselves: „The truth is that we change without ceasing, and that the state itself is nothing but change.” (Bergson, 2013, p. 12)

Change is by no means the juxtaposition of discontinuous moments. There is no phenomenological way to disprove the feeling that certain experiences enter our awareness with particular verve, but for Bergson these strong experiences are “the beats of the drum which break forth here and there in the symphony” (2013, p. 13). Strong experiences are part of the flow of consciousness or the “fluid mass of our entire psychological existence”. “Each is only the best illuminated point of a moving zone which comprises all that we feel or think or will – all, in short, that we are at any given moment. It is this entire zone which in reality makes up our state. Now, states thus defined cannot be regarded as distinct elements. They continue each other in an endless flow.” (Bergson, 2013, p. 13) Bergson labels this endless flow, the reality of the entire psychological existence, “duration”. Change and duration are inextricably linked. Bergson’s use of “duration” runs counter to the usual understanding that that which lasts does not change. As far as psychological life is concerned, time is the substance of which it is composed (Bergson, 2013, p. 14).

Time, or, in the case of the psyche, duration is the substance of which the ego is composed. The ego does not float timelessly over a changing or constant psychic life – as an unfortunate mental lapse of Husserl’s (2013) suggests – but continues like life itself. Consequently, Bergson states that there is no substance that is “more resilient” or “more substantial” than duration. It embraces and makes present, past, and future possible. „If our existence were composed of separate states with an impassive ego to unite them, for us there would be no duration. For an ego which does not change does not endure, and a psychic state which remains the same so long as it is not replaced by the following state does not endure either.“ (Bergson, 2013, p. 14) From this follows a thought as keenly deduced as it is well formulated: “Duration is the continuous progress of the past
The concepts Bergson formulates in *Creative Evolution*, from which I quoted so far, can be found as early as in his first book. There, in *Time and Free Will*, Bergson developed his counter-model for the quantification of psychical phenomena. The main idea is that all spatially determined entities are distinct: we can clearly distinguish trees from bushes and these from other objects – and that which is clearly distinguishable, can be counted. Spatiality and quantification are directly related. Mental states, subjective states, cannot be separated from one another – as already established (see above). Bergson insists on the autonomy of the psyche beyond a spatial, quantifiable definition. However, he does not deny that sensations are linked to external causes. Yet mental states occur in the “depth of the mind” and by no means show “solidarity” with external causes (Bergson, 2012, p. 22). Bergson moves teleology and thus freedom before the causal dependency demanded by psychophysics: “Either sensation has nothing to do, or it is nascent freedom.” (Bergson, 2012, p. 32)

Contrary to psychophysics, which is fixated on causality, it is the directionality of the consciousness, its teleological orientation that moves stimuli into the focus of attention in the first place. “The affective state must then correspond not merely to the physical disturbances, movements or phenomena which have taken place, but also, and especially, to those which are in preparation, those which are getting ready to be.” (Bergson, 2012, p. 32) It is not the objective increase in stimulus alone that leads to an increase of the intensity of the experience, but the increase in stimulus in combination with the anticipation and bias of the person exposed to the stimulus. As the stimulus increases, the response to the stimulus changes, and this is what leads to an increase in intensity.

One is inclined to view an affective state as nothing but the conscious expression of an organic stimulus or the internal reaction to an external cause (Bergson, 2012, p. 31). But do pleasure and pain, to name two affective states here, really express what is happening within the organism right then? Is it not also their function with regard to stimuli to “announce those which are to follow” (Bergson, 2012, p. 31)? What is the difference between an organism that functions purely automatically and an organism experiencing states of consciousness between physical reactions? “If pleasure and pain make their appearance in certain privileged beings, it is probably to call forth a resistance to the automatic reaction which would have taken place.” (Bergson, 2012, p. 32) Humans are not “automatons”, but conscious beings. The intensity of affective sensations is therefore not the awareness of the involuntary movements “which are being begun and outlined, so to speak, within these states, and which would
have gone on in their own way” (Bergson, 2012, p. 33). Consequently, pain should not be compared to a note on a scale which grows louder and louder, but with a symphony “in which an increasing number of instruments make themselves heard” (Bergson, 2012, p. 33). The intensification of an affective sensation such as pain is guided by the interest or rather the involvement of the entire organism. “Within the characteristic sensation, which gives the tone to all the others, consciousness distinguishes a larger or smaller number of sensations arising at different points of the periphery, muscular contractions, and organic movements of every kind: the choir of these elementary psychic states voices the new demands of the organism, when confronted by a new situation. In other words, we estimate the intensity of a pain by the larger or smaller part of the organism which takes interest in it.” (Bergson, 2012, p. 33)

What is true for pain is also true for pleasure. “What do we mean by a greater pleasure except a pleasure that is preferred?” (Bergson, 2012, p. 35) The intensity of a pleasurable sensation lies in the fact that the body gives itself to it completely, sinks into it, and rejects every other sensation (Bergson, 2012, p. 35). A keynote turns into a symphony that requires a whole orchestra: the body becomes more and more involved when we perceive an increase in intensity. Bergson does not consider this a simple “more” or a quantitative increase in sensation but a qualitatively different absorption of the whole body by a sensation. This also applies to “many” conceptual sensations, since these also have affective character (Bergson, 2012, p. 35) – such as light sensitivity, olfactory sensibility, and auditory, taste, or temperature sensations. That the increase in intensity results from physical involvement applies to all of them. Bergson argues that the way to differentiate between different levels of intensity with regard to sensation lies in the effort or defensive attitude toward the stimulus, which results from physical involvement – thus, he indicates clearly that this is a matter of something qualitatively different, because, in phenomenological terms, our respective intentions differ.

Bergson easily explains the phenomenon of why intensity is (falsely) considered in quantitative terms. When the respective sensation loses its “affective character” and passes into the state of imagination, the physical response tendency moves into the background and the object which caused the reaction into the foreground. The cause is extensive and thus measurable, which closes that vicious circle of thought. “We thus associate the idea of a certain quantity of cause with a certain quality of effect; and finally, as happens in the case of every acquired perception, we transfer the idea into the sensation, the quantity of the cause into the quality of the effect. At this very moment, the intensity, which was nothing but a certain shade or quality of the sensation, becomes a magnitude.” (Bergson, 2012, p. 38) In order to personally experience
this idea, Bergson proposes to take a pin and slowly stab it into one’s own left hand. At first, one will feel a slight tickling sensation, followed by a touch, followed by a sting that transitions into a localized pain and finally radiates into the surrounding area. But these are different qualitative sensations, “variants of the same”. Bergson adds something else: the effort felt in the right hand, which does execute the motion and has to do more work with increasing depth of penetration, is reinterpreted into the intensity of the sensation, cause and effect are reversed so that quality may become quantity (Bergson, 2012, p. 38; and also Bergson, 1991, p. 40).

This physical involvement, the “collectivity of the shocks received by the organism” (Bergson, 2012, p. 38), can also be applied to auditory sensation, which yields clear nuances of intensity. A highly intense sound captures the attention completely, thus suppressing all other sounds. The listener will also perceive a characteristic vibration in the head or even in the body – but this does not change the fact that the sound perception does not correspond to the vibration or could be reduced to it. On the other hand, the physical epiphenomena cannot be denied. On top of that, people listening to intense sounds tend to think about how much effort it would take them to produce a sound in this volume (Bergson, 2012, p. 39). If one produces one note after another, there will be a short pause between notes, a discontinuity, and that suggests the association of notes as discrete points in space. Bergson admits that it is this physicality that allows quantification, yet he contends: “But the sound would remain a pure quality if we did not bring in the muscular effort which produces it or the vibrations which explain it.” (Bergson, 2012, p. 40) Bergson demonstrates the same for the sensation of temperature as well as for light. (Bergson, 2012, p. 43ff) In anticipation of the Qualia discussion (Nagel, 1996), Bergson (1991, p. 40) asks: “What, indeed, would be a pain detached from the subject that feels it?”

With this, Bergson’s analysis reaches the point at which he differentiates between the surface self and the deep-seated self. This distinction is based on the assumption that the ego comes in contact with the external world at its surface (Bergson, 2012, p. 94). This contact creates successive sensations and these retain something of the reciprocal exteriority that characterizes their causes objectively – which is the reason why “superficial psychic life” takes place in a homogeneous medium (Bergson, 2012, p. 95). This superficial psychic life is distinguished by a symbolic character. “But the symbolical character of such a picture becomes more striking as we advance further into the depths of consciousness: the deep-seated self which ponders and decides, which heats and blazes up, is a force whose states and changes permeate one another and undergo a deep alteration as soon as we separate them from one another in order to set them out in space.” (Bergson, 2012, p. 95) The “deep-seated self” in this
description is reminiscent of Schopenhauer's will, especially the use of the word “force” for its basic characterization and it being the actual decision-making unit. Schopenhauer’s will, objectivized in an individual, also makes the decisions from within the depths of the individual, and passionately. But Bergson’s reception of Schopenhauer is not the topic here. The surface self and the deep-seated self or the “deeper self” (Bergson, 2012, p. 95) form one person. Therefore, the state of the surface self is reflected down in the depths of the ego, for it is reciprocal exteriority to which material objects owe their co-existence in space. This reflection has consequences: “little by little our sensations are distinguished from one another like the external causes which gave rise to them, and our feelings or ideas come to be separated like the sensations with which they are contemporaneous.” (Bergson, 2012, p. 95)

A legitimate question arises: if consciousness is homogenized in everyday life, how does Bergson know that this interweaving heterogeneity of states of consciousness even exists, that there is thus a deeper self which can be separated from the surface self? The answer lies in dreams. When dreaming, the surface self is switched off, duration no longer measured but felt, and full quality – spatial quantity, the distinction between different thoughts and emotions is lifted in dreams (Bergson, 2012, p. 95). “The imagination of the dreamer, cut off from the external world, imitates with mere images, and parodies in its own way the process which constantly goes on with regard to ideas in the deeper regions of the intellectual life.” (Bergson, 2012, p. 103) It is not only his dream theory that makes Bergson precursor and inspiration to Freud and Adler, but also a different thought, which can be found in Matter and Memory: “Now, in every way, dreams imitate insanity.” (Bergson, 1991, p. 170) But, unfortunately, this connection shall not concern us here and must therefore be dropped again after this mention.

Duration cannot only be grasped in dreams, but also in everyday life (Bergson, 2012, p. 96). The deep-seated self “sees” itself in its own quality through intuition. “Intuition is what encompasses mind, duration, and pure change.” (Bergson, 2008a, p. 45) For intuition, change is essential. Intuition is a “direct contact of the self with the self” (Bergson, 2008a, p. 44); it is immediate consciousness. “There is only one thing, the continuous melody of our inner life – a melody that lasts and will last indivisibly from the beginning to the end of our conscious existence. And that is our personality.” (Bergson, 2008b, p. 169)

Just as Holzkamp reinterprets conditioning as acting in flawed situations as well-reasoned acting under a certain premise and thus counteracts behavioural psychology with a psychological design that puts the free person instead of a biofeedback automaton at its centre, Bergson responds to psychophysics with the symphonic model, which establishes the autonomy of sensation from a postulated
causal dependence on stimuli, because it is the beginning of freedom which manifests in the proposed focus on this or that stimulus and in a more or less strong involvement of the person as a whole. While the “details of interpretation” of modern thinker Holzkamp and romantic thinker Bergson may differ, the motif remains the same.

Assigning Bergson’s philosophy to romanticism may seem counterintuitive, because he did not really live in the era of romanticism. Nevertheless, his motifs are still characterized by romantic influences (Jankélévitch, 1994, p. 64). In this respect, it may be surprising that he formulates a theory of memory in his œuvre that Holzkamp may have used as a template.

3.

The general view is that cognitive psychology overcame behaviourism and ran straight into the next problem – it turns human beings completely into automatons, or, more precisely, into computers. Holzkamp (1995, p. 136) attests to the consistent “homunculisation” that happens in cognitive psychology: a computer is not an acting entity but is programmed and used by acting entities, specifically human beings. If the person who is programming and using the computer is thought of in terms of a computer, it would be necessary for this human to carry another human, a homunculus, inside themselves who would have to program the human computer and use it for their own purposes, ad infinitum. If genuinely human faculties such as thinking, feeling, experiencing, etc., are surreptitiously outsourced into causally describable processes, it becomes necessary to cheat and introduce another entity that is capable of performing these genuinely human faculties. It could also be said that the homunculus problem is a disguised inclusion of the explanandum into the explanans: neurons think, the amygdala feels fear, a certain brain area experiences this or that emotion, etc.

Holzkamp logically and consequently rejects the conception of memory as a mere data storage facility. All memory and multi-memory models can be defined in terms of justificatory discourse. Doing this, it becomes clear “that the ‘strategies’, ‘search processes’, etc. mentioned there refer to activities of the subject which are used ‘reasonably’ to optimize retention and retrieval efficiency.” (Holzkamp, 1995, p. 139) Holzkamp replaces the computer-metaphorically “contaminated” concept of memory with the dual concept of “retention-remembering”. The relation between the two terms is inferential-implicative: “To intend retention without anticipating the requirement for recollection is obviously meaningless from the subject’s standpoint; or, to put it
even more bluntly, the intention to retain, in a certain way, is the same as the intention to remember what has been retained at a later point.” (Holzkamp, 1995, p. 143) Mere repetition does not explain anything; rather, the test persons develop subjective strategies in order to fulfil the anticipated requirement for recollection and thus improve their memory by repeatedly perusing the learning material (Holzkamp, 1995, p. 145) – just as pupils repeat vocabulary and formulas over and over again to pass a test. Memory does not simply “happen”, but is integrated into the context of a person's life. Without the intention of retention and remembering, memory models are open to ambiguous interpretation and, according to Holzkamp, should be reinterpreted from the subject’s point of view.

The “expectancy concept of the subject’s active, change-inducing outreach into their lifeworld” (Holzkamp, 1995, p. 151) must be positioned against the “worldlessness” of behaviourist and cognitive theories. Learning requirements presented to the learner do not necessarily result in the learning process. “To accept the respective subjective learning problem implies [...] that the transition to the (intended) ‘learning’ is a certain attitude (of detachment, decentring, aspectuation, etc.) by which I deliberately resolve not to continue in my usual fashion (since that has led nowhere), but first to orient myself so that I may find indications of where and how it might be possible for me to learn something, and thus deliberately assume the problem of action to be a learning problem (or reject such an assumption for me).” (Holzkamp, 1995, p. 184) To express this in an existentialist way: what individuals are willing to learn depends on their personal design and the resulting realizations. Advancements in learning, which Holzkamp calls “learning leaps”, are characterized as the overcoming of a real limitation regarding one’s approach to the world via an extended approach to the world – what happens is a realization of new possibilities through learning about the subject. “Learning leaps [...] do not happen as an approach to an – in some way – externally determined ‘final state’, but are carried out by me as a learning subject by having ‘good reasons’ to realize a ‘fundamentally’ higher level of access to a certain subject through attempting to overcome a certain learning problem at a certain level of approaching a subject through learning while considering the connection between worldview and extension of disposition/life.” (Holzkamp, 1995, p. 245)

The conception of memory as “data storage” or “inner possession” ultimately lacks the positionality of the acting subject in a world where it must respond to the circumstances into which it was born. In the perspective of the “homo faber”, memory is “a characteristic of the historically grown living situation into which the richness and clarity of the relationships between the individual and their social as well as tangible environment enter into as a
This implies a fundamentally external focus of what is retained – the memory, or what is retained/remembered, should not be viewed as separate from the object that triggered closer examination. This is the point where Holzkamp locates the permanence of what is memorized. “Permanence grows to the extent that what is to be retained can be integrated into existing permanent knowledge structures via depth of access to the subject.” (Holzkamp, 1995, p. 310) The discussion about the “retention time of long-term memory” in cognitive psychology reveals itself once more to be the result of a false concept of human beings, who are thought of as isolated thought apparatuses with physical supplementary equipment, i.e., as cyborgs whose relationship to the world is reduced to the evolutionary concept of adaptation – even though being human is, in fact, better realized using the terms producing, creating, and being in contact.

The subjective relationship to the world refers to the relation of the physical subject within its lifeworld: “my respective” location means a “physical situatedness” (Holzkamp, 1995, p. 253). In addition to this, the “mental-linguistic situatedness” (Holzkamp, 1995, p. 259) and the “personal situatedness” (Holzkamp, 1995, p. 263) have to be incorporated into the conceptual design of the learning subject. Holzkamp formulates the foundations of a psychology the smallest examination unit of which is not the “black box” but the individual in their “my respective” situatedness in the world. In this – if I may allow myself this brief digression at this point – Holzkamp connects with Thompson and Noë, who, in their critical examination of the neuroscientific research about subjective conditions, insist on a paradigm shift insofar as they want the empirical philosophy of Locke and Hume to no longer be applied as the basis for the idea of man used in research, but rather Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of corporeality, which does not underestimate the individual’s intentional relationship with the world (Holzkamp quotes Merleau-Ponty). Noë (2009, p. xiii) illustrates the postulate of human-in-their-world as the smallest research unit even for neuroscientific research with the beautiful sentence that thinking is like dancing: being human means to physically share the world with others. Thompson (2010) offers, in Holzkamp’s words, a reinterpretation of neuroscientific results in terms of Merleau-Ponty. In the “enactive approach”, cognition is “the exercise of skilful know-how in situated and embodied action”; even more: “A cognitive being’s world is not a pre-specified, external realm, represented internally by its brain, but a relational domain enacted or brought forth by that being’s autonomous agency and mode of coupling with the environment.” (Thompson, 2010, p. 18)
Again, I resist the temptation to embed these thoughts into the philosophy of the twentieth century – the endeavour would span a wide range of thinkers from Husserl and Sartre over Wittgenstein and Ryle to Bateson and Varela. Instead, it is imperative to recall the impact of Bergson’s analyses on this motif – that memory and action cannot be separated, and that memory must be approached from the perspective of the homo faber.

4.

While Bergson’s first publication, *Time and Free Will*, establishes intuition as the central faculty, meaning the faculty used by humans to contact their deep-seated self, and strongly criticizes the focus on and entanglement with worldly things that characterizes the majority of the average humans, Bergson’s *Matter and Memory* – probably Bergson’s most ingenious book, according to Jankélévitch (2015, p. 66) – performed a complete about-face, viewing the physical and social worldliness of humans in a positive light (Jankélévitch, 2015, p. 96). The fundamental law of the inner life is now “the focus of our consciousness on action” (Bergson, 1991, p. 176). Intuition is now joined by intelligence. Intelligence is defined as the ability to understand, an “offshoot” of the faculty of acting and thus “a more and more precise, more and more complex, and more and more supple adaptation of the consciousness of living beings to the conditions of existence provided for them” (Bergson, 2013, p. 3). Human intelligence is directed at handling the world, primarily by handling “inanimate objects”. “We are made in order to act as much as, and more than, in order to think – or rather, when we follow the bent of our nature, it is in order to act that we think.” (Bergson, 2013, 336) What we do depends on who we are, and also on what we have already done. We are creating ourselves continually. (Bergson, 2013, p. 17). „[F]or a conscious being, to exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly.” (Bergson, 2013, p. 17)

The reconnection to handling life becomes clear in the following, almost poetic words which *avant-la-lettre* are reminiscent of Camus’ (2015, p. 24) characterisation of the absurd human in *The Myth of Sisyphus*; Bergson states: “Harnessed, like yoked oxen, to a heavy task, we feel the play of our muscles and joints, the weight of the plow and the resistance of the soil. To act and to know that we are acting, to come into touch with reality and even to live it, but only in the measure in which it concerns the work that is being accomplished and the furrow that is being plowed, such is the function of human intelligence. Yet a beneficent fluid bathes us, whence we draw the very force to labour and to live. From this ocean of life, in which we are immersed, we are continually drawing
something, and we feel that our being, or at least the intellect that guides it, has been formed therein by a kind of local concentration.” (Bergson, 2013, p. 221)

Handling life is a constructive process through and through: “In a general way, human work consists in creating utility; and, as long as the work is not done, there is ‘nothing’ – nothing that we want.” (Bergson, 2013, p. 337) It is desire and need, or vital requirements, which drive people to rise up against the void by creating something useful – homo faber creates something full from emptiness. For Bergson, life moves in the direction of the full.

Memory occupies a central position in the physical, needy worldliness of humans and is positioned between perception and action – Bergson speaks of the “deed”. A human being possesses a high degree of indeterminacy, their essence must not be compared to a reflexive automaton – sensation, as stated above, is the beginning of freedom. What is perceived reaches further the freer the animate being happens to be – Bergson (1991, p. 15) claims that this is true for all living creatures and establishes that mammals in general are suspended from being automatons. The freer a living creature, the more indeterminate its action and the further reaching its perception. The fact that freedom almost necessarily results in the indeterminateness of action need not be discussed further – but how do the reach of perception and freedom fit together? The answer to this is memory: “In fact, there is no perception which is not full of memories. With the immediate and present data of our senses, we mingle a thousand details out of our past experience.” (Bergson, 1991, p. 18) Memory “surrounds” the core of the immediate perception and consolidates a multitude of perceptual moments into one – it thus creates the subjective side of the perception of things (Bergson, 1991, p. 19). Consequently, there is no impersonal perception; perception is always perception from a subjective perspective, a perspective that denotes the particular history of a particular person. Perception is my respective perception, and this is because perception is saturated and streamlined by my respective memory. And perception is positioned physically: the objects are interconnected and they turn toward “our body” the side, emphasized by the light upon it, which interests our body (Bergson, 1991, p. 21). One must not make the mistake to regard perception as “a kind of photographic view of things”, because that is a fundamental error.

If one proceeds, as Bergson (1991, p. 51) does, from activity, that is from “our ability to bring about changes in things”, it is reasonable to assume that without an “equal and corresponding outlook” over the past, there can be no “grasp of the future” (Bergson, 1991, p. 53). At the same time, being active gives meaning to movement and the memorization of movements becomes particularly important, indeed the work of memory is of central relevance for action: “to act is just to induce this memory to shrink, or rather to become thinned and
sharpened, so that it presents nothing thicker than the edge of a blade to actual experience, into which it will thus be able to penetrate.” (Bergson, 1991, p. 98)

The memory that has this motoric quality combines physical-subjective positionality with the necessity of action and causes the moments to flare up which are important when dealing with the world. Memory provides answers to the questions the world presents to us – and these answers will differ if the histories of the people involved differ, but they will be similar if the histories of the people involved resemble each other.

Future, present, past – these three appear to be strictly separate. The moment when the future becomes present, the future is destroyed, and the present crumbles as it is carried into the past. This idea, well known since Augustine, is specifically interpreted by Bergson since he emphasizes the basic concept of his theorizing – that is duration: The present must not be thought punctual; it is not a notch in the time axis stretching from future to past. The present is duration (Bergson, 1991, p. 132). The lasting present is described as follows: “What I call ‘my present’ stands with one foot in my past and with the other one in my future.” (Bergson, 1991, p. 132) To make this picture even more vivid: The stretch marked off by between two widely straddled legs is the present – in imagery, it is stretched, but actually it is duration. My present is the consciousness of my own body moving in space (Bergson, 1991, p. 133). The body is a “centre of activities, the place, where the received impressions intelligently choose their path in order to realise themselves in movement; the body, thus, represents the actual state of my becoming, or what is in the state of getting formed in my duration.” (Bergson, 1991, p. 133) Memory materialises as image that is relevant here and now. Thus, this memory leaves the state of being ‘mere memory’ and turns to be a part of the present. Pure memory, however, is powerless (Bergson, 1991, p. 135).

The past and mere memory seems to be pointless when defining the present in this way – since here presence is fully understood in terms of the future, in terms of creating something useful and handy for bodily, needy humans. The ‘promises and threats’ of the material universe attract our attention (Bergson, 1991, p. 138). It is memory that gives orientation to what is to choose and what is to avoid; memories are not dead weights (Bergson, 1991, p. 139), but beacons: Memories create a ‘chain of the same sort’ and, thus, the person’s character “that is present at all decisions and they are present in the actual synthesis of all our past states” (Bergson, 1991, p. 140). The past emotional life exists, hence, in a higher degree than the outer existence (also Bergson, 2013, p. 15). The impression that memories flicker up only then and when simply results from the fact that the duration of the present allows that to become conscious what is useful in the course of action. Consequently, memory is not at all a faculty of
storing things into categories (Bergson, 2013, p. 14) – it is constantly present, drenching and standardises perceptions and guides the actions accordingly to the person’s character that bundles up memories. “Thus, our perception, so momentary it might be, consists of an uncountable set of memorised elements, and, in truth, every perception is already memory. Virtually we perceive the past only; the pure present is the unfathomable progress of the past that nibbles at the future.” (Bergson, 1991, p. 145; Bergson will adhere to the metaphor of ‘nibbling at the future’ in Creative Evolution, see above). These thoughts will take formative influence on Adler – and Bergson’s influence, according to my view, strongly outweighs Adler’s encounter with Freud’s psychoanalysis.

Eventually, Bergson polemicalises against psychologists who compare memories with kink folds engraving increasingly when repeated. Bergson’s reply is clear: The majority of our memories refer to events in our life with one specific date, and thus no repletion; the memories the psychologist speaks about are rare (Bergson, 1991, p. 72). A psychological theory on memory based on repetition is mistaken. Such a theorising should be reinterpreted in the light of a memory theory that gives a better account of the psyche.

5.

Bergson’s ideas were once, according to Foley (2015, p. 107), radical and disputed, but latest when he was awarded with the Nobel prize, Bergson’s influence on philosophers, artists and scientists became highly influential so that a direct reference in the respective works was no longer necessary – everybody knew Bergson – what changed after World War II, first slowly, then rapidly. Thus, it is a fascinating venture to search for clues of Bergson in the writings of philosophers, psychologists, and psychotherapy school founders. The similarities (interpreted as influences) between Holzkamp and Bergson are a small contribution to this venture.

There is a further similarity: Both, Bergson and Holzkamp, share the same destiny. Neither of them was broadly received in mainstream psychology. That deplorable state must not be forgotten, especially the reflection on what humans are must be brought and re-brought into the minds of psychologists since experimental data gaining, data calculation and clinical focusing is simply not the full and satisfying programme of an academic discipline that, in the first place, deals with human subjective states (and not behaviour). However, fortunately there is a silver strip on the horizon since another psycho-discipline emerged in the academic field – psychotherapy science. Psychotherapy science must not be mixed up with quantitative and qualitative psychotherapy research; rather,
Psychotherapy science is the “discipline of the subjective” (Pritz & Teufelhart, 1996), and thus its methodology is hermeneutics. Research designs are applied that are founded on the first-person and the second-person perspective; furthermore, there are radical hermeneutic research strategies (e.g. Greiner & Jandl, 2015; Jandl & Greiner, 2017) aiming at the reflection of view of man in the different psychotherapy school. Psychotherapy science in its academically institutionalised form as ‘geisteswissenschaft’ with immanent clinical application is oriented both on psychotherapeutic treatment and on philosophically oriented reflection on the view of man.

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References

Martin J. Jandl, born 1969, studied philosophy, art history and psychology at the University of Vienna. In his book “Kritische Psychologie und Postmoderne” (“Critical Psychology and Postmodernism”, published 1999 in German only) the procedure of philosophical reflection on psychological theories is first performed. Since then Jandl tries to fight cognitivism as the starting point of the definition of the human being. Jandl tries to strengthen linguistic and praxeological approaches founding his philosophical work on psychology. His investigation topics are philosophy of language, philosophy of science and philosophy of mind. Jandl is Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Psychotherapy Science at the Sigmund Freud University in Vienna, Austria. E-mail: martin.jandl@sfu.ac.at
Conceiving inter-subjectivity in social work: Phenomenology and Critical Psychology

Karl-Heinz Braun

Abstract
The Marxist oriented Critical Psychology and the phenomenological grounded lifeworld-approach have one central common point of reference: human subjectivity which is understood by both as inter-subjectivity. Both approaches have some dissemination in Social Work. But without any particular investigation about their potential, desirable relations and mutual stimulation. The article is a contribution to these issues. For this we want to begin with reconstructing the important steps in the development of Critical Psychology: the establishment of Critical Psychology (1937-1977), the first modification phase (1977-1983) and as the second alteration an extension of the subject-scientifically approach with an additional theory of learning. Thereby we want to reveal also relevant weaknesses in developing Critical Psychology: e.g. the non-recognition of the same origin of work and language; the insufficient thematicization of individual/personal responsibility; the lack of knowledge about ongoing Marxist or Marxist-inspired diagnoses of present time; and, last but not least, the complete abstinence in elaborating approaches for practical actions and projects toward a radical reformism. Even never a reformation project in sense of a full, radical reformism took place. Such weaknesses could be overcome by a systematic reception of lifeworld approach within social work – and, on the other side, this approach could thus improve its theoretical quality by elaborating and adding differentiations to its conception of inter-subjectivity.

Keywords
inter-subjectivity, social work, critical psychology, phenomenology, life-world, reformism

1 This article is a revised and extended version of Braun (2012).
The concept of life-world (Lebenswelt) was developed by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). In his late work, the famous “Crisis” study, it occupies a key position as a basis for the critique of the committed understanding of the rationality of a natural scientific ideal of objectivity of the modern era. The theoretical and methodical distance of the life-world therein, understood as a structural distance towards the dimensions of experience of the relations of intersubjectivity and relationships was, for him, one reason why the barbarism of German fascism had been able to conquer the self-determination claims of the European Enlightenment (comp. Husserl, 1992, §§ 9-15 u. 34-42). For social work (in the FRG), however, this original transcendental-phenomenological concept was not of lasting importance, but rather its decidedly social-theoretical sublation by its integration into a “theory of communicative action”, as first presented by Habermas in 1981.

In doing so he intersected Husserl’s epistemological considerations with social-scientific issues (comp. also Habermas, 1991, p. 34ff u. 41ff) and tapered them to the structurally-charged relationship of system and life-world (cf. Habermas, 1988, chap. VI.2). The (capitalism) critical question was then shown in the theorem of the colonisation of the life-world, by which he understands the transformation and limitation, and also the erosion and destruction of the relative autonomy of social and interactive intersubjective relations of the monetary imperative of the market and the power imperative of the state (cf. ibid. chap. VIII.2).

This basic idea of understanding the process of the individual and collective socialisation as the interrelation between the system and the life-world and the consequences of capitalistic oppression and alienation as a process of colonialisation, has been immediately recognised by social work in its paradigmatic meaning and prolifically incorporated. This first occurred at the Bielefeld conference “Understanding or Colonialisation?” (Müller & Otto, 1984). Later, life-world oriented social work gained systematic form, especially through the works of Hans Thiersch, who effectively evolved this concept from the bottom up through his earlier interaction theoretical considerations (cf. Thiersch, 1977) in a qualitative expansion by means of numerous exemplary studies (cf. Thiersch, 1986, 1992). In the 1980ies he could already emphasize how this subjectivity concept could and should contribute to a largely new understanding of pedagogic action within social work (comp. the result, in Thiersch, 2003).

Widely independent of this theory development, since 1980, there have been intensive efforts within the context of critical psychology and its surroundings to make full use of the understanding of intersubjectivity for the theory and practice of social work or socio pedagogy. This has been done particularly effectively for over a decade at the Department of Social Work and
Social Affairs of the UAS of Fulda. Reference is made to the following events and projects:

- The empirical analysis of subjective reasons as to why heroin addicts can overcome their addiction without pedagogic-therapeutic support (cf. Braun & Gekeler, 1983).


- The lecture series “Practice Analyses of Critical Psychology” in the winter semester 1985/1985 (cf. Braun & Gekeler, 1985) and the 4th International Recess University of Critical Psychology (5-10.10.1987; cf. Dehler & Wetzel, 1988) were both determined by the effort to explore the practical relevance of the understanding of intersubjectivity for different fields of social work.

- These theoretical and conceptual efforts were concluded with the publication, following a research project, of “Subject-theoretical justification of social work action” (Braun, Gekeler & Wetzel 1989).²

At the end of the 1980s, a concept similar to the core propositions “Relationality of system and the life-world” and “The criticism of the colonialisation processes”, which combined the critical-psychological core theorem of the “social mediatedness of the individual existence” with the ”Critique of the alienation of man from nature, society and himself” occurred. However, up to the present, efforts for a critical dialogue have been, for whatever objective causes and subjective reasons, rather rare.³ Against this background, this article aims to address the questions:

- how the critical-psychological concept of intersubjectivity has developed by the constructive accomplishment of critical arguments;

- which of the partial concepts and partial insights which have been developed for life-world related social work are or should still be of interest today;

- or conversely: which findings of life-world oriented social work and its social-theoretical background assumptions for critical psychology have perhaps been, until the present, insufficiently acknowledged or unsatisfactorily addressed as a challenge.⁴

² This emphasis on the understanding of the subjective causes of action then also made possible a first bridge to the approach of Habermas, namely his discourse-ethical draft (cf. Braun, 1992).

³ This includes, in any case, the work of Pantucek, 1988, chap. 3 and 4).

⁴ In the course of the reconstruction of the development of critical psychology, I take some considerations from Braun (2004) where an attempt was made to explore the
1. The founding phase of critical psychology (1973-1977): objective determinateness and subjective determination of object and symbolic meanings

The transition of critical psychology from an abstract and “total” criticism of traditional psychology (cf. Holzkamp, 1972) to its definite negation and concrete sublation was fundamentally promoted by the reception of the cultural-historical school of Russian psychology founded by L. S. Wygotski (1896-1934), especially in the works of A. N. Leontiev (1903-1979). He took the establishment and development of animal life forms and the developmental levels of the organism-environment correlation contained therein as a starting point for his research, explored the transformation into the societal human-world correlation during historical anthropogenesis and conceptualized it to the relation between objectification and acquisition.

Critical psychology has been connected with different focuses during its different stages of development. This is to be briefly reconstructed and so the respective connecting points for a broader understanding of life-world related social work are presented. – The establishment phase involved the publication of “Sensual Awareness” (Holzkamp, 1973), the natural historical analyses of Schurig (1975, 1976) and the motivation studies of Holzkamp-Osterkamp (1975, 1976) and their public conclusion in the presentation of the research results at the 1st international Congress of Critical Psychology (May, 13-15, 1977) in Marburg (cf. Braun & Holzkamp, 1977).

1.1 The objective and symbolical dimension of objectification and appropriation

Leontiev’s concept appropriation of was further developed by the analysis of relations between factual and personal objective meanings and their relations to the symbolic meanings to which all perceptual and thought processes refer:

“As with the factual subject matter meanings experienced by the senses, which in work products – according to the respective objective requirements of social life sustainment – general human purposes are embodied and realised in human activity, so subject matter meanings, perceptible by the senses, which the other person in their production and usage of work product related activities and work disposition are determined according to the necessities of social life sustainment relevance of critical psychology for the social-environment orientation in social work (cf. also Braun, 2008; also on the theoretical history of critical psychology cf. Wetzel, 1999, chap. 2).
objectivity or objectivity based general purposes” (Holzkamp 1973, p. 141). “The factual and personal side of these objective meaning structures are in a relational connection, they have the character of mutual reference of meaning.” (ibid., p. 146)

These structures of meaning are so complex and ambiguous that they themselves need systematic interpretation which goes beyond the purely individual possibilities of interpretation; these interpretation and orientation functions take over the social communication systems and are also the central medium in which thinking and perception unfold:

“The linguistic symbolic emerges … not isolated in the realm of human communication, but is a differentiation result within the process of the objectifying man’s work. In the formation of the linguistic symbolic, only human communication as a symbolic communication gains a new quality.” (ibid. p. 153)

“It also allows the communication about facts that are not present. This being realised from the release of presence is a prerequisite for thinking, which at the same time ‘controls’ the perception as sensory perception. Consequently, “the linguistic symbolic, according to its development from the objective necessities of production, makes possible on the one hand the generalised apprehension of characteristics of the real outside world adapted by social work, and on the other hand by its representative function a prerequisite for the extension of the determination of human reality in abstract thought, so that perception and thinking as a differentiation result of the process of social work are mediated by the linguistic symbolic area.” (ibid., p. 154)

Socially mediated ontogenesis is therefore an appropriation process, as these object and symbolic meanings must be recorded and reproduced in material and non-material actions and so can also be altered. It should be borne in mind, however, that under the conditions of the bourgeois class society by means of fully developed commodity relationship, all these structures of meaning are transformed by the contradiction between use and exchange value, which, at the same time, reproduce and obscure class relations (which Holzkamp at the time interpreted in a polarising way, as that of bourgeoisie and proletariat) (cf. ibid., chap. 7 and 8.2).

This also makes clear the antonym of appropriation is not alienation, because those dimensions of object and symbolic structures of meaning, which suggest the alienation of man from nature, from social relations and from
himself, promote and even force the individual biographically – to concur with Leontiev – are not given but assigned.

In contrast, *expropriation* means the structural elimination (or exclusion) of all relevant forms of social participation (which, for example, is at present concisely and dramatically expressed by the return of the demographic group of the “superfluous”).

### 1.2 Change of conditions by individual and social subjects

The previous description has thus raised the central problem of critical life-world oriented social work, how the comprehensive active material and symbolic appropriation of social life conditions, and thus the surmounting of the expropriation and alienation processes can theoretically be more precisely comprehended. The answer to the question of the relationship between *objective determination* and *subjective determination* contained in the initial phase of critical psychology was found in the concept of *social subjects*:

According to the following, only “social subjects ... can acquire the ‘historical’ magnitude of effectiveness, with which a conscious change of social living conditions is actually possible. Accordingly, individual subjects can influence to a certain degree their relevant living conditions, which are always social living conditions, as groups or classes belong in the same objective position as social subjects with a historically determinant influence and thus, in addition to the conscious social control of reality, also increase the control over their own circumstances.” (Holzkamp 1977, p. 58f, all emphases deleted, K.-H.B.)

Thus, a basic problem of the former concept of critical psychology intensifies: as little as can be doubted that *sociality* and *subjectivity* of individual life activity are part of a practically necessary relation, so should it be asked whether the concept of social subjects does not involve an open and / or concealed objectivism, in the sense that the plenitude and diversity of an individual way of life is increasingly restricted and shortened to those aspects which are of functional meaning to the social reproduction, or for the political enforcement of humane living conditions.

Habermas already pointed out the risk of ignoring the difference between political-state and individual-collective lifestyles in his acceptance speech on receiving the Hegel prize: The concepts and terms of “democratisation” or

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5 This relationship between social and individual subjects has then been systematically developed within the framework of a so-called “political psychology” (cf. Braun, 1978: second and third part).
“politicisation” are problematic when they put the real extension of the political possibilities of development with the collective understanding of needs and life-world experiences (cf. Habermas 1976, p.116f). Even up to the present, in (life-world orientated) social work – for example following American pragmatism – there is a tendency to see democracy not only as a form of government, but also as a form of life (cf. e.g. Richter, 2011, p. 21ff).

However, the fundamental difference between economic and political system integration and life-world social integration is ignored. At the same time however, these difficulties, which continue to the present day, illustrate how complicated it is to make these relationships theoretically appropriate, that is, not to fall into the trap of a purely functional or a merely understanding theory of society.

During the initial phase of critical psychology (Holzkamp-) Osterkamp already directly and indirectly objected to the dedifferentiation of a social and individual way of life: Explicit reference was made to the obvious cognitivism of Holzkamp’s determination of the appropriation of subject and symbolic meanings, which largely excluded the question which subjective relevance each of these structures of meaning have for mankind (cf. Holzkamp-Osterkamp, 1975/76, vol. 2, chap. 4.2.3).

This consideration is still justified today with regard to the debate about moral education (in social work, in which – following the discourse ethics of Habermas – a life-world superiority of the cognition is hypostatized against the emotions, because there is no adequate concept for the understanding of motivation as a generalized emotionality, which is symmetrical to the generalized cognitive justification of social and personal action. (cf. Braun, 1992, p.72ff).

The implicit and subsequent argument of Holzkamp-Osterkamp resulted from the systematic reception of psychoanalysis (especially in its classical, Freudian form). Here, it was already clear that the subjectivity of humans cannot be “traced” back to (or derived from) social relativity, nor restricted to their social-political functionality, but rather manifests its own inherent logic, which makes it possible to understand why individuals can not only change their life conditions, but also voluntarily really want this. It would be obvious circular reasoning – as repeatedly found in different habitus concepts of social work - to explain these motifs from the conditions and functions, which are yet to be changed.

In this context, the critical psychological sublation of the psychoanalytic conflict model (that is, the detachment from the impulse theory recognised as problematic and its integration into the critical-psychological understanding of the subject) gained a central meaning: According to this, people evaluate
objective requests for action (as they arise, for example, from the interior design of a children’s and youth centre) by the standard of their own personal need, and to what extent a more satisfying way of life can be anticipated by its realisation (e.g. by improving the social climate inside and outside these institutions), or if they jeopardise the already gained level of satisfaction of needs (if, for example, public position is taken against latent xenophobia).

The objective side of this risk constellation, which is inherent in every personal emancipation process, consists of the relation of extension of action and limitation of action, the subjective in the expectation of happiness/willingness to perform and anxiety/expectation of failure. When, in the emotional condition, the danger and anxiety side is determined, then it leads to a psychodynamic defence process (if only to a limited extent) in order to maintain the action, reflexion and enjoyment capacity. Their intrapsychical authority is the “superego” and its psychical result is the subconscious as that part of the personal memory, which flees from the conscious relation to my own subjectivity. These self-alienating dimensions are similar to the processes of a “third person” within me; and they also “control” my perception and my thinking processes:

“While the voluntariness of the self-request for the control of needs with ‘justified’ requirements arises from the insight that the fulfilment of demands is also in their own interest, the appearance of the ‘voluntariness’ of the inner compulsion can only be generated and maintained when the fact and origin of the inner compulsion is replaced by the ‘exterior compulsion’ itself, whereby the control body must assume the character of an introjective identification as a further crucial sign of the ‘superego’ in the Freudian sense.” (Holzkamp-Osterkamp 1975/76, vol. 2, p. 349f; all emphases deleted; K.-H.B.)

This results in those “thinking, questioning and action inhibitions, which not only leave the legitimacy of laws and prohibitions, rules and norms of the authoritarian unaffected, but the barriers of existing margins are never used in any way and the given limits are never touched, because only in this way is the appearance of the ‘voluntariness’ of the inner compulsion to be maintained.” (ibid. p. 350)

The contradiction between these two subjectivity concepts within critical psychology was not made clear during the whole establishment phase and therefore have not been dealt with (this happened only in the reconstruction phase after the First Congress in 1977). Nevertheless, this critical-psychological interpretation of psychoanalysis (and the following by Holzkamp, 1985, p. 38ff, which also includes the hermeneutic traditions) has a somewhat exhausted stimulus for life-world orientated social work, because it offers a wide range of
possibilities that systematically take a closer look at the *psychodynamic underlying structure of the life-world drawbacks of modern society*. Here the central contradiction of classical psychoanalysis should be pointed out, which on the one hand takes the side of the subjects whilst on the other hand taking the side of the ruling conditions. Social work also aims to provide support and help for the children, adolescents, adults, and elderly who are entrusted to its care and require assistance, whilst at the same time being endowed with immeasurable control (as a consequence of the contradictory, ever colonializing relationship between system and life-world in capitalism). However, this does not remain external to the interaction relationship, because it leads to a basic social fragility: as a person seeking advice or support, I do not know how far, if at all, I can trust the social workers. For me, they are always a potential threat or source of fear. In this function, they can strengthen and intensify psychodynamic defence processes (if, for example, they urge school dropouts, with open or covert pressure, to return to school and take part in class, which they have justifiably criticized and which cannot at all be changed).

Thus, there arises intensive interdependence between biographically subconscious attitudes and current defence against threat constellations. However, this is often not understood, and there is the expectation that social workers can overcome long-established biographically psychodynamic defence processes within a relatively short time. If they do not succeed, then clients searching for support or advice are degraded as ungrateful, unreasonable, difficult to educate, etc. and the social workers as incompetent, unenthusiastic, etc. But here the fact is ignored, that amongst other things the tendencies towards internationalisation, Europeanization, globalisation, flexibility, the independence of the financial markets or neoliberalism, new control, the slender state, activating the welfare state and prosecution of the poor and protesters, and the connected *new boost of colonialisation* and the resulting increasing *divide between system and social integration* between the effort to communicate within the life-world all do not remain external. They lead rather to a deepening of communicative distortions. As displayed, for example, by the increase of xenophobia, especially Islamophobia. Here, *other* people, believers of a different faith become *strangers*, with whom I am by no means connected, in the worst case I feel threatened. In the psychoanalytic concept of the "*other mind*", this interactive and intrapsychic alienation tendency has been brought to the (usually not critically meant) concept: If my fellow human is no longer the other person with whom I communicate and who I understand, but is or becomes the stranger, with whom building such forms of interaction is no longer possible, then I

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6 Dörre (2009) in this case speaks of a new settlement by the dynamics of financial market capitalism.
become alien to myself. For even in my uniqueness, I can only understand myself “through” my fellow humans; even more: only through such uncensored efforts to communicate, can I develop my own unique “identity”. As this erosion and destruction of interpersonal relations contradicts my fundamental need for social integration, I must hide these self-hostile ways of action, thought and judgement from myself and others, repelling, repressing, denying, rationalising, reinterpreting through projections, etc. However, these fundamental limitations of the interactive efforts to communicate can also assume the character of deprivation, which stands for the “widespread disease” of depression, which is classed as a specific transitional form between “normal” alienation and manifest mental illnesses.

The fact that today it has assumed such a massive character, is certainly also attributed to the previously mentioned new thrust of colonialisation, and it is certainly due to the fact that now approximately 35% of people in highly-developed capitalist countries in the West have to live under precarious conditions. In life-world orientated social work, there is now both the tendency not to analyse this inner connection between the new crises of capitalist societies and the social pathologies with any clarity, and at the same time to clearly underestimate their consequences for the limitations of the ability to act, reflect and experience (in practice both aspects are somehow recognised, but they play almost no role in the concrete work).

For this reason, a systematic, sociological and subject-scientific enlightened understanding of psychoanalysis would make both the drama of our epochal situation clear as well as the search for challenging and realistic perspectives (cf. also Braun, 2006).

2. First reconstruction phase (1977-1983): the structural difference between a social and individual way of life

In this developmental phase, an attempt is first made to overcome the previous mediation difficulties of objective and intersubjective structural analysis by the means of reconstruction of the fundamental theoretical architectonics in a sustainable way. It found its expression in Holzkamp’s “Groundwork of Psychology” (1983) and was introduced and discussed publicly for the first time at the 1st International Recess University of Critical Psychology (7-12 March, 1983) in Graz (cf. Wetzel, 1983).
2.1 The equiprimordiality of social and individual development processes

Very much in the spirit of historical research paradigms, this reconstruction, which increasingly assumed the character of a refounding of critical psychology, was achieved by further elaboration of the natural historical development of the human-world-context.⁷

Here, the special focus was on the second qualitative leap within the historic anthropogenesis: The corresponding research (cf. e.g. Autrum, 1983; Langaney et.al., 2000, third act, esp. p. 175ff. and 199ff.) clearly shows there is no continuity between those forms of society which already created their food and circumstances by working, and exchanged their products, but reproduced their social existence at the level of mere immediacy.

Only with the formation of the temple and palace economies (for the first time in Mesopotamia around 3,800 BC) was a social reproductive level achieved, which drove the selective advantage of social work and communication so far that it overrode itself. Since then there has been a measurable continuity of mankind. – These empirical findings completely independent of critical psychology are then theoretically generalised by Holzkamp as a breach of the original unity of social and individual reproduction (from which Holzkamp had initially proceeded; cf. par. 2.1):

“On the one hand, the individual is involved in the creation of generalised social possibilities of life, and on the other hand sustains and develops his individual existence by realising the thus created possibilities of life, the link between these two moments is not directly produced by the individual, but is mediated by society as a whole, it depends on the degree and nature of the specialised circumstances, as to how the form of individual contribution to social life extraction and the possibility for individual livelihood and development are related to each other.” (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 193)

Such psychosocial development processes can therefore be characterised as alienating, which endanger ecological and economic livelihood, which do not

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⁷ Among the little-noticed similarities in the research methods of critical psychology and the communication theory of Habermas (which does not imply similar results) is the systematic inclusion of research of historical anthropogenesis (cf. Habermas, 1998, chap. V 1/2). This interconnection of phylogenetic and ontogenetic modes of argument has almost been ignored by life-world oriented social work. For this reason, it is not only rather indifferent towards the problematic psychoanalytical understanding of human (impulsive) nature, but is rather helpless towards the new thrust of the biologizing of social modes of action and especially the cognitive development potentials.
guarantee the individual sufficient development and learning contexts and create inadequate possibilities to make individual contributions to the provisions of general existence – including political and cultural development.

Such social circumstances are regarded as *expropriating*, which destroy nature, exclude individuals from economic, political and cultural participation and do not provide development and learning opportunities.

With this breach of immediacy of the relation between system reproduction and individual way of life, social life conditions which have been hitherto understood as action *requirements*, become *possibilities* for action. This possibility relationship between the prerequisites for action and modes of action is, however, no arbitrary relationship, because people are *turning to society because of their need*, so they are “oriented towards sociality”. This has its most general foundation in the formation of the human nature even during the first developmental stage of historical anthropogenesis, where the early form of the direct sociality already existed, but at the same time the laws of selection were still genomically effective:

> “Thus the biological functional basis of the learning and development ability of hominids evolved .... more and more into the biological functional basis for the ability of social organisation of life extraction. Humans, by such a cumulative process of genomic information, become the only beings, which are capable of gaining social life extraction because of their ‘species specific’ biological developmental potential. Thus, at this point, any contradiction between the ‘nature’ and ‘sociality’ of the human being cannot be construed: Man gains in the phylogenetic way to the dominance of the social process - not in a metaphorical, but in the literal sense - his ‘social nature’, that is, natural development potential for sociality.” (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 179f, all emphases deleted, K.-H.B.)

For *ontogenetic* appropriation, these processes have the following consequence: The basic individual developmental discrepancy emerges between the biologically anchored possibility and the need to appropriate social reality in a material and symbolical way, and the factually limited ability and willingness to do so. This discrepancy becomes a personal one, in which the individual

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8 This understanding of human nature is in sharp contrast to that of classical psychoanalysis, which is set against society. Under the conditions of class societies, however, this understanding contains subversive potential for resistance, as it indicates and insists that humans can never be completely oppressed by these dependencies. To this extent, the critical-psychological interpretation of the psychoanalysis of life-world oriented social work can make new dimensions accessible to the relationship of tension between education and leadership, of the educated individual and the society which rejects education.
recognizes these possibilities of action as individual possibilities of development and learning, and can experience or anticipate their realisation inherent to their own need.

Human nature is capable - to the extent that it realises objective possibilities of appropriation in an individual way, and to the extent that it also realises the potentiality of its genetically traditional features as a differentiated biological function of individual sociality.

- This occurs ontogenetically in three central logical development moves (they are both incomplete and not identical to real-biographical progression forms, – e.g. biographical phases; cf. Holzkamp, 1983, chap. 8.2. & 8.3):

In the generalisation of meaning, the subject recognises and evaluates – on the basis of the already evolved ability and willingness to develop self-intentions and to adapt to the intentions of fellow humans (that is, social-intentionality) – the objective and symbolic meanings in one’s directly given social world (e.g. the furniture, the arrangement of the flat into rooms and the regulated relationships of the different persons in it, the different buildings of nursery schools and savings bank and the work relations and social contacts therein) and condenses them step by step to coherent structures (e.g. one’s own residential district), where it is possible to move in a mostly free and confident way, and at the same time tries more and more to exert creative influence on it (e.g. if a child rearranges his room or adolescents group together to rearrange and restructure and old factory building as their meeting place).

The logically following transgression of immediacy then becomes a necessity for the developing and learning subject, when it experiences or perceives and also increasingly recognises that the immediate world is not the ‘whole’ world, but that there are overlapping structural contexts, which cannot be immediately “seen”, but which nevertheless have an impact on one’s own life and coexistence (why is the empty factory building empty or what has this to do with the labour market and social policy).

The subject can only turn its “need” that is dependent on something in immediate life, but which is not present in this immediacy, by crossing this immediacy and establishing a relation between the individual and the way of life as a whole society. The more it can turn this need, the more it develops – as a third developmental move – its generalised capacity for action.

Decisive progress consists of individual developments which are no longer derived from the social, but recognised as being of equal origin: humans are thus initiators of their own development and recognise and acknowledge their possibility of self-education. This also opened up new possibilities for the reception of phenomenology – and vice versa: this reception – as Holzkamp (1984) made clear – essentially contributed to subject-scientific contouring (also
CONCEIVING INTER-SUBJECTIVITY IN SOCIAL WORK

It must be noted here that the relational theoretical determination of the relations between objective assertiveness and subjective determination provide new perspectives, which relate social spatial orientation and life-world orientation in a more precise way than is often the case in social work: accordingly, the social environment is characterised as the immediate side of objective social reality and is integrated into the systemic spaces of the social production and the state/politics.

The life-world encompasses on the one hand the immediate, everyday forms of interaction and collective models of communication, and on the other hand, the “higher level” interaction relationships or overall social life-worlds, within which the immediate is integrated.\(^9\) Moreover, the concept of ontogenesis is based on an approach which does not focus on the conditions and progressive form of growing up, but which as a framework concept is capable of understanding the whole lifespan from birth to death in its internal development discrepancies and dynamics. This is of particular interest for social work with adults as well as older people and the elderly, as these fields of activity have greatly increased in importance.

2.2 Critical-psychological and critical-theoretical understanding of society: fundamental differences

It has already been pointed out in the title and introductory words that not only life-world orientated social work can learn from critical psychology (which has so far been the focus), but also vice versa. The corresponding theoretical challenges (which – as always – have political implications) do not result from social work in a very limited sense, but from their critical-theoretical background assumptions and epoch analyses, which are in considerable contrast to the social understanding of critical psychology, but which, of course, is not external to its understanding of intersubjectivity. In other words: it is a matter of looking more

\(^9\) Here an unsolved problem arises for the critical reception of the original life-world approach, as Husserl (1992, e.g. §§ 36-38, 46-50, 69-71) did not reduce the life-world – as the reception in social work mostly assumes – to its everyday life, but also debated its very complex forms that went as far as mankind as a universal intersubjectivity. If you dispense with the term “sociality subjects” for previously mentioned reasons, then it would have to be clarified how these interaction relationships can theoretically be more precisely determined (the expression “higher-level” [ibid., p. 177]) can only be a metaphor, in other words a substitution).
closely at and analysing the social structures that enable and determine the social aptitude of personal existence. Five problem areas are briefly outlined:

a) The insight into Equiprimordiality of social and individual ways of life is partly withdrawn when social and individual developments are conceived according to a functional mode of thinking:

“How ‘free’, etc. an action may be for, is ‘me’ as a subject always justified by my ‘human qualified needs. As far as .... my actions correspond to my conscious ‘behaviour’ in my life conditions (that is the realisation of possibilities and not just the ‘process’ stated to me as a third person...) I can be at odds with objective interests in life, but cannot be at odds with my human needs and interests in life, as I experience them as my situation. In the sentence, where the human cannot consciously harm himself, is, so to speak the only material a priori of individual science – whereby the standard for what is meant here as ‘harm’, however, cannot be linked to external characteristics such as physical integrity/infirmity, but simply lies in the concrete, historical condition of the respective individual .... In this sense, every action, as long as I perform it consciously and in a ‘justified’ way, is functional for me; for this reason, the concept of function in its subject-scientific specification is determined by the substantive necessity of action.” (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 350 all emphases deleted; K.-H. B.)

This understanding of the personal development process thus suggests a kind of intrapsychological subjection to conditions: since my actions as those of my fellows are always subjectively functional (if they are not unconscious), there can be no experience or knowledge in the consciousness or pre-awareness that I can exactly harm myself with certain actions (if, for example I evade certain development requirements that I have recognised, thus compromising the relationship that is important to me).

In this way, I can justify every kind of personal escape of responsibility to myself and others, because I do not seem to recognise the difference between reality and possibility or functionality and legitimacy within my conscious or pre-aware way of life and therefore cannot or should not have a “guilty conscience”. This, however, points to a deeper theoretical problem:

b) Critical psychology has always distanced itself from concepts that want to dictate social or communicative rules to subjects (see, for this, the multifaceted argumentations and distinctions in Holzkamp, 1997b, second and third part). As far as authoritarian attitudes of entities or persons are concerned, one can unanimously agree with them. Unfortunately, here critical psychology throws the baby out with the bath water, because it does not sufficiently distinguish between normalisation and normativity. This ambiguity results not least from the fact that
– if I am correct until today – intersubjective communication is thought of as being mainly *speechless* (despite its sophisticated concept of symbolic meanings!) and thus *conclusively* enclosed *normative* requirements in language are ignored in favour of *everyday communication*.

This “compulsion” is *performative* in the sense that the recognition of these rules of communication is the prerequisite for people to be able to communicate at all (one does not have to explicitly agree with them). Critical psychologists also recognise them as human beings in *a practical way*, even if they doubt them theoretically (in this respect their radical scepticism is something of a token gesture).

As I begin to communicate as a language capable subject (and this is part of the ability to act, reflect and experience), I have already recognised these claims of validity. Thus, for example, in a case study (whether, for example, a girl should be removed from the family after sexual abuse by her father) is, on the one hand a *question of truth* (in the example: “What exactly happened in this case of sexual abuse?”) but it is also a question of the *correctness* of an action (“Was it correct that the girl had waited for a longer time before turning to the youth welfare office for help?” and “Is it right to remove the girl from the family even if the father no longer lives with the family, but the mother concealed or covered up the sexual abuse?”). Especially for the socio-pedagogical action, the claim of *truthfulness* of expressions is significant (whether – in the previous examples – the girl really says what she thinks and feels). If nothing else, it is about the *comprehensibility* of communication (“Can the girl make her psychological situation appropriately clear to the social worker?” and, “Can the social worker describe the different solutions in such a way that the girl can adequately assess the consequences for herself and her social relations, in order to make a decision which best meets her needs and interests and is in this sense rational?”)

In a further understanding, such a professional dialogue (in the sense of an overcoming of immediacy) is also linked to a (potentially) unlimited *public* because it has to be informed of certain social and pedagogical issues, in order to overcome such grievances through political decisions (in the example: the sexual abuse of girls, and also of boys, is informed about in an anonymous way, reports find their way into political cases – e.g. the children and youth reports of the government – and based on this, legal and administrative measures are taken for the protection of the adolescents).

These normative legitimacies can be *violated* by structural distortions of communication, but *cannot be overridden*. Moreover: they are the prerequisite for recognising and overcoming these distortions and pathologies as such.
In other words: the normativity of language reveals the horizon of possibilities of communicative socialisation of the subjects, and, in the name of these human possibilities, criticises the structural (thus not accidental) limitations of these possibilities of communication by the conditions of authority and power.

They thus make an important contribution to the criticism of the social alienation processes and keep the emancipatory perspective of successful communication open. As the contradiction that communicative claims of validity are both recognised and *subverted* in a very different way, *always* penetrates into the consciousness or the subconscious – and this is the starting point for appropriate (self-) education processes.

c) That this normative content of language was and is blocked out in critical psychology, has also to do with the fact that the Equiprimordiality of *work* and *language* is not acknowledged, but that here – in contrast to the relation between social and individual practise – a relation of derivability is assumed. This is something like the functionalistic formation of the Hegel-Marxist concept of totality. On this type of social analysis Habermas correctly noted:

“The analysis was … bound to a holistic understanding of society: a totality which is moral in its origin is torn and mutilated by the division of class, in the modern world by the negligent force of the capitalist economic process. The utopia of the workforce, spelled out in Hegel’s basic terms, inspires the background understanding of criticism towards the political economy, performed in a scientific spirit. This is why the self-exploitation process of the capital can, as a whole, appear as a charm which, once broken, can dissolve into its factual, then rational, administration. In this way, the theory blinds itself to the systemic waywardness of a differentiated market economy, whose control function cannot be replaced by administrative planning without jeopardising the degree of differentiation reached in modern societies.” (1990, 189f)

This also applies analogously to the systemic waywardness of administration and bureaucracy as opposed to life-worlds. – This does not, however, depreciate the Marxist tradition of criticism of capitalism:

“There is a stereoscopic view, which is neither adherent to the surface of modernisation processes, nor directed to the back of the mirror of instrumental reason, but to the ambivalences of rationalisation processes which crush society. Furrows rupture the natural covering and at the same time loosen the soil. Many have learned from Marx, and everyone in their
own way, how Hegel’s dialectic of the enlightenment can be translated into a research program.” (ibid., p. 193)  

d) This drafted theory dilemma of critical psychology has led to the consequence that the alienation and objectification process has been interpreted more completely, society was always thought more static than if there had been no relevant developments within the social epoch of capitalism (which contradicts the basic approach of the historical method) that social criticism was increasingly reduced to ideological criticism, so that the entire analysis assumed the contours of a negative dialectic of intersubjectivity, which at the same time had avant-garde claims.  

Through this kind of “paranoia of the control” – as Sennett (1997, p. 35) wrote about his friend Foucault – the scope for a radical reformism of the reconstruction of sociality and social relations became ever smaller as, for example, the extremely sceptical assessment of the German school reform shows, which leaned strongly on Foucault (cf. Holzkamp, 1993: chap. 4.5; 1997, 271ff)  

By Holzkamp himself, this brought about a contradiction between work and person, because he committed himself to the end for a democratic university reform. However, this also reveals a further theoretical dilemma:  

e) One of the central cognitive services of critical psychology is the concept of the possibility of relations between the individual and society. This, however, – as is increasingly assumed – is not a single digit, but a three-digit relation: this also includes – as already mentioned – the possibility horizons of both personal and social development. Neither people nor society are already what they could be. Critical psychology has elaborated on this in its universal-theoretical analyses. And these categorical-historical lines of argument are in no way principally opposed to the normative-logical explanatory figures of the linguistic actions mentioned above.  

And they could – which is increasingly ignored in life-world oriented social work (cf. Treptow, 1985, part III. and IV) through speculative-utopian, pictorial designs of a just society, supplemented and deepened by a liberated, good life. Unfortunately, these normative and utopian theory potentials have not been used by critical psychology. This is probably due to the fact that the social-theoretical  

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10 Meuschel (1992) has successfully empirically tested the theoretical critique of the materialistic concept of social totality, which differentiates between the economic and political systems, between the cultural sectors of science, art and morality / ethicality as well as between policy and law, by means of published self-understanding GDR documents.  

11 It should even be discussed in more detail whether such normative claims of validity can only be found in the field of language, and whether the work includes such performativity beyond its purposeful structures.
background assumptions of critical psychology have increasingly lost the empirical connection to the dynamic complexity of social reality. This resulted in a kind of argumentative worldlessness (which was reserved for psychology referred to as “bourgeois”, cf. Holzkamp, e.g. 1996, p. 17ff), which no longer covered the new social processes, which also raised and still continues to raise new theoretical questions. A striking example of this is the fact that the proposal that the historical-diagnostic and sociological risk analysis by Beck, et al. be integrated into the psychological appropriation concept (cf. Braun & Wetzel, 1990) which was either completely ignored or rejected brusquely (namely by Zimmer, 1991).

At the same time, no separate historical diagnostic analyses were presented. In the 1970s this was different: thus critical psychology was the first discipline to be dealt with in the FRG at the 2nd International Congress (13-15 May 1979 in Marburg) with the theme of ‘labour and unemployment’. With its empirically substantial analyses of society, life-world oriented social work is far superior to critical psychology and will only be able to increase its attractiveness for the profession and discipline, by working through their time diagnoses in a critical constructive way.

In addition, it presents the conceptual necessity of theoretically and empirically applying the subject-scientific content to its functionalist self-misunderstanding. This could and should be done by transforming it into a critical theory of the intersubjective communication (or a “critique of psychological communication relations”), thus abolishing and “inheriting” it. This also includes the new perspective for the scientific exchange with life-world related social work, to place the contradictory relations between functional and communicative reason, between purposeful and communicatively-oriented action, between system integration and social integration at the centre of the analyses, as a contemporary form of critical theory. This suggestion is based on the assumption that there are still more aspects of critical psychological subject understanding, which are subsequently “illuminating” for life-world orientated social work.

12 This naturally has to stand as an abstract request, comp. for its social-philosophical argument Habermas (1992, chap. VII and VIII) and for the relevance of these distinctions between the instrumentally rational and communicative forms of rationality for sociopedagogics Böhnisch (1996, chap. 14) and Thiersch (2002, p. 16ff and 32ff).
3. Expansion of the subject scientific fundamental concept: motoric and mental learning (1986-1993)

Between about 1986 and 1993, the problem of learning was at the centre of Holzkamp’s scientific work and publications. It found its prominent ending in the monograph “Learning” \(^\text{13}\) (whereas important interim results were introduced at the 6\textsuperscript{th} International Recess University of Critical Psychology [24 - 29 February 1992 in Vienna][cf. Braun & Wetzel 1992]). Even the subtitle of the book “subject-scientific foundation” illustrates the reference to the framework concept (also cf. Holzkamp, 1993, chap. 1). For life-world related social work this concept of motoric learning and its relations to the mental, is of particular interest (cf. ibid. chap. 3.4./3.5), because it can overcome a considerable one-sidedness in the reception of phenomenology. It had been widely “overlooked” that for Husserl corporeality was an integral part of the life-world approach (cf. Husserl 1992, §§ 28, 47, 60 a. 62). This abridgement is astonishing even though it is precisely in this context that the subject-reference of this approach is expressed particularly concisely. For the corporeality is, as it were, the “meeting place”, the communication media between the physicality and the sociality of the human being and his way of life. Physicality is to be understood as the \textit{psychophysical state} and the \textit{behavioural potential} of people (brain/nervous system, skeleton/muscles, organs/tissue, skin/sense organs, digestive system and gnomic information), which have emerged in historical anthropogenesis (cf. par. 1 and 2.1 of this paper).

However, this lack of reception is also astonishing, because life-related social work has dealt more closely with experiential education, where also – at least factually, if not according to the concept – the corporeality of socio-pedagogical action is in the foreground (cf. Thiersch, 2007).

The concept of motoric learning is of interest for social work, because here, the objective side of objective reality is placed in a relationship with the intersubjective appropriation processes of this reality dimension, and thus an additional interdependence between \textit{social environment} and \textit{life-world orientation} becomes clear. In general, motoric learning is concerned with the physical appropriation of the objective social world which demands specific learning processes from the human being, motoric skills and mobility are adopted to adapt “practically” to localised spaces: to dance in a disco, to do gymnastics with equipment in a gym, to climb a peak in the mountains, etc. At the same

\(^{13}\) The expression “monograph” in this context has a special meaning: While the composition of the “Perception” and the “Foundation of Psychology” were still part of a collective research process, Holzkamp could almost refer to his own research in this publication.
time, the localised material spatial conditions initially present *resistance* to my *intentions of movement*, as if they “would” not let me appropriate them. Even in the case where my physical immobility and sluggishness is especially great, i.e. I continuously fail in corresponding attempts (who, for example, has never played the piano, will not achieve the finger and hand flexibility just “by-the-way”) to put in a proper *learning loop*, in which I train myself in necessary movement sequences and, in addition, conceive individual self-sustaining learning steps (as in every dance or music lesson and in each sport training session).

The “practical” realisation of space succeeds to the extent that I overcome my immobility and I move more objectively in the material localised space, while also learning and respecting the rules of body control. The subjective achievement here is the feeling of an increasing “weightlessness”, where I appear to feel my own body less and less – and at the same time I am fascinated by my own abundance of movement, so that sometimes, in rare and happy moments, I experience a “flow” (for example when I want to climb a mountain ever higher and higher, I am insatiable and cannot feel the real effort of my body).

This body control – combined with higher performance and perfection – then becomes routine for me, when I no longer need to pay attention to every single movement (e.g. the coordination of accelerating, braking and clutching, shifting, accelerating again on a motor bike), and thus relieved, I therefore only need to control the whole process of the bodily sequence of movements and so can realise a sensory quality within myself (e.g. driving along a very winding road) and at the same time enjoy geographic spaces (e.g. a beautiful landscape) that are developed by my movements.

The singularity of motoric spatial appropriation is that it can be *promoted* by linguistic-symbolic communication, but cannot be substituted (thus, I can know a lot about a sport and frequently watch it on TV, but I can by no means pursue it, and a lot of adolescents are very disappointed when they try). At the same time, it is already indicated that motoric and mental learning – and thus also social environment- and life-world orientation - are not to be strictly separated from one another: for in order to explore the material and symbolical content of, for example, a city (such as, for example, Marseille with its segregation and gentrification processes) the personal “physical” presence in this city is also necessary, but the physical strain therein must also be endured (e.g. traffic noise). Of course I see much more if I know something about the characteristics of this city (e.g. the “Unité d’Habitation” von Le Corbusier), but at the same time I understand my knowledge better and can individualise it when I, *myself* am actually there and see it with my own eyes, and the historicity of the buildings and facilities reveals itself to me in a sensual and present way.
These rebuilt, developed and constructed spaces are also part of the collective memory of the people, in particular cases even of mankind (thus Le Corbusier’s previously mentioned building is part of world cultural heritage, because it is a striking example of modern housing construction – with all its contradictions).

In contrast to the mental form of remembering, where I keep something to myself (for example, where this building is located) and the immediate-communicative, when I ask a person (e.g., how I get there), the objectivised form is deprived of such individual prerequisites and social opportunities (as they are characteristic of transient spaces, such as the performance of a play on the flat roof of a building) and can therefore, in a very special way, preserve the material form of a spatial idea and its symbolic expressive power (in this so called “radiant city” the problems of a radical modernised “living machine”, its dynamic interrelations between construction and function, are expressed in a certain external “harmonious” form). It can enable future generations to experience them in an immediate and personal way (although it is clear that we see this kind of functional architecture differently than Le Corbusier’s contemporaries).

Motoric and mental spatial appropriation are thus two closely connected processes, which, however, can be accented in their own particular way (that is, what is in the foreground of the spatial appropriation) and through them the subjects reveal the objective and symbolic significance spaces. So, for example, for the appropriation of architecture it is inevitable that you yourself actually physically approach it, enter it, walk through it, climb its stairs, go up in the elevator, use the seating, look through windows and over balustrades, etc. – whereby, in the best case, you can and should retain these personal perceptions, adventures and experiences on photos and film.


The publication of the learning study was followed by a renewed reconstruction phase which focused on the theory of the conduct of everyday life. Because of Holzkamp’s early death (1995)\textsuperscript{14} corresponding drafts remained as fragments (cf. Holzkamp 1995, 1996), but they provide a good impression of this new approach to critical-psychological research,\textsuperscript{15} which is of interest to life-world oriented

\textsuperscript{14} This article generally assumes that critical psychology did not reach a new qualitative level of development after Holzkamp’s death; this assumption would have to be verified in a separate article in a differentiated and empirical way.

\textsuperscript{15} To what extent Holzkamp’s suggestions (1996, p. 58ff and 98ff) on the dialogical
social work for two reasons (also, cf. Braun 2003, p. 404ff and 416ff). Firstly, on the one hand Husserl emphasised the self-evident fact life-world in a one-sided way. This leads to the misunderstanding, as if it were the prerequisite, rather than the result of individual and collective human action. On the other hand, Holzkamp emphasised (1996. p. 41ff) that coping with everyday life on the part of the subject requires a threefold social construction effort:

- They integrated the diversity and inconsistency of the requirements in a synchronously (Which tasks have to be managed at the same time?) and a cyclically recurring sequence (What has to be done every day, every week, every month, every year?);
- this requires the construction of individual structures of relevance (What is important, what is an objective and/or subjective priority, what is subordinate – e.g. doing homework or going training?) and a coordinated time budget (How much time do I need or want to spend on doing something);
- since this cannot be individualistic, this implies the establishment of a certain level of coordination (e.g. between my working hours and the opening hours of different shops), of relationship patterns (in the partnership, workplace, clubs, etc.), that result in intersubjective obligations in the form of informal or formal rules, the distribution of rights and duties as well as mutually accepted or at least known familiar habits (e.g. when using a room – such as the bathroom – at different times of day or for different reasons).

All this is gradually converted into routines, thus stabilising the everyday interactions between personal experience modes, ways of thinking, forms of emotional assessment and emotional states and motivational efforts.

Both the figure of thought “interrelationships between system and life-world” and that of “social mediatedness of the individual way of life” make it clear that everyday life is not the whole world. The ontogenesis concept of critical psychology (cf. par. 2.1) also contains a suggestion on how this overcoming of immediacy can be conceived as a personal development process. Holzkamp now points to a completely different kind of transcendence of everyday life when he writes:

“It appears from the character of everyday cyclicality as a vehicle of elementary life security that the everyday way of life, for me, cannot be the ‘whole life’. Although it is the basis for everything else, through it my communication of the subjective reasons for action can be seen as the willingness to overcome the relative “speechlessness” of the critical psychology, must remain completely open here.
existential fear is pushed back, in other words, I am freed of any obligations: the ‘real’ – productivity, exhilaration, happiness, fulfilment of meaning, the common fight – stands however, although perhaps somehow in the creases, almost vertically to the cyclicality of the lifestyle. In this way, everyday recurring troubles become endurable, maybe they are even pushed to the fringes by the consciousness fulfilling breadth of ‘real life’.

A dynamic may be found in the direction of the real transgression of everyday life, disregarding of its regulations, ignoring of its day-to-day requirements – with the risk of perhaps not ‘finding a way back’ and thus losing the elementary basis, from which the ‘real’ can alone emerge. On the other hand – the extent to which the perspective of a ‘a real life’ is barred by confined life conditions, illness, age, isolation, the dullness of ‘daily monotony’ consciously gains breadth, and so the resigned to desperate question imposes itself on me, what for, why should I get up every morning, now that … life is only really a burden for me.”

(Holzkamp 1995, p. 845)

This opens up a further and relatively new perspective for the life-world approach: namely the research of meaning processes, in other words the personal attention to the design of meaning and the active involvement with them as one of the central life themes and the conscious relationship to one’s own biography. It is important that these questions of meaning must not or cannot be imposed on people from the outside, but that daily routines occur by themselves. These designs of meaning, however, not only give the biography a direction, which can always be corrected, but are at the same time a central prerequisite, but also a consequence of the overcoming of personal immediacy (e.g. in the form of a lifelong commitment to peace). In this context, it is not just about secular norms and values (e.g. human rights), but also about the religious (e.g. “the preservation of creation”), whereby both biographical and sociocultural reality greatly overlap (as can easily be seen, for example, in the concepts of a happy life, of paradise, or in the characteristics attributed to a “God”).

Holzkamp’s biographical designs of meaning undoubtedly belong to the foundation and development of a really modern and societal-critical psychology. His obituary of Piaget closes with the sentences: “Piaget is, like Freud, an exceptional phenomenon of psychology, which imposes a qualitative increase on one’s own level of argumentation, and commitment to the truth upon his critics, if they wish to do justice to his requirements. Our theories and methods must be more and more perfected in discussions on Piaget. I do not know of anything better to say on the death of a research scientist” (Holzkamp, 1981, p. 216). Exactly this can be said about the relationship between life-world oriented social
work and critical psychology: The debate is worthwhile for both sides – and this is also the best thing which can be “acknowledged”.

References


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The constellation of meaning in the subject-scientific approach of Critical Psychology (Klaus Holzkamp) and ‘Discourse’ in Michel Foucault’s theory of governmentality: A synopsis

Lucie Billmann

Abstract
With the rise of the governmental studies, a theoretical debate inside the German Critical Psychology began. Members of Critical Psychology criticized that for Michel Foucault subjectivization and subjection is the same. In their opinion this theoretical frame undermines the idea of autonomous agency.

In this paper there will be argued that Michel Foucault’s concepts of power, governmentality and discourse can be productively used in the theory of Critical Psychology without giving up the basic assumption of the autonomous subject.

In the first chapter the ‘constellation of meaning’ based on Holzkamp’s concept of ‘conduct of life’ will be described. Up next, there will be a short exposition of Michel Foucault’s concepts of power, governmentality and discourse. In the final chapter there will be asked which aspects of Michel Foucault’s concepts are interesting for the Critical Psychology as a further socio-theoretical approach.

Keywords
meaning, constellation of meaning, conduct of everyday life, contradictions, reason discourse, restrictive versus generalised agency, dual possibility, actual life, power, resistance, governmentality, technologies of the self, history of governmentality, art of government, normality, discourse, Michel Foucault, subject

1 Translated by Loren Balhorn and Jan-Peter Herrmann
The rise of governmentality studies as developed by Michel Foucault in various social-scientific fields also prompted a theoretical engagement with said concept within the discipline of critical psychology (Markard, 2003). Klaus Holzkamp himself referenced Foucault’s deliberations on disciplinary mechanisms in his book *Lernen* (Holzkamp, 1993, pp. 346-347). Critical psychologists criticise Foucault for, among other things, treating subjectification and subjugation as one and the same, arguing that his theoretical model does not allow for conceiving of self-determined agency as such (Rehmann, 2007, p. 86). ‘All that is self-willed, all activity, all action is substantiated by the internalisation of external power relations, so that the subject itself is dissolved into a purely structure effect of power relations’ (Langemeyer, 2007, p. 231). This paper argues that Foucault’s theoretical deliberations on power, governmentality and discourse can be used productively by critical psychology without abandoning the standpoint of the subject. The first section deals with the aspect of ‘meaning, structures of meaning’ in Holzkamp’s work, while the second presents Michel Foucault’s theoretical reflections on power, governmentality and discourse. The third and final section is devoted to the question of to what extent certain aspects of Michel Foucault’s theory could be of interest to critical psychology in the sense of an additional social-theoretical method of approach.

1. The aspect of ‘Meaning, Structures of Meaning’ in Klaus Holzkamp’s concept of ‘Conduct of Everyday Life’

The point of departure for the following deliberations was an engagement with Klaus Holzkamp’s reflections on ‘conduct of everyday life’ (Holzkamp, 1995). Only towards the end of his creative period would Holzkamp discover the ‘conduct of everyday life’ as a potential subject of psychological research (Holzkamp, 2013). The conduct of everyday life raises questions about the relation between the subject and social structures, which must be ‘concurrently comprehensible as the immediate world relations of the experiencing and acting subject’ (p. 276). From this emerges the necessity of depicting ‘the mediation between the societal structures and the individual’ (p. 277). The conduct of everyday life must harmonise social demands with subjective aspirations and desires. A consistent daily or weekly routine can lend a certain stability to the conduct of everyday life, although we can assume that most people perceive their day-to-day lives as characterised by countless contradictions, which can in turn generate feelings of frustration, fatigue, limitations of one’s capacity to act, and indignation in the face of injustices. As a critical psychologist, Holzkamp therefore assumes that every human is familiar with the feeling that this ‘cannot
yet be the “whole life” (Holzkamp, 1995, p. 845). Everyday life cyclical ity may help to take the load off one’s back, push back against existential fears and provide a kind of base. ‘That which is “actual” – productivity, intoxication, happiness, meaningfulness, shared struggle – however, is set essentially perpendicular to the cyclicality of the conduct of everyday life, albeit somewhere in the latter’s folds’ (ibid.). This longing for the ‘actual life’ ultimately opens up a space of possibility for intellectually transcending the given state of things.

In order to be able to analyse the entanglement of social demands and subjective interests, Holzkamp worked with different mediation levels.

1.1 The First Mediation Level Between Social Structure and Individual Conduct of Everyday Life: The Structure of Meaning

An initial mediation level pertains to the structure of meaning. Everyday life is embedded into social meanings and structures of meaning with which the individual must actively interact. In this context, Holzkamp refers to concepts from social anthropology and ethnology drawing an analytical distinction between the social structure and culture, or rather structure of meaning (Holzkamp, 2013, p. 278).

Holzkamp cites Clifford Geertz as a representative of this approach, who, in his essay ‘Thick Description: Towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture’, describes his concept of culture as semiotic: ‘Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs’ (Geertz, 1973, p. 5). He views culture as a ‘pattern of meanings’ on the basis of which humans act, and within which they situate their experiences (p. 89). Geertz demonstrates that social structure and culture (or structure of meaning) are not two distinct structures, but merely two different perspectives: culture, or structure of meaning, is the side of social structure facing individuals (ibid.). The social structure represents the capitalist social order and appears as action-relevant aspect to the individual:

…whereby, on the one hand, its complex formations recur in the formation of the meaning structure, yet on the other, the “world of meaning” results from the individual’s own activities so that the societal structure is not only differently interpreted but can also be changed by them. (Holzkamp, 2013, p. 278)

Holzkamp then seeks to grasp the relation between meaning and action more closely, referring to attempts within critical psychology to render the concept of meaning applicable for psychological processes (pp. 278-279). He distinguishes between ‘meaning structures’ as ‘action requirements for society as a whole’ and
‘meanings’ as the connective element in interpersonal relations and the respective overall social context:

In their overall societal reference context, “meaning structures”, on the one hand, represent the epitome of all actions which are (or must be) performed on average (“modal”) by an individual as long as the productive and reproductive process is (should be) possible at a certain level, that is to say, “overall social action necessities”; in this, “meanings”, on the other hand, constitute the relation between each human to the overall societal action context as exists within the surrounding meaning structures – namely by the fact that the preservation, or development of everyone’s own individual existence vitally depends on the realisation of the action pertaining to the simultaneously socially linked meanings. (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 234)

Here, individual action can be placed in relation to social meanings as follows: the overall social context as conveyed via meaning structures appears to the individual as a self-reproducing system. The individual realises that it need not necessarily participate in the ‘system’s’ preservation. The overall social action demands have no ‘coercive’ character with regard to the individual (p. 235). The social contexts of meaning therefore merely represent social ‘opportunities to act’ to the individual. Although the individual is forced – in order to secure their livelihood – to ‘make use’ of these action opportunities in one way or another, there is always the possibility of alternative action as well; in this sense, the individual is ‘free’ (p. 236). As a result, the individual is capable of ‘relating consciously’ to these relations (p. 237). This conclusion should by no means be understood as an attempt to diminish the significance of barriers, contradictions and hierarchical power relations, which exist in society and limit and obstruct individuals’ opportunities to act (Holzkamp, 2013, p. 280). Nevertheless, this is the central kernel of critical psychology’s approach: the ‘dual' possibility relation represents a specificity of human existence and would only come to an end – to put it drastically – with humanity’s extinction (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 355).

As it were, this is the basic thought behind Holzkamp’s notion of subjective ‘freedom’. The ‘dual possibility’ means that the individual acts either within or under the overall social conditions or attempts to expand their discretion over life possibilities. The possible alternative lends the action a new quality under the given conditions – ‘namely, the quality of subjective freedom and self-determination’ (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 354). On the other hand, however, this also implies that individuals have the possibility of foregoing the alternative so as to accommodate themselves to existing action spaces. In this sense, they – as a subject – are always responsible for their own actions (p. 355). The specific
manifestation of this dual possibility is constantly reshaped throughout history. What is central, however, are not the historically ascertainable overall social structures of meaning, but the constellations of meaning as they appear – linked, as they are, to historically ascertainable social relations – to individuals themselves in their specific life situation (p. 368).

Holzkamp developed the categorical pair of ‘restrictive versus generalised agency’, which appears as the specific manifestation of the ‘dual possibility’ within the capitalist social formation (Holzkamp, 1990, p. 41). ‘Restrictive agency’ refers to the ‘subjectively founded’ coping strategy of conducting one’s everyday life under conditions of existing power relations. ‘Generalised agency’, according to Holzkamp, represents action, which is directed towards expanding discretion in the interests of all (p. 35). Holzkamp himself conceives of ‘restrictive versus generalised agency’ as a categorical differentiation of the psychological (Markard, 2009, p. 180). Morus Markard criticises this categorical determination and inquires as to whether the concept of dual possibility may be the target of excessive concrete-historical weight, so that social changes can no longer be identified (p. 196). Markard therefore suggests analytically subsuming the possible meaning of the conceptual pair of ‘generalised versus restrictive agency’ as follows:

According to all that has been said, the conceptual pair of generalised versus restrictive agency implies neither the normative prescription of a specific lifestyle or similar, nor can it replace concrete analyses, but rather allows for dwelling on the question as to how, when and under what conditions I myself, while attempting to cope with my own life, infringe upon the rights of myself and others simultaneously. (Markard, 2009, p. 200)

He raises the question as to whether we ought to treat the conceptual pair as a guiding hypothesis, the categorical basis of which is constituted by the social conditions of individual existence in combination with Marxist social-scientific concepts (p. 181).

1.2 Second Mediation Level: The ‘Reason Discourse’ – Reasons to Act from the Perspective of the Subject

It is insufficient to depict constellations of meaning merely as individuals’ opportunities to act, given that this provides no insight into how these possibilities are actually translated into real action (Holzkamp, 2013, p. 281). Here, Holzkamp introduces the concept of reason discourse, which proceeds from the assumption that every individual has subjective reasons for their
actions. They are always ‘one’s own’ reasons and must be considered from the respective individual’s perspective or standpoint. There is no such thing as ‘actions without reasons’ in the context of the ‘reason discourse’. According to this understanding, everyone possesses ‘good reasons’ on the basis of which respective individual’s interests in life – that is, the life interests they perceive to have (pp. 285-286).

Holzkamp defines ‘life interest’ as an individual’s interest in expanding or at least retaining their quality of life. This requires a minimum of possibilities to influence one’s living conditions. The more limited these possibilities to exert influence appear the greater the feeling of helplessness, the more difficult it becomes to preserve one’s life quality. These ‘life interests’ represent the basis upon which the individual acts ‘reasonably’ (p. 287). Holzkamp therefore defines the ‘subjective reasons to act’ as ‘premise-reason-relations’ (Holzkamp, 1995, pp. 838-839; Holzkamp, 2013, p. 287).

Critical psychology understands itself as an analytical tool for concrete reality with all of its contradictions. Correspondingly, one important method of subject-scientific research is ‘social self-understanding’ – the ‘interlacing of perspectives’, that is to say, the attempt to experience the perspective of one’s counterpart in conversation, to place oneself in their situation (Forschungsgruppe Lebensführung, 2004, p. 16). ‘Self-understanding’ in this context refers to the ‘coming to an understanding with myself’ about that which affects me – generally, for example, about my own ‘conduct of everyday life’ (Holzkamp, 1995, p. 834). This process of ‘self-understanding’ is supposed to allow for a certain ‘inherent knowledge’ to be revealed. Over the course of common understanding, the goal would be to reach a common language, placing ‘each one’s standpoint’ in the perspective of a ‘generalised standpoint’ (pp. 843-844). Elsewhere, Holzkamp refers to the mode of intersubjective understanding as a form of discourse (Holzkamp, 2013, p. 287).

The concept of ‘reason discourse’ cannot only be conceived in the context of intersubjective communication. On the contrary, planning, pondering, and deliberating all mostly take place as an internal dialogue – as ‘inner speaking’. Through this internal conversation, one performs a ‘doubling’ of oneself. Holzkamp speaks of an ‘implicit intersubjectivity’: inner speech, clarifying things and reflecting upon them for oneself represents an attempt at winning oneself over to a certain standpoint. Only through this can the manifold relations to the world take shape and the corresponding action options gain relevance. ‘Inner’ and ‘external’ speaking form a polar unit – both forms are needed in order to express oneself, to articulate oneself to oneself and others (Holzkamp, 2013, pp. 291-293).
In the following discussion, Holzkamp’s insight that ‘man, to the extent that he preserves his life in a cooperative-societal manner, does not face in his processing of reality a reality hitherto “untouched” by “thought” which he must conquer “cognitively” as an individual, but in a way an already previously “conceived” reality’ is crucial (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 285).

Holzkamp links this ‘conceived reality’ to the social relations fundamentally characterised by their specific respective material-economic base. The meaning structures related to the latter have manifested in the very form originally intended for them: namely, the (more or less) cooperative securing of society’s livelihood (p. 285). Subsequently, ‘reason discourse’ to Holzkamp represents a ‘discourse form of intersubjective interactions’ – forming the hinge ‘between meanings, reasons and intentions to act/actions’ (Holzkamp, 2013, p. 294).

Foucault’s concept of discourse will be addressed later on. In my view, however, a possibility for linking these concepts can already be observed: for the ‘previously “conceived” reality’ is shot through with discourses emerging in the respective social relations, which continue to develop and contribute to reproducing – or challenging – existing relations.

1.3 Questions Pertaining to the ‘Constellation of Meaning’ Concept

The specific forms of speech and thought ‘in’ the given power relations serve as a point of individual orientation and form the basis of their reasons to act (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 232). The ‘dual possibility’ as conceptualised by critical psychology indicates that the individual has the ‘freedom’ of consciously relating to this ‘already previously “conceived” reality’ (p. 285), meaning the constellations of meaning which surround it. The individual is capable, through ‘reason discourse’, of weighing distinct action options and perhaps even becoming aware of the glass walls constituting his or her proverbial fish bowl.

This moment of ‘becoming aware’ is quite difficult to capture, however, and even more difficult to define. What does the contemporary ‘dual possibility relation’ look like? What does it mean to abandon one’s restricted capacity to act and discover the generalised moment in one’s agency (without diving right into the next ideological fish bowl)? The majority as well as oneself appears quite comfortable – sometimes more, sometimes less – with existence under the given conditions. The exciting question is therefore precisely that of the effectiveness of constellations of meaning inscribed into the infrastructures of acting subjects’ everyday lives. What value does Holzkamp accordingly assign to the effectiveness of the structures of meaning, and how does he view them in relation to the relations of production when he speaks of the ‘already previously
“conceived” reality’ (p. 285) in which ‘thought’ occurs? Indeed, this question strikes at the very social-theoretical premises of critical psychology.

Conflicts around the discipline’s social-theoretical foundations have been numerous among circles concerned with critical psychology.² To Holzkamp, the ‘human-world-relation’ is shaped by the ‘overall societal mediatedness of the creation and use of means and conditions of life through the organisation of social production/reproduction based on a division of labour’ (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 193). If one is to take this seriously, psychologically speaking, then it requires theoretically defining and addressing the respective objective overall social conditions – that is to say, reference to other scientific disciplines is indispensable (Markard, 2009, p. 149). As a result, capitalism marks an essential analytical point of reference (p. 162). In Grundlagen der Psychologie, Klaus Holzkamp draws heavily on the social-theoretical approach of Karl Marx (p. 174), who argued that ‘the anatomy of this civil society, however, has to be sought in political economy’ (Marx, 1992, p. 425). The primacy of production remains valid, though Holzkamp emphasises that one must analytically proceed ‘from the standpoint of the subject […] from the individual situation in and practice of life within the reproductive sphere’ (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 359).

This article thus assumes that relations of production – although of crucial significance – represent only one aspect of deeply intertwined power relations. The ‘hegemonic bloc’ (Gramsci) is not entirely straightforward: a state apparatus and, beyond that, an apparatus consisting of different reason patterns and concepts of normality in order to stabilise a certain set of power relations. These may be inherently contradictory and contain distinct value judgements, yet still support the hegemonic power formation. The individual is forced to manoeuvre their way through this ‘jungle’ of possible interpretations. The range of interpretations available may in one instant appear as an instrument to expand one’s discretion so as to gain a higher level of autonomy but can nevertheless shift from one moment to the next and begin forming another restricting and exclusive structure of meaning in one’s everyday life conduct.

Without seeking to abandon the concrete-utopian moment in the conceptual pair of ‘restrictive versus generalised agency’, this model nevertheless obscures the diffusion of everyday life and suggests (broadly speaking) an easy way out: all we must do to overcome the current social system is join together, and the rest will resolve itself.

² Debates with other currents within Marxist social theory would emerge in the 1970s and 1980s, such as between representatives of the ‘Ideologietheorie’ project and Ute Holzkamp-Osterkamp. The subject of the debate was the theoretical interaction with ‘ideologies’ in critical psychology, see, for example: Haug, 1979, 1983; Holzkamp-Osterkamp, 1983; Nemitz, 1981.
Later works by Klaus Holzkamp suggest a certain opening up of his understanding of power relations. In his last article on the ‘conduct of everyday life’, he speaks of power relations which threaten the stability of the conduct of everyday life, ‘not as clear distinction between the “powerful” and the “powerless”, but as distribution of power relations in strategies of everyday assertion or defence as Foucault repeatedly highlighted’ (Holzkamp, 1995, pp. 839-840).

It is for this reason that Michel Foucault will be used here to open up a new social-scientific avenue of approach: after presenting his concept of power and his thoughts on the theory of governmentality, I will subsequently address ‘discourse’ before inspecting how these theoretical approaches can be used productively by critical psychology.

2. Power, Governmentality and Discourse in Foucault

There is a documented remark by Foucault concerning his own thought revolving around three specific axes: ‘knowledge’, ‘power’ and ‘power relations’, and, finally, the ‘self’ and ‘relations to the self’ (Sarasin, 2005, p. 12). His published legacy does not leave behind a consistent theory, but rather a highly diverse corpus of writings, lectures, analyses, presentations, and more. Over the course of his scholarly activity, various theoretical shifts and instances of re-orientation can be observed. My intention here is merely to forge a bridge from his concept of power – via the concept of ‘governmentality’ – to the concept of discourse, addressing to what extent ‘discourse’ can be conceived alongside Holzkamp’s ‘constellations of meaning’.

2.1 Power and Power Relations

As he once admitted in an interview, Foucault was originally interested in the analysis of knowledge and perceptions as they exist in society (Foucault, 2003b, p. 516). Only later would he realise that his actual problem was the question of ‘power’. He viewed this theme as the central problem of the 20th century, speaking of its two ‘dark’ legacies: fascism and Stalinism. ‘The main problem during the 19th century was destitution, economic exploitation, the emergence of wealth, capital which arose from the misery of others – who in fact produced this wealth.’ (p. 517) This state of social affairs triggered wide-ranging controversies among economists and historians at the time, ultimately leading to the establishment of Marxism as a major scientific system. That said, the problem of the 20th century – at least in the industrialised countries – was no longer social
destitution, but rather excessive use of power. The fascist regimes and their capitalist social formation as well as the ‘allegedly’ socialist regimes (such as Stalinism) both brought forth unrestrained state power, bureaucracy, and dictatorships whose exercise of power became unbearable for many (p. 517). The truth and fabrication of truth in a given society take centre stage in the nexus of state and power. Resembling a technician, the state seeks to function as the interface between power and truth, or between power structures and knowledge systems (p. 521).

Foucault defines power relations as ‘a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or the future’ (Foucault, 1982, p. 789). He assumes that society is permeated by power relations: between men and women, between children and adults within families and, within schools and universities, between those who have already acquired knowledge and those compelled to study this knowledge (Foucault, 2003b, p. 524).

The assertion of state power also represents the main theme of his major work Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, originally published in French in 1975 (Foucault, 1995). Based on mechanisms of punishment, the book places primary focus on how relations of power and dominance are inscribed into the body so as to utilise it economically, to promote and challenge its productive force. Foucault speaks of the ‘micro-physics of power’ applied in a targeted manner by apparatuses and institutions, but whose effect actually only manifests in the fact that individuals ultimately adhere to these appeals (pp. 26-27). Relations of power exhibit an inherent ambiguity – flashpoints and instances of confrontation may emerge, leading to a reversal of power relations (p. 27).

In Foucault’s concept of a ‘micro-physics of power’, the emphasis is very much on the body and its disciplinary treatment. Over the course of his scholarly work, however, this conception would prove inadequate: the concentration on institutions of discipline such as the prison did not allow for simultaneously conceiving the far more comprehensive processes of subjectification. As a result, the ‘state’ would gradually move to the centre of Foucault’s thought. Through this expansion of his analytical toolkit, Foucault attempted to grasp ‘the state as a resultant of the balance of social forces’ (Lemke, Krasmann, & Bröckling, 2000, p. 8). The state in fact relies on the many minor confrontations and local struggles – it exerts its influence in these struggles while at the same time being constituted by them.

The state, as a general, abstract and also violent entity could never maintain control over all those individuals were it not so rooted in and able
to take advantage of all those small, local tactics which restrain each of us.  
(Foucault, 2003b, p. 524)

Foucault is particularly intrigued by an analysis of resistances. He faced repeated accusations that this broad concept of power depicted the subject’s actions as entirely determined, leaving little space to conceive of actual resistances. Foucault, however, objected to this claim. To him, power and resistance are complementary: ‘Where there is power, there is resistance’ (Foucault, 1978, p. 95). There have always been groups of people who sought ‘not to be governed like that’ (Foucault, 1997, p. 28). For Foucault, the analysis of resistances and struggles indeed represents the starting point for revealing power relations (Foucault, 1982, p. 791).

2.2 The History of Governmentality – The ‘Art of Government’

Foucault delivered two lecture series at the Collège de France in 1978 and 1979, published in English under the titles Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–78 in 2007 and The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–79 in 2008. In these lectures, Foucault outlines the history of what he terms the ‘art of government’ from the Middle Ages to the 20th century. The term ‘government’ assumes a kind of ‘hinge function’. On the one hand, it serves as a ‘connecting link between strategic power relations and conditions of dominance’ (Lemke et al., 2000, p. 8). On the other hand, it represents an intermediary between subjectivity and power. This concept is intended to allow for focusing on how techniques of power are themselves tied into the subject’s actions through ‘technologies of the self’ – that is to say, how the social order and thereby a certain ‘normality’ is reproduced through everyday actions. This reproduction does not occur seamlessly, however: through actions, individuals re-interpret ‘normality’, constantly inducing variations and changes. The interaction with the full range of governing technologies and the corresponding effects within distinct social dimensions is eventually subsumed under the concept of ‘governmentality’ (p. 8). In his lectures, Foucault himself defines ‘governmentality’ as follows:

…by “governmentality” I understand the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument. (Foucault, 2007, p. 108)
Drawing on the writings of the physiocrats/national economists of 18\textsuperscript{th}-century France, Foucault works through their insight that the productive force responsible for the preservation of the state’s power and prosperity is its population. The ‘natural’ development of the population of course depends on a whole series of variables (climate, development of trade, laws, taxes, customs, religion, etc.). These external factors must be attended to and transformation techniques developed in order to create favourable overall conditions for the population’s productive force to unfold. This includes influencing cash flows, favouring export and import, etc. (pp. 68-70). Another object increasingly attracting scholars’ interest over the course of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century and gaining more and more relevance with regard to ‘discourses’ was the public:

The public […] is the population seen under the aspect of its opinions, ways of doing things, forms of behavior, customs, fears, prejudices, and requirements; it is what one gets a hold on through education, campaigns, and convictions. (Foucault, 2007, p. 75)

In other words, the population is the government’s highest motive.

The next point of reference is economic policy as the most important form of knowledge. In the second lecture included in \textit{The Birth of Biopolitics}, Foucault traces liberalism’s evolution and depicts the emergence of neoliberalism as the hegemonic school of economic thought. One essential element of this theory is the role of the state whose function it is (at least according to most economists) to ensure the free and smooth functioning of the market. Politics are to affect the population only in the sense that ‘the regulatory principle should not be so much the exchange of commodities as the mechanisms of competition’ (Foucault, 2008, p. 147). The development of neoliberalism in the United States eventually brought forth the theory of human capital (pp. 219-221). If man had previously, as \textit{homo oeconomicus}, been of interest mainly in the sense of being a trading partner, the American theorists now pursued ‘\textit{homo oeconomicus} as entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings’ (p. 226).

Thirdly, Foucault identifies ‘apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument’ (Foucault, 2007, p. 108). This refers to those mechanisms deployed to persuade individuals in a given society to adhere to the respective order. Foucault identifies a number of distinct mechanisms: the \textit{juridical-legal mechanism} through which, by means of the legal system, an order is created to which everyone must conform along with punitive measures applicable to those who fail to do so. The second element is the \textit{disciplinary mechanism} which emerges in institutions such as prisons, schools and psychiatric facilities over the course of the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries. The addressees of this mechanism are made
‘familiar’ with the hegemonic ‘norms’ and ‘values’ – they are disciplined. Simultaneously, however, they develop the view that people should not only be told what to do but be granted a certain amount of freedom as well (pp. 5ff.). The longing for freedom – the freedom to determine one’s own life, freedom in economic trade, and the freedom to choose one’s government – was contested over many decades with varying intensity but nevertheless incessantly, eventually finding its way into today’s social order. What subsequently emerges alongside sovereign law and disciplinary technologies are the so-called *technologies of security*. In Foucault’s argument, the emergence of technologies of security is coupled to that of liberal governmentality: liberalism is more than just a ‘increase in freedoms’ enjoyed by the masses – it is an attempt to prepare the conditions under which people can/should develop freely. It is ultimately a question of demarcating the frame within which state action is to occur – while simultaneously granting citizens the greatest possible degree of freedom. The concept of technologies of security is not about the enforcement of certain norms, but about indirect control over people: a certain degree of deviation is permitted, even encouraged. Once this deviation becomes too great, it is then – if possible – integrated, or disciplined, e.g. suppressed by a massive police presence (Lemke et al., 2000, p. 13; Ludwig, 2011).

Deploying a limited dose of repression requires a kind of social consensus, a kind of ‘normality’ in which most citizens believe and orient themselves towards. The *technologies of the self* are indeed essential factors in governing techniques. They include all those thoughts and actions people perform to generally comply with hegemonic norms to realise their concept of a ‘normal life’ (Ludwig, 2011, pp. 145-146). Technologies of the self represent the means to realise aspirations in one’s own life – in other words, to optimise the conduct of everyday life, which in our society is closely tied to the capitalist mode of production. The nub of current governance techniques is that they open up a field of possibility in which one governs and leads oneself out of a desire to participate in the grand idea of a ‘normal life’ while, at the same time, a space for self-empowerment is opened up as well. This central aspect was worked out by Gundula Ludwig in her monograph *Geschlecht regieren*: through technologies of the self, we subordinate ourselves to a specific notion of ‘life’ and ‘normality’, bowing to a certain technique of government. The promise of being rewarded with a degree of freedom in return for this kind of life conduct, however, simultaneously opens up that dimension in which this ‘normality’ is questioned, viewed critically and if needed acted upon (pp. 126; 146-147).
2.3 Discourse

Discourse occupies a central position in the mediation of the three axes of ‘knowledge’, ‘power relations’ and ‘relations to the self’. Michel Foucault also applies this term with differing accentuation in various instances. With view to his development of scholarly thought, he draws on earlier works in this context – long before the concept of ‘government’ would come to play such a crucial role in the lectures cited above.

Foucault asks himself the question as to why certain orders emerge and stabilise and others do not at an early stage:

Foucault’s discourse analysis proceeded from the following questions: Why is one thing said and not another? Why does this order of expressions exist and not another one? Why was only this said and not all the other things the endless play of characters allows? (Sarasin, 2005, p. 64)

Foucault pursues these questions in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (p. 62), devoting himself to ‘discourse’ in the form of systems of scientific knowledge. Foucault’s aim is to break up certain structures of thought, which persist in the historical sciences. An historical analysis is thus no longer to look for traditions and traces, but for extracts and boundaries. It is no longer about the question as to how continuities were able to establish themselves, but the analysis of transformations (Foucault, 2002, p. 14) in pursuit of the ‘question of discontinuities’ (p. 15). Foucault rejects a conception of global history as a ‘network of causalities’ and their segmentation into longer phases or units, all linked through the principle of cohesion (p. 11). Foucault’s unsettling conclusion reads: history is no longer where the subject’s historical consciousness resides, nor do literature or other sciences remain quiet places any longer. They themselves represent a ‘whole cluster of questions’ – emerging within a given field of discourse (p. 29). Foucault wants to treat discourses as practices ‘that systematically form the objects of which they speak’ (p. 54), thereby outlining the deeply material dimension of discourses.³

During his 1970 Inaugural Lecture at the Collège de France titled *The Order of Discourse*, Foucault puts forth the following claim with view to discourse:

… that in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of producers

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³ A more detailed review of the question of the subject as discussed in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* would exceed the scope of this paper.
whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality. (Foucault, 1981, p. 52)

To Foucault, discourses represent a central tool for government action: discourses serve as a means through which to establish a public consensus – a consensus regarding the government action of the politicians in charge, general values and concepts, certain forms of life, what is considered ‘normal’, etc. At the same time, a certain extent of counter-discourses and critical discourses is permitted as long as the fundamental order system is not called into question. For discourses can – as expressed in the quote above – take on a life of their own and suddenly cause entire governing orders to teeter. Discourses are not confined to the written or spoken word for Foucault, but may just as well be expressed through gestures, behaviours and the arranging of rooms.

Discourse manifests just as much in that which is omitted or is expressed through gestures, attitudes, ways of being, behaviour patterns or the arrangement of rooms. Discourse comprises the totality of imposed and imposing meanings pervading social relations. (Foucault, 2003a, p. 164)

Over the course of his lectures, he distinguishes between three different procedures regulating the production and style of discourses in a society (Foucault, 1981, pp. 52-54). For one, there is the principle of exclusion which seeks to regulate discourse through a combination of power and desire – via prohibitions, creating taboos, drawing borders such as the distinction between sanity and insanity – and through prescribing that which is right and wrong (pp. 53-54). The ‘will to truth’ and all other systems of exclusion are supported by certain social institutions, such as the education system, literature, media (or, more recently, the internet), and so on (p. 55). The ‘will to truth’ tends to marginalise or even overwhelm other discourses.

Another group of procedures that have a modifying effect on discourses are internal procedures which take effect through classification, arrangement and distribution, ‘as if this time another dimension of discourse had to be mastered: that of events and chance’ (Foucault, 1981, p. 56). There is a gap between everyday discourses which – once uttered – disappear immediately, while those discourses rooted in other forms of speech which repeat these speeches transfer them to a new context, interpret, etc. (p. 57). This is particularly interesting with regard to the conduct of everyday life: if everyday discourses proceed from general, hegemonic speech acts, e.g. when variations of what a ‘good mother’ ought to be like are constantly cited, then these everyday discourses have an impact on the conduct of everyday life. Foucault points to the utility of that
permanent citing. The ‘risk’ of the event and coincidence is contained. Open diversity is curbed: ‘The new thing here lies not in what is said but in the event of its return’ (p. 58). Another determinant of internal procedures is the organisation of discipline (pp. 59-61).

It is always possible that one might speak the truth in the space of a wild exteriority, but one is “in the true” only by obeying the rules of a discursive “policing” which one has to reactivate in each of one’s discourses. The discipline is a principle of control over the production of discourse. The discipline fixes limits for discourse by the action of an identity which takes the form of a permanent re-actuation of the rules. (Foucault, 1981, p. 61)

This aspect is particularly important when aspiring towards a professional career, leadership positions, or success in certain occupations. Knowledge about the language of the milieu in which one moves is required – about what is being said, in what way, using which terms and concepts. These ‘identity games’ surely often take place unconsciously. In most cases, one ‘grows’ into them.

The third procedure Foucault lists concerns the rarefaction of the speaking subjects: the task is to establish rules as to who is permitted to participate in a discourse and who is not. In short: access to discourses is limited (pp. 60-61). This is ensured by various systems of curtailment: rituals, for example, define the qualification a subject requires to be allowed to speak (p. 63).

Social discourses as presented to us on a daily basis in multiple ways and by the most diverse media enter into everyday discourses, comprise the background noise, so to speak, which influences people’s decisions, actions, and above all orientations. They foster notions of ‘normality’, ‘women’ and ‘men’, what it means to me ‘successful in your job’ etc. Discourses are therefore closely linked to structures of social power:

The link between Foucault’s discourse analysis and his analysis of power is the question as to how knowledge is organised in a given space, how spaces are strategically occupied by knowledge, how knowledge is structured and spatially arranged. (Sarasin, 2005, p. 141)

People view reality from the perspective of their respective conduct of everyday life and through certain discursive lenses. As Sabine Hark puts it, discourses can be understood

… as a “truth-inducing” mode, that is to say, as socially-institutionally anchored grid of understanding, ordering and hierarchizing, generating
possibilities of perceiving reality, creating the objects of knowledge by making statements about them and thereby only rendering the viewing thereof possible in the first place. After all, it is not a previously conceived reality that is interpreted, but a specific reality – and no other reality – that is created. (Hark, 2006, p. 366)

Here, the argument is put forward that discourse – according to Foucault’s use of the term – can be conceived in terms of critical psychology’s understanding of meaning structures. Synthesising critical psychology and Foucault’s discourse theory certainly poses a challenge with many obstacles in need of careful negotiation – particularly with regard to the concept of the subject. Nevertheless, discourse theory can be drawn on as another social-theoretical reference level of critical psychology, as further elaborated in the following section.

3. Thinking Holzkamp and Foucault Together, or: Bridging the Breaking Point

3.1 The Question of the Subject

One essential breaking point between the critical psychological approach and Michel Foucault’s theories is the question about the subject. Critical psychology posits a universal basic assumption in this matter:

Regardless of how precisely and concrete one […] captures and investigates the conditions of life on the social-theoretical level, one never reaches the point on this path at which the actions/sensibilities of the individual can be seen as totally determined by these conditions: the individual subject eludes as such through its possibility of conscious “relation” to the conditions of its total “conditionality”. This remains valid, as already mentioned, irrespective of which class-specific limitations, oppressions, mystifications, ideological forces, etc. the individual may be subject to in their living conditions: even deeply limited alternatives to act remain alternatives, and the individual as subject can “relate” consciously even to grave relations of oppression, objective illusoriness, ideological influencing, etc. The total elimination of these possibilities is synonymous with the extermination of human existence.’ (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 345)

This is what characterises critical psychology’s subject-scientific approach. Although the focus is placed on humanity’s ‘social nature’ – not least serving to distinguish from other psycho-analytical concepts arguing on the basis of a
natural, anti-social drive, or from biologistic concepts attempting to account for human behaviour through reference to biological functionalities (Markard, 2009, p. 143). It is assumed, however, that a certain behaviour may be suggested by social conditions and meanings but is never determined by the latter. When including social-theoretical references, the conditions ‘as the individual experiences them’ become apparent (p. 151). The concrete psychological meaning, then, must always be deduced from the standpoint of the subject (ibid.).

The question of the subject in Foucault’s theory proves somewhat more difficult. He provides no coherent method by which to accommodate power, discourse and subject relations, but instead constantly refines his analytical tools, stumbling from one work to the next – as he himself once put it in conversation (Foucault, 2003b, p. 522; Sarasin, 2005, p. 13). His view and perspective on these relations are in flux, while no single polished definition can be found.

In his essay ‘Who Needs Identity?’ referencing The Archaeology of Knowledge, Stuart Hall establishes that one of Foucault’s achievements was ‘attacking “the great myth of interiority”’ (Hall, 1996, p. 10). Eager to distance himself from subject-theoretical standpoints – including humanism or a philosophy of consciousness – Foucault conducted a radical historicisation. Michael Jäger and Thomas Seibert present a similar argument in their pamphlet titled alle zusammen. jede für sich. die demokratie der plätze: in their view, a distinction must be made between determinism and ‘emancipatory deconstruction’. The motive of self-criticism in Foucault (but also in Althusser and Butler) is ‘the reference to the fact that as well as how the state, capital, and patriarchy make the self productive and dominable for themselves through isolation, atomisation and moralisation’ (Jäger & Seibert, 2012, p. 14). Stuart Hall shows how the subject is reproduced as an ‘effect’ in specific discursive formations. The change between distinct subject positions appears to lack a coherent existence and transcendental continuity – let alone an identity. That said, Hall also problematizes the fact that Foucault fails to explain how the individual ultimately fills its subject positions (Hall, 1996, p. 14).

Beginning with his focus on power relations and the development of his genealogical method, Foucault attempts to grasp the relations between discursive, economic and social formations in his works more systematically (Sarasin, 2005, pp. 126-127). Discourse, that which can be said, recedes into the background, while he instead reconstructs – in his function as genealogist – the level of practices. This occurs with Discipline and Punish – not least with the intention to write a contemporary history, his contemporary history being marked by the prison revolts in French prisons during the early 1970s in which he was deeply politically involved (p. 268).
But in these works, dominated by the concept of a subject which self-regulates itself through forms of power such as surveillance, confession and spiritual direction, the question as to ‘what might in any way interrupt, prevent or disturb the smooth insertion of individuals into the subject positions constructed by these discourses’ (Hall, 1996, p. 11) is also left unanswered. The inherent tensions of a concept of power which renders any thought of a subject consciousness as pure power factor untenable eventually forced Foucault to address the questions of ‘government’ and the subject beginning in the late 1970s (Sarasin, 2005, p. 174).

Hall appreciates the fact that Foucault attempted in his later works to accommodate this criticism, such as, for example, in *The Use of Pleasure* or *The Care of the Self*:

…without moving very far from his insightful work on the productive character of normative regulation […] he tacitly recognizes that it is not enough for the Law to summon, discipline, produce, and regulate, but there must also be the corresponding production of a response (and thus the capacity and apparatus of subjectivity) from the subject. (Hall, 1996, p. 12)

Hall identifies many productive insights in Foucault’s work, even though he does not pursue a ‘single switch to “agency”, to intention and volition’ (p. 13). The depiction of the practices of self-constitution and how they are related to normative regulations – essentially, how ‘subjectification’ emerges as the result of normative compulsions in the first place – are all significant insights Foucault provides. Finally, Foucault outlines the ‘existence of some interior landscape’ within which the subject reveals the mechanisms responsible for the organisation of compliance with the norm and discipline (p. 13).

In an article published in 1982, Foucault himself writes that he does not seek to ‘analyze the phenomena of power, nor to elaborate the foundations of such an analysis’ (Foucault, 1982, p. 777). He is instead interested in the ‘history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made into subjects’ and therefore observes the surface forms that turn humans into subjects in the first place (ibid.). At the end of the day, he states, his central preoccupation has always been the subject. However, he felt compelled to devote himself to relations of power because relations of production and the relations of meaning in which the human subject is embedded are nothing but highly complex relations of power (p. 778). In this article, he suggests a new research approach – namely, the analysis of power relations based on resistance. If one seeks to understand how power is exercised, it is conducive to study the resistance against it.
As a starting point, let us take a series of oppositions which have developed over the last few years: opposition to the power of men over women, of parents over children, of psychiatry over the mentally ill, of medicine over the population, of administration over the ways people live. (p. 780)

He lists the connecting elements of these struggles and concludes that they were not directed against specific institutions, elites, groups, etc., but rather contested a certain form of power present in immediate everyday life. An everyday life whose inherent power formation groups individuals into categories, ascribes them an individuality – a power which establishes the law of truth which individuals are to identify both within themselves and others – in short: a power that turns individuals into ‘subjects’ (p. 781).

A further approximation of the ‘subject’ occurs in his lectures on The Hermeneutics of the Subject, in which he seeks to sketch out the relation between ‘subject’ and ‘truth’ by analysing the Greek concept of ‘care of the self’ (epimeleia heautou) (Foucault, 2005, pp. 1-2). Nevertheless, he remains sceptical of a universal concept of the ‘subject’, regarding ‘subject-being’ as both subordinated to universal norms of domination and bound to one’s own identity. Nevertheless, he remarks, there is a power resonating in each of these meanings which ‘subjugates and makes subject to’ (Foucault, 1982, p. 781).

### 3.2 Bridging the Breaking Point

In Lernen, Holzkamp links his concept of ‘educational meaning structures’ to Foucault’s reflections on disciplinary systems such as, among others, in the specific institution of the school (Holzkamp, 1993, p. 11). Holzkamp discovers for himself by reading this text that schools and other educational institutions reflect certain hegemonic discourses concerning discipline, control, etc. Actions by people moving within these institutions therefore call for analysis in the context of these power structures.

For which other aspects of the subjective conduct of everyday life could Michel Foucault’s theoretical considerations, then, form an adequate social-theoretical contribution to critical psychology?

One assumption this paper follows is that the key possibility of linking Foucault’s concept of discourse and Holzkamp’s reflections on the conduct of everyday life lies within the reason discourse. For Holzkamp, a central aspect is that social meanings and conditions appear to the individual as opportunities to act (Holzkamp, 2013, p. 302). Why individuals act the way they do and when corresponds to their ‘subjective’ reasons (p. 305). Individual action is guided by
inner reasoning as to why this or that way is chosen and not another. This *reason discourse* implies an *inner engagement with social meanings* with which the individual is confronted in the form of everyday discourses, media discourses, etc.

Drawing on Foucault’s discourse theory, Siegfried Jäger developed a method for analysing discourses in the form of critical discourse analysis (Jäger, 2009). Indeed, he engages in a similar linkage of subject and discourse/object world. To do so, he draws theoretically on Aleksei N. Leontiev’s concept of activity. This theoretical relay allows Jäger to demonstrate that discourse is a product of human labour/activity (pp. 78-79).

Leontiev’s point of departure is Marx’s premise that human consciousness is determined by social being. Human life, however, is above all a system of alternating activities. Over the course of this activity, the object being engaged by the individual at any given moment is changed into a subjectively processed form – or meaning (pp. 89-90). Jäger thus concludes: humans appropriate reality, internalise it in the form of meanings, ‘process’ it through their activity, through which the external becomes the internal. This processing of reality into constellations of meaning, however, takes place ‘*in a very specific manner*’ and, more importantly, differently for each individual (p. 90).

The subject is never “alone” with reality, but rather always together with others, through which it is equipped with social impressions and incorporated into historically-socially given discourses. Similarly, reality is never merely natural, but rather an historical product which took on its specific forms in strong dependency on the dominant discourses, or rather from the respective given “*discursive swarm*”. (Jäger, 2009, p. 90)

Jäger is keen to emphasise that the individual, through its everyday use of speech acts, texts and discourses, may indeed always participate in them and both absorb and transmit the respective multi-layered meanings (p. 107). This is not to say, however, that meanings are simply extracted from reality, internalised and then returned to the historical process. As it were, the process rather occurs the other way around:

‘*Humanity has sought to assign* meaning to the realities, has socially “agreed” upon which excerpts of reality are assigned which meaning. These human products are transmitted alongside concurrently occurring interactions with these reality excerpts […].’ (p. 108)

For Jäger, the key moment is the active ascription of meaning to objects. This meaning is learned through active interaction in the corresponding social and
discursive contexts. Consequently, Jäger concludes that the ‘objectivity of meanings’ is ultimately a ‘result of social human labour’ (p. 109). Leontiev’s activity theory may in fact suffice to achieve what Foucault failed to do: to conceive of the process of mediation between subject and discourse (pp. 111-112).

At this point, the following conclusion can be drawn: turning to Michel Foucault’s approaches in order to apply them in critical psychological analyses need not necessarily imply abandoning the standpoint of the subject. The respective subjective reason discourses/reason premises are embedded in historical conditions and meanings. This ‘preconceived reality’ (Holzkamp) can be understood as congealed discourses, power formations and modes of governance. The individual is confronted with these forms of meaning structures over the course of conducting everyday life, must ‘articulate’ to itself and its social environment what its action is determined by, which interests it pursues, etc. – but also that ‘actual life’ (Holzkamp) it is really dreaming about deep inside.

To put it somewhat solemnly: that which sometimes makes our conduct of everyday life so difficult, at least in my view, is the effectiveness of these meanings, the fact that they simultaneously act as a kind of corset, as a cementation of social relations. On the one hand, they provide guidance and orientation, which can by and large indeed be useful, but may at the same time – when experienced as more of a limitation – have to be unlocked, broken up. It is difficult to inscribe other meanings into those already cemented.

It is Foucault’s achievement to have rendered these corsets ‘visible’ in theoretical terms, to have shown that one is in such a reference frame at all times, with no possible escape. That said, Foucault points out that it is always possible to engage with this surrounding in a critical manner. In his lecture ‘What is Critique?’, he seeks to depict the history of critique – as an antithesis to the development of the ‘art of government’. He outlines the development of a moral and political stance, ‘a way of thinking, etc. and which I would very simply call the art of not being governed or better, the art of not being governed like that and at that cost.’ (Foucault, 1992, p. 12).

Holzkamp’s insight underlines that there is always a possibility space – be it ever so coded a surrounding, captured within a discourse – a ‘freedom’ to interact with it differently at any given moment (Holzkamp, 1985, pp. 352-354). As Holzkamp demonstrated, one essential mediation level is ‘reason discourse’ – the reasons for action from the standpoint of the subject. Throughout the conduct of everyday life, one is exposed to a veritable ‘discursive swarm’ (Jäger). The universal action category of ‘dual possibility’ propagated by critical psychology
appears multiply fragmented in everyday life, and a highly developed sense of orientation is required to come to terms with this ‘discursive swarm’.

Foucault calls for refusing to be ‘governed like that’. Holzkamp notes that every human longs for the ‘actual life’ and is nevertheless preoccupied with wrestling the contradictions at different levels of everyday life conduct. In order to find an answer to the question as to what ‘generalised agency’ in the sense of an expansion of discretionary power in the interest of ‘all of us’ may signify, it is fundamentally necessary to analyse what ‘governs’ one’s conduct of everyday life, which discourses one has been taken in by, what speech one has internalised and indeed long ceased to question. ‘It is ultimately about recognising given borders and experimenting with the possibility of crossing them, of wanting to avail oneself of them.’ (Hodec & Süß, 2015, p. 114). ‘Generalised agency’ in this sense would be the vanishing line to be permanently reinvented, leading out of the folds of everyday life conduct, blasting apart supposedly unalterable lines of discourse – while searching for a shared ‘actual life’.

References


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Understanding and reinterpreting Piaget

Gisela Ulmann

Bringuier: Do you feel you’ve been badly interpreted?
Piaget: Yes, in general.
(Interview with Bringuier 1980, p. 54)

Abstract
“I am not a psychologist. I am an epistemologist”, Piaget once declared to Bringuier in an interview, admitting that he was generally misperceived. In order to understand him better, his research work is biographically unfolded. Following this, Piaget’s data are reinterpreted within the framework of Holzkamp’s ontogenetic categories. It is shown that Piaget’s hypotheses regarding the developmental dynamics fail to recognize human subjectivity.

Keywords
genetic epistemology, development of knowledge at children

I. Confusions concerning the "developmental psychologist" Piaget

Jean Piaget began to publish his empirical studies in the 1920s, but was recognised by mainstream psychology only much later. Hans Aebli, a professor at Berlin’s FU in the 1960s, contributed significantly to Piaget becoming known in Germany through the many of his works that he commissioned for translation. In the United States it was above all John H. Flavell (1963), who (albeit
limitedly) brought the Swiss Piaget to greater attention. Piaget was and still is regarded within the discipline of psychology as a developmental psychologist. In the encyclopedic "Psychologie des 20. Jahrhunderts" [Psychology of the 20th Century] published by the Kindler Verlag, Volume VII on developmental psychology from 1978 bears the title "Piaget and The Aftereffects". In the standard German textbook on Developmental Psychology edited by Oerter and Montada (2008) as well as in that of Schneider and Lindenberger (2012) several chapters refer to Piaget and present his theory as that of "intellectual development" or as "development of thought". Yet, is Piaget a developmental psychologist as he is held to be?

II. Piaget´s questions, methods – and his results

Having completed a doctorate in Biology, Jean Piaget began to take an interest in epistemology and in the 1920s decided to become a "psychologist", by which he meant he began to engage in empirical research. From the point of view of Piaget the philosopher, empirical research counted as "psychology". His goal was, however, the development of a genetic epistemology, as Piaget himself maintained in hindsight: "I’m not a psychologist. I’m an epistemologist. (Still, you practice experimental psychology?) Because I want facts." (Bringuier, 1980, p. 49). In this respect Piaget’s works would more easily be placed within general psychology rather than developmental psychology. In order to determine the significance for psychology of his research findings it is necessary, in my opinion, to clarify what their subject matter actually is.

Piaget himself describes this in a nutshell: the subject matter of the theory of cognition are “the psychological origins of the notions and operations” of knowledge (GE 1970, p. 1). Piaget often describes "knowledge" as "intelligence". The subject of a genetic theory of knowledge is the genesis of operations and concepts. Piaget also pursued the genesis of "knowledge" historically; since the available evidence appeared to him as insufficient, he

1 Gopnik et al (2000) write that Piaget’s and Vygotsky’s work "was almost completely ignored" (p. 19). They, like Astington (1993) point out that it was only in the 1990s that the appeal of Piaget’s methods decisively advanced research in developmental psychology. In the 1960s and 1970s Piaget was indeed much discussed in the USA but his methods were derided as "storytelling", since he neither quantified nor statistically evaluated his data.
2 Since Piaget’s research is presented here above all as historical research, I always indicate the original year in which a work was first published. The corresponding page numbers of the quotations refer to the English translation. In the bibliography I cite both editions --as far as English translations exist. I indicate Piaget’s work in the article with the first letters of their titles.
turned – like “biologists” who instead turn to the investigation of ontogeny– to children in order to study the genesis of knowledge. “What is wonderful about the child is that you always have an individual starting from scratch, and you can see how all this occurs” (Bringuier 1980, p. 20). "The fundamental hypothesis of genetic epistemology is that there is a parallelism between the progress made in the logical and rational organization of knowledge and the corresponding formative psychological processes" (GE 1970, p. 13).

Piaget begins with the objection that, according to the accepted epistemological conceptions of his time, the categories of knowledge must either precede this, as Kant assumed (apriorism) -- or else evolve through experience, as assumed by Hume (empiricism). As a result, he maintains a front within psychology against gestalt psychology as "structure without genesis" and "associationism" in the sense of behaviourism (see PI 1947). Piaget contests both: categories can be neither innate nor acquired through simple experience. He posits instead that experiences are made through active contestation with reality, which become schemata or are reflected in operations; categories are constructed by means of these operations.

The data that Piaget amassed with many colleagues in decades-long research work with children deal with the pre-stage s of the operations and categories of knowledge. With this a genesis in the sense of a process is established. Yet the process itself is not visible through the data but can only be deduced by way of interpretation. Before these interpretations are examined, the operations and categories as Piaget conceived of them must be outlined. For this purpose, I adopt a research-biographical approach so that the overall design will be comprehensible and hence clearer.

Piaget commenced his empirical research in the Theodore Simons Laboratory in Paris at the start of the 1920s. Here he did not find the conventional work of constructing and standardizing intelligence tests as particularly interesting, yet he was fascinated by the manner in which children responded to intelligence test questions (A, 1950). He pursued this in greater detail using "clinical methods": he interviewed children and discussed with them. He regarded the ways of thinking that were expressed in the children’s answers to be "precursors" of a developed intelligence, which were also evidence for the genesis of knowledge (LT 1923, JR 1924). In the course of this he also compiled questions for children, which he later posed to children so as to then analyze their answers (CW 1926, CP 1927, MJ 1932).

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3 I haven’t found any reference in Piaget to Haeckel and his formulation of a "biogenetic basic law", which states that ontogeny is the recapitulation of phylogensis.

4 In 1970 Piaget states that the "stimulus-response scheme" is not an association, but an assimilation of the relevant "stimulus" in an existing structure, upon which the reaction follows (PP 1970, p. 707f).
The first decade of his empirical research furnished Piaget with, as it were, two stages of knowledge: a (developed) end-stage of logical thinking that humans acquire from about 11-12 years of age, and a pre-stage that human children put into practice up to this age. In five publications he describes this thinking "in children" most notably as "egocentric" and – in this respect – pre-logical and pre-conceptual. With "egocentric" Piaget means children are not yet able to adequately distinguish themselves as the subjects of knowledge from the objects of knowledge. This "epistemological attitude" does not allow them to differentiate between thinking about reality from reality itself, which is why they equate their own thinking with reality. In this respect children initially form theories about the world based on the pattern of their own activities. They see objects thus as living, manufactured and evolving, as having intentions, etc.; in this respect the necessity of evidence is alien to them – and they do not recognize inconsistencies. Piaget later distanced himself from some analyses of his "early work": most notably he had not sufficiently analyzed the category of "causality" (Bringuier 1977 p. 101 f.)

Two very significant events at this time led to a further development in method and hence theory. First, Piaget’s three children were born (1925, 1927 and 1931), whom he and his wife observed from their birth with regard to pre-linguistic possibilities for knowledge and then (as soon as possible) interviewed them. These observations brought Piaget to the conception of another "pre-stage": knowledge operations are from the very beginning "sensomotoric", that is perceptive, grasping and involve movement, i.e. walking. Piaget published the results in two parallel works: In 1936 "The Origins of Intelligence in Children" appears, in which Piaget, starting from reflex, works out activity schemata in six stages, that is, the precursors of the structures of thought. In 1937 "The Construction of Reality in the Child" appears, in which Piaget presents how the categories of knowledge (identity as a permanent object, space, time and causality) are constructed in the first two years of life by means of the activity schemata. A kind of continuation of these observations of his children – in particular the origin of imitation as "pure accommodation" and the symbolic function as "pure assimilation" appear in 1945. Only in these three works are

5 Unfortunately, in the titles of English translations "chez l’enfant" is often stated as "of the child". This very often leads to the criticism that there are children that (for example in the age specified by Piaget) do not think like this, that do not express themselves as such. Piaget pointed out that he discovered these utterances in children --and also stated the exact age of the respective children. Every item of data reported by him contains the first letter of the name and the age of the child, i.e. Luc (5;4).

6 According to Piaget an activity has a schema (i.e. shaking/agitating, hitting/beating), an operation has a structure (i.e. comparing, forming categories).

7 On the significance of the concepts of assimilation and accommodation see below.
the observed data also occasionally presented within the living contexts of the children, since after this Piaget altered his methods.

It was another significant event that prompted this change in method: Piaget took into account critiques from the Anglo-American world regarding his "clinical", that is to say, purely verbal method. His new method, which Piaget called the "critical method" consists in him having children solve manipulated problems with concrete material. The "activity" and the "contemplation" enable some children who cannot yet solve purely verbally posed problems to find a solution by means of concrete operations! Yet children who are younger than 7 years old do not use this possibility to concretely manipulate material to find solutions. This prompted Piaget to subdivide the previously homogeneously conceptualised stage of "Child" into one, which he named "concrete operational" and another, which he (in this context) named "pre-operational": There were even children for whom it was not yet possible to perform concrete operations. The first publication in which this new method was applied is "The Child’s Conception of Number" in 1941 from which a series of further publications followed: on the concept of identity (measure, weight, volume 1941b), time, space (1948), causality (1927). His final empirical research appeared posthumously in 1983.

By 1940 Piaget had produced a synopsis and guidelines for further necessary empirical research. This "synopsis" is arguably the first in which Piaget produced an integration of all the "subject matters" he researched referring to data collected to that point, which were only published years later in the respective – and in the meantime expanded– overall context. In it he also speculated on the feelings of children, on which he later, apparently reluctantly, held a lecture (IA, 1954), in order to subsequently finally abandon such "unstructured constructs” such as emotions (Bringuier 1977, 85ff).

What is interesting however about this synopsis from 1940 are two things. First, Piaget also (still) pursued his concern in demonstrating the disappearance of egocentrism, that is, the decentering in the sense of the differentiation between the subject of knowledge and the object of knowledge, but now from infant to

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8 1947, the forward to the third edition of JR.
9 In the meantime Piaget worked at the Jean Jacques Rousseau Institute, which was affiliated with a preschool where Piaget could conduct research with many children.
10 Solving the verbally posed problem: 'Edith is fairer (or has fairer hair) than Suzanne; Edith is darker than Lili. Which is the darkest, Edith, Suzanne, or Lili?’ corresponds to a formal operation. Children who cannot solve this problem, but who then can if they are shown equivalent dolls, are able to think concretely-operationally. Children who still cannot solve this problem despite the dolls, think in a pre-operational manner: they cannot yet understand that Edith is fair as well as lighter. (See JR 1924, 87).
11 A second one --with Inhelder– followed in 1966. As far as I know it was only in this publication that Piaget claimed to have outlined the "psychology of children".
"adolescents" up to adults. A newborn cannot at all distinguish itself as a subject of knowledge from an object of knowledge. Yet even if the "Copernican turn" succeeds, a child can incorporate itself as a body among other bodies, yet it mixes up the perspective, believing that its perspective is in accord with that of all other people. Only later does it become possible for the subject of knowledge to recognize its own position and its own perspective as its view of the objects, to coordinate these with the others and finally to categorize itself into the community (of recognizers). These turning points serve Piaget in conceptualizing qualitatively different stages in the development of knowledge.

On the other hand, in this compendium the notion of the genesis of knowledge as Piaget conceives it becomes clear: with each respectively developed activity schemata and operational structures of knowledge the categories of knowledge can be elaborated. For example: once a child can conceive of the unviewed relocation of an object, it looks to where it was last hidden (before its eyes) – objects now become permanent.\(^\text{12}\) Quantity, in contrast, is not yet permanent for this child. Instead, it suggests that a ball of clay rolled out into the form of a sausage has now become more (since it’s longer) or also less (because it’s thinner). Only when it can mentally combine both these changes can it recognize that one and the same activity (rolling it out) makes the quantity thinner as well as longer; provided that thickness and length compensate each other the quantity hence remained constant.

In this first compilation (1940) Piaget still arranged the stages according to age specifications\(^\text{13}\). Later (PI, 1947 and PC, 1966) he arranges according to sensorimotor and operational knowledge. Additionally, he incorporates the development of the symbol function that he had studied by then (PDI, 1945), which in his opinion makes possible the transition from sensorimotor to operational knowledge.

Piaget himself always presented the sequence of steps from the ontogenetic beginning outwards and hence showed how those that follow in each case "transcend" (preserving and evolving from) the preceding stages, from which follows irreversibility. In my opinion, however, this sequence becomes much clearer if we consider the stages retrospectively, that is to say, starting from the most developed form and going backwards to the respective preform. If we

\(^\text{12}\) If an object in a closed hand is hidden under A and found there by a child, but then the hand with the object first travels under A, and then under B, the child searches for the object under A, where it previously had found it. According to Piaget the object is thus quasi dependent on the activity of the child, in this sense still not permanent. It is only so (permanent) when it can be seen by the child as being independent from its own activities.

\(^\text{13}\) 0-2, 2-7, 7-12 years, adolescence. These age specifications are empirical – not normative!
outline the development in four\textsuperscript{14} stages (guided by SPS, 1940), the following
results: cognitive capacity, whose genesis interests Piaget\textsuperscript{15}, is described by him as “formal-logical intelligence” (empirically demonstrated by him with children and youngsters from circa 11 years old). Thinking is hypothetico-deductive, hence, independent from concrete reality. Thus, conclusions can be drawn from sentences (propositional logic), whereby sentences can be mere hypotheses. For example, a youngster recognizes: when all a’s are elements of the quantity A, and this is an a, then it is an element of the quantity A. Hypothetical thinking is the particular “ability” that identifies this stage.

The preform: hypothetical capability is missing, knowledge is dependent on concrete experiences. Thinking is (already) internalized and thus reversible.\textsuperscript{16} Once concrete operations are possible, then identity (as an identifiable invariant of a particular transformation), space (as the coordination of all coordinates and perspectives), time (as the coordination of the sequence of events and the interval between events), and causality (in terms of a specific cause and its effect) can be comprehended. Classes can be formed and arranged according to a uniform feature and placed into a hierarchy; i.e. a child now knows that the quantity of all flowers is greater than that of the bellflowers. Piaget calls this "concrete operational intelligence" (empirically shown by him with children between 7 and 11-12 years of age). The particular "ability" at this stage is reversibility, that is, the mental reversibility of operations.

The preform: reversible thinking is not yet possible, thinking is "pre-operational" (empirically shown by Piaget with children between 2 and 7 years of age). This follows the one-dimensional activity and the one-dimensional perception of the subject of knowledge, that indeed already distinguishes itself from the object of knowledge, but that cannot yet coordinate its own point of view with other points of view, that is, its perspectives with that of other people. Invariants of transformations are not recognizable (several dimensions such as "length" and "thickness" are indeed discerned, but not yet coordinated), speed

\textsuperscript{14} Students have often asked me how many stages Piaget conceptualized. The answer would be: at least three, but according to what he wanted to differentiate there are many more. I refer here to four stages in order to make the logic of development intelligible.

\textsuperscript{15} Other than what critics often accused him of, Piaget does not see in formal-logical intelligence "the end" of the development of knowledge possibilities. As for the question whether afterwards dialectical thinking would not yet develop (Kesselring 1988, 163ff), he doubtless would reply that he was too little familiar with dialectic (Bringuier, 1980, p. 100).

\textsuperscript{16} Thus a child can for example think about making a sausage out of a ball of dough and simultaneously a ball out of the sausage and thus realize that nothing changes through the deformations regarding quantity, weight and volume; these dimensions are hence "identical" regarding the sausage and ball of dough.
still decays in spatial sequence and temporal interval\textsuperscript{17}, space is not yet consistent (locations and perspectives of respective coordinates cannot yet be coordinated\textsuperscript{18}), causality cannot yet be differentiated from intentionality\textsuperscript{19}. To be sure, symbols can already be formed, but concepts are formed syncretically (that is, by alternating dimensions\textsuperscript{20}) and cannot be thought of in hierarchies. \textit{The particular "ability" here is the "internalization" of the knowledge activity.}

The preform: internalization is not possible, knowledge is only possible through activity and perception, it is contained in it and is not to be uncoupled from this\textsuperscript{21} --it is "sensomotoric" (empirically shown with children from birth to circa 2 years of age). The subject of knowledge and the object of knowledge cannot be differentiated. Objects can be classified with respect to their application by means of a schemata of action, methods can be applied to purposes. \textit{The earliest possibility for knowledge from birth is the (sucking) reflex, since via the sucking reflex the class of suckable objects can already be distinguished from the class of non-suckable.}

From this deduction it follows that an inversion of the sequence of these (pre-)forms of knowledge possibilities is not at all possible for logical reasons. The formation of each of these stages can nevertheless be delayed or accelerated, as Piaget himself (already in 1936 with regard to his own three children) expressly highlighted\textsuperscript{22}.

\textsuperscript{17} Hence a toy train that travels just as long as another but for a shorter distance is not regarded as slower, rather as just as fast --since both set off and arrived at the same time (PC, 1966).
\textsuperscript{18} Thus a child holds its perspective on a board with three clearly distinguishable piles (of things) for the perspective per se, this also applies for an observer who stands across or to the side of the child, and the child cannot specify from what perspective the different photos of this constellation were taken (CS, 1948).
\textsuperscript{19} Thus a child believes that a marble that rolls down an inclined board wants to go to the teacher standing under it--even after someone tries to explain to the child what a slope is (LT, 1923).
\textsuperscript{20} Hence a button and a coin belong together because they are round; the coin resembles a duck because on the coin a bird is depicted; the bird is equated with water because it can swim in it; the water resembles milk because one can drink both. (This example is attributed to Darwin’s observation; see Vygotski 1987, 176.)
\textsuperscript{21} Thus a child regards an object visibly hidden in front of its eyes initially as having disappeared; it does not search for it and cries if in case it wanted the object; somewhat later it searches for it in the place where it last found it. The child does not yet realize that only a specific activity has a specific (desired) outcome. The child in some cases mixes up chronological sequence, it explains for instance that we first blew out and then lit the candles(CR, 1937).
\textsuperscript{22} Hence his eldest daughter was the "slowest" --because, born in winter, she spent a lot of time in a baby carriage on the balcony without almost any possibilities for activities (OI, 1936).
Excursus on speed – on phases and stages

Since the still prevailing critique of Piaget directs itself above all on his "too late" starting of the knowledge capabilities of children, in particular with regard to that of a "permanent object", it is useful to look more closely at this. More modern investigations\(^ {23}\) with practices like habituation conclude that since three-and-a-half month old infants already look longer at events that are contrary to expectations than those that conform to expectations, that objects for them also exist when they are fully covered. This corresponds with one of Piaget's observation of his three-month-old daughter whose facial expression registered disappointment and expectation as her father hid himself. A crucial criteria that a stage has been reached is, however, according to Piaget, if a child searches for a disappeared object. The age group that Piaget gives for this to first occur is also observed in modern investigations. Does a child know that an object exists even when it is hidden and it just does not look for it --or does it not know this? The answer lies in my opinion in Piaget's conception of a "stage" that completes a "phase": this is reached when no more mistakes at all are made with objects of knowledge that have the same structure\(^ {24}\). Piaget describes the cognitive achievements occurring before this as prestages. That Piaget uses the words phase and stage as synonyms may remain hidden to a perfunctory reader. Piaget remarked on the problem regarding the acceleration of development through experience 1955 (GLT), 1972 (PGP) and 1980 (Bringuier, p. 44). He addressed this systematically in 1959 (TL, 1970). Here he observes 4 types of "apprentissage"\(^ {25}\): maturation, substantive experience, social transmission and equilibration. Each type contributes to the formation of knowledge, the first three mentioned are however inadequate as an explanation. The objections to material experience lead to the conception of the pre-operational stage. Against social transmission Piaget argues that a child must first assimilate and digest for itself that which someone tries to teach it\(^ {26}\) --what in turn is contingent on the laws of

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\(^{23}\) For a summary see Schneider & Lindenberger 2012, 391.

\(^{24}\) If a Berlin child would say for instance that there are actually more animals than dogs, but in Berlin there are more dogs than animals, then the stage has not yet been reached.

\(^{25}\) English translation: learning.

\(^{26}\) According to Piaget, many of his critics have provided evidence precisely for this. If need be one can teach children to correctly repeat words or sentences, i.e. to imitate, -- yet since they cannot apply these to structurally similar situations shows that they do not understand the “influence of the social environment”; they have not made it their own. (PP 1970, p.714ff)
spontaneous development\textsuperscript{27}. In this respect, according to Piaget, only the concept of equilibration (see below) is an adequate explanation.

### III. Piaget´s conception of the dynamic of development

How does Piaget conceive of the "motor" of development? What advances the process? In general, this is not accessible through simple observation.

By way of illustration: When a plant is photographed daily or filmed continuously, we can indeed see that it grows and produces leaves etc., yet we cannot see why it grows --we do not see that it needs water and light for this, rather we can only come to know this through further investigations and theoretical efforts.

Piaget did not undertake this. He proceeds on the assumption that every subject of knowledge is active, produces experiences through activity and reflects this. His point of reference initially was the differentiation between the subject of knowledge from the object of knowledge (the decentring of egocentrism). Later he switched to the cybernetic paradigm of self-regulation of structures (BK, 1967), as will be further outlined in the following:

In his early writings Piaget proceeds from the view that a "child", because it still cannot distinguish between a subject of knowledge and an object of knowledge, and therefore is not conscious of its own subjectivity, thinks "egocentrically" by necessity. It must then quasi absolutely posit its own location and its perspective which then leads to the egocentric distortion ("assimilation") of knowledge. To the extent that the child de-centers its thinking and can distinguish its thinking about things from things themselves, its knowledge can become "objective"\textsuperscript{28}. This occurs on an ever-higher level so that the youth must then understand that even its theories about the world and their refinement differ from the theories of others and the world itself, and in this respect can transform from a reformer into a realizer with respect to Piaget´s tested categories\textsuperscript{29}.

In later writings, systematically in Piaget’s work "The Development of Intelligence" (1936) the concept of "assimilation" borrowed from biology and – as a countermovement – "accommodation" took on priority as an explanation for the progress of development: already with its innate sucking reflex an infant "assimilates" surrounding factors and "accommodates" the reflex on these.

\textsuperscript{27} In my opinion Piaget uses "spontaneous" to refer to the child’s own construction.

\textsuperscript{28} For Piaget "objective" means that even objective reality is brought to account as an object of knowledge and is not simply thought of as being formed according to the subjective image of it or is open to influence by it.

\textsuperscript{29} I will return to this at the end.
Assimilation refers to the utilization of a knowledge schema and a knowledge structure to a set of circumstances, whereby, conditions permitting, it results in a distortive perspective/way of thinking. Accommodation refers to the adaptation of a knowledge schema and a knowledge structure to the set of circumstances. The direction of these processes is determined when they come into balance, what Piaget calls "equilibration". "Balance" means: a specific activity from the standpoint of the subject is from an assimilation; from the standpoint of the object from an accommodation; however, in terms of the result assimilation and accommodation do not differ substantially (Brinquier 1980, 44).

By having replaced the egocentrism-concept in his theorizing with the concept of equilibration (which also has the advantage of being completely non-dependent on age), he also, in my opinion, eliminated the recognizing subject from his theory. It is thus the schema, or, the structure, which assimilate, accommodate and coordinate themselves and equilibrate in this way. Piaget uses the emergence of cybernetics as a model to explain the self-movement of structures (Biology and Knowledge 1967). In Genetic Epistemology (1970) he designates this explanation as being too general and in 1975 puts forward a more comprehensive explanation with the title “The equilibration of cognitive structures”, in which he expressly critiques his earliest interpretations of the mechanism of development. As is already indicated in the title, the structures are quasi the subject; and even when Piaget here differentiates the observations of the activity of the subject from the observations on the object, his conception remains one of self-movement. Piaget sees its dynamic as being in the fact that no result of assimilation is fully in accord with a corresponding result of accommodation, insofar as each solved problem still manifests existing contradictions – however, in my opinion, he gives no explanation for why these still existing inconsistencies are (later!) recognized.

Piaget, by substituting the concept of (decentering) egocentrism with the concept of equilibration of structures, no longer poses the question of how the subject of knowledge discovers an inconsistency in its (putative) knowledge, since “all knowledge brings up new problems just as much as it resolves old ones” Piaget (ECS 1975, 25). The children, whose reasons he describes, are nevertheless for a certain time steadfastly convinced of the correctness of their answers. How do they experience “new problems”, or, their problem as “new”?

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30 Thus, an infant that, for example, thus far suckled only a breast, but now sucks on a blanket assimilates this into the category of something suckable – and accommodates its sucking action to the blanket, which is also suitable for this.

31 Seiler (1968) shows that repeated questioning also does not lead to children altering their conviction. An interpretation for the belief by children that a mass becomes more or less when it is transformed in front of their eyes is found in Ulmann (1997). Children see that it is no longer identical, that is, no longer “equal” --consequently it must have
With regard to experience, Piaget argues against the “empiricists” and against “associationism” that the operations and categories of knowledge presented by him cannot be based on simple experience with objects, rather this is only facilitated by the reflection on the experience. This is made clear with a simple example: When a child is asked whether there are more flowers or more bellflowers, and it initially answers that it did not count these, and it regards this as an empirical problem to be solved, and when the same child somewhat later correctly answers this question, it is not for the reason that it in the meantime the child counted them, but because it can place its operations of category formation reflectively in relationship to each other. Yet according to Piaget the movement is “spontaneous” and takes place in self-regulation.

With this conception Piaget clearly differentiated himself from nativism. Viewed from a genetic-psychological perspective he argues rather “constructively”\(^\text{32}\) (schemata and structures construct the categories) or “epigenetically”, but in my view using a quasi theory of maturation, since he does not pose the question why a subject does not attend to an inconsistency.

This must be problematized. As stated at the outset, Piaget assumed a parallelism between ontogeny and sociogenesis, he also intensively engaged with the history of science, and again and again pointed out that children develop specific outlooks and theories as a rule in the same chronological order as these were developed socio-historically (see for example CQ 1941a Bringuier 1980, 93ff). It in no way escaped him that a child in the 20th century demonstrably progresses much further than an adult from more than 2000 years ago. Yet he did not consider, to my knowledge, that children today can form operations and categories that adult humans from more than 10,000 years ago could not at all!\(^\text{33}\)

This is in a way very peculiar, since Piaget’s most superb topic of research were logical-mathematical structures, whose development, on the one hand, count as not yet completed, and on the other hand, in today’s known historical documents were only tentatively used circa 4000 years ago. The question to be asked: Can a child itself “construct” the concept of numbers as Piaget investigated it --or can become more or less. As long as they cannot yet distinguish that “something” is now other, “others” but yet the same, they do not let themselves be dissuaded from this conviction.

\(^{32}\) In no way “social-constructive”; according to Piaget the categories of objective reality are becoming more and more adequate.

\(^{33}\) The formation of the abstract concept of numbers that Piaget (CN 1941) empirically presented with children at the age of roughly 7 years, relates to that particular concept that first became possible via “arabic numerals”, which in turn emerged social-historically in India between 600-900 CE. Up until then and for some (adult) people even today things are “counted concretely”: i.e., by tallies: per a real animal, bread, etc. a notch or indentation. (see for example Ifra 1991).
the child pick up (constructing it) the concept of numbers, because (or if!) it is socially developed?

If we understand ontogenesis as an individual process within a process of social-historical development (see Holzkamp, 1983, Chapter 8), then only the latter can be a correct answer. The possibility of thinking is not the only thing inherent to children, which Piaget – as “is universally accepted” – is in agreement with (PDI 1945, 196), but also the possibilities for the acquisition of respective social-historically developed knowledge – yet this also precisely requires its social-historical development. If one does not assume that this social knowledge can be instilled into children, as Piaget rightly rejects, and if one also does not assume that a child isolatedly deals only with current facts, objects, circumstances (“reality” according to Piaget) and actively experientially grapples with them, but rather when we take into account that a child is also confronted with theories about these and reflects these, we come to a better understanding of the process of acquisition that at times appears as “spontaneous development”34. It is from here that we can also evaluate the psychological relevance of the data presented by Piaget.

IV. Re-interpretation 1.: Development: the subject “climbing” over steps

If we only consider the data as Piaget comprehended it in the 4 phases described above, his research objective becomes clear; this should also be clarified by means of a developmental-logical reconstruction. He proceeded with a stage defined by operations and categories of knowledge and pointed out logically-subordinated pre-stages. He explained this not only theoretically and logically but also provided empirically supporting data for it. Yet he by no means describes the “intellectual development” (let alone the cognitive development) of children (which is usually asserted in psychological receptions), rather he only illustrates the sequence in which children acquire, in the actual sense of the word, these social-historically developed operations and categories; how they are able “to make it (with understanding) their own, if they have the opportunity (and the ability) for it.

They do not even need to do this. This is clear with the concept of numbers and mathematics: If the concept of numbers and addition, as well as

This is how the following episode was presented in our project “Subject development in early childhood”: two children quarrel over which of them is bigger. Na points out that she is 5 years old and that No is only 4. No points out with gestures to her taller height --and a little later differentiates “bigger” regarding an older age and taller. Words that signify constructs and theories which these children acquired made possible the differentiation they needed for the resolution to the conflict and disagreement.
multiplication, were not socially developed no child would be able to “develop” them out of itself. Yet, although the concept of numbers and mathematical operations are socially developed, a child can nevertheless fail in the attempt to acquire it or even choose to refuse to do it. That the acquisition of the concept of numbers must precede the acquisition of addition, and to that the acquisition of multiplication, is “logical”, because addition requires the concept of numbers; multiplication is an abbreviated or special form of addition (i.e. $4+4+4+4 = 4 \times 4$), which in turn is the potentiation of a special form of multiplication, etc. The inversion is not possible – yet it is still possible not to acquire all this.

Piaget’s indisputable service to psychology, in my view, lies in the fact that he, as it were, was a master in “skeletonizing” the operations and categories of knowledge that he investigated and then making relevant observations regarding their sequential (pre-)forms. He was also able to invent experimental designs, which made the structure and the coordination of the categories discernable. Through his “epistemological lenses” he could see this razor sharp – but only this. He himself incidentally noted that formal logic is “not an adequate description for the whole of living thought; formal operations constitute solely the structure” (PI, 1976, 150).

V. Attempts at application – and misunderstandings

An “application” that Piaget himself suggested in 1947 (PI, 154-55) is the individual diagnosis. At the time he pointed out that his colleague Bärbel Inhelder, by screening using the concept of invariance could differentiate the slightly “mentally retarded” from the “feeble-minded” and these from “imbeciles”. Although later he no longer returned to this. His (problem) questions were occasionally applied (unstandardized) in the assessment.

Nevertheless, it should be assumed to be a mistake that the acquisition of knowledge is fulfilled by all children exactly like this, as Piaget described. As strongly emphasized, Piaget looked for and found “preforms” among children; one single proof for a developmental-logical preform would have sufficed. That Piaget observed, interviewed and experimented with more than one child was quite necessary in order to exclude that what was being dealt with was an individual peculiarity with each observed preform. Guided by the concept of “normal” as described by Alfred Binet, Piaget proceeded from the assumption that something is “normal” for a particular age group when it can be observed in

35 In my opinion Piaget took responsibility for responding to this “mistake” since he described every prestage as necessary, “It’s the same because each stage is necessary to the following one. It’s called a ‘sequential order’” (see Bringuier 1980, 25).
circum 75 percent of the children (JR, 1924); percentages require larger quantities. Piaget indeed emphasizes “sensorimotor intelligence” as the first preform. He sees the structures of operations and concepts already primed in the modes of activity and perception, and therefore as necessary prestages of logical thinking (Bringuier, 1980, 25). Yet it would be an error to assume that a child must pass through this prestage to acquire logical thinking and the categories of identity, space, time and causality. Even if, in general, “grasping” precedes grasping as “understanding”, this in no way means that the ability to (physically) grasp something is a necessary prerequisite to be able to understand. The same is true with respect to seeing and hearing – and recognizing. Physically handicapped children find other verifiable ways.\textsuperscript{36}

Misunderstandings regarding the application of Piagetian findings exist also in my opinion with regard to mathematical didactics; when examination questions are used as teaching-learning tasks. Piaget worked out that being able to count does not mean being able to recite numerals in the correct sequence, but rather that the concept of numbers is instead formed by the assignment of seriation (ordinal number) and classification (cardinal number), and that it is preceded by a pre-operational way of thinking in which quantities are considered according to their spatial extent: i.e., children judge that two rows with 8 small plates each, which are however of different “lengths”, contain different quantities. From this it is concluded that a child must first acquire the concepts of “same, more, less” in the pre-numerical sphere, before it can acquire addition and subtraction. In the respective textbooks,\textsuperscript{37} instead of numerical quantities being explained to them, children are hence initially confronted\textsuperscript{38} with just such tasks, with which according to Piaget’s research in some cases they initially have difficulties, (see in addition to this Ulmann 1992 and 1997).

A useful “application” for the everyday practical interaction of adults with children consists, in my opinion, in a better understanding of precisely this. When one knows that a very young child perhaps cannot yet take the point of view of someone else, then one will not interpret it as being “mischievous” when it gets into the hair of another child. Hair is so very nicely soft and if one pulls on it there are sounds to be explored. The “social behaviour” of a very young child

\textsuperscript{36} Vygotski (1924/1975) points out that there are different ways for the schooling of socially developed abilities, all of which are cultural, whereby the usual way is seen as being “natural” and all the others, as it were, “artificial”. Learning cursive handwriting is considered to be normal, acquiring the ability to write braille is considered an indirect route. Piaget sees, as it were, only the path that children set out on without any hindrance. How deaf children develop knowledge was studied by Furth (1966).
\textsuperscript{38} Seiler (1968) has shown that no progress occurs for children even when they are repeatedly subjected to such exercises.
can also consist in it bringing another crying child its toy; or in it likewise crying; or that it hits the crying child (perhaps because crying and hitting “belong together” and the blow is yet to come – or because that is how the noise stops). When one knows that specific “mistakes” in the thinking of children are present at specific ages then one can understand children better. When for instance a thirsty child stubbornly fights to get only the slender glass among many glasses with the same amount of juice (because in this one the liquid stands at the highest) even when one assures it that all glasses contain the same amount, one will not regard the child as stubborn but rather understand that it only notices the height of the liquid and from this it infers the quantity.

VI. Re-interpretation 2.: The data

There is a significant difference between experimental settings and life praxis. In the 1930s Vygotski (1969) criticized Piaget on account of the lack of life praxis in his research. Piaget only got around to reading this criticism almost three decades later and responded in 1962. He regretted that Vygotski, who died long ago, could not know the results he derived with his “critical method”. Distorting clay balls or threading beads (activities which Piaget listed in his response) are indeed “practical” activities (in contrast to verbal) yet they are in no way what Vygotski meant by life praxis. What was intended was made quite clear, in my opinion, in a report on expeditions undertaken by his colleague Alexander Luria in the 1930s.39 People, whose (rural agricultural subsistence) life praxis did not make a formal logic necessary, also did not “develop” this at a much older age according to Lurija’s observations; they formed concepts “situationally”. People who received at least a minimum of formal education, or who worked for some time on collective farms, could construct formal categories and draw logical conclusions.

Analytical categories for the itemization of Ontogenesis as a life praxis were conceptualized by Holzkamp (1983). It is worth testing whether, with this approach, the psychological content of some of Piaget’s empirical data can be adequately recognized – and whether this is even data, which Holzkamp applies to the actual empirical research by means of the analytical categories conceptualized by him.

Holzkamp at first reconstructs analytical categories phylogenetically and then socio-historically. He does not conceptualize formal-logical intelligence, as does Piaget, as a central category, but rather “action potency” as a psychological

39 The expeditions took place in 1931 and 1932 (Lurija 1976); a lengthy publication appeared only in 1974. A German translation appeared in 1986.
aspect of a socially mediated mode of life. This – derived phylogenetically and then socio-historically – serves him as a point of departure to achieve the categories for the itemization of ontogenesis up to the attainment of the ability to act. The ability to act requires the (thinking) transcending of the immediate circumstances of life and life praxis towards the recognition and consideration of social structures that cannot be vividly experienced.

The possibility to thinkingly transcend immediacy must be preceded by an ontogenetic process, by which, in the (understood) transcending of immediacy, the socially mediated mode of life/life praxis first becomes perceptible. Holzkamp expressly supplies no data on ages for this “developmental course” of immediacy-transcendence, which then changes into a “process-type”. This is due mainly to the fact that a particular “essence” is “recognizable” in its social-historical “emergence” and, to that extent, also in its alterability (including one’s own way of thinking).

This also implicitly involves recognizing what is genuinely unalterable such as physical, chemical and biological causality, which unlike social laws cannot be abrogated through a legal ruling but can only be taken into account and be used.

An ontogenetic process must precede this process-type, in whose way of thinking the social mediatedness of its own existence is still lacking: that is, a cooperative form of life in which it is already “realized” that objects are in general produced by people, generally for a specific general-human purpose, and for this reason generally have a specific usefulness (“object-intentionality”); this can be realized by understanding that people generally have intentions (“social intentionality”). Holzkamp labels this course of development as involving the generalization of the meaning of objects “Gegenstandsbedeutungsverallgemeinerung”, which then also transitions into a process-type, and for which Holzkamp similarly emphatically provides no specifications regarding ages.

Prior to this there is only a relative human-nonspecific precursor to conceptualize, in which the objects of utility without their social character can only become meaningful via their material characteristic and form, corresponding to possibilities of action or usage.

Holzkamp reconstructs the development of the human Specific – Piaget regards this to some extent as pre-existing, since he investigates a specifically

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40 “Developmental course” refers to the process in which a (cognitive) possibility develops. When this becomes dominant Holzkamp speaks about a “process type”. “Process-type” approximates in my opinion Piaget’s “stage” or “level”. “Process” emphasizes however that every new structurally similar problem must be solved --if it even can be solved. Whoever has understood that all are more than a few can apply this on all super- and sub-categories.
human knowledge-possibility and in this respect does not have to pose this question. Yet, as will be shown, this distorts knowledge for him:

Like Piaget, Holzkamp proceeds with an active child, yet with one that wants to improve its life in a contradictory society – and it can do this mainly because it acquires control over its life circumstances by, at first, resolving ontogenetically induced inconsistencies. To this end it must first by necessity “recognize” a lot, which – as very briefly shown– has nothing to do with Piaget’s concept of knowledge, and in this respect almost works in the opposite direction, because it is not the invariants of the activity which are primary, but rather the variants. This will be investigated much closer below.

Piaget compiled his data mostly in quasi-experimental settings, which result from his epistemological considerations – and the observations of his biological children also took place through epistemological lenses (he could not research for long with a baby that was “too hungry”). If one reads in particular the observations dealing with the life praxis of children using “psychological lenses”, one encounters something quite interesting, for instance, with the data pertaining to the acquisition of identity and causality. This can be shown with some examples:

1. Piaget spotlights a significant recognition problem with children between the ages of 7-9 with their orientation on the “success” of their activities and their modes of one-dimensional perception as well as their one-dimensional “doing” thinking. As long as a child – according to Piaget– is interested in the success of its activity, it is not interested in how this comes about, and as long as it thinks “in doing” (and “in seeing”), it accentuates the changes within transformations and disregards the invariants, that is, that which does not change in a transformation. Furthermore, it egocentrically “over determines” its own activity as being experienced as intended and also ascribes intentions to things. Thus children believe, for instance, that marbles want to roll to a specific location and that mountains, rivers and wood were made by humans for human purposes (see in particular CW 1926 and PDI 1945). Piaget describes these childish theories as animism and artificialism.

Yet this “recognition problem” signifies – if read differently by interpreting the shortcoming as an ability– that children are primarily interested in how one can improve life’s circumstances, and that in this respect they do indeed acquire knowledge! Thus for a child it is extremely important to understand that people generally – like itself– have intentions, not only because it can then distinguish between the meaningful, and as the case may be, essential activities of others and their arbitrariness, but also, because this makes possible for the child a more

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41 Piaget was able to show empirically (SU, 1974) that a child/youngster initially does not understand its successful practical resolution of a problem.
conscious interweaving of intentions, that is to say, communication with others. And for a child that wants to acquire control over its life circumstances it is quite important not only to realize what objects are used for and how one can use them as an instrument (the sensorimotor phase according to Piaget), but rather for what purpose they were made. Because when, for example, a child ruins things through unsuitable use, they will, if need be, all too quickly be taken away from it.

Piaget’s data show: the first attempts to influence the actions of other people are already observable in the second year of life (see 1936 and 1937). That children in this age group also attempt when prompted to make objects do something, which is understood by Piaget as “universal intentionality”. What constitutes an “over-determination” with respect to objects, as Piaget describes it, is with regard to people quite correctly recognized! Piaget concludes from his data that the idea of universal intentionality differentiates itself from the understanding of rules on the one hand in “precausality”, which leads to the concept of causality, and on the other in psychological motivation, which leads to logical reasoning (LT 1923, MJ 1932). Which types of control (Verfügungsmöglichkeiten) accrue to a child if it understands psychological intentionality – “social-intentionality” for Holzkamp –, Piaget did not consider, rather he only took account of (egocentric) mistakes. He observes this also in the data published above all in 1926, 1927 (and 1945), which concern childish theories about nature. In 1940 he summarized this as follows: “In other words, there is no chance in nature, and everything is ‘made for’ man and children according to an established and wise plan with the human being at its center. Thus it is the raison d’etre of things” (SPS 25). Indeed this is valid for most things that surrounds a child! A child that recognizes this – “objective intentionality” according to Holzkamp – expands its control capabilities. This data from five early publications and three subsequent works illustrate the developmental course of the generalization of the meaning of objects (Gegenstandsbedeutungsverallgemeinerung) conceptualized by Holzkamp. The data also empirically demonstrates Holzkamp’s notion of a “logically” reconstructed sequence, whose assertion is only possible actual-empirically: at first a child only recognizes the usefulness of a thing; as soon as it begins to recognize human intentionality, it also recognizes that one can make, produce and change something; both lead to the recognition of the usefulness of

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42 About one to two decades after the publication of “Grundlegung der Psychologie” [Foundation of Psychology] by Holzkamp, to which I refer here, but without reference to it, the ontogenesis of the understanding of intentions became the object of research in mainstream psychology (see Astington, Orig. 1993). Tomasello in particular examined this closer and termed it the “nine month revolution” (2002, 61f).
(manufactured) objects. Being able to differentiate manufactured objects from “nature” is the next step.

2. According to Piaget the “sensorimotor recognition pre-form” is outgrown when action can be internalized; yet even for actions only to be thought about requires that their consequences be anticipated. This begins with delayed imitation; later a child can form symbols (symbolic play), its schemata become operations that are reversible but still require concrete materials, until they also become detached from them, become “formal” and make hypothetical-deductive thinking possible. Thus can the categories of identity and causality, etc. also be constructed. A constantly changing world in which, furthermore, nothing is foreseeable can also appear unsettling to children. To that extent their control also obviously expands when they recognize what remains constant, and which specific cause has which specific outcome.\(^{43}\) This also means, according to Piaget, that a child can increasingly overcome being imprisoned in immediacy (Unmittelbarkeitsverhaftetheit) in all vividness to the benefit of sheer (logical) thinking, that is, logical inference from premises. Viewed differently one could also express it as such: The child/youngster can increasingly “conceptually grasp” his/her practical experiences, i.e. in general terms. This corresponds to an aspect of Holzkamp’s conception of the developmental course of transcending immediacy (Unmittelbarkeitsüberschreitung), which holds as essential that socially mediated existence is also recognized. Since Piaget, following Rousseau, understands society as a social contract, that is, as an accord between all individual members of a community, this notion does not occur to him.

VII. Conclusion

To summarize: According to Piaget’s data a child is primarily above all a “practitioner”; if praxis is understood in Marx’s sense as change-causing activity: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, the point is to change it” (Marx, 1845). As a “practitioner” it accentuates above all the variants, that is, the changes via activity – that in certain circumstances it also wants to cause. Presumably because Piaget methodically precluded the life praxis of children, since he only observed and questioned children under quasi-experimental conditions, he could not see, whether and how the abstraction of life-practical experiences, as well as the social-historical theories that mediated them, also facilitates their formal thinking and recognition of invariants.

\(^{43}\) Piaget’s data on concrete-operational and formal-operational modes of thinking have never been refuted to my knowledge – even though many children today reach the stages earlier.
Piaget states: “Equilibrium is attained when the adolescent understands that the proper function of reflexion is not to contradict but to predict and interpret experience.” (SPS, p. 64) “True adaptation to society comes automatically when the adolescent reformer attempts to put his ideas to work. Just as experience reconciles formal thought with the reality of things, so does effective and enduring work, undertaken in concrete and well-defined situations, cure all dreams.” (ibid, p. 68)

Piaget conceptualizes people – according to his own image and his research question – as experimenters, without considering that they must also eat, that food must be produced, and that, indeed, people are also producers, they can evolve in how they relate to their world – and must do this.

Yet to understand their socially-mediated existence, another kind of transcending of immediacy (Unmittelbarkeitsüberschreitung) is required than the formal-logical one investigated by Piaget: they have to understand the difference between visible social relations (that correspond to Rousseau’s social contract conception of society, which Piaget adheres to) and non-visible social structures. The recognition of social structures did not interest Piaget the epistemologist.

Of course, only when they are “grown-up” do humans, who are no longer children, have the ability to actually influence change in social relations, not only as experimenters.

References

Works by Jean Piaget

LT – 1923 Le langage et la pensée chez l’enfant

JR – 1924 Le jugement et le raisonnement chez l’enfant

CW – 1926 La représentation du monde chez l’enfant

CP – 1927 La causalité physique chez l’enfant

MJ – 1932 Le jugement moral chez l’enfant

44 In 1940 Piaget also mentions “professional work”; in 1955 he defines “work” as organizing a systematic plan for research instead of just engaging in trial and error, and continually experimentally varying two or more variables simultaneously.
OI – 1936 La naissance de l'intelligence chez l'enfant
The Origin of Intelligence in the Child. New York: Routledge, 2011, c1953

CR – 1937 La construction du réel de l'enfant

SPS – 1940 Le développement mental de l’enfant

CN – 1941 La genèse du nombre chez l'enfant
The Child’s Conception of Number. New York: Routledge, 2000, c1952

CQ – 1941 Le développement des quantités physiques chez l’enfant (With Inhelder)

PDI – 1945 La formation du symbole chez l’enfant –Imitation, jeu et rêve – Image et représentation

PI – 1947 La psychologie de l’intelligence

CS – 1948 La représentation de l’espace chez l’enfant

CG – 1948 La géométrie spontanée de l’enfant


IA – 1954 Les relations entre l’intelligence et l’affectivité

GLT – 1955 De la logique de l’enfant à la logique de l’adolescent


PC – 1966 La psychologie de l’enfant (with Inhelder)

BK – 1967 Biologie et connaissance

GE – 1970 Genetic Epistemology


PGP – 1972 Problemes de psychologie genetique

SU – 1974 Ressuir et comprendre

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People and social uncertainty: Critical Psychology’s orientation theory meets Bourdieu

Tobias Kröll

Abstract
This paper will concentrate on intersections and connections between the sociological approach of Bourdieu and the critical-psychological approach of the Tübinger Forschungsgruppe (TFG). Both are focused on the “standpoint of the subject”. Neoliberalism, migration, and refugee movements will serve as points of reference in understanding the connections between these two practice-oriented scientific approaches.

Keywords
changing societies, cultural capital, depth sociology, economic crisis, neoliberal economic structures, orientation pressure of modernization, receiving societies, refugee movements, refugee crisis, research as cooperation, social self-understanding, social uncertainty, social upheaval, solidarity, standpoint of the subject, types of capital

When looking at the opportunities for and limitations to individual action within changing societies, it is useful to refer to the practice-oriented approaches of Bourdieu and the Tübingen Research Group (Tübinger Forschungsgruppe, short: TFG) as analytical tools. These approaches do not give generalized statements or recommended courses of action for very current topics. The use of such theoretical approaches in practice always involves individual agents.

Switching perspective from the “standpoint of the subject” to the structural societal level and back again entails certain uncertainties and vagueness in presentation. These two perspectival levels cannot be portrayed in one single clear picture – the people being described, or who ideally “self-describe,” as research subjects, are also in uncertainty themselves.
Pierre Bourdieu’s scientific intention is to work out a “depth sociology” that strengthens the standpoint of the subject (e.g., Bourdieu, 2001/2012). The “orientation theory”- approach of the TFG is based on a critical-psychological perspective, one which inherently incorporates society and the social context while, in practice, aiding the social self-understanding of the individuals involved in the research. The TFG refers to Bourdieu in various studies (see, e.g., the projects “U35” and “EVA60 – Vielfalt gefällt!”, Josef Held in this ARCP issue).

This paper will concentrate on intersections and connections between the sociological approach of Bourdieu and the critical-psychological approach of the TFG. Neoliberalism, migration, and refugee movements will serve as points of reference in understanding the connections between these two practice-oriented scientific approaches.

The first passage will focus on the perception and description of uncertainty in human orientation, the second on changing societies, and the third on the self-understanding of science “for the people.” The fourth chapter will look more closely at both approaches, while the fifth chapter will illustrate the practical application of these categories.

1. Social uncertainty and orientation – An approach

Fueled by neoliberal economic policy, the world economy and the socio-economic infrastructures of many countries have undergone fundamental changes since the beginning of the 1980s.

The enormous impact of economic crises, wars and civil wars in different regions around the world have led to massive migration and refugee movements. Many societies, organized around the nation-state, that serve as frame of reference for human action and orientation began moving on a mass scale. In addition to these movements, the chances of social exchange, networking and orientation began changing and diversifying due to modern communication technology. New opportunities and risks have arisen, as current discussions about fake news and the way of dealing with information from the World Wide Web have shown.

People move through time and physical spaces on earth; they move in and between societies. In doing so, they absorb different cultural elements (Farb, 1988: pp. 26-27) and develop their own special personal repertoire of competencies, orientations, and possible courses of action.

A good many of the certainties acquired during socialization (regardless of whether they are rated negatively or positively) are not fully applicable in situations of upheaval. This applies as much to immigrants as it does to long-
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established residents and domestic migrants. This may lead to great uncertainty and confusion on all sides. Events like terrorist attacks or the “misbehavior” of individuals and groups have, in combination with modern media, an immense impact on orientation and action, which could in turn result in an unforeseeable feedback loop between individuals and groups, self-image (the way one sees oneself) and perception by others.

Rainer Bauböck (1998) uses an analogy to describe certainty and uncertainty associated with migration (or local, rapidly changing political environments): Imagine you are sitting in a stationary train and you see another stationary train beside you. If you look out the window, you only see the other train in the background, nothing else. If the train beside yours begins moving in one direction, you will have the feeling that your train is moving in the other direction. Our “normal” experience is, that backgrounds don’t move if the foreground doesn’t either. For individuals, national borders and nationalities “normally” represent an ever-present background (cf. Bauböck, p. 21). These backgrounds may change if, e.g., national borders are modified, in times of war, or for refugees. Such kinds of sudden “background changes” (with immense impact on life) have been experienced by, for example, Iraqi people in regions occupied by the so-called IS.

If you change the perspective (in Bauböck’s train-analogy) by turning your head to look out the opposite window, you will be confused to see that your train hasn’t been moving at all. The same confused feeling will occur once the train beside yours leaves the station and the station building appears again. An immediate sense of uncertainty has become palpable and you notice that your own perception and orientation are relative. Presumably solid points of orientation can begin moving and shifting, resulting in a new image. After such confusion, regaining and stabilizing orientation takes time.

Stabilizing the orientation seems easy in the case of optical uncertainty, but in a case of a societal background change, where personal resources consists primarily in internalized cultural capital of individuals (Bourdieu, 1983; Kröll, 2012), this process will take more time. With the help of these resources, individuals have to act and orient themselves in a new social context that represents new rules and assumptions. This is especially the case when the social field is not homogenous and consists of various sub-levels containing their own respective (unconscious) rules regarding, for example, different gender roles and gender-hierarchies. Furthermore, most situations of migration or flight involve new language(es) that may use another alphabet, languages which are based on a different internal structural logic, and which provide different modes of expression.
Rapidly-changing political circumstances can, for example, in a country in the midst of political upheaval, may lead to mass oppression of individuals and groups that are “traditionally oriented” to the society before.

An obvious choice for stabilizing orientation would be to fall back on broad categories, but this would run the risk of stereotyping and, in the case of conflicts, of mutual escalation.

2. Societies in upheaval – Subject and theory

Pierre Bourdieu developed his theoretical tools in the 1960s in Algeria, analyzing Algerian (specifically Kabyle) society under the influence of French colonialization. The pre-capitalistic Kabyle society operated with a behavioral logic different than the capitalistic-influenced French society. Native Algerian people encountered the capitalistic logic of the French colonial empire and many individuals, especially in the cities, adjusted themselves under the prevalent circumstances to this new logic. As a result, there arose a break with or contradiction to the individuals acting from the old logic. Depending on the standpoint of acting individuals, either the background had changed, the individuals, or both (see also, Frisinghelli/Schultheis, 2003; Kröll, 2012). In order to be successful in a capitalistic economy, other resources (the Bourdieusian “types of capital”) and behavior patterns are necessary than those in a pre-capitalistic economy.

Bourdieu photographed during these changing times in Algeria. These photographs have the ability to serve as a mirror for better understanding dimensions and consequences of current economic and social upheavals (Schultheis 2003, pp.16 ff.). Most of the present societies have been “confronted with a brutal neoliberal radicalization of capitalism and its logic” (Schultheis 2003, pp. 16f., translation by TK ¹). More and more segments of the population are affected and “they are confronted with a new economic logic that demands a completely flexible and mobile labor force without history or social commitment. This logic is incompatible with the patterns of thinking and behavior of many people.” (Schultheis 2003, p. 16, translation by TK ²)

There is an apparent analogy between the “deruralized” farmers of Kabylia and “the dismantled and deregulated employees of present capitalistic societies”

¹ „mit einer brutalen neoliberalen Radikalisierung des Kapitalismus und seiner Logik konfrontiert“ (Schultheis 2003: 16)
² „Auch sie sind mit einer neuen ökonomischen Logik konfrontiert, die vollkommen flexible und mobile, geschichts- und bindungslose Arbeitskräfte fordert, eine Logik, die mit ihren grundlegenden Denk- und Handlungsschemata schlicht nicht zu vereinbaren ist.“ (Schultheis 2003: 16)
(Schultheis, 2003, p. 18, translation by TK). One could compare the testimonies from the Algerian Kabyle with the results of the research conducted under the direction of Pierre Bourdieu and gathered in the collected works on the French society, “The Weight of the World” (Bourdieu et al. 1997 “Das Elend der Welt”). More current changes are taking place in European societies due to the so-called “refugee crisis.”

The TFG conducted a study with young employees from the service sector (in Germany) with an approach analogue to Bourdieu’s premise that (young) employees are affected by the strong pressures of economic modernization, which can be described as the “neoliberal pressure of modernization” (Kröll 2013, p. 79). Individuals orient themselves under this pressure and it influences them with regards to their solidary actions as well as their subjective agency. In an interview with the German magazine SPIEGEL, Bourdieu compared the effect of neoliberalism on the stability of societies with the effect of AIDS on the human body:

Neoliberalism is a siege weapon that declares an economic fatalism against which any resistance seems futile. It is like AIDS: it attacks the immune system of its victims.” (Bourdieu 2001, p. 120, translation by TK)

In their study, the TFG looked at solidarity among young employees working in the service sector and their subjective agency. The Bourdieusian analogy of the immune system was proven to be true: Solidary action in the working environment seemed to be permanently affected by the impact of neoliberal economic policy. The study began shortly before the bankruptcy of the Lehman Brothers and the European financial and economic crisis. The main part of the research was conducted in the period at the beginning of the crisis (2007-2010).

One main result of the study was that individuals interested in the sustainable and solidary modernization of the work environment (and society) face the challenge of supporting the resistance “against the neoliberal invasion” (Bourdieu 1998, translation by TK) and of “(re)creating stable spaces where communal solidary actions and learning experiences are encouraged and made possible again.” (Kröll 2013, p. 94, translation by TK).
This does not take place without contradiction. Intense discussions and debates occur between groups with (seemingly) similar goals, but ideas regarding the means with which to reach them differ considerably (cf. Kaul, 2017 on the supposedly “meaningless violence” at the protests against G20 summit in Hamburg in July 2017). At the same time, universities are subject to increasing economic pressure and a certain “commercialization” and commodification that makes market-independent research more difficult.

The migration movements within Europe as a result of the financial crisis, and refugee movements to (central) Europe mainly as a result of the Syrian civil war, brought new players, topics, challenges, and uncertainties to public awareness. Politically-religious terror attacks contribute to uncertainties and influence the orientation of the various people involved.

### 3. Research for the people: Subject standpoint and understanding

Essentially, Bourdieu’s personal goal is an emancipatory research for the people. “Sociology isn’t worth a penny if it only provides knowledge from experts to experts” (Bourdieu 1993, p. 7, translation by TK). This was the main driving force behind Bourdieu’s political involvement and what led him to publish the anthology “Acts of Resistance” (1998). Bourdieu wants to connect economic and social policy and demands a return to the roots of social misery:

The sociologist, who is usually just summoned to glue the crockery shattered by the economists, could remember on this occasion that sociology could infer on the political decision-making level, which is frequently left to economists. Human suffering, caused by neoliberal politics (as we described it in “The Weight of the World”) must be described and related to the social policy of companies (redundancies, types of employment contracts, wages), their economic outcome (profit and productivity) and their typical social indicators like work accidents, occupational illnesses, alcoholism, drug use, suicide, delinquencies, felonies, rape, and similar. The foundation for an economy of happiness could only be reached on that basis. It would be an economy that would take into account things, economic leaders and economists don’t –

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überhaupt erst wieder möglich machen.“ (Kröll 2013: 94)

7 „Die Soziologie wäre keine Stunde der Mühe wert, sollte sie bloß ein Wissen von Experten für Experten sein.“ (Bourdieu 1993: 7)

8 Original French: „Contre-Feux“; in German: Gegenfeuer.
strategies that are the guidelines on behalf of which the politicians wish to
govern us. (Bourdieu 1997, pp. 54-55, translation by TK 9)

The TFG rejects as does Bourdieu the scientific “observer’s point of view”.
Keeping in mind one’s own point of view, (emancipative) interests, and the
impossibility of neutrality, there can be no attempt to place scientific interests on
a pedestal. A completely different approach is realized in viewing the role of
science as part of a process and, ideally, as a catalyst that helps all those involved
to advance. 10

This approach has been described in the publication on the TFG-project
“Vielfalt gefällt!” in which practice-projects in the academic field of
migration/integration were given support from the TFG-team:

Research, from our standpoint, is a form of cooperation, in which
researcher, practitioner and user are not bound to hierarchies but instead
stand in intersubjective relation to one another, so that all retain their
subject status. We want to support a process of social self-understanding,
where the opportunities and distinguished characteristics of the respective
project are made apparent to every participant.” (Held/Bröse/Kechaja
2015, p. 19, translation by TK 11)

9 „Der Sozialwissenschaftler, der gewöhnlich nur gerufen wird, um das von
Wirtschaftlern zerschlagene Geschirr zu kitten, könnte bei dieser Gelegenheit daran
erinnern, dass die Soziologie auf jener politischen Entscheidungsebene eingreifen
müsse, die immer häufiger Ökonomen überlassen wird. Die menschlichen Leiden, die
durch neo-liberale Politik verursacht werden (wie wir es in der Studie ‘Das Elend der
Welt’ beschrieben haben) müssen dargestellt und mit der Sozialpolitik der Unternehmen
(Entlassungen, Art der Anstellungsverträge, Gehälter), ihren wirtschaftlichen
Ergebnissen (Profite, Produktivität) und den typischen sozialen Indizien wie
Arbeitsunfällen, Berufskrankheiten, Alkoholismus, Drogenkonsum, Selbstmord,
Vergehen und Verbrechen, Vergewaltigungen und ähnlichen in Beziehung gesetzt
werden. Erst auf dieser Grundlage kann man das Fundament zu einer Ökonomie des
Glücks legen. Es wäre eine Ökonomie, die endlich berücksichtigen würde, was
Wirtschaftsführer und -wissenschaftler bei ihren phantastischen Berechnungen alles
außer Acht lassen - Berechnungen, auf deren Basis uns die Politiker regieren wollen.“
(Bourdieu 1997: 54f)

10 Basis and prerequisite for this are implicit: shared fundamental values and
orientations regarding humane, solidary society, which receives no further mention.

11 „Forschung ist also für uns eine Form von Kooperation, wobei zwischen
Forschenden, Praktikern und Nutzern kein hierarchisches Gefälle bestehen soll, sondern
eine sogenannte Intersubjektivitätsbeziehung, die jedem Teil seinen Subjektstatus lässt.
Wir wollen also einen Prozess sozialer Selbstverständigung unterstützen, wodurch allen
Beteiligten deutlicher wird, was das jeweilige Projekt auszeichnet und welche
Möglichkeiten darin stecken.” (Held/Bröse/Kechaja 2015: 19)
Such processes of social self-understanding in France were encouraged by the study “The Weight of the World” \(^\text{12}\) (Bourdieu 2001/2012).

### 4. An outline: Cultural people – Individual cultures, orientations and scope of agency in fields

The focus of German Critical Psychology and the resultant orientation approach is the standpoint of the individual subjects (“each me and I”\(^\text{13}\)), which is placed in relation to society and social context. The Bourdieusian approach is ideally compatible with this focus. Critical psychology’s perspective “from the subject’s point of view” corresponds with Bourdieu’s “understanding” (Bourdieu et al. 1997, pp. 79ff.). Bourdieu’s scientific tools make it possible to grasp and structure the relation between the subjects’ personal resources and social circumstances.

Society consists of social fields and individuals with specific orientations. The Bourdieusian capital approach provides a scientific tool with which to describe the resources available to the respective agents in social fields. The orientation approach makes it possible to become aware of the internalized basis for orientation (in various fields).

The U35-study of the TFG outlined an integrated model to illustrate the relation between the structural level and subject level. The goal of the integrated model is to avoid the misrepresentation of top-down models, in which individuals and their orientations are seen as direct results of social conditions.

An additional mediation level has been placed between the social structural level and the subject level (Held et al. 2011, p. 22).

Figure 1: Relations between the structural level and subject (orientation approach of the TFG)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural level:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- social structure</td>
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<tr>
<td>- social context</td>
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<tr>
<td>- structures of meanings/culture</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Mediation level</th>
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<tr>
<td>- subjective meanings/orientations</td>
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</table>

\(^{13}\) In german: “je ich”. This kind of focus is fundamentally different to a neoliberal view and involves a perspective which enables and integrates solidarity to the other “each me and I’s”. 
On the structural level, various facts and circumstances are taken into consideration. Of particular importance are the economic structure and the political structure, both gathered under the umbrella term “social structure,” and the communication structure (media, social media, general public). The respective dominant language is also important from the standpoint of the subject.

The structural levels are mediated to the subject through subjective meanings, justifications, and orientations.

For example, neoliberal economic structures are increasingly accompanied by social insecurity (precariousness) on the subject level, which has an impact on subjective orientations and justifications, and affects an individual’s lifestyle and everyday scope of action. In this way, the middle class of economically-strong European countries is increasingly defined by the fear of job loss, which impacts subjective agency, as well as the subjectively-reasonable demands and possible courses of action.

The Bourdieusian structural level is defined as a “field” or “fields”. Agency in these fields is determined by the various types of capital individuals are equipped with. The embodied cultural capital plays a significant role in the subjective action at the level of mediation between the structural level (fields) and the subjects. This type of capital is linked to the body: “The accumulation of cultural capital in the embodied state, i.e., in the form of what is called ‘culture’ in French, ‘cultivation’ and English, and ‘Bildung’ in German, presupposes a process of incorporation, which [...] costs time” (Bourdieu 1986, p. 244).

There are common and known “rules” respective to these fields and Bourdieu describes them with the term “doxa.”

Figure 2: Relation between the structural level and subject (Bourdieu)
In order to be effective, specific cultural goods or achievements have their necessary equivalents and complements within the subjects’ internalized cultural capital. In music, for example, it is necessary to be able to read music and play an instrument (internalized cultural capital) in order to use the reified cultural capital (a composition, piano or guitar). The whole of internalized cultural capital represents an ensemble of “individual cultures” that correlate with the related social fields.

Neither of the above-mentioned scientific models explicitly describe the levels of values and morality, which serve as the bases for individual action. These can be of religious or secular (such as human rights) nature.

The supposedly natural rules of a field (Bourdieu) and/or the structures of meaning in a society are determined by all kinds of social (power) structures. The various rules and/or meaning structures can be diametrically opposed and thereby trigger moral conflicts in individuals. They influence (free) action. It is possible, for example, that individuals oppose a political regime for religious or humanistic reasons (as based on rules, meaning structures, or “values”). In terms of concrete action, other aspects (such as fears, scope of agency in societal and social hierarchies, and relations between groups) play a role.

On the subject level, the individual’s place in the society or, more precisely, in “various social fields” plays a role: of importance are both self and external definitions, as with, for example, categories such as gender or skin color, which likely intersect.

Societal situations and conflicts appear perfectly suited to be analyzed objectively. In concrete situations, history (historical aspect) plays an enormous role. Relations between various groups (“collectives”) have already and will become “history.” These histories are passed down in various ways and the individual cannot escape them. This can be realized on the level of the “each me and I” (Klaus Holzkamp’s “je ich”). In reality, where concrete, subjective experiences and feelings are also playing a role, dynamics can develop in which objective analyses seem immediately a reductio ad absurdum.

5. Upheaval – Orientations and actions

Bourdieu developed his approach in Algeria during times of upheaval under the influence of the French colonial empire. The tools he developed there he later applied to French society under the influence of neoliberal upheavals.

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14 There are also individuals who can play a composition without knowing how to read music.
This approach differs in its application to refugees, in which case the structural levels are in flux (as mentioned in Bauböck’s “train-analogy”). The old and familiar social fields that formerly directed their usual scope of action and determined their cultural capital are disappearing. Refugees are forced adjust to new fields both during and after their journey. Certain structures are replaced by others.

Growing up, child refugees become acquainted with uncertainty and, in severe cases, (sexual) abuse as a quasi-normality.

In response to the orientation uncertainties of their attachment figure, children living in such conditions are hardly able to learn stable social relations. Ethnic background and gender roles present themselves in such situations as stable and obvious foundations for personal orientation and “identity.”

The social anthropologist Joke Schrijvers (Universiteit van Amsterdam) describes the latter using the example of internal refugees in Sri Lanka (Schrijvers, 1997). The researchers made it possible for those being interviewed to express their subject-standpoint as freely as possible:

I did not work with a questionnaire, but left maximum room for the refugees themselves to come up with their own subjects and points of view, their own needs and analyses of the situation they found themselves in after their flight. (Schrijvers 1999, p. 48)

Of interest are Schrijvers’ findings with regards to the actions and various orientations of men and women in the refugee camps resulting from the civil war in Sri Lanka. The conditions and circumstances can be described from Bauböck’s depiction of the confusions caused by changing backgrounds. Schrijvers observed internal refugees living in Sri Lankan camps, where life continued to go on: informal schools were established, religious rituals were observed and festivals were celebrated. Schrijvers was able to identify a pattern that made it possible for social and cultural life to keep going in the camps (Schrijvers 1997, p. 8). Ethnic background and gender became the most important tools with which to “normalize life” (ibid., 3). At first glance, it seemed that women in the camps were in a better position. They did what they had done before: domestic work and arranging the everyday life of the family. Their gender identity remained stable. Men, on the other hand, experienced a complete rupture with their past (ibid., 13). They lost their work, wealth, and the socio-economic position that came with it: everything that had defined their identity as men fell apart. One possible way of escaping the situation was through alcohol. Some men tended towards emphasizing their ethnic background or their masculinity as a way to reclaim their identity. Others used violence against women as a way to restore the old dynamic.
This example demonstrates how differentiated the various orientations of refugees are, and how fundamental categories like ethnic background and gender become the most obvious refuge when trying to regain some semblance of stability in life.15

The same categories seem to apply also to the receiving societies. Thus, in Germany, polarizing positions that create a division between “us” and “the refugees” (regardless of origin) become stronger. The disrespectful behavior of some male refugees against (German) women was and is depicted and justified in public discussions in terms of ethnicity. Insecurity on all sides seems to increasingly provoke polarizations. Ultimately, the only way to avoid or fight against this is through establishing meetings and creating enough space (and time) to do so. Such a thing takes time and considerate, engaged people working on it, along with financial resources and profound knowledge e.g. of intercultural communication.

This presents the problem and task of finding ways to sustainably achieve this in societies where the national budget has come under the neoliberal austerity mandate and where, for years, everything has been set in motion to ensure that the free market and individualization are the best solutions.

References


15 In the United States the hope for a stable identity in economic insecurity may for many (mainly white) people based on “Make America great again”.


Agency and subjectivity: From Holzkamp via Bourdieu to Laclau and Mouffe (and back?)

Judith Vey

Abstract
How can we better understand the subject and its agency? There is a wide range of theoretical concepts dealing with this question - from (post)marxist to (post)structuralist theories. However, often these theories are not discussed together in order to compare and combine them. In this chapter, I aim to analyze three key approaches in left theory which have the focus on political and social struggles and the regarding role of the subject and its agency: the concepts of Klaus Holzkamp, Pierre Bourdieu and Ernesto Laclau/Chantal Mouffe. I will examine the differing aspects and the elements that can be combined with each other in order to gain a more precise understanding of the subject and its agency. In short, I go from Holzkamp via Bourdieu to Laclau and Mouffe and in some aspects back again to Holzkamp.

Keywords
subject, subjectivity, agency, Klaus Holzkamp, Pierre Bourdieu, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe

Introduction
The theoretical concepts of Klaus Holzkamp, Pierre Bourdieu and Ernesto Laclau/Chantal Mouffe are important approaches for many leftist scholars in analyzing political and social developments and struggles regarding the role of the subject and possible ways of emancipation. With some exceptions, in which two of the three theories have been jointly examined, these theories have never been discussed together. However, each of them stands for a key approach in

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1 This paper is based on my diploma thesis (Vey 2007).
theory building within the left (and beyond) and are used for many important analyses. Holzkamp as the main representative of a strong Marxist perspective on the subject, Bourdieu as a Marxist-inspired sociologist of the wide landscape of practice theories, and Laclau and Mouffe as representatives of poststructuralist perspectives on social reality and the subject stand for key streams in left and mainstream political and social theory.

All theories have a particular, implicit or explicit epistemological understanding of subjectivity and agency. This understanding has far-reaching effects on the construction of their main categories, ideas and analyses. However, these understandings are often not visible at first sight. Klaus Holzkamp, as a main representative of German Critical Psychology, puts a very strong emphasis on the idea of a (potentially) rationally acting subject, whereas Pierre Bourdieu understands the subject as very much produced by external social structures, which are incorporated into the subject. While Bourdieu conceptualizes the subject as a largely coherent unity – united by the habitus as an action-producing entity – Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe reject the existence of closed and coherent subjects without inner contradictions. With their theory, a fundamental fragmentation and de-centralization of the subject is being introduced.

The three approaches differ widely regarding their disciplinary background (psychology, sociology and political science). They are developed in very different academic contexts and argue different sides of the subject and society. So why discuss these three theories together? In my view, the value added by such a comparison and combination lies at different levels: All three approaches stand – of course to varying extents – in a Marxist tradition. They all show similarities concerning different, but very essential aspects of critical theory and practice. They all discuss and reflect on the possibility of autonomy of the subject and ways of emancipation. Whereas Holzkamp and Bourdieu also shed much light on the individual level of the acting subject and its social conditions, the perspective of Laclau and Mouffe is characterized by a predominantly meta-subjective view – with the main focus on the production of social reality. With these three theories, it is possible to illuminate different and important levels and aspects of agency and subjectivity.

In this chapter, I aim to analyze the different understandings of subject and agency in the three theories. I will examine the differing aspects and the elements that can be combined with each other in order to gain a more precise understanding of the subject and its agency.
The Autonomous Subject: Klaus Holzkamp and Critical Psychology

„[The individual] always also [has] the ‘alternative’ not to act or to act differently, and is in this sense ‘free’ with respect to the meanings as mere possibilities for action.”² (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 236, emphasis in original, see also Holzkamp, 1992, p. 198)

This quotation gets to the heart of a subject-based Critical Psychology³. According to Holzkamp, the subject always has the possibility to decide, to decide in a different way, or not to decide at all. As a consequence, until its death, even right before being executed, the subject always possesses agency. In Holzkamp’s view, agency is the basic quality of every human being. Thus, agency (Handlungsfähigkeit)⁴ is the key category in his approach. However, in capitalist societies, agency is fundamentally limited by the way capitalist society is organized. Thus, Holzkamp’s analysis is a fruitful supplement to other works in critical theory, because it illuminates the subject-theoretical blind spots in Marxist thinking and lays the foundation for a Marxist-inspired psychology (see also Gundlach, 2015). The basic premise of Critical Psychology is the “material a priori”, which means “that no one can consciously act against his or her life interests, as he or she experiences them”⁵ (Holzkamp, 1991, p. 7). The actions performed always have a subjective functionality for the subject, even if the subject does not know it yet. For this reason, all actions can be understood and explained through a rationally reasoned discourse. Or, as Morus Markard puts it: There is a fundamental connection between the premises of an action and the action’s subjective functionality for the individual; what follows from this is that an intersubjective comprehensibility is always given (cf. Markard, 2001, p.

² German: “[Das Individuum hat] immer auch die „Alternative“, nicht oder anders zu handeln, und ist in diesem Sinne den Bedeutungen als bloße Handlungsmöglichkeiten gegenüber „frei“.“ Unfortunately, most of Holzkamp’s writings have not been translated into English (Painter et al., 2009) and he himself only wrote one paper in English (Holzkamp, 1992). An exception is the book edited by Ernst Schraube and Ute Osterkamp with selected writings by Holzkamp in English (2013). For this reason, the quotations are translated by myself with the help of Felix Pahl, who corrected this paper and to whom I owe many thanks.

³ As Horst Gundlach points out, there are also other critical psychologies which are not mainly based on the writings of Klaus Holzkamp and colleagues (Gundlach, 2015).

⁴ The German term „Handlungsfähigkeit“ is translated into English in different ways: Whereas Holzkamp used the term „action potency“ (Holzkamp, 1992), other authors speak of „capability for action“ (Papadopoulos, 2009) or simply „agency“ (Tolman, 2009). The latter seems to me the most readily understandable term (Tolman, 2009) and will therefore be used in this paper.

⁵ German: dass “niemand seinen Lebensinteressen, wie er sie erfährt, bewusst zuwiderhandeln kann”.

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AGENCY AND SUBJECCTIVITY
1179). Therefore, irrational actions cannot exist, because actions are always functional for the subject. Thus, I would argue that in this respect, functionality and rationality are synonymous in Holzkamp’s understanding. Even if the reasons do not seem to be rational and clear at first sight, they are definitely comprehensible and subjectively functional on second sight. They are “subjectively grounded” (Papadopoulos, 2009, p. 163). Based on a “grounding’ discourse”,

“it can be shown that the groundedness of actions is ‘comprehensible’ or comprehensibly reconstructable to the extent that the particular concrete living conditions can be understood as the premises upon which the subject can base actions that achieve an increase in satisfaction of needs and quality of life through disposal over the conditions of his/her life.” (Holzkamp, 1992, p. 200, emphasis in original)

Agency as the main category of a subject-based psychology is defined as the “social disposal over the conditions of his/her life” (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 239). In modern societies with division of labour, “necessities for action become possibilities for action: the subject is free to select from different opportunities”. Consequently, it is able to behave consciously towards them. In order to characterize different grades of agency, Holzkamp differentiates between a restrictive and a generalized form of agency (Holzkamp, 1985, 1990, 1992).

Restrictive agency describes situations in which the subject acts along the existing structures and does not challenge them. The restrictive alternative is the more obvious one in capitalist society (“naheliegendere”), since it is able to expand the scope of action to a certain extent and in the short run. For example, it can be easier not to protest against bad working conditions and instead to struggle to withstand competition. In the short run, agency might be extended: Possibly, I will get a promotion or at least not lose my job. However, in the long run, my agency is limited or at least not extended: I have to compete with colleagues and permanently struggle in order to survive in the labor market. In particular in the neoliberal regime, no one’s job is safe. My health, my well-being and my future perspectives are fundamentally influenced by this. In Holzkamp’s view, I am forced to act against my interests and values (and against those of others). By contrast, the term generalized agency describes situations in

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6 German: “gesamtgesellschaftlich vermittelte Verfügung über die eigenen Lebensbedingungen”.

7 “The individual’s action is not directly determined by the societal meanings but responds to them as mere possibilities for action” (Holzkamp, 1992, p. 199, emphasis in original).

8 German: „restriktive und verallgemeinerte Handlungsfähigkeit“. 
which the subject tries to change the social structures in order to expand agency. This can mean standing up against the hierarchical relation of dependence and protesting against these harmful conditions, although this can limit the current agency.

It is important to underline the fact that Holzkamp introduced the idea that classification of actions cannot be made from an “objective” external point of view. Holzkamp points out that only the subject itself can decide on the (limiting) character of an action (Holzkamp, 1985). The task of a Critical Psychologist is thus to help the individual better understand and analyze its motivations and reasons for its actions. Furthermore, these categories of actions only classify situations and not persons.

The advantages of such an understanding of the subject, its actions and motivations are obvious: Since actions and reasons for actions can only be understood through the eyes of the acting individual, a paternalistic view and relationship among people can be prevented. An equal relation between patients and therapist is being fostered. The subject is not analyzed independently from the social structures. Options for a fundamental expansion of agency and for an enhancement of life conditions are improved. The subject and its actions are taken seriously.

Despite the idea of an autonomous subject, Holzkamp's concept is not based on the assumption of an almighty subject. On the contrary, it is very much influenced by the “imperatives of a reflexive subject, of a general rationality and ultimately of a universal understanding of history” (Papadopoulos, 2006, p. 8), and in this respect it stands very much in the tradition of the enlightenment. Hence, it is dominated by a strong idea of a rationally acting subject that is potentially free to act: “Whether or not a person can utilize the possibilities offered by an object or situation will depend on his or her power to do so” (Tolman, 2009, p. 154). It is the (capitalist) society that potentially limits its agency. In this understanding, the subject is never fully determined by social structures and power relations. Humans always theoretically possess the cognitive ability to act consciously, to challenge and to shape social structures. They are able to act autonomously, and they are responsible for their decisions (Maiers, 1996). Therefore, “defensive self-restrictions of the subject” (Maiers, 1998, p. 93), which may appear irrational, are a highly functional reaction of the subject. As a consequence, there are no irrational actions.

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9 German: “Imperativen eines reflexiven Subjekts, einer allgemeinen Vernunft und schließlich eines universellen Geschichtsdenkens”.
10 German: “defensive Selbstbeschränkungen”.
The Socially Determined Subject: Bourdieu and the Concept of Habitus

„Not the subject acting according to a free conception it chose for itself, as it is found in all its radicality in Sartre and in attenuated form in the rationalist theories of action (…), but the actor shaped by society stands at the center of what might be called Bourdieu’s sociological ‘conception of the human nature’.\textsuperscript{11} (Schwingel, 2003, p. 61, own translation)

Pierre Bourdieu’s theory is developed on the basis of extensive empirical research. On that basis, he builds his theory of social reality, the theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1976). In his ethnographical fieldwork, he found that many human actions are not logical or only follow rational arguments up to a certain point. He concluded that there must be a different explanation for these actions. Cornelia Bohn and Alois Hahn explain it this way: “For the logic of practice is (...) logical up to the point at which being logical would no longer be practical”\textsuperscript{12} (Bohn & Hahn, 2003, p. 255, own translation). In order to explain this observation, he developed the concept of the “habitus”, which he defines as “lasting, acquired schemes of perception, thought and action” which – most of the time – are unconscious and control our action unintentionally. They are the permanent internalization of the social order in the human body;

“(…) systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’ without in any way being the product of obedience to rules.” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72, emphasis in original)

Being “history become body” (Bourdieu, 1985a, p. 69, own translation; see also Costa, 2006, p. 882), they are persistent and lasting structures in the subject. For this reason, our actions are in most cases not the result of a strategic intention and purposeful behavior; by contrast, they are the result of incorporated social structures, based on our social position in society – in particular in relation to the social fields and classes. The way we think and feel and even the ability to reflect on our actions are strongly influenced by these dispositions.

\textsuperscript{11} German: "Nicht das gemäß einem freien, selbst gewählten Entwurf handelnde Subjekt, wie man es in aller Radikalität bei Sartre und in abgeschwächter Form bei den rationalistischen Handlungstheorien findet (...), sondern der gesellschaftlich geprägte Akteur steht im Mittelpunkt dessen, was man auch als Bourdieus soziologisches 'Menschenbild' bezeichnen könnte."

\textsuperscript{12} German: "Denn die Logik der Praxis ist (...) logisch bis zu jenem Punkt, an dem Logischsein nicht mehr praktisch wäre."
As a consequence, according to Bourdieu, “we are automatons in three-quarters of what we do” (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 474). Nevertheless, Bourdieu does not assume a simple causal relation: “Take all the impressions that a person has received – you will not be able to deduce a single future action from them (...)” (Bourdieu, 1985b, p. 386, own translation). Instead, these dispositions define the scope of possible actions, and here in particular the way an action is being performed. For example, Bourdieu argues that workers may also listen to classical music or go to a museum. But the way in which they listen to the music or look at a picture is determined by their class-related habitus. Thus, you can often identify very clearly from which class someone comes. Bourdieu explains this observation by the fact that similar conditions of life produce similar forms of habitus. Decisions are thus made in a “quasi-conscious manner”\(^{13}\) (Bourdieu, 1976, p. 166, own translation). They are in most cases not the result of a strategic and rational intention. Although it is possible to reflect on these conditions and their influence on one’s actions, it is not possible to reflect on them fully and to get rid of these dispositions. Even if you try to climb up (or down) to another class and to adopt another habitus, it will still be visible that your behavior is not fully incorporated in your body and that, instead, you always have to actively imitate this habitus. Thus, the habitus as the “unchosen principle of all choices” (Bohn & Hahn, 2003, p. 259, own translation). Even “free” decisions are made on the basis of the habitus. It works as an action-producing principle.

As a consequence, the idea of a free and autonomous agent becomes subject to a huge limitation. Bourdieu shows that only conditioned freedom and autonomy are possible. Due to this invisible action-producing principle, the actions people perform always imply more meaning than they are aware of (c.f. Bourdieu, 1976, p. 179). Thus, despite all efforts of critical reflection, it is never possible to uncover all of the limiting dispositions and foundations of decision-making processes and to act without these inner limitations. As an amplifying effect, as a result of their socialization, subjects have different dispositions concerning the ability to reflect on their habitus. Therefore, the ability to reflect on the reasons for actions and to make a decision on that (rationalized) basis does not primarily depend on a person’s reason, but on the dispositions of a subject to reflect on and consciously deal in a constructive way with the reasons. Additionally, the expected prospects of success might also have an impact on the question whether a subject starts a reflection process, reacts on an emotional level or just suppresses the moments that might irritate the habitus. Choices, actions and reactions thus mainly depend on the dispositions and not on a free choice for either a rational or an emotional action or reaction. Because of these

\(^{13}\) In German: „quasi-bewusste Art und Weise“.
predispositions, for some persons a rational decision is more likely than for others.

What does this tell us about the context of a justification for an action and the resulting agency? First of all, it is theoretically possible to reflect on one’s actions and to identify and analyze the reasons why a person is acting in this or that way. The actions are surely often functional for the subject in the sense that it acts according to its habitus and challenges neither the internal nor the external structures. However, a full transparency of reasons is never possible.

Secondly, the reasons for social and individual change are often not a result of a rational reflection and one’s own independent motivations and a free will, but of a contradiction between the personal dispositions and social structures. The starting point of such a reflection can be an experience through which the habitus as an internal structure encounters irritating external structures (c.f. Bourdieu, 1976, p. 182f.). At this point, Bourdieu follows a strongly dialectical argumentation. If the schemes of perception, thought and action are suddenly irritated and not running smoothly, they have to be modified or displaced with new ones. On a larger scale, revolutions can be initiated when – due to fundamental changes in the political, social, economic or cultural structure – conditions of the masses are aggravated.

With Bourdieu, Holzkamp’s relatively autonomous subject experiences fundamental limitations. In Holzkamp’s view, actions that proceed unconsciously are also rational in the sense that they are functional for the subject (or rather, he seems to make no difference between a subjective functionality and rationality). With Bourdieu’s insights, therefore, it seems to be more precise to understand this functionality as an autonomous reaction based on socially determined habitus; consequently, “free will” is never free from these internalized social structures. With Bourdieu, it turns out that the simple division of external limiting structures and a potentially independent inside is too undifferentiated and thus has to be abandoned. In Bourdieu’s terms, the subjective functionality is instead a “practical sense” (of one’s place). For this reason, actions often seem to be rational, since they can be reconstructed as such. However, they are neither functional nor dysfunctional for the subject. They are more a kind of habit und thus not really justifiable or intentional. Due to the fact that the habitus is class- and field-related and thus can be very different from person to person, the perception and ways of reasoning can vary widely interpersonally. Therefore, an intersubjective “comprehensibility” of actions and their reasons can be very complex, challenging and sometimes even impossible. In order to understand the reasons for an action, you need to understand the (biographical and social) background of the action in its whole complexity, or, in other words: the genesis of the habitus. And still, since you yourself also always speak from a specific,
subjective point of view, it can happen that you are not able to understand the other person’s reasoning.

In Holzkamp’s view, the subject is the starting point of social change. It is able to reflect and position itself consciously towards society. With Bourdieu, a more complex and differentiated but also pessimistic picture is being drawn. In this respect, Bourdieu seems to be closer to a materialist-Marxist understanding of society than Holzkamp, since he gives more weight to the power of the social structure than to a free and autonomous subject. With Bourdieu, the externally, materially produced internal limitations of a free and independent agency and subject come into view. In that conception, it is not the insistence on an autonomous and self-reflective subject that produces agency, but the insights into the possibly irrational, highly socially determined reasons for action. Nevertheless, this can produce a kind of agency, too:

“If it is true that the idea of personal opinion itself is socially determined, that it is a product of history reproduced by education, that our opinions are determined, then it is better to know this; and if we have some chance of having personal opinions, it’s perhaps on condition that we know our opinions are not spontaneously so.” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 27)

The Post-Foundational Subject: Laclau and Mouffe and the Loss of the Subject

“So, what we did, and this is central for your point concerning identity, is to put into question the notion of an identifiable agency. That is to say, what we conceived is that the subject is constructed through a plurality of subject position [sic!], that there is an essential unevenness between this position and, that there are constant practices of re-articulation.” (Laclau, in Laclau & Mouffe, 1999)

Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s discourse-theoretical hegemony theory is mainly situated in the field of political philosophy, and specifically in poststructuralist theories. Their work is strongly influenced by a critical examination of Marxist theories; besides Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony is the main Marxist anchor point (Laclau & Mouffe, 2006). Although their work is not a result of empirical studies, it has its origin in the wish to understand the new social movements of the late 1960s and 1970s which were not formed around a class core but instead around different issues and identities. Laclau’s and Mouffe’s theory integrates and rethinks very different philosophical theories, such as Louis Althusser’s concept of interpellation, Jaques Lacan’s works on language, Derrida’s deconstruction and the ideas of other
poststructuralist thinkers such as Judith Butler and Michel Foucault. In the poststructuralist tradition, their understanding of the subject is fundamentally anti-essentialist; they view it as fragmented, de-centralized and fragile. As Urs Stäheli puts it: “What Bourdieu still assumed with the concept of the habitus is renounced here: a unifying principle that coordinates the practices of a subject so as to avoid incongruities”\(^1\) (Stäheli, 2000, p. 48, emphasis J.V., own translation). What exactly does this mean regarding their understanding of agency and the subject?

In their eyes, the subject is not constituted by external structures or in reaction to them. There are no basic needs the subject can act against. Since there are no ultimate foundations, fixed facts or conditions such as economic structures or material bodies, subjects can only get their identity through difference and in relation to others. Thus, this approach is also classified as difference-theoretical and post-foundational. As a consequence, no identity and subjectivity is independent from relationships (c.f. Buden, 2000). What follows from this is that the idea of identity has significantly changed: identity is no longer understood as a coherent unity, but as a subject which identifies itself with and in relation to something and which gains its identity only through this process of identification. This field of differences constitutes different subject positions, a term introduced by Michel Foucault. A subject position can be being a teacher, a white citizen of the EU, a woman, a mother, a girlfriend, a political activist etc. Every identity consists of many different subject positions. Since different expectations and logics of actions concerning these positions exist, and since the subject is always interpellated (in the Althusserian sense, see Althusser, 2014) as a concrete subject, these different positions can and often do conflict with and contradict each other. Accordingly, the subject is fundamentally ambivalent, de-centralized and fragmented. As a consequence, meaning is never fixed and elements always have more than a single meaning; they are “overdetermined” (e.g. Laclau & Mouffe, 2006). In contrast to role theory, the subject not only takes these different roles, it is fundamentally constituted through these positions (c.f. Stäheli, 2000, p. 49). The reality of the subjects is thus always contradictory, fragmented and incoherent. The assumed unity (“Einheit”) of the subject and the idea of a subject as an autonomous executor of actions are both only produced discursively and thus not “real”. Due to this fundamental overdetermination, a closure of the subject and a compatibility of all the different positions are never possible:

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\(^1\) German: „Was etwa Bourdieu mit dem Begriff des Habitus noch voraussetzt, wird hier aufgegeben: ein vereinheitlichendes Prinzip, das die Praktiken eines Subjekts so aufeinander abstimmt, dass es nicht zum Stilbruch kommt."
“Such an approach can only be adequately formulated within a problematic that conceives of the social agent not as a unitary subject but as the articulation of an ensemble of subject positions, constructed within specific discourse and always precariously and temporarily sutured at the intersection of those positions.“ (Mouffe, 1992, p. 237)

Moreover, these different positions are also not based on rational or pre-discursive foundations. For example, being a woman does not imply predetermined and common interests or needs. A deduction of specific demands is not possible. For that reason, for example, it is potentially possible to connect feminist demands with racist and anti-racist demands at the same time, since the connection of elements is not determined. Instead, the connection is always made in a contingent space of possibility (“Möglichkeitsraum”). As a result of this temporary connection, the elements receive a concrete meaning and identity. This space of possibility is not completely open for all kinds of possibilities. It is limited and pre-structured by former discourses and praxes. Some of them may have sedimented and appear as a social structure. Nevertheless, they always need to be reproduced. They are always at risk of being replaced. For this reason, neither is everything possible nor is everything totally determined; instead, everything is contingent. At this point, Holzkamp, Bourdieu and Laclau/Mouffe share the same understanding of society.

The establishment of a social order and social identities always implies a temporary suppression of alternatives. Since there are no foundations that decisions can be based on, they are accomplished by acts of power in a “space of undecidability”. According to Laclau and Mouffe and other poststructuralist thinkers, power is not conceptualized as an external relation, but as a constructive and positive force, the basic precondition for the constitution of identities: Power suppresses other possibilities and thus makes identities and sense possible in the first place. Without power no identity. Agency thus arises in the opposite way as it is thought in Holzkamp’s approach, who does not differentiate between power and domination. In relations of domination, identities, hierarchies and subject positions are fixed and cannot be changed. In contrast to power relations, domination is negative and destructive. It is not the absence of power that guarantees agency, but the presence of power that makes the subjects autonomous. The idea that Holzkamp and Bourdieu share, that external power relations limit the subject, is in this sense obsolete. Difference, conflict, antagonism and power are integral parts of subjects and society. For this reason, they are not understood as disruptive factors that need to be eliminated. Only if a power relation transforms into a relation of dominance, Laclau and Mouffe regard this as limiting for the subject. Thus, the idea of an autonomous (Holzkamp) and self-identical subject (Bourdieu) is abandoned by Laclau and
Mouffe. Instead, we can learn from them that different kinds of self-relationships exist.

As a consequence, the assumption that any decision and action can potentially be understood and explained to everyone has to be abandoned. No rational or intersubjective foundation exists on which a decision-making process is equally comprehensible to everyone. Instead, all points of view are fundamentally subjective. Mouffe underlines this argument in reference to Ludwig Wittgenstein, who concluded that agreements in opinions depend on agreements in forms of life (c.f. Mouffe, 2000). Lila Abu-Lughod puts it this way:

“Standing on shifting ground makes it clear that every view is a view from somewhere and every act of speaking a speaking from somewhere.” (Abu-Lughod, 2005, p. 468)

To sum it up, the assumption of the social production of meaning and identity, which Holzkamp and Bourdieu also share, but do not realize in total, is fully applied here. While Bourdieu’s approach still implies the existence of external structures, such as socio-economic conditions, which are internalized (in a modified form) into a habitus, here, the distinction between external and internal structures is being fully – also analytically – abandoned. Everything is relation, and without relations, there is no subject, agency or meaning. Actions are neither primarily the result of a rational or at least potentially rationalizable decision and motivation, nor the result of an internalized schema of perception, thought and action as it is thought by Holzkamp and Bourdieu. They are the result of contingent, hegemonic constellations that make some actions more likely than others. All decisions are made within this constellation of power.

Laclau and Mouffe, and also Bourdieu, show with an almost hard brutality how unfree and dependent on social relations the subject is. So how can we conceive of agency and subjectivity in this concept? At first sight, their concept can leave a frustrating feeling regarding the understanding and the perspectives of autonomy and agency. However, at a second glance, you could say that while one door is being closed, another is being opened: If there are no ultimate foundations on which a decision is based, not only the decision itself but also the conditions of the decision come into sight. To give an example, this can mean to not only and primarily ask: Are there two different genders and how can we prove this assumption? But also, first and foremost, to ask: Why do we differentiate between sexes and genders? What is the purpose and objective of this differentiation? Who is representing which point of view and which “facts” are being presented? And, above all, from which position is someone speaking? As a consequence, relations of power and dominance that constitute these
discourses come into sight. For example, with regard to political actions, the main point of struggle can be not to defend assumed pre-existing identities or class positions, but to produce these identities in the first place, to create a legitimate subject position and make it politically visible and livable. In this respect, Laclau and Mouffe put the emphasis on the closure of a social order and identity for the sake of becoming a subject. Butler follows the same argumentation, but she highlights the potential re-opening of a temporary fixed identity as an opportunity for resistance, social change and political action. She argues that since no identity is based on pre-existing foundations such as a material body or a sex, the borders that constitute an identity can always be moved.

Basically, this is how we can conceive of agency and subjectivity in this concept: by expanding the space of possibility, namely in at least two major ways (c.f. Vey, 2015, p. 83ff.). First, the space of possibilities is expanded by including subject positions which were hitherto excluded or impossible in the space of legitimate identities (Butler, 2001). For example, in Western societies (and also in other societies worldwide) in the past decades, other sexual identities made inroads into the social order, gained certain rights or at least a legitimate speaking position or recognition. However, at the same time, every identity inside the social order is – certainly to a different degree – at risk of ending up outside the legitimate space.

The second way agency and subjectivity can be conceived of in this approach is in form of a re-signification of existing identities and meanings. With regard to an observed governmentalization in the Western societies in Europe in the 16th century, Foucault points out that the key questions are “how not be governed like that, by that, in the name of those principles, with such and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that and by them” (Foucault, 2007, p. 44). On this basis, he defines critique as “The art of not being governed quite so much.” This means that by resisting (hegemonic) interpellations, existing social horizons of truth can take on another meaning or be used in a different way. An example for this is the attempt to resist an interpellation as a woman or the neoliberal interpellation as a pro-active, entrepreneurial self.

**Conclusion: Subject – what’s left of you?**

The following table compares the approaches of Holzkamp, Bourdieu and Laclau/Mouffe concerning their understanding of the subject, agency, structures, rationality, freedom (of decision), individual and social changes and sums up
their key problems and shortcomings on the one hand and their benefits on the other.

Table 1: Comparison of the concepts of Holzkamp, Bourdieu and Laclau/Mouffe (source: own research)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Understanding of ...</th>
<th>Holzkamp</th>
<th>Bourdieu</th>
<th>Laclau/Mouffe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>... the subject</td>
<td>Based on premises of the enlightenment. - subject is able to reflect on the reasons for an action and to act on that basis -&gt; rationally acting subject</td>
<td>Determined by society. - subject is produced by the internalization of external structures, written into body and mind = dispositions of the habitus</td>
<td>Subject as fundamentally relational, fluid, fragile, decentralized and fragmented. - no consistent subject and identity - instead: focus on subject positions which can be taken - is produced discursively, always in relation and differentiation from others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... agency</td>
<td>Subject always has agency and is able to act consciously. Two kinds of agency: 1. restrictive 2. generalized</td>
<td>Most actions are unconscious and not intentional. - reaction of inner structures to external requirements - subjects are up to three quarters automated in what they are doing</td>
<td>The subject is not the primary origin of actions. - however, no differentiated theory of subject and action developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... structures</td>
<td>Strict division between internal and external structures. - external structures potentially limit freedom of action, subject behaves towards them.</td>
<td>No strict division between internal and external structure. - external structures are transformed into inner structures - however, objective and measurable social structures do exist</td>
<td>No division between internal and external structures at all. - no external conditions such as economic structures - materiality as only discursively accessible - the social as sedimented practices, they need to be reproduced all the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... rationality</td>
<td>Possibility of rationality. - subject can theoretically fully understand the reasons for actions by analyzing them rationally</td>
<td>Rationality as a historical construct.</td>
<td>No universal rationality, power as central force. - no universal rationality or truths which decisions can be based on or receive their legitimacy from - Instead: undecidable situations, always multiple solutions possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... freedom (of decision)</td>
<td>Subject theoretically has full freedom, if external structures do not restrict it</td>
<td>Most actions are not based on (free) decisions - instead they are performed automatically on the basis of the habitus - understanding of premises of actions and free decisions is only partly possible</td>
<td>No freedom - resistance as: not to be governed in that way (Foucault) - power always exists and is something constructive; domination can be battled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… individual and social changes</td>
<td>Reflection of external (capitalist) conditions which</td>
<td>Habitus and field no longer match → new forms of action need to be</td>
<td>Space of possible actions is transformed: broadened or reshaped, or new spaces are</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
restrict my freedom, make use of the generalized form of agency and change the conditions of my actions.

found.

opened.

Why this happens is undertheorized.

### Problems/ shortcomings

| Problems/ shortcomings | Too rational understanding of the subject. | “BourDIEU”: Subjects seem to be predominantly automated with no real agency and freedom of decision. Unity of subject and objectively existing structures and identities is assumed. | Subject theoretical blind spots concerning the understanding of subjectivity and agency, and thus concerning the reasons why the world is changing and how you can characterize different degrees of agency. |

| Insufficiently complex understanding of the interrelation of subject and society. | | |

### Advantages of the approach

| Advantages of the approach | Fruitful TOOL TO ANALYZE how (capitalist) society restricts agency. | Useful UNDERSTANDING OF THE SUBJECT and the reasons for its actions. | POST-FOUNDATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE ON IDENTITY and the role of power, fragmentation and contingency is underlined. |

| - Basic premise: actions are always functional for the subject | - the foundation and character of the subject are not chosen autonomously, but socially determined | - subject not as a self-identical unit |
| - radical subject-oriented perspective: reasons for actions can only be understood by the subject itself | - makes visible how complex premises for actions are and how hard it is to change them | - no objective social structures, instead they have to be given meaning |
| - characterization of different degrees of agency and personal freedom | - against the idea of a free will | - no universal truths, instead particular, non-rational reasons |

How can we conceive of all these three important left approaches together? No coherent conception of the subject and agency connecting the three approaches is possible. Fortunately, this is not the objective of this paper. However, each approach is able to solve some problems of the other two. In Table 2, the key benefits of the three approaches are summed up (in boldface). The remaining entries in the table show how one theorist (named in the column) resolves the shortcomings of another theorist (named in the row).

Table 2: Advantages of each approach (own research)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages of the approach</th>
<th>Holzkamp by …</th>
<th>Bourdieu by …</th>
<th>Laclau/Mouffe by …</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Holzkamp resolves the shortcoming of …</td>
<td>… presenting a tool for the analysis of agency from a subject-theoretical point of view, to</td>
<td>… putting emphasis on the subjective perspective of an action.</td>
<td>… filling the subject-theoretical blank space in hegemony theory.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Regarding Holzkamp’s idea of an intersubjective comprehensibility of motivations, it is still relevant and desirable to try to understand, from a subjective point of view, why a person acted in a specific way. Although we are standing on shifting ground, and without the clarity and safety of universal truths or logics, we should at least try to understand the highly subjective reasons for an action that may make sense to the acting person. Holzkamp shows us that it often seems to be easier to act against one’s own needs and to restrict one’s own agency in the long term, since society makes this the easier way of acting. This insight and emphasis on the subjective functionality of actions can help us to refrain from judging others from the outside, and instead to try to discover the motivations and reasons for actions from their point of view. However, we must also take into account that, due to the different grounds we are standing on, there is no universal reason that is the same for everyone. Even if we try to understand the motivations and conditions, it is important to recognize that this might not always be possible.

With Bourdieu, by contrast, we can better understand that many actions do not primarily imply functionality for the subject. Instead, they are mainly a result of incorporated social structures that control our actions automatically. Often, when a person stays in the same class and field, the habitus is functional for the subject since most of the time it is synchronized with the rules of this field and class. However, in particular when someone changes his or her social environment, it becomes obvious that it is not that easy to change one’s habitus. Although most actions are not functional for the subject anymore, it is hard to
change these dispositions. This phenomenon can be better explained on the basis of the habitus concept. As a consequence, the idea of an autonomous agent who is able to reflect upon, and on that basis to position itself towards the social structures and limitations, is highly diminished.

Finally, Laclau and Mouffe deconstruct the assumption of pre-discursive existing foundations, such as material bodies, classes or economic conditions that give the elements meaning and help to differentiate between right and wrong needs, motivations and actions. They assume a fundamental fragmentation, incoherence and fragility of the subject. According to them, the unity and autonomy of the subject are only discursively produced and not of any substance. The coherence that Bourdieu’s understanding of identity is dominated by is only an imagined one. But instead of leaving us frustrated on abandoning the idea of a rationally thinking and acting subject and the idea of an independent social actor in general, this viewpoint opens new perspectives on agency and the constitution of the subject: Social realities and borders are highly contingent and can be moved, so that alternative identities and social orders become possible; or, as Foucault puts it: “We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries” (Foucault, 1983, p. 216). Thus, the question of the possibility of subjectivity and agency is and always will be a question and struggle about the understanding of subjectivity and agency themselves.

Bibliography


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The ontology of presence and participation in Critical Psychology, affinity space theory and agential realism

Tine Jensen and Anders Wulff Kristiansen

Abstract
In the German-Danish Critical Psychology developed by Klaus Holzkamp, Ole Dreier, Ernst Schraube, and many others, participation is a key term. Subjects emerge in- and through their acting in the world; in and through their participation in social practice(s) whereby they themselves change the context. However, the theory, especially in older versions, also focuses on an embodied first-person perspective, taking the ‘standpoint of the subject’ as their shibboleth and defining characteristic. In a time where humans are involved in multitudes of fluctuating and ephemeral connections proliferating through the increased use of- and connectivity provided by computers of various shapes and sizes - laptops, tablets, smartphones, etc. this notion of physically bounded subjects and practices is challenged. We argue that it becomes more difficult, and perhaps even counter-productive, to always attempt to understand participation from the standpoint of the subject in bounded contexts. We will be using posthumanist inspirations and a critique and development of the classic theory on communities of practice to destabilize and discuss the concept of participation in Critical Psychology.

Keywords
digital engagements, critical psychology, agential realism, posthumanism, affinity spaces, digital prosthetics, affinity spaces

We take our point of departure in Critical Psychology, because we find that it offers relevant and promising theoretical grounding and conceptualizations for understanding human subjectivity and participation. Our aim is then to look into
how the theory can be developed to offer a helpful and timely approach to understanding a world where participation has become a much more fluid and transitory concept. This is also what led James Paul Gee to suggest his critique and development of Communities of Practice into his concept of Affinity Spaces:

In my view, the key problem with notions like “community of practice” is that they make it look like we are attempting to label a group of people. Once this is done, we face the vexatious issue over which people are in and which are out of the group, how far they are in or out, and when they are in or out. … What I want to suggest instead is that (at least sometimes) we start with “spaces” and not groups. (Gee, 2004, p.78)

This is a reasoning we will take up later in a move to challenge how to think about participation and context, before we key in Karen Barad to attempt for a new understanding of participation in a decentered version of Critical Psychology. As the title of this article suggests, we will primarily be looking at the “who” and “what” of participation. Or in other words, we will try to de/stabilize the concepts of subject and context in ways that might better allow them to be useful for understanding participation in a world where subjectivity could be said to become distributed by an embodied connectivity through digital devices. The aim is not to completely dissolve subjectivity or the subject, rather it is to expand the unit of analysis.

The digital human?

Looking at the titles of many books and articles on the topic of how new digital technologies are affecting us, many seem to be performing a few things before you even read the first sentence (e.g.: Chen, 2011; Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005; Palfrey & Gasser, 2008; Prensky, 2012; 2001a; 2001b; Rosen, 2007; Small & Vorgan, 2009; Tapscott, 2009; 1998). Looking at the titles of these texts, there seems to be a clear idea of digital technology playing a very important role in shaping people - particularly a new ‘digital generation’. The digital technology even seems deterministic for the generation in the titles and content of the texts – it is ‘grown up digital’, or even ‘born digital’, as if the baby emerging from the womb comes out wearing Google glasses and with built-in Wi-Fi. Whether the author is stressing positive or negative effects of growing up surrounded by digital technologies, the culprit is invariably the Internet, video games, social media, etc.

Basically, the argument goes that TV shows today have more simultaneous plot lines than before, that video games require more from the player, and that
the Internet offers such a vast complexity that the human brain has had to develop to deal with the new reality (Johnson, 2005; Prensky, 2001a; 2001b; Small & Vorgan, 2009). The book “iBrain – Surviving the Technological Alteration of the Modern Mind” written by M.D. in neuroscience Gary Small and Gigi Vorgan in 2009, gives a further description of how, “Besides influencing how we think, digital technology is altering how we feel, how we behave, and the way in which our brain functions.” (p. 2) and describes how “we are witnessing the beginning of a deeply divided brain gap between younger and older minds – in just one generation.” (p.3). Some authors are directly citing research in neuroscience on how our brains adapt to the stimuli it is presented with, and how it is most malleable in early childhood, others are merely arguing that people will always be highly influenced by their surroundings in their identity-formation.

Throughout the research and the books, articles, etc. on humans and digital media there are many concerns and hopes. Those we will not go into in this paper. However, the amount of literature on the subject as well as the popular focus in various media on it make clear, that it is relevant and important to be able to understand and theorize about how digital media and technologies and humans are entangled.

Common for the authors on this topic, whether they are positive or negative, are descriptions of how (primarily) young people today are increasingly connected and present on various social media and digital platforms. This resonates with empirical data we have seen across multiple projects, where we have both witnessed and had described to us how young people are simultaneously and constantly connected to and present in multiple contexts or spaces. They might be sitting with friends or family in a physical location, while being active on Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, several chat-services and more, where multiple conversations and lines of communication are open and active at more or less the same time. Hansen (2011) argues for a generation, where place is of little importance, but synchronicity is of huge importance. Several other authors (e.g. Chen, 2011; Small & Vorgan, 2009; Tapscott, 2009; Teo, 2013) make the same argument or show it based on data, that (young) people are expected, and expect others, to respond almost immediately at all times. This makes the digital-device-as-connectivity into an extension of the space we are present in, as Tapscott (2009, p. 89) says of the “Net Generation”, as he calls them:

They like to be in touch with their friends on their BlackBerrys or cell phones wherever they are – on the street, in the store, or at work. It gives them a sense of virtual community all day long. It makes them feel like they have a friend in their pocket. (2009, p. 89)
This idea of a digital ‘co-pilot’, an extension of self, is what we want to be able to theorize better about. The types of descriptions found in most of the referenced literature tend to focus on generalized “traits” of an entire generation, and undervalue individual experiences of living in digitally mediated times, leaving out important insights, while making overgeneralizations about, and potentially pathologizing large parts of the population. We therefore turn to theories that on the one hand focus on subjective experience, and on the other hand are sensitive to the ways in which digital technologies and media are at work in everyday life.

The always-already-there subject

Critical Psychology is a vast body of theory, but the discussions in this chapter will focus mainly on the concepts of subjectivity and participation, since these are the concepts that are most fundamentally challenged by new digital technologies.

First, we will discuss subjectivity. According to Holzkamp, subjects act in order to sustain their means of living long term (Holzkamp 1979; 1985). Subjects act on the grounds of their perceptions of their objective conditions, as well as on the emotional and cognitive valorization of the subjective meanings of these surroundings; the surroundings posing material possibilities and limitations for the subject (Dreier, 2008; Holzkamp, 1979; 1985; Osterkamp, Holzkamp-Osterkamp, 1991) we may further see humans as acting in-, and across specific contexts where conditions in one context has bearing on the subject’s actions in another context. In each context every subject has a personal perspective that is an effect of their personal positions and locations in the context.

In Critical Psychology, the human subject is seen as the foundation, conceptualized as both something that emerges from its participation in and with the world, and as something ‘always already there’ (Nissen, 2002). Critical Psychology is conceptualized as ‘research from the standpoint of the subject’ – it is a “subject science”. It takes the subject and its subjective experiences to be a methodological and ethical à priori for an empirical-practical approach (Nissen, 2002, p. 74). Especially in the classic Critical Psychology developed by Holzkamp, there is a strong dichotomy between subject and structure – the subject emerges and exists in participation with, but is also bound by and within an overall societal context of ‘objective conditions’. This dichotomy has been loosened in later iterations (e.g. Nissen, 2002), but remains an axiom of the theory.

However, when working with connectivity, methodological and theoretical issues emerge. We might see subjects that are apparently not participating in the
context at hand; or rather, their participation is seemingly passive while they are engulfed in their mobile devices. We might see the same people participating simultaneously in several different, physically non-present contexts via different social media. Thus, the delimited, local, physical context steps in the background of mediated, virtual contexts dispersed across a vast space.

**Bounded context**

Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger’s work on situated learning and Communities of Practice together with Critical Psychology both rest on the same basic ontology and explicitly refer to each other (Dreier, 2003; Lave, 2003; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Nissen, 2002). The main differences in our reading of the theories, is that Lave and Wenger have developed their theory more on Communities of Practice and (social) situated learning, where Critical Psychology has focused more on the ‘subject-side’. In both theories the subject is defined by participation in social practice, but where Communities of Practice focus on the development of a theory based on understanding the types of contexts that the subject participates in, Critical Psychology focuses on what the participation means for the subject, and how the subject negotiates participation in so-called ‘life trajectories’ (Dreier, 2008; Wenger, 1998).

Modifying the term, I define a social context of action as a delineated, local place in social practice that is re-produced and changed by the linked activities of its participants and through its links with other places in a structure of social practice. (Dreier, 1993b; 1994 op. cit. Dreier, 2008, p.23)

Our focus here is not on individual subjects, but rather on, what this framing would call the participation in, and formation of, communities of practice and trajectories of participation. At the same time, the ‘human subject’ emerges from participation in the world, and is thus not separate from the world - it exists as a “person-in-the-world” (Nissen, 2002; Tolman, 1994). In the same way, the ‘social contexts’ come into being through the relations created by participants in social practice. So, though it could be argued that there are traces of the subject-object divide being reproduced, it is also being destabilized and blurred, and thus can resonate with the STS approach.

Critical Psychology is, however, a humanist theory with an anthropocentric view of the world. This is made clear in the focus on the first-person perspective as an epistemological axiom:
On the one hand human experiencing, feeling, thinking, acting with and in the world, are always sociomaterially mediated processes (through language, others and the social and technological world); on the other hand, they are always someone’s processes. They exist only from the point of view of a subject that has them, and in this sense, they always exist in a perspectival mode, and therefore in the first-person perspective. (Schraube, 2013, p. 9)

In other words, the psychological dimensions of the subject are only accessible from the point of view of the subject her/himself – whatever I feel or experience is my feeling or experience – this points to an ontological subjectivity, since it exists because of the subject, if there were no subject, there would be no feeling or experience. Yet, this does not make the feeling or experience any less real – “The fear experienced by an individual really exists and, in this sense, is an objective fact; though an objective fact accessed in a subjective form.” (Schraube, 2013, p. 9). The subjective form of the fact means that it is only indirectly available to others, through reports or language. Thus, the first-person perspective rests on the realization that there are important facts that are ontologically subjective, and that all experiencing and acting happens from a particular (first-person) perspective, which means that all meaning gained and reasons for acting are ontologically subjective. As this is understood from the Critical Psychological ontology of the subject as emergent in social practice, the first-person perspective should not be seen as a solipsistic view (Schraube, 2013).

However, we are still stuck with a bounded subject in a delimited, physical context. To resolve the issue of digitally mediated contexts we draw on James Paul Gee (2004) who has coined the term Affinity Spaces as a development of Communities of Practice that moves some of the focus from the human subjects to the creation of ‘spaces’ that they can participate in. In Gee’s understanding, technological infrastructure is at the core of analysis in the shape of “portals” and “mediators”. In Critical Psychological terms these infrastructures might be likened with objective conditions or with context. Thus, it is fairly congruent with Critical Psychology, especially with newer developments by Ernst Schraube (2009; 2013), where things are included as ‘materialized action’. We shall return to these developments below.

**Technology as other**

Since classical critical psychology has no explicit theory of technology, Schraube has worked on conceptual development of the theory to grasp technology. He draws on the same basic understanding of subjects, participation, and grounds for
action as the aforementioned authors, but he expands the theory to include a specific understanding of technology, specifically in relation to the conduct of everyday life (Holzkamp, 2013; Schraube & Marvakis, 2015; Schraube, 2017). Rather than referring technology to the objective conditions en bloc and thus making it invisible, which is often the case in critical psychological analyses, that mainly focus on human action and historical-societal conditions, he conceptualizes technology as "materialized action" (Schraube, 2009).

Using especially mobile digital media poses some challenges to the notion of the human as the centre of analysis. While participation in the local, situated context at hand may be minimal, participation may be intense in affinity spaces with participants spread across the world. While some of the actions performed with a smartphone may be analyzed as frozen action, for instance e-mail which replaces physical mail, and the physical practice of distributing mail from one person to another, other practices cannot be reduced in the same way, since they represent whole new forms of interaction. Thus, smartphones represent more than merely frozen action, since they can perform actions that would not be possible without them or perform known practices in places where they were not performed before. One may participate on several social media at the same time, while checking email and watching a movie. Thus, several actions are folding into the local situated context, which may be a social gathering, a cafe, or in the seclusion of one’s own home. If we look at participation as local and situated in delimited context, we may only see people “alone together” and “always on” (Turkle, 2008; 2011), to whom Schraube also refers (2009). In this case we will see real conversations and togetherness in the room replaced with mediated conversations in mediated contexts. Thus, we might unwittingly establish a hierarchy of relations where proximity is equated to intimacy, and face-to-face conversation is related to authenticity; whereas distance is equated to alienation and mediated conversation is related to inauthenticity. This is not Schraube’s intention, but in his analyses, he still focuses on the personal reasons of the human subjects for acting with technology. In Schraube’s understanding of technology, although technology actively shapes human action, locally, situated humans, and their conduct of everyday life remain at the center of analysis. This delimits our ontological focus to what we can actually ask people about, and excludes us from asking for instance the smartphone about the ways in which it participates in shaping people’s lives.

To sum up: In critical psychology, what is present is a human subject with personal meanings and grounds for action, but technology is at best a substitute for human action resulting in a widening of human agency, but still a tool or a condition in service of the subject. What is emphasized, even in materialized action is the human subject as the onset and end goal of action, thus limiting
analysis to the bodily presence of human subjects in a given, delineated, physical practice.

However, when we are dealing with distributed subjects, critical psychology tends to hit a snag. Who is participating in what? We need ways of thinking that can include technologies and materiality in a fuller, and more nuanced way, and we lack an understanding of how subjects can exist, if they are distributed and flow in and through a multitude of proliferating, ever-changing, partially simultaneous and fluid contexts.

As we argued in the beginning of this article, (young) people are simultaneously participating in multiple contexts across digital and analog modes of being. To develop a way to better theorize these engagements and distributed subjectivity, we will first de/stabilize context (the what) and then the body boundaries of the subject (the who) that constitute the participation.

**Unbounding context**

To de/stabilize the context we first turn to Affinity Spaces. James Paul Gee developed the term “Affinity Spaces” while criticizing traditional schooling, and pointing to how video games can construct good learning (Gee, 2004; 2007). Later, he has further developed and expanded it along with others, such as Elisabeth Hayes, and Sean Duncan who co-edited the anthology “Learning in Video Game Affinity Spaces” from 2012.

In their conceptualization of the ‘affinity space’ there is some (re)production of the binary distinctions between humans participating *in something* as separate entities interacting. However, technology functions as portals and generators of content. Further, the theory falls within the same basic understanding as Lave and Wenger and Critical Psychology, where the subject is seen as emergent in praxis. Later, we will argue for a more posthumanist view using Karen Barad, where we challenge the a priori distinction between human and non-human/technology. For now, we will define an affinity space as a gathering of human subjects and technology constructing a relatively stable space collected around an affinity or an idea, which is enacted by these actors, generators and portals.

Gee (2004) describes a portal as that which gives access to the space, and a generator as that which creates the content of the space. Gee also states that there are no binaries in this – a portal can be a generator and vice versa, and “… *it is degrees that are often of most importance here …*” (Gee, 2004, p. 83). In this way, portals can be websites or services, such as YouTube, Instagram, Wikipedia, etc., while these are all also generators. Users can be generators, as
well as portals in the sense that they can introduce to other portals. Portals and
generators gather and create content that create affinity spaces in an emergent
process, much as participants form and are formed by communities of practice,
but with the difference that both portals and generators can be human as well as
non-human. In our reading, therefore, in affinity spaces humans and technology
stand in a more symmetrical relation than in critical psychology.

Most importantly, the affinity space allows a decentering of the ‘human
subjects’ as participants, and allows us to see the what, that we are tracing, as a
loosely defined and fluid space, or perhaps more accurately, a constellation of
spaces. ‘The Internet’ becomes the portal, the generator and the gathering trope
of a multitude of (affinity) spaces, which is, of course, also simultaneously what
constitutes ‘the Internet’ in the first place. ‘The Internet’ both allows and is the
materialization of actions, thoughts and ideas in texts, pictures, and videos,
collected in playlists, collages, albums, sites, etc. This is what is enacted every
time anyone presupposes or refers to the digital space.

Online affinity spaces offer their participants the opportunity to participate
pseudonymously, or even anonymously, a feature that makes
“membership” difficult to establish and “belonging” into a moot point. In
addition, the nature of online media allows the number of participants to
scale in these spaces into the thousands, well beyond the population
constraints of off-line environments. As participation in online affinity
spaces continues to increase, membership becomes an increasingly
nebulous concept in many circumstances. It goes without saying then that
membership cannot be the central organizing metaphor for understanding
identity transformations and learning in many online affinity spaces.
(DeVane, 2012, p. 183)

Ben DeVane discusses identity and social learning in affinity spaces in his
contribution to the aforementioned anthology edited by Duncan & Hayes (2012).
Here he destabilizes the notion of membership, which is central to the social
situated learning of Lave and Wenger. He argues that identity-formation is much
more complex when it comes to ‘participation’ in affinity spaces, especially in
regards to those that are online. Further, he uses the meaning of the word
‘member’ as an argument against membership:

Membership, as a term, implies a sense of permanence and belonging.
While it is often used to refer to a person belonging to a club or institution,
it is rooted in description of components of the body. Being a “member”
implies belonging to a public body like a club, and suggests an enduring
relationship between the member and the body. (DeVane, 2012, p. 182)
Thus, in affinity spaces, both ‘the what’ and ‘the who’ of participation are blurred. Affinity space theory has its advantages in the unbounding of the what, but simultaneously ‘the who’ is dissolved to such a degree that it practically disappears. We need a workable concept of subjectivity in order to conceptualize participation in unbounded affinity spaces. We will therefore plug in Agential Realism to re/discover the subject before we turn the above metaphor of membership on its head to redefine member and membership in ways that re-actualize Critical Psychology as a (more) useful way of theorizing digital engagements.

**Re/bounding the subject with technology**

Mobile, digital media call for an approach that can grasp what we see. We see distributed and fluid participation and we want to be able to address it without throwing out the subject with the bath water. We see subjects acting simultaneously in-and out of digital space, across platforms and across the World, and thus we need to work out concepts for understanding subjectivity as not necessarily embodied. Further, we find a need to look for ways of understanding intimacy without proximity, and authenticity without presence. In order to accomplish this, we introduce an approach that takes the distribution of subjectivity in socio-techno-material entanglements to new limits. The science philosophy of Karen Barad (2007; 2012) offers a way of thinking about subjectivity that is radical in the sense, that it de-stabilizes the subject completely in order to re-stabilize it in what she calls agential cuts.

Karen Barad’s *agential realism* (Barad, 2007) draws heavily on Niels Bohr’s quantum physics, Foucault’s understanding of power, and Judith Butler’s concepts of performativity in her approach to science studies. At the onset, she claims, everything in the universe is entangled, constantly *intra-acting* to form reality, as we know it. By using the term *intra-action*, she distances herself from inter-action which she refers to as two separate entities influencing each other. For Barad there are no a priori separations in the world. Everything is entangled across space and time, and comes continually and constantly into existence as separate entities, as re-iterations, in what she calls *agential cuts*. Many of Barad’s concepts use a slash to illustrate the simultaneous double nature of the concept. By for instance using dis/entangled, she points out that things are entangled, and come to being as entities in one move (see below).

To understand, what an agential cut entails, we need to take a tour into quantum physics and how to understand light. Barad takes her onset in the *double-slit experiment*, performed by Thomas Young in 1801. Up until that
point, light was understood as particles. Light particles bombarded objects and particles are reflected from them. A way of illustrating this is to look at light and shadow, for instance light falling on a wall through blinds. Where the light is blocked by the bars of the blinds, there will be dark stripes; whereas there will be light stripes where the light passes through the slits. This can be considered proof that light has the form of particles. However, Thomas Young discovered that by first shining a light source through one slit, and then through two slits, he could produce a wave pattern, which ought to be impossible, since waves can overlap, and two particles cannot occupy the same space at the same time.

This brought on a dispute which lasted more than a hundred years between believers in light-as-particle and those who believed in light-as-wave; an unresolvable dispute, since both experiments can be repeated with the same outcome indefinitely. Bohr’s Columbus egg was to enroll the observation into the equation. The observation of light-as-particle or light-as-wave, he claimed, would produce exactly that which it was designed to produce. He proposed a completely different logic, namely that before measurement, light was neither particle nor wave, but undetermined. What could be determined was the phenomenon light-as-particle or light-as-wave, and this phenomenon included the measuring device, as well as the observer. What determined the quality of light was the apparatus which was designed to measure light as either particle or wave. In Bohr’s understanding, according to Barad, light has no pre-existing quality; it arises only in measurement.

Barad then uses the term apparatus in conjunction with Foucault’s concept for power producing processes, which he calls appareil or dispositif. Thus, an apparatus in Barad’s terms could be seen as a socio-material-discursive “measuring device” that measures, and thereby produces certain qualities or agency in whatever is being observed.

Barad moves her argument further, and makes this into her onto-ethico-epistemological claims that she holds true for anything in the universe. Until something is determined as an entity, its nature is indeterminate. This determination, or delimitation happens in what she calls agential cuts, and these happen constantly and continually. Everything comes into being by observation, also the observing entity which is itself being observed. Here, it is important to understand that for Barad observation does not have to be optical, nor does it have to be conscious. This process she calls cutting-together-apart or agential cut. In the agential cut entanglements become dis/entangled, separate, delimited, bounded. Since the cuts happen constantly everywhere, entities, such as subjects, appear to be relatively stable over time. However, they are not so by default or à priori. Taking this claim on to understanding subjectivity, a subject cannot be understood as a pre-existing entity, but as a specific cut, an agentiality, in time-
and-space, as a time-space-mattering coming out of the infinity of socio-material-discursive entanglements.

This understanding of subjectivity differs radically from the one presented in critical psychology where the subject (albeit in a dialectic relation to the World) is set a priori, and at the centre of action. Furthermore, a fixed understanding of context as bounded cannot be upheld. A context is not delimited à priori but rather, it also emerges from entangled relations in specific cuts, as time-space-mattering. The qualities of a subject or context arise in the specific cut. If we look at the opening scene of this article again in this light, we are no longer talking about subjects and context but of entanglements, apparatuses and time-space-mattering. The point is not, however, that there is no world prior to observation, but that we cannot determine it before. Rather than setting contexts and subjects as the starting point of analysis contexts and subjects will arise from the empirical analysis.

Applying agential realism to for instance people sitting over their smartphones in a cafe, allows us see people using these technologies as more than bounded subjects, not interacting in a delimited context. In Barad’s terminology (2007) what occurs in a given moment is a phenomenon. A phenomenon is the sum of socio-material-discursive entanglements that are visible at a certain time, and a certain place. In such a phenomenon we see buildings; smartphones, portals; generators; bodies; furniture; doors and windows; social media; discourses of subjectivity, proximity, alienation, intimacy, authenticity, and participation; time-together, and time-apart; and so forth coming together in a specific apparatus that cut the people together-apart as mobile phone- and social media users in specific ways.

The people emerge analytically as entangled agencies in a large apparatus, containing both present and past. Continuous iterations and re-iterations of subjectivity are going on in this situation where the beginning and end of the context dissolve. Techno-material elements are intra-acting in this apparatus: The internet, Facebook, mobile phones, Wi-Fi connections, operating systems are all entangled. Furthermore, all sorts of content might present: TED talks, music, photos, articles, and commentary posts cutting specific agencies as consumers of same content.

Agential realism challenges the ontology of presence, and participation. These concepts take on different meanings in the light of entanglement. The boundaries of the context blur, since what is making up the context is not necessarily present, and the boundaries of the context is re-iterated through agential cuts, the context itself making up particular agency of bounding activity.

What is present in a given moment is an agentiality. Agentiality is a process of cutting-together-apart potentiality in specific socio-material-discursive
apparatuses that emerge in intra-action, rather than in inter-action between bounded entities. In Barad’s understanding, everything in the universe is entangled, constantly re-iterating each other. This applies for material, as well as socio-discursive agentialities. So, everything and everyone in the empirical observations are agentialities in line with other agentialities. However, since the cut is also discursive, discourses, like those of the authenticity of presence, and the intimacy of proximity, also take part in the cut.

Drawing on Barad we see humans (and everything) a priori as intra-acting agencies, rather than a priori bounded subjects. There is no a priori context in which a subject has a position, rather subjects and contexts emerge in the cutting-together-apart of agentiality.

Expanding the analytical frame

As we have seen, Critical Psychology understands human subjects as relatively bounded, and participating as such in delineated, local, social practice. There is something to be had from the idea of participation as the change agent of subjectivity, as Dreier conceptualizes it (2003) but with an a priori understanding of the subject as participating physically in locally bounded contexts, digital media easily turn into alienating entities that cut off people from one another and from authentic participation, and thus from changing their life circumstances.

Critical psychology offers interesting ways of examining practice, and, rather than pathologizing the subject, it understands action as reasoned. However, it has its limitations when it comes to conceptualizing subjects that are participating in contexts outside their physical boundaries, or that are mobile without moving; that are present, but not embodied. It thus holds the potential for hidden normativity hailing physical presence over mediated presence, as we have discussed above.

Affinity Space Theory offers an understanding of participation that is more fluid. Rather than understanding participation in context, Gee (2004, 2007), and DeVane (2012) understand participation as the content emerging through portals and generators, where technology and content are put at the centre of analysis. However, human subjects disappear into the background, or are dissolved completely.

So, we need to reintroduce the subject into the equation. Taking a different approach, Agential realism offers analytical tools that promise to grasp socio-material-discursive entanglements of distributed communities and connectivity.

In our Barad-inspired approach of seeing bodies as “... phenomena that acquire specific boundaries and properties through the open-ended dynamics of
intra-activity.” (Barad, 2007, p. 172) we find the conception of membership interesting as a metaphor. We do not see it in a sense of permanence and belonging between two separate entities, such as the common understanding of being ‘a member of a club’ might indicate but rather as being a member, a part of the body, attached and intra-active with ‘the internet’ seen as a ‘body’. In this reading developing ‘membership’ becomes a matter of embodiment. The metaphorical body-boundaries of the ‘human subject’ becomes fluid, and is shaped by that which it is made to be constructed of. This resonates particularly well with a point Barad (2007) makes regarding how prosthetics and wheelchairs are ‘part’ of the disabled bodies:

It is when the body doesn’t work – when the body “breaks down” – that such presuppositions generally surface. It is often only when things stop working that the apparatus is first noticed. When such (in)opportunities arise the entangled nature of phenomena and the importance of the agential cut and their corollary constitutive exclusions emerges. (Barad, 2007, p. 158)

Barad is here referring to research on how the wheelchairs or prosthetics of disabled people are not separate from their body until they break down, and thus become separate. This should be seen in the same way that any other part of the body can break down – if you break your arm, it becomes other to the (able) body, it becomes a hindrance, the boundary is created by the arm being broken, in the same way that it can be created by the prosthetic breaking. Or here, by the ICT being absent or not working (as we want it to). This also goes for the community of practice or affinity space. If access and social interaction is denied, either for technical or social reasons, we become aware of the social, and that we have been dis-membered.

The digital-technology-as-connectivity is ‘part’ of our bodies, our subjectivity, our being. We can barely imagine a world without it; we get very upset when it does not work – like an able-bodied person might feel about his hands or eyes if they stop working. In addition, we generally do not spend much time considering how it works or what it means to us, in the same way that we might not usually consider our hands or eyes. We make this comparison not to equate a smart phone with eyes or hands, but rather to attempt to destabilize a common understanding of the body as bounded in a particular way, and open the door to considering the blurring of these boundaries. As follows from a Baradian approach, boundaries are not static, they are created and (re)configured. This is also not to say that the smartphone has become a ubiquitous, integrated, permanent part of our bodies, it is to point out a range of enactments constructing the digital technology in a certain way. It is a way that resonates with the ‘digital
co-pilot’ of Tapscott (2009), where access to the internet (materialized as the smartphone), is something integral to the participation and identity formation.

In this way, subjectivity becomes a matter of how we draw the boundaries, how we construct the human subject as other to something else. If subjectivity is shaped by the presencing of particular cuts of this heterogeneous, multiple and entangled body-as-assemblage, then it follows that the context(s) enacted in and by these cuts or assemblages are also constitutive of how that subjectivity looks.

Through this view, human subjectivity can still be constructed in a sense similar to that of Critical Psychology and situated learning, as emerging from the entanglement, facilitated by the ubiquitous assumption of the distinction between the human subject and other in modern thought, yet as de/stabilized, in/coherent and dis/continuous. Participation is created in, through and by the entanglements, and produces us in return. *Human participation can be seen as the gathering and destabilization of human subjects in entanglements where non-human actors proliferate, ‘participate’ and ‘demand’ to be more than tools, as they are embodied by us, and embodying us, especially as traditional meanings of membership become problematic when talking of the ‘online affinity spaces’.*

In this paper, we have explored the concepts of subject and participation in relation to mobile, digital technologies. Critical Psychology has much to offer in the understanding of subjectivity and participation, but has shortcomings when dealing with the proliferating connectivity of especially the aforementioned technologies. The aim of this paper is not to do away with the subject and participation, but to expand the analytical frame, so that it may grasp the ways in which mobile, digital technologies are an integral part of modern life. Participation in/with technological networks becomes a matter of membership in socio-materially entangled affinity spaces that are de/stabilized through the participation of subjects that emerge for instance as mobile phone/users.

**References**


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What we can learn from Karl Marx on (child) competence or: On the relation between childhood studies and Critical Psychology as subject science

Morus Markard

Abstract
Against the everyday education furor, Childhood Studies have advanced the idea of child competence, a concept which Critical Psychologists – from a Marxist, subject-science perspective – have related to the contradictions of capitalist society and the “pathology of the normal” (“Till you’re so fucking crazy you can’t follow their rules,” John Lennon). Referring to the concept of agency, which draws attention to the power-mediated relation between abilities for and obstacles to action, this paper will discuss how contradictions of development or of action can be understood from the standpoint of the child and how, instead of setting limits, solidarity of action can be developed across generations in common processes of learning and change.

Keywords
childhood studies, Critical Psychology, subject development, education criticism, agency

1. Setting Limits: The concept of the educandus and his a-social nature

About 25 years ago, in the first issue of the Zeitschrift für Pädagogische Psychologie, Rolf Oerter (1987: 20) presented the child as “educandus,” that is as someone to be educated. Oerter used the male form, but girls—who, as we all know, can also be unruly and thus require education—were certainly meant, too. In any case, Oerter found that children as those to be educated were objects insofar as they were the “objects” of “pedagogical efforts”; they only became
subjects as a result of these efforts. This was a dialectic contradiction that could not be resolved “in favor of the subject relation (“Subjektbezug”).”

In the following, I will show that it is a fallacy to think of humans as objects, even if one strives to influence them, and even if those other humans are children. To be clear, I am not trying to deny important differences between adults and children, especially young ones, with respect to their cognitive abilities or their agency in the world—but these differences are not ones between subject and object.

While the type of pedagogical psychology promoted programmatically by Oerter thinks of the child as a being to be educated, Honig et al. (1999: 16) advance a Childhood Studies perspective—as a “turn from an understanding of the child as and educandus […] to an understanding of the child as a person with her own right” (my translation), a turn that was “paradigmatic” in concerning the foundation of thinking about children.

Oerter’s idea of education is not only marked by the idea that a newborn child has to learn quite a lot; this is as clear as it is undisputed. What is at the bottom of this confrontation, I think, is rather the idea associated with pedagogical thinking, but also popular far beyond the discipline, that children have to be taught a certain social usefulness against their supposed pre-social or a-social nature (whether that nature is romanticized or vilified). The structural functionalist Talcott Parsons thus approvingly reported the idea of newborns as an invasion of barbarians: “What has sometimes been called the ‘barbarian invasion’ of the stream of new-born infants is, of course, a critical feature in any society” (1951: 208) – although he conceptualized socialization as a lifelong task (in relation to role expectations). That social existence is a struggle against human nature, which turns into close combat in education, was also the belief of the Marxist Gramsci: “In reality each generation educates the new generation, i.e. forms it, and education is a struggle against instincts linked to the elementary biological functions, a struggle against nature, to dominate it and create the ‘contemporary’ man of the epoch.” (1999: 284). Here, too, being educated is conceptualized as lifelong attendant circumstance of human existence. As much as both authors differ in their perspective – functioning within society vs. its fundamental transformation – they are united in their notion of the child as educandus to be restrained; a notion also shared by psychoanalysis and its idea of an un-social nature of drives.

The current, everyday and “how-to” guidebook version of this notion is articulated in the expression that developing children need to be set limits. But if one observes development from the—assumed—perspective of the child: does not their entire existence amount to a liberation from paternalism, from
protection, which always also involves control—and thereby also to the necessary resistance to “limit-setting”? 

2. Development to the pathology of the normal

Change of scenery. Charles Bukowski once wrote that (almost) everyone is born a genius and buried an idiot (1969: 161). Is this development to be seen as the result of constant limitations? Bukowski is not at all alone in his position. The reform pedagogic Berthold Otto thought:

“Every child, every one without exception, is a genius up until age six. In a sober psychological examination, all criteria of the genius return in every child,” namely: “the suddenness of insight, the volatility of thought, the inability to steer the mind into certain mental channels, [...] the sovereign independence of thinking, which through various interferences with the conventional world order gives rise to our lament over ‘outrageous misbehavior’ (“Ungezogenheit”), over the ‘incredible obstinacy’ of children.” (quoted after Honig 1999: 36, my translation)

Whereas Otto seems to conceptualize limit setting as an interfering variable of development, John Lennon, in his song “Working Class Hero,” directly addresses the consequences of limit setting and fencing in: “As soon as you’re born they make you feel small,” with the aim “till you’re so fucking crazy, you can’t follow their rules.”—“Fucking crazy”: Lennon addresses (the attempt at) the idiocy of observing rules that, following Bukowski, we carry to our grave; the idiocy of normalcy, so to say – or, more elegantly put, in psychoanalytic terms: the “pathology of normalcy” (Leithäuser & Volmerg 1988: 16), the suffering of adaptation, which however is contradictory, as it is also meant to secure success. To once again quote John Lennon: “There’s a room at the top they are telling you still, but first you must learn how to smile as you kill, if you want to be like the folks on the hill”—implying that, if you want to get ahead, you have to adapt to the vermin up there, to bend over. Against this pathology of normalcy, Leithäuser and Volmerg argue, the cognitive interest of psychoanalytic social psychology has to consist in “examining social institutions and their complex relationship, which serve to prevent the outbreak of sociopathic dysfunctions or to promote it” (1988: 17–18, my translation).

Summing up the positions I reviewed, we can conclude: Whether education is a close combat against nature, the disruption of the development of a genius (in which Honig sees an “almost lyric child cult” [1999: 37]) or the repressive adjustment to the pathology of the normal (deviations of which are again
pathologized [Ullmann 2008] or medicalized [Wolf-Kühn 2010)—it will be hard to claim that competence can develop beyond the attendant contradictions. But what is, then—against this background and abysses—“competence,” what is, in these contradictions, “child competence,” which has to or should be assumed as possible, if one wishes to take children seriously, as both Childhood Studies and Critical Psychology intend?

### 3. Competence—in the contradictions of the capitalist society of competition

In that way, I have come closer to my topic, what we can learn from Karl Marx on competence. This is because the name of “Karl Marx” stands for the analysis of societal contradictions in which we move, and which also show through with Bukowski, Otto and Lennon. The reference to Marx stands for the perspective of a free development of everyone (as the condition for the free development of all) and the critique of conditions in which man is a despicable being. In capitalist society, marked by competition, “competence” means not only but also to assert oneself against others at their expense (the free development of one as the bruises of the other). Competence moves between smart coping in the jungle of competition and the—solidarian—engagement with it. What are the attending psychological effects of each? But above all: how do children relate to this alternative? If one therefore wants to take children seriously, take into account child competences and promote them, one has to be aware of these contradictions—in common processes of learning and change of children and adults.

From a formal or general point of view, competence can be seen as “readiness and ability of subjects to self-organize processes of learning and development” (Bescherer & Wille 2010: 1375); but it does not realize itself in a vacuum, it encompasses active adaptation to requirements also set by others—despite an expected personal responsibility. Competence can mean functioning in conditions as well as the understanding of social contexts; as such, it has to be the object of political reflection (Bürgin 2013: 67 and 100ff).

Moreover, competence is a term that at least today, as Reutter puts it, “condemns” the individual “to incessant pursuit.” “He has the chance of developing throughout his life; but he has no prospect of completing the development processes, in a certain manner he remains infantile” (2009, quoted after Bescherer & Wille 2020: 1376; my translation). This means: the development of competence finds no (natural) biographic end, and it is also not child specific; more so, from this perspective our entire life suddenly appears as
“childhood.” For our purposes here, this is remarkable because in Childhood Studies papers there is often talk of understanding children not (only) as “becoming” but also as “being” (cf., Greene & Borkowski 2008: 51), while Honig et al. (1999: 14) note that this is not necessarily a “depreciative phrase.”

In any case, for proponents of Childhood Studies, the point is to understand children as members of society and as participants in it, not as individuals who do not yet belong. Nonetheless, I consider this programmatic statement problematic, since in our existence and being-as-we-are, thus as “beings,” we are always also “becoming.” Even more, especially in our intergenerational relationships, we are challenged in our being adults as those becoming. From a Critical Psychology perspective, another point is to be added: pinning people down to a being generally carries the danger to interpret their actions as the result of characteristics, thereby pinning people down to this, instead of trying to discover, together with them, their specific reasons for their action in the specific situations of their lives (Holzkamp 1985).

But this very intention, to understand actions as situation-bound, is part of the Childhood Studies program, which in the following I will take up in the facets that seem important to me, and which I will relate to psychological, or rather critical-psychological, also developmental-psychological ideas, in an effort to achieve or promote a productive discussion.

I will advance the argument that, first, the core demand of Childhood Studies for the participation of children in concrete historical situations is compatible with Critical or subject-science psychology both theoretically and methodologically. Second, I will present some ideas from subject-science developmental psychology, which may be useful to Childhood Studies research. Third, I will sketch out how a subject-science approach is generally opposed to the idea of an “educandus.”

4. Research from the standpoint of the subject - with adults and children

It is a general demand of Childhood Studies research not to research children but with them, that is, to bring to bear their perspective (Honig 2009). I think this not only applies to children but should apply to all humans that are or get involved in psychological research: Critical Psychology research sees itself as psychological research “from the standpoint of the subject,” in a literal sense: Individual subjects are not to be researched, but participate in the research themselves. The object of research are not (other) individuals, but the world as it is experienced by the individuals, instead of asking how the world affects the individuals, which would mean thinking of them as objects.
Such research from the standpoint of the subject includes that the relationship between those involved is as symmetrical and equal as possible. Against this background, we call those not professionally involved in the research process “co-researchers.” This relationship between “researchers” and “co-researchers” is in no way static, since the respective competences shift during the research process—and have to, since and to the extent that “co-researchers” and “researchers” have to qualify themselves (Markard 2009:247ff): the professional “researchers” by, for example, getting to know the living circumstances of the “co-researchers” that are relevant for the problems at issue. The “co-researchers,” for example, by engaging with thematically relevant concepts, if they want to use the research for their life practice. For the ideas and theories developed in the course of such research are to serve for the self-reflection of those involved, that is: they are meant to contribute to a better analysis of the problems in their lives and to a possible resolution. Insofar, this type of research is action research, which relates its insights from the interrelation of recognition and change in everyday practice.

This alone creates the necessity of another theoretical-methodological demand, advanced by both Childhood Studies and Critical Psychology: The scientific inclusion of the concrete living circumstances of those involved: Critical Psychology insists that living circumstances do not simply consist of the relevant situation, but also of societal structures in which such situations are embedded: Thus, in school classes, there are individual situations between children and between teachers and children; but an understanding of the arising dynamics cannot (only) be developed by looking at the concrete situation; rather, we also need to know the school system and its function in the social structure. “Structure” here means the system character of societal life (re)production that in general is independent of the individuals, their actions and the concrete situations. We therefore have to take account of the specificity of human existence by not only considering or deciphering situations but also the societal structures in which the situations are embedded: Without the analysis of societal structures, the “situations,” too, will remain uncomprehended (cf. Markard 2009: 152, 162).

5. Analysis of conditions, meanings, premises and reasons

Starting from this relationship between situation and structure, Critical Psychology proposes to distinguish between conditions, meanings and premises: conditions refer to the objective-economic life circumstances, meanings point to the extent to which these conditions create opportunities for and obstacles to
action, while premises finally mean those aspects of meaning that an individual accentuates for herself for her specific reasons. This takes account of the fact that the individual cannot “directly relate to ‘society’ … as a ‘whole’” (Holzkamp 1983a: 196, my translation), but only with the sections available to them, such as their position in an intergenerational relationship, their job, household, “free time”, romantic relationships, education, “hobby,” work in associations or parties. The individual person is not only working a specific job or is being out of work, he is also single or not, has children or not, a sick grandma or not, is “head over heels” or not, etc. If one wants to think about real sensitivities and opportunities for or obstacles to action, these aspects cannot be left out. This is why the—interdisciplinary—social theory analysis of life circumstances is indispensible for psychology, “while its concrete psychological meaning has to be proven from the standpoint of the subject” (Markard 2009: 151).

It is obvious that such a psychological perspective has to rely on interdisciplinary references, since the analysis of societal contexts cannot be achieved with psychological research and methods. This also means becoming involved with competing sociological, economic, political science approaches and to differentiate the “sociological perspective in Childhood Studies” (Hungerland 2008, my translation) by whether this perspective is critical or rather affirmative—as Dörre et al. (2009:12) point out, when they seek to “promote” the “return of critique to Sociology.”

6. Agency and restrictive arrangements: Grasping contradictions

Against this background, I will now refer not to the concept of competence, but with the wider concept of agency, which focuses more on the relationship of opportunities for and obstacles to action, in particular with respect to how these relate to relations of power and dominance, or rather how these societal constellations of dominance and power “enter” into the pores of individual life praxis—whether the individual realizes this or not. This raises the question what if can be subjectively functional to renounce the expansion of possibilities for action and to arrange oneself with limiting circumstances. This means deciphering how and why those involved to not seize opportunities for action, which risks they are avoiding, to which extent the dangers that resistance implies seem greater than the perspectives it might open up, which previous experiences make them come to this conclusion. Which ideological offers are available to them? How are unruly impulses for action warded off? Which social support or constraints are present? Which compromises are made, at whose expense? Which experiences led to which resignations? Do I prefer the bird in the hand or the two
in the bush? Which emotions do I feel to be overwhelming, which do I feel I need to control, which are considered (in)appropriate by others?

In this respect, it is interesting to note that Marx, when in 1844 he used the phrase of “loveliest appearance” (“liebenswürdigste Schein”) with which others are “conned” (“geprellt”) to analyse the specificity and ambiguity of emotions in capitalism (547), asked questions that are still relevant. Examples for such analyses are those by Ottomeyer (1976) on “empathy,” in the “capitalist” (197ff) and the “late-capitalist reproductive process” (218ff). In 1983, Hochschild published her analyses of emotion management (using the example of stewardesses); also in 1983, Holzkamp summed up the emotional aspects of “instrumental relationships” (“Instrumentalbeziehungen”, 1983a: 402ff). What these analyses with their different categorical references have in common is the question of the psychological cost of the “loveliest appearance,” the question of how and whether emotions should or have to be advertised or hidden, definitely controlled, in professional or private settings, and to which extent individuals understand the relevant ambivalences (with respect to their societal dimension) (Kaindl 2008; see also Markard 2009: Ch. 11).

I find those types of question interesting as research questions, because they—in specific ways—relate to both children and adults.

And because this is the case, child competence or agency, too, has to be seen as more or less contradictory and fractured. I want to illustrate this with an example of Beatrice Hungerland (2008: 86): “Children have their own way of expressing themselves, and the point is to accept this: They are not worth less just because they have had less time in life to learn how one gains an advantage in the most clever way” (my translation). The discussion that could follow here is what it would mean to “gain one’s advantage in the most clever way,” at whose expense this is done, and which possibilities for solidarity are left out. Put differently: This demonstrates how children’s ways of acting and thinking are also confronted with societal traps. For example, if someone gets good grades in school she also gets them because she doesn’t cheat by helping others in forbidden ways; getting along in school always also means getting along in circumstances that are also marked by selection and competition.

This is why we cannot simply and seamlessly counter the contradictions in our society with a progressive intention, attitude or practice, and therefore also not with a seamless support of children (Holzkamp 1983b). This would be the illusion that wrong life could be lived rightly (“Es gibt kein richtiges Leben im falschen”, Adorno 1951: 42). But that does not mean that there is nothing that is right or reasonable. Progress, reason and humanity rather consist of realizing the contradictions of society, of one’s own practice, or in the lives of children (and to draw the consequences). To use Gramsci’s words: “The philosophy of practice
[i.e. Marxian philosophy, MM] does [...] not aim at peacefully resolving the contradictions existing in history and in society, but is, to the contrary, the theory of these very contradictions” (1995: 1325, my translation)—a crucial aspect of what we can learn from Karl Marx on child competence—or, more generally, on agency.

7. Subjective necessity of control and child-specific premise situations

Children, just like adults, seek to make their life circumstances disposable, to become able to act and in that sense “free.” Psychologically, this expresses itself mainly as the “experience of the limitation of agency, which is tantamount to the subjective necessity of overcoming this limitation” (Holzkamp 1983a: 241, my translation).

Against this background, development can be understood as the alteration of a condition experienced as problematic, in the direction of expanding one’s power of disposition. It follows, also, that agency is not a goal of development that is eventually reached or completed, but has to be understood as a permanent process.

However, from an external perspective, we cannot determine what the subjectively necessary step of another person, also of a child, is. Children and adults may even be unsure about this themselves. As a rule, psychology has to deal with the fact that in critical situations, the reasons and consequences of our actions are not obvious, but that we have to figure them out against superficialities, self-deception, etc. Intersubjectively, that is, between adults, between children and between children and adults, the aim in such situations can only be to contribute to understanding and clarifying given contradictions between reality and possibilities, with the goal of developing the subjectively necessary next step for the individual person concerned.

This includes figuring out or developing the premises (as explained above, as subjectively accentuated meanings of action). In this way, strongly development-psychological considerations come into play: What do the premises of small children look like?

On the physical level, let us first consider the infamous colic of newborns, which are abominable not because they involve terrible pain, but because to a newborn, who does not know their temporary character and therefore cannot anticipate their passing, they must appear as its mode of existence, an atrocious moment of helplessness, which is related to a “not yet” of development-psychological relevance.
Further, I want to use the example of the power outlet to explain the problem of child relations to meanings / premises (see also Ulmann 1987: 151–152). If somebody said the meaning of a power outlet was to look like a stylized pig’s nose, we would understand this as a joke. (Take the cartoons of pigs standing before power outlets, saying: “Come out, coward!” or “Who walled you in, you poor bastard?”) This is because we know the meaning of a power outlet, to the extent that we know its function, that is, to the extent that we know what it is made for. Power outlets have a (societal meaning) resulting from the fact that they substantiate, if you will, specific human intentions. In everyday life it is immaterial how deeply we have internalized the electric functional relations; it is enough that we know that a blender will work and will only work if we plug it into an outlet—but not if we plug it into a button with big buttonholes: and: We know that we should not play around in an outlet with knitting needles.—At a certain age, children do not know that yet—and we certainly prevent them from making an experience with the knitting needles in the power outlet, which they will never be able to repeat, as Gisela Ulmann likes to say (see also Ulmann 1987:100). Of course, power outlets can still also be used as a target for knitting needles, even though they are not made for that. We could also say that this is an unspecific (and in this case fatally dangerous) use of power outlet holes.

Children at first experience societal meanings in such an unspecific or despecified way, and they therefore cannot understand why they are kept away from power outlets. In a way, this can be compared to a situation where we encounter objects of a foreign culture, of which the sense objectified in them is not accessible to us.

As to the power outlets, there are two levels in which children do not understand adult prohibitions: first, as a blind fact: as an early crawler, I am somehow removed from certain corners of the room; to the extent that I have started understanding that humans differ from other circumstances by the fact that they have intentions, I can also experience the prohibition as a specific injury, because I cannot yet understand the reasons that adults have for their prohibition. This also means: the interpersonal relations are not symmetrical in that I cannot yet guess the objective content of the prohibition and therefore also cannot know the difference between arbitrariness and factual reason; I have to experience everything as arbitrary, as long as I cannot understand the sense of object meanings.

In the biographic development of children, specific contradictions therefore arise from the fact that a child’s efforts at expanding her power of disposal meet limitations, which result from/ are limited by the fact that it cannot understand the actions of others or, rather, the meanings relating to them. It can react aggressively, but also keep its aggressions to itself, in order to retain the favors of
the adults experienced as arbitrary. Possibly, a child will already develop a sense of guilt from reacting aggressively to the also “kind” adults, which would mean that preforms of restrictive entanglements can develop (which were hinted at above in relation to the contradiction of adaptation). The preform character of the restrictiveness lies in the fact that the child has no real alternative of changing the conditions yet. It can neither understand the interpersonal situation, nor can it extricate itself from the framework of dependency; even if—as in cases of extreme neglect—it can leave the familiar framework, it will enter new (institutional) conditions of dependency, which also demonstrates that specific power relationships between adults and children cannot be disputed. They are part of overarching power relationships and, so to say, given as a matter of fact. It is our task to constantly reflect on this aspect of the relationships between adults and children.

8. Development contradictions from the standpoint of the child

With these few examples, I intended to show, firstly, that we encounter specific problems when we seek to comprehend the reasons for action of children, and, secondly, what kinds of biographic burdens children may carry onwards (cf. Holzkamp 1983a: 495ff). Thirdly, I want to indicate where considerations of developmental psychology that address a “not yet” of child opportunities could be useful for all involved, where they heighten the sensibilities of adults for children’s plights, which result from the fact that their own premises for action are unspecific in relation to societal constellations. This has nothing to do with sequencing etc., but with the effort of understanding development contradictions from the standpoint of the child. They result from the discrepancy between the possibilities of disposal that are objectively given in societal reality and the limited capacity for their realization in the child. Woodhead (2009) also pointed this out when he showed that, also in developmental psychology—e.g. by Piaget (ibid.: 53–54)—children are treated as actors, who are however “relatively more vulnerable, dependent and inexperienced (ibid.: 57; on the critical-psychological interpretation of Piaget’s approach cf. Ulmann 2013).

This can also be applied to the situation where older children suddenly comprehend connections that they had not realized before: a nice example is contained in the German biography of the piano genius Glenn Gould (2002: 61), who was completely aghast when he realized that the first fish he caught was going to be killed: “Ever since I have been a militant opponent of fishery.” (My translation) In David Grossmann’s novel To the End of the Land, there is a passage where one of the sons realizes that the meat on his plate stems from
animals that used to be alive, and who because of the deception or betrayal of trust he assumes quarrels with his parents for weeks. An academic and grandmother I know did not dare to honor the truth when her grandson claimed that so-called Chicken McNuggets were delivered to McDonald’s by chickens. Many examples of how children experience societal facts such as poverty, prejudice, etc., can be found in the “Handbuch Kinderwelten” (Wagner 2008; see also Kölbl & Mey 2012).

There are numerous claims in Childhood Studies, especially in the area of methodology (cf., e.g., Lange & Mierendorff 2009 or Mey 2005, 2010), to the effect that cognitive-emotional specificities of children have to be taken into account. What I care about is to explore where Critical Psychology count contribute to their analysis and to overcoming them (Holzkamp 1983a: 417ff; Ulmann 1987; Markard 2009: 222ff).

Critical Psychology neither wants to nor can tell people, including children, how they should be or live. This is mainly due to the fact that emancipation cannot be thought of as an imposed norm or standardization. The standpoint of critique of Critical Psychology is not perfect humans in arbitrary conditions, but conditions in which—as Marx puts it—man is not a desicable being, and in which the free development of everyone is the condition of the free development of all. As far as this perspective can be generalized—as a thought experiment or in reality— it contradicts a normative concept of dealing with humans. The standpoint of Critical Psychology is therefore a specific critique of societal conditions, not a norm for those that live in them. Emancipation does not need spiritual-moral leadership; it replaces that with solidarian action—also between individuals of different generations—and in communal processes of learning and change.

9. References


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Generalized agency and commonism

Denis Neumüller and Stefan Meretz

Abstract
In German Critical Psychology the category pair of restrictive vs. generalized agency is key. While restrictive agency as acting by accepting given societal conditions is well elaborated the counter-notion of generalized agency remains rather vague. In this paper we challenge the prevailing understanding of the concept of generalized agency. First, we critically examine class theory as the theoretical basis of the concept of generalized agency. We question the notion of extended control over one’s living conditions as the main criterion for the question of how actions can be grounded in a generalized way. Instead we suggest that a notion of sublated capitalism is needed in order to gain a directional determination of generalizable agency. Based on the concept of societal nature of humans and a renewed critique of capitalism, we outline basic determinations of a post-capitalist mode of production. This society – we call it commonism – is structured by general relations of inclusion having the commons (instead of the commodity) as the elementary form of societal reproduction, and a societal mediation in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all. Finally, we suggest that a notion of general agency unfolded under such conditions can serve as a directional determination of generalizable agency today.

Keywords
generalized agency, extended control, Marxism, commons, commonism, inclusion

This contribution is the product of a process of joint self-understanding by the authors about their unease with the concept of generalized agency as it is currently used in Critical Psychology. We do not perceive this process as complete; instead we hope that our contribution stimulates a discussion about this concept and the categorial foundations of Critical Psychology as a whole.

First, we would like to explain why the prevailing version of the concept of generalized agency in the book Foundations of Psychology (Grundlegung der Psychologie, Holzkamp 1983, hereinafter: GdP) and other critical-psychological literature seems contradictory to us. On this basis, we argue that this
contradictory version can only be resolved by gaining a concept of sublated\(^1\) capitalism – we use the concept ‘commonism’ for this notion.

**From “dual possibility” to “generalized/restrictive agency”**

The category of agency is viewed as the “central concept” (Markard 2009, p. 166)\(^2\) of Critical Psychology. It serves to make the mediation between individual life activity and societal\(^3\) process understandable. For the individual, this mediation is represented by a relationship between possibilities and restrictions for action. Human agency, in this sense, is conceived of as “the exercise of control\(^4\) by the individual over his or her own requirements of life through participation in the control of the societal process” (GdP, p. 241). The ability to exercise control over one’s own living conditions thus concerns both control over the possibility of satisfying one’s own needs *under* the given societal conditions and control *over* the very conditions under which the satisfaction of needs takes place. People themselves create the conditions under which they act in a societal context. This gives them the opportunity not only to accept the given framework, but also to change it in order to overcome restrictions. According to Holzkamp this „dual possibility“ (GdP, p. 354) represents a general definition of societal individuals, i.e. it applies to all societal formations.

In capitalism, the relationship between individual life process and societal reproduction process takes on a specific contradictory form. Under capitalist constellations of meaning with their corresponding structures of action, people not only develop reasons “to change the respective circumstances according to their life interests, but also reasons to arrange themselves with the given possibilities, namely whenever the risk of conflict with the authorities makes a

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1. We use the Hegelian term sublation (Aufhebung) to grasp the three moments of transformation: 1. to do away with, abolish, cancel out; 2. to keep or preserve; 3. to lift or raise up.
2. All German quotations were translated by the authors.
3. We use the word *societal* instead of *social* when referring to the German word *gesellschaftlich*. The distinction between aspects on the level of society and aspects on the level of social interaction is central for Critical Psychology. See Tolman (1994, pp. 37-38) for a comprehensive explanation.
4. There is a bigger translation problem: in accordance with the translations of critical-psychological articles that exist so far, we use ‘control over’ for the German word “Verfügung über”, which – as Tolman (1994, p. 150) notes – “literally means ‘disposal over’, which approximates the sense of ‘subject to one’s disposal’. None of the ordinary dictionary meanings of ‘disposal’, however, quite captures the Critical Psychological intent.” What is meant is participation in collective decision making processes and access to and cooperative use of resources and means of production, which are both necessary for each individual’s own life conditions and conduct of everyday life.
changing intervention appear too great and dangerous” (Holzkamp 1992, p. 66). The attempt to secure one’s agency within the given framework then leads one “to participate in the perpetuation of the circumstances through which this [one’s agency] is threatened” (GdP, p. 378). This aspect of individuals’ efforts to exercise control over their living conditions is what Holzkamp calls the restrictive alternative of agency. Holzkamp then speaks of an “arrangement with the rulers” that serves “to pass on the suppression from ‘above’ in various ways to those ‘below’ to whose expense one’s own partial interests are to be enforced” (GdP, p. 375). The counterterm that characterizes the “second possibility” (GdP, p. 355) – the change in conditions with the perspective of realizing long-term or generalized opportunities for life and development – is generalized agency.

The categorial pair of restrictive and generalized agency does not serve to classify persons or actions as restrictive or generalized. It is supposed to further the understanding of the restrictive and generalized aspects of one’s actions and thus to identify existing possibilities and limitations for action in one’s life situation, or as Markard (2009) writes: “it allows for the insistence on the question of how, when, why, under which circumstances I simultaneously hurt my own and others’ life interests in attempts to cope with my own life” (p.200).

This version of the categorial pair of restrictive-generalized agency incorporates social-theoretical analyses of capitalism. Here, Holzkamp refers to Karl Marx’s critique of political economy as it was read in the 1970/80s by those schools of thought that were oriented towards actually existing socialism. After the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, this reading was extended by some authors (e.g. by analyses of neoliberalism, cf. Kaindl 1998, 2008), but also criticized and declared invalid (Baller 1995). We would like to add to this discussion a third, constructive criticism of the traditional interpretation of Marxism and show that it can help resolve categorial ambiguities.

In contrast to Kaindl (1998, p. 28), we do not see the “general structural concepts” on which Holzkamp bases his reception of Marxist social theory as the only “basis for Marxist theorizing and debate” that are “largely shared”. We oppose the idea of a single generally evident “Marxist framework theory” as Kaindl argues following Haug (1998, p.375). Instead, we argue that there are various framework theories within the reception of Marx’s critique of political economy, which understand those general structural concepts or their significance and meaning in different ways. In contrast to Baller (ibid.), we do not think that the reference to Marx’s theory has become obsolete due to historical changes. Rather, we consider it worth including newer approaches to Marx reception (cf. Postone 1993, Heinrich 2012, Larsen et al. 2014), which refer to precisely these “general structural concepts”. We think this might be crucial both for the (singular theoretical) understanding of current inner capitalist
changes (e.g. the rise of neoliberalism) and for the formation of individual and subject-scientific categories. Thus, we do not turn away from the critical-psychological basis of Marx’ theory, for example in favor of postmodern approaches. We try to develop a position on a dialectical-materialistic basis that goes beyond the limitations of traditional interpretation and allows a more appropriate determination of the critical-psychological categories (in this paper with a focus on the category of generalized agency).

**Class theory as the present theoretical basis of generalized agency**

Traditional Marxist social theory assumes a basic division of society into classes. The main antagonistic proponents in this conception are labor and capital. The class positions result from their relation to the means of production: The capital class controls them, while the property-less labor class is forced to sell its labor, which in turn can be bought, utilized and exploited by the capital class. Critical-psychological texts, with references to social theory, therefore often use shortened terms like “the exploiters” and “the exploited” or “the rulers” and “the ruled” (H.-Osterkamp 1976, GdP, Kaindl 1998, Markard 2009). The perspective of transformation consists in the conquest of control over the means of production (“expropriation of the expropriators”) and state power by the exploited in order to build a socialist society. This strategy gains legitimacy from the configuration of interests. While the capital class only follows its partial interest of valorization and exploitation, the historical task of the labor class is the enforcement of general human interests. In this theoretical arrangement, therefore, the orientation “towards the enforcement of general interests in joint control over one’s own living conditions [stands] against the prevailing partial interests in restricting this control” (GdP, p. 373), the striving for the realization of general interests by the dominated (labor class and allies) stands against the currently effective partial interests of the ruling class (capital class and allies).

Under capitalist conditions, it is important to counter the economic power of the capital class through political unification. Each piece of counter-power achieved by the dominated expands their possibilities for action and (potentially) quality of life by pushing back the power and possibilities for action of the ruling class. This leads to a particular conception of the category of generalized agency. It comprises the successively extended control of the dominated over the

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5 We use the terms “capital class” and “labor class” instead of “capitalist class” and “working class”. We prefer this categorial rather than the sociological designation of the respective groups of individuals subsumed under these categories (cf. Kurz/Lohoff 1989).
conditions of action with the perspective of collective control over all societal living conditions in socialism. In this theoretical arrangement, the quest for extended control, especially when it takes place through a “cooperative alliance of individuals at the interpersonal level” (GdP, p. 331) in organizations of the dominated, is the sufficient criterion for generalized agency. The category does not have to be further qualified in terms of content; the extension of control plus organized counter-force (that has to be concretized in each particular empirical constellation) are sufficient for defining the right direction (cf. e.g. Holzkamp 1980).

This notion is contrasted with the category of restrictive agency. It comprises actions of the dominated within given limits under acceptance of existing conditions. Like the action of the capital class, it too remains in the mode of partial interests at the expense of other partial interests. The difference between objective general interest and subjectively realized partial interests of the dominated is bridged by the figure of the “arrangement with the rulers”. Instead of exposing myself to the risk of losing opportunities for action in the event of failing attempts to expand my disposition power at the expense of the rulers, I try to “arrange with the rulers... [and] participate in their power to secure/expand my own capacity to act at the expense of others’ interests...; whereby the suppression from ‘above’ is passed on in various ways to those ‘below’ to whose expense ones own partial interests are to be enforced” (GdP, p. 375).

If we criticize class theory, it is not because we deny the existence of classes. On the contrary, we think, the problem is different: By privileging class antagonism as the supposedly main contradiction, the significance of other relations of domination is devalued. In the 1970/80s, socialist feminists demanded to end the treatment of patriarchy as a side contradiction and to recognize it on an equal footing with class rule. At the end of the 1980s, Triple Oppression Theory went one step further and declared classism, patriarchy and racism to be equal relationships of domination, which would have to be overcome in the same way. From the 1990s onward, numerous groups affected by specific power relations empowered themselves to address their particular experiences of oppression (cf. Habermann 2008). Numerous other dimensions of domination have been highlighted and have entered the realm of the speakable: sexuality, desire, color, relationship forms, body, language, physical appearance, education, age, etc. – an inexhaustible list. Intersectionality research was established in the 2000s with the aim of investigating the interaction of different forms of domination. The concern of making the particular visible has been put forward by poststructuralist theoretical approaches, especially in the academic field. Authors of these approaches explicitly distance themselves from unifying
“grand theories”.

In this view, Critical Psychology is a grand theory of the old style.

We share the criticism of the privileged treatment of class contradiction, while at the same time adhering to a “grand theoretical claim”: the world as a coherent whole can in principle be depicted with a theory that is consistent in itself. However, such a uniform insight is not a final state to be achieved, but a continuous process of approximation. Based primarily on readings of Marx’s theory that put the fetishism of societal relations at the core, we come to other conceptual definitions of the essential contradictions in capitalism and the corresponding consequences for a concept of transformation that sublates capitalism. We claim that this has consequences for the content of Critical Psychology’s categories. In line with Holzkamp’s approach to concept development, this alternative definition at the level of societal theory has to be elaborated in terms of meanings and forms of thought. We can only indicate this in this article. Further analyses and explanations are required which go beyond the scope of this article (cf. Meretz 2012, pp. 69-62 and 95-98).

We consider the criticism of the multiple manifestations of domination, to which ever new groups and individuals are subject, to be essential for an updated critical-psychological theory formation. At the same time, there is currently no analytical approach available that can identify and theorize the common roots of the diversity of the domination dimensions. We outline such an approach in the remainder of this article.

**Capitalism as a system of general relations of exclusion**

Separated private production based on the institution of property forces an ex-post mediation via the market where commodities are exchanged. Marx calls the commodity the “elementary form” (Marx 1890/1990, p. 125) of this way of societal production. Commodities are produced privately by distinct entities. The dimensions of utility (“use value”) and mediation (“exchange value”) are in contrast to each other. In production and consumption, the sensual (material and immaterial) character of the commodity to satisfy needs is the central focus; in mediation, only the socially valid production effort counts that determines the

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6 With the New Materialism approach, there is again a counter-trend within poststructuralist theory formation (cf. Coole and Frost 2010).

7 The position of class contradiction in traditional Marxist theory is categorically derived from the analysis of production conditions. An immanent criticism would have to start at this level. We cannot do this here, but refer to the newer approaches of Marx reception already mentioned above.

8 Assumed that individualizing unconnected explanations are not adequate.
equivalent exchange. This means that the so-called sensual-vital and the mediation-related productive aspects of control over need satisfaction (GdP, p. 242) also tend to be separated and appear as opposites. In a commodity society, for example, the obvious focus of satisfying needs is on consumption, while the productive aspect of work appears only as a means of earning money.

In the process of valorization, the contrast between the utility and the mediation of a commodity undergoes numerous “changes of form” (Marx 1890/1990, p. 200), but never dissolves. The “metamorphosis of commodities through which the social metabolism is mediated” (ibid, p. 199) creates a fundamental societal logic of separation through the contrariness in its changes of form. This logic arises because mediation determines the societal metabolism, while utility is subordinate to it. Thus the (surplus) value is the purpose, the utility value the means; the profit the purpose, the production the means. In the context of the societal provision of living conditions, the relationship is exactly the opposite, utility is the purpose, mediation the means. The perverted metamorphosis movement becomes problematic because the value that sets the purpose becomes an endless feedback loop in itself: “It is constantly changing from one form into the other, without becoming lost in this movement; it thus becomes transformed into an automatic subject” (ibid., p. 255). Marx (ibid.) describes the consequence for people as follows: “Their own movement within society has for them the form of a movement made by things, and these things, far from being under their control, in fact control them.” (p. 167f). Marx calls this perverted and autonomized movement the “fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities” (ibid., p. 165). The resulting and perpetuating societal logic of separation now has two dimensions, a material and a social one.

The material dimension of the societal separation is the logic of externalization. Since, in order to be competitive, a commodity has to be produced at no more than average effort, other cost-increasing production aspects are outsourced and harmful consequences of cheapened production are imposed on third parties. This means, however, that commodities are permanently produced for sale and eventually for the satisfaction of certain needs, while, at the same time, this very production restricts and violates other needs. Externalization means destruction of ecosystems and global climate, degradation of resources, harmful working conditions, questionable product quality etc. Although these consequences can be limited by government regulations, they can

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9 Work can be fun as much as consumption, but often fun refers only to the operative subaspect of actions, since the aspect of determining the overriding goals of action is usually not available (cf. GdP, p. 279ff).
never be eliminated entirely, let alone reversed into permanently positive externalities.

The social dimension of the movement of societal separation is the logic of exclusion. It is a social logic of the permanent opposition of interests, as a structural relationship in which “I can only extend control of my living conditions at the expense of others” (GdP, p. 374). This also includes the aspect of “self-hostility” (GdP, pp. 376-382). The logic of exclusion is always a dynamic relationship of real inclusions and exclusions. Inclusions based on partial interests are certainly a means of increasing the ability to exclude third parties. The logic of interests and the logic of exclusion are closely linked.

It is important to understand that the logic of exclusion is not a relationship of intention but a structural relationship that arises from the commodity form.

We see the societal logic of separation with the two dimensions of externalization and logic of exclusion as a system of general relations of exclusion. In this way, society disintegrates into partial interests, and particular domination embodies its central dynamic. Domination is therefore not an external relationship with clearly assigned positions of rulers and dominated (for example as the dominance of capital, with which one can “arrange” oneself), but an inner relationship that goes through us and which we reproduce daily. This is in line with Holzkamps notion of power in his book Lernen (Learning): following Foucault, he claims “the ‘obsolescence’ of a ‘power of the sovereign’ through the modern ‘power economy’, which works through those affected, and in which everyone is in a certain sense simultaneously perpetrator and victim” (1993, p. 535). It is obvious that power and influence can be distributed very unequally. Nevertheless, the logic of exclusion inherent in the commodity form and secured by the institution of property cannot be overcome along individual exclusion dimensions. It can only be sublated by sublating the social forms of “commodity” and “property” in the production of overall living conditions. This, in turn, can only be achieved through the implementation of a new mode of reproduction (see below, see also Meretz 2015, 2017).

Now it also becomes clear why the criterion of an extension of control does not suffice to determine the direction of generalized agency. Under conditions of the logic of exclusion, extensions of control of some are necessarily (because structurally mediated) at the expense of others. Rather, the question is whether it will remain like this or whether there is also a moment that transcends these exclusionary conditions.

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10 A fundamental separation we cannot go into here is the separation of the spheres into a realm of valorization and the public with “male connotations” and a realm of reproduction and the private with “female connotations” (cf. Scholz 2014).

11 There can be no general interests within the logic of exclusion. The enforcement of general interests is identical to the abolition of the logic of interests in general.
The problem of "extended agency"

The combination of generalized agency with extended control has led to a notion of an “extended agency” (erweiterte Handlungsfähigkeit) (Büs 2011, Nowak et al. 2012, Kierstein 2013, but also GdP, p. 371). Although this reformulation has rightly been criticized time and again (e.g. Markard 2013), it contains a true core: it indirectly refers to the problem that the extension of control with respect to dispositive power does not necessarily have to be of a generalizable nature. In everyday practice, it might be helpful for overcoming or resolving problematic situations by discovering new possibilities for action by means of extended control over one’s conditions. However, the emancipatory content of the analysis of such situations is in danger of getting lost with a reduced category of “extended” agency. In fact, extended control over the conditions of action has a restrictive moment, when it is at the expense of others in the mode of partial interests and thus reproduces general conditions of exclusion. It has a transcending, thus generalizing moment, when it strives for general conditions of inclusion in which one’s own development is the condition for the development of others and vice versa. This gives rise to two points of criticism for us. Firstly, the extension of control – since its content is undetermined – is insufficient as a “directional determination” (Holzkamp 1984/1991, p. 60) of generalized agency. Secondly, we also wonder whether extending the scope of control is not a general aspect of agency, i.e. it should not be associated only with generalization. We now turn to the first point and discuss the second point in the summary section at the end of the article.

Klaus Holzkamp did not make a clear statement on the issue of extended control. There are only a few passages in which he writes about extending control in the context of restrictive agency (GdP p. 202, 376; 1984/1991, p. 37), which are then ultimately always connected with the aforementioned arrangement with the rulers. Generally, Holzkamp conceives of “generalized agency” as a “joint extension of societal living possibilities” (GdP, 2). Markard (2010) also states: “Terminologically, ‘extending’ stands for non-restrictive” (p. 6).

If “extended control” is not sufficient as a criterion for determining the direction of the category of generalized agency, how then can the direction be determined? So far, there have only been a few comments on the direction. One example is Kaindl (1996), who states “‘Generalized agency’ ... describes the insistence on the question of humane conditions that do not continually disavow human possibilities. They find their empirical counterpart at best in emancipatory tendency... Only from the standpoint of ‘reasonable’ utopia – i.e. from the standpoint of insisting on fundamental criticism of society – it is possible to criticize unreasonable and inhuman conditions as such and to grasp the disavowal
of human possibilities as such disavowal” (p. 106). Kaindl (ibid.) uses the concept of *reason* to criticize capitalism as “unreasonable” and “inhuman” and calls for a “reasonable utopia” (ibid.). Such a utopia would be based on a “fundamental criticism” (ibid.) of capitalism in order to recognize the (practical) denial of human possibilities. This is an understandable approach; however, it retains a simple negation. The concept of reason, however, is capable of going beyond the limits. In G.W.F. Hegel’s work, reasonable thought means sublative thought in the sense of a double negation. A “reasonable utopia” is a theory that outlines societal conditions that must be created so that human possibilities can be recognized as constitutive and are able to unfold in an unrestricted way. If such conditions are conceptually developed, there is also an objective that can be used to determine a direction. Only under these conditions can an “extended control” be qualified in such a way that restrictive and generalizable moments of agency in the sense described above become apparent.

Consequently, we are concerned with the question of how the generalization of actions can be appropriately determined categorically, or, as Markard (2006) puts it, “in relation to the objective of societal emancipation ...how actions ... can be grounded in a generalizable way” (p.107).

**The problem of utopian theory building**

With the call for a reasonable utopia that conceptually sublates capitalism, we are tackling a *taboo* of left-wing theory that was erected after the defeat of real socialism: Nothing can and must be said about a possible future society. It is the prohibition of a utopia as well as of a philosophy of history that realizes this. This is sometimes also referred to as the “*Bilderverbot*” (the ban on images) in reference to monotheistic mythologies. What is meant is the class configuration, in which the labor class has the historical mission to follow the predetermined historical path derived from the development of productive power to liberate humanity. *This* historical-philosophical theory has been practically put out of commission, but historical philosophy as a philosophically based position on history has not. In this text, we propose the development of a categorically founded historical-philosophical position, which shares with the ban on images that there must be no concrete “detailing” (*auspinseln*, “casting a picture of utopia in a positive manner”) (Adorno in Bloch & Adorno 1964/1988, p. 10) of a

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12 In fact, it is impossible to do social theory without a historical-philosophical position, even if it is not explicated. The assumption of a fundamental openness and indeterminacy of future historical development is also a historical-philosophical position.
future everyday life. However, we argue that fundamental considerations regarding the mediation between individuals and society of a sublated capitalism are possible. These considerations are based on three sources: (a) determinations of the societal nature of humans; (b) conceptual negation of the capitalist mode of production; (c) categorial determination of post-capitalist, or as we put it, commonist mode of reproduction.

Regarding (a): A concept of the societal nature of humans was developed by Critical Psychology. This term not only determines what societal people are, but also defines the space of human-societal development in history. Generally speaking, the development potential is that people can shape their living conditions according to their needs, because with the shift of dominance to societality, “the maintenance of single individuals’ existence has become the consciously aspired goal” (GdP, p. 190), as Holzkamp grasps this potency. Up until now, this potential has always been realized in forms of hierarchies and domination, which, however, meant that the conscious realization of goals of some was always at the expense of other people. However, this limits the development of the genuine potential of humanity as a whole. Only when the “free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (Marx/Engels 1848), i.e. actually all individuals are part of the consciously designed societal way of existence, has the potential been truly exhausted. Part of the concept of societal nature is the potency of general relations of inclusion, which is synonymous with the absence of domination and the free development of all people.

Regarding (b): Thus, it now also becomes apparent that general relations of inclusion as the potency of human-societal development are the (double) negation of general relations of exclusion as we analyzed them for capitalism (see above). We argue that there are no privileged dimensions of exclusion in the relations of domination (such as the class division), the abolition of which makes the sublation of capitalism possible. Instead, the overall systemic context and its basic logic of exclusion, which underlies all concrete dimensions of exclusion and phenomena of domination, can only be transformed as a whole. This is synonymous with sublating the capitalist (i.e. commodity-based) mode of production. At the same time, however, this transformation must include the dissociated, non-commodified, areas of reproduction by sublating the division of

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13 Markard demonstrates this ironically: Critical Psychology would have “designed explicatively how it will look like if people live on a cooperative basis realizing their human specificity of being able to relate to their own needs. Then conditions would be created ‘under which sexual and related needs can be satisfied regularly and appropriately, etc.’... As far as I personally am concerned, I do not have the slightest desire for this cooperative design, including appropriate humping” (Markard 2013; quote from H.-Osterkamp 1976, p. 107).
the spheres as such (cf. Scholz 2014). It is therefore not just a question of a different economy, but of a fundamentally different – inclusionary - way of societal provision of living conditions in a broad sense.

Regarding (c): However, the insights from (a) and (b) do not yet determine what this new generalized societal provision, in short: the new mode of reproduction, looks like. Above all, it is still to be developed which forms of societal mediation suggest rationalities of action that make actions in accordance with the general structures of inclusion subjectively functional. To roughly sketch this on a categorial level remains the task of the last part of this text. Without further proof, the following statements are based on the consideration that the commons in commonism – analogous to the commodity in capitalism – represent the basic element-system relationship of this new mode of reproduction (cf. Meretz 2017, Sutterlütii and Meretz 2018).

Excursus: Commons

In order to illustrate what we will talk about in the following, we will add a phenographic excursion (cf. Holzkamp 1973, pp. 21-22) on the functioning of commons, which we have gained from existing practical examples. We abstract from all empirically existing aspects which – according to our analysis – are owed to the capitalist framework and fictitiously place these commons in a commons-friendly environment (which is not the case in capitalism). This illustration cannot replace the following categorial analysis, but is intended to provide a descriptive approach to the subject for those people who have not yet had any experience with and in commons contexts and therefore do not know or suspect “what is to be discussed” (ibid.).

Commons are “resources (code, knowledge, food, energy sources, water, land, time, etc.) resulting from self-organized processes of common need-oriented production, administration, maintenance and/or use (commoning)” (de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commons, accessed on 13.11.2017). People with similar goals come together to plan, organize and execute a re-/productive process. They use resources in the broad sense described in the quotation, i.e. natural assets or (preliminary) products of a material, immaterial or social nature. On the surface, such a “project” can certainly be compared to a “company” in the functional structure of capitalism. However, the purpose, organization and control over processes and products differ greatly.

The purpose of a commons is to satisfy the needs of both those directly involved and, through the societal organization, those who benefit from the results. For those directly involved, the focus of their activities is on satisfying
the productive aspect of needs. In this way, they develop their agency by participating in the societal creation of living conditions. The results are in general freely accessible to the users. The organization of activities is carried out by the participants themselves, i.e. it is self-organization in a comprehensive sense. They determine the rules of cooperation, determine their decision-making procedures and settle conflicts. An important prerequisite for self-organization is control over the conditions of cooperation, essentially including control over the resources required to meet the purpose. Since the means of power are not available to force individuals to take part in activities, the conditions for participation are usually designed in a welcoming manner. Only then will an individual premise structure develop that makes participation probable for good individual reasons. However, this participation is indispensable in order to achieve the commons’ goals. In commons, it is therefore subjectively functional to make the needs of others the premises of one’s own actions and to solve conflicts communicatively.

In the following section we develop categorial definitions of commons, which – in contrast to capitalist relations – are in a positive generative relation to a commons society (commonism).

**Commonism as a system of general relations of inclusion**

On the basis of anthropological, historical and contemporary empirical studies, the commons can be determined as an elementary form of a new way of societal reproduction (the following is only a condensed outline, for details see Meretz 2017, 2018, Sutterlütti and Meretz 2018). Commonism would therefore be the society in which commons are the elementary form of societal reproduction; they produce and are produced by commonism.

The dimensions of usefulness and mediation can also be distinguished in a commons, but they do not contradict each other and are connected. This basically sets them apart from the commodity form (see above). The usefulness and mediation are both expressed in the sensual (material, immaterial and societal)

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14 This is a prospective assumption. With current commons, the sensual-vital need aspect often outweighs the productive one. The dominance of direct cooperation is based on the niche character of the projects.

15 It must be taken into account that the previously quoted Wikipedia definition refers to today’s conditions in which commons, according to our assumption, have the character of an embryonic-form but not of an elementary-form. That is because the systemic level corresponding to the elementary form and thus the reciprocal generative connection is “missing” (cf. Meretz 2014).
character of the product. Thus, both in respect to the sensual-vital aspect of usefulness and to the productive aspect of control over living conditions and mediation, there is a direct connection to needs. In commons, the needs-based mediation does not take place ex post (i.e. retrospectively) as is usually the case with commodities, but before production, i.e. ex ante. Before the production is implemented, the different wishes and requirements as well as the objective and social conditions and priorities – in other words, ultimately the needs – are communicated. This can lead to conflicts of needs, which are now not decided by the “power of the factual” at the expense of others (due to a lack of property-based decision-making power), but are (must be) dealt with communicatively. The interpersonal relationships of reciprocity that form in commons are usually unconditional (no conditional linking of taking to giving), peer to peer and including; in critical-psychological terms, they are intersubjective relationships. Holzkamp also states that “‘intersubjective’ relationships are decidedly characterizing collective or societal subjectivity” (GdP, p. 373).

The relations of mediation at the interpersonal, directly cooperative level – according to the element-system relationship of commons and commonism – find their counterpart in the transpersonal societal context of cooperation. While market mediation in capitalism is only quantitative, separated from usefulness, via the radically reduced information channel of value (expressed as price) and thus only indirectly referring to singular needs, commons mediation represents needs directly and qualitatively.

The term stigmergy is used for informational mediation (cf. Meretz 2015). Locally available information (stigmata = signs) serves the indirect coordination of activities in large social systems. In capitalism, for example, prices have such a stigma function, but the mediation information is merely quantitative and – because of the ex-post character of mediation – only serves for subsequent marketing purposes. Commons mediation, on the other hand, is qualitative, ex-ante and refers primarily to the production of means for need satisfaction. This includes object-related process information (measured values, status signals, tracking data, etc.) that is generated in and with the activity, and meta information that accompanies the activity and serves planning and coordination.

In contrast to commodity production, social conditions also belong to the consciously produced “products” that are geared to needs. In the former, these are either subject to the fetishist inversion (i.e. are determined by the factual process of the commodity movement) or are outsourced to the dissociated, immediate personal “private sphere”.

The alleged complexity and information reducing quality of money is often praised, referring to money as a tool for representing qualities in quantitative terms. This actually means that all qualitative dimensions that are not directly related to the product are cut off, or in economic terms: are externalized. However, these externalities are not out of the world, but often occur (in most cases somewhere else on the planet or in the future) as damage and thus restriction of quality of life.
(requirement descriptions, plans, statistics, wish lists, etc.). This qualitative, directly needs-related information arises before or in processes dedicated to creating the material, symbolic and social conditions for the satisfaction of needs.

The social aspect of stigmergy is the self-selection of activities, in which the decision-making process is reversed. Instead of assigning activities – that have been chosen hierarchically or consensually – to people who have to carry them out (with more or less external pressure or internal compulsion), people look for and choose activities that are right for them. On the basis of locally available information, which can certainly refer to global phenomena, they select the constellation in which they want to be or become active. Self-selection based on voluntariness is the best prerequisite for truly motivated action that is not thwarted by external constraints (that occur for the purpose of valorization, for example). Thus, not only the separation of decision and execution, which Karl Marx criticized as “the enslaving subordination of individuals to the division of labor” (Marx 1875/1970, p. 11), is sublated, but also the societal division into a public sphere that is value-productive and carries a masculine connotation and a private-reproductive sphere that carries a feminine connotation.

Stigmergy in a commons society can be understood as a form of indirect and emergent self-management of the communicative mediation of needs, resources, limitations and goals. The principle of self-selection at the individual level leads to a similar change of focus at the overall systemic level: Instead of directly organizing the processes by means of central planning, the aim is to create the conditions for social self-organization, which then produces the stigmatically distributed planning. The inclusion logic creates the conditions for its own reinforcement: Inclusive actions are subjectively functional and create conditions for further inclusive actions. General relations of inclusion emerge.

With the categorial outline of general relations of inclusion in commonism, we have set the preconditions for discussing the problem of determining the direction of generalized agency. In doing so, we want to take up and answer the postponed question of whether extending control could be better conceived of as a general aspect of agency.

**General agency as directional determination**

The term “generalized agency” sounds like a state. In the sense of a directional determination, it would be more appropriate to speak of “generalizable agency” in order to grasp the processual character of an orientation towards relations in which agency, the participation in the societal control of living conditions, is no
longer restricted in the form of domination, but has become “general”. At the same time, the character of potentiality is emphasized: the “not yet” free development, can only be the free development of all. The goal of generalizable agency would therefore be general agency in conditions in which the potential of human-societal development can fully unfold. In our view, such conditions can only be general relations of inclusion – commonism in our terminology. General agency can therefore be understood as the unrestricted subjective-intersubjective realization of human-societal development potentials. The “double functionality” of ensuring individual existence and societal reproduction is no longer structurally contradictory here (reproduction of the conditions that oppose one’s own living possibilities). Instead, because of the logic of inclusion, individual goals can be realized fully in accordance with societal goals. This means that one can participate in the conscious process of societal provisioning in an unrestricted manner that is appropriate for each. Intersubjectivity is the suggested inclusionary form of relationship that one both needs and realizes when satisfying one’s needs.

The development of a general agency in general relations of inclusion is the sought-after directional determination for the category of generalizable agency. It is about the moments of agency that can potentially be generalized under capitalist conditions and thus point beyond them. Generalizable moments are opposed by restrictive moments in which options for action promise an extended control of conditions for action, but which, at the same time, reproduce exclusionary conditions, i.e. can only be realized at the expense of others. Both moments, the transcending and restrictive, are always in a relationship under capitalist conditions, so they are not types of action, but analytical concepts for reflecting one’s own actions. If we bring together the considerations made here about the prevailing conceptual constellation of restrictive/generalized agency, then “extending control” no longer clearly stands for “non-restrictive” (cf. Markard 2010). Rather, the extension of control over conditions is always contradictory: it can coincide with mere restrictive forms of coping under acceptance of dominant societal conditions and the restriction of others; or it can transcend the dominant conditions, be rather generalizable and point to the direction of general relations of inclusion.

However, this would mean that extension of control would be the general determination of agency and the complete renunciation of extension a borderline case. In Holzkamp’s words, agency as such is “an analytic category that can help

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18 It is evident that there are other restrictions, such as those imposed by nature (produced, for example, by ecological devastations of capitalism). What is meant here are only the societal restrictions imposed by domination, which can also be transcended societally.
us to understand how the **general directional determination of a tendency toward extended control over one's own life conditions** [emphasis added] through participation in societal provisioning manifests itself – however reduced, perverted, or mystified - under concrete social developmental conditions and obstacles. The surface appearances of individual courses of development that are ordinarily encountered can thus be analyzed in terms of the relationship they express between the generalized action potency and the developmental restrictions through which they are canalized and deformed.” (Holzkamp 1984/1991, pp. 60-61). Thus, extending control determines the direction of agency in general.\(^\text{19}\)

Holzkamp did not elaborate on the idea of interpreting extended control as a determination of agency in **general** and making the contradictions of extending control analytically accessible. Instead, the adjective “restrictive” usually stands for renunciation of extension and “generalized” for an extension of control over conditions for action. In this respect, it is understandable if recipients are reducing generalized agency to simply an extended one. Nevertheless, there are some passages in which the contrasting juxtaposition of restrictive and extended agency is relinquished. Holzkamp asks: “But how is it possible for individuals to overcome the current limitation/threat in the direction of extending their agency/fulfilment of existence if the alternative of collectively extending their control is abandoned, i.e. within the framework of the existing possibilities for action and power relations?” (GdP, p. 374). Here, collective vs. individual extension of control are contrasted, i.e. different ways of extending control. However, the approach of analyzing the inner contradictions of extending control of agency itself was not pursued further.

With this article we hope to have taken up, carved out and further developed an immanent but hidden intention of Holzkamp’s. The consequences for research on psychological practice and on the conduct of everyday live would be the subject of further investigations.

\(^{19}\) This is also in line with Holzkamp’s argument on ontogenesis. For the child growing up, the aim is to reduce fear and dependency by continuously extending his or her agency in the direction of “adult” agency. The fact that the child can choose options of conflict resolution as preforms of restrictive agency in a way that is oriented towards coping and instrumentalizing does not change the purpose of the extension of control. Extending control is an unconditional moment of child development. It is questionable why this should no longer apply to the development of adults.
Bibliography


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Experience - Affliction - Emancipation

Christian Küpper

Abstract
This article considers the emancipatory impact of including the perspectives and experiences of afflicted or affected (ex-) users of psychiatry in the design of psychosocial support structures. I argue for the importance of securing the right to shape one’s own care through support structures that do not reinforce violence, heteronomy, exclusion, or cause additional suffering. Instead, each individual’s autonomous approach to self-understanding would need to inform facilitation techniques. To this end, I wish to describe two initiatives in Germany that incorporate the perspectives of those who have been afflicted or affected by psychiatry. I place special emphasis on the anti-psychiatric Berlin Runaway House. To further explore contemporary participatory models of psychiatric care and by way of a counterexample, I will then shift to examine the “peer counselling” model (also called Ex-In or Experienced Involvement), in order to problematize some of the reform efforts within the field of (social) psychiatry. I will conclude with some thoughts on the concepts experience and social self-understanding from the perspective of critical psychology, which I believe offers a useful framework and language to discuss the role and place of the experiences of afflicted or affected (ex-) users of psychiatry.

Keywords
Antipsychiatry, to be afflicted or affected by psychiatry, user control, mad/madness, critical psychology, criticism of profession, experience, affliction, emancipation, (social) psychiatry, social self-understanding

Introduction

The nascent science and practice of psychiatry in Germany had little regard for the experiences and hard-won insights of its initial victims. From the nineteenth century onward, research and clinical structures and practices demanded the strict separation between professionals and those who seek help or services, thereby also subordinating and disempowering the latter. All participants in the psychiatric field had their assigned parts: the subordinates – named alternatively sick, insane, or damaged, thereby rendering them socially disposable and fit for exclusion – and the dominant actors, empowered to determine whose and which kinds of knowledge were valid and applicable. They – the professionals – were the only actual agents within the psychiatric field’s hierarchy. Traditionally, and often still today though perhaps in different ways, power has been exerted from the top down. The professional psychiatrist researches, documents, observes, theorizes, interprets, develops technologies, and thereby generates knowledge. To diagnose, to treat, and indeed to cripple and imprison, all reiterate and confirm the power of the knowledge-generating subject, and simultaneously disempower the individual who uses psychiatric services. To come into contact with the field of psychiatry and its coarsely comparative diagnostic model – voluntarily or involuntarily – is at some level to be essentialized and dehumanized: such individuals are mentally ill or disturbed, their experiences are abnormal, defective and not infrequently resulting from perceivable somatic causes. Further: they will be controlled, pathologized, straight-jacketed, while forced into rolls and spaces of containment. They become, at last, the object of psychiatric technologies and treatments. And as an object, they can never participate in a dialogic practice; conversations can only transpire between two or more self-determining individuals.

Of course, the state of psychiatry in Germany today cannot be captured in such a limited (and unflattering) sketch of its emergence and historical practices. At least since the commission and publication of the 1975 Report on the Condition of Psychiatry in the BRD (called the Psychiatrie-Enquête), the field of psychiatric care in Germany – now called “social psychiatry” or “community psychiatry” – has distanced itself from asylum-based psychiatric practices of old. Among other changes in the theory and practice of psychiatry, the language used in the field of (social) psychiatry² and by its

² With the term “(social) psychiatry,” I am referencing Castel’s observations about psychiatry as a field in Germany today. According to Castel, there are five constitutive elements that insure psychiatry’s independence as a (theoretical and practical) scientific field: its theoretical precepts, its procedural technologies, its institutional authority, its
practitioners to describe themselves and their orientation has certainly evolved. In recent years, terms like *participation, triologue, inclusion, empowerment, life-world orientation, recovery, and autonomy* have proliferated, with an implicit understanding that this terminology humanizes psychiatric care and elevates the status of *users* (as opposed to patients, or consumers) and individuals afflicted and / or affected by psychiatry (in German, *Psychiatriebetroffener*) in ways that would have been unimaginable to earlier reformers. But in light of these epistemological shifts, we might also ask what initiatives *structurally* incorporate individuals who have had (especially negative) experiences with psychiatry in Germany today, and how language conventions relate to, support, or obscure questions of praxis.

This article considers the emancipatory impact of including the perspectives and experiences of afflicted or affected (ex-) users of psychiatry in the design of psychosocial support structures. I argue for the importance of

body of professionals, and its users (cf. Castel, 1983, p. 12f). Since the 1970’s reform movement, different practices, procedures and theories have indeed evolved, and the term “(social) psychiatry” seeks to lexically differentiate between the older model of asylum-bound psychiatry and newer, socially-minded facilities and concepts of care. This contemporary field is however not wholly distinguishable from the older order insofar as it is similarly constituted (qua Castel). The socially-dynamic aspect of psychiatry is more like a different side to the same coin, and therefore it is important to lexically mark that ambivalence with the parenthetical construction.  

3 The question of naming, and especially self-naming, is of central importance within the anti-psychiatric and psychiatric-critical movements, and especially key in the struggle of and for those affected and afflicted by psychiatry (cf. Hölling, 2001). Within that context, such individuals are named (and name themselves) *Psychiatriebetroffene* (those who have been afflicted or affected by psychiatry) and also *Psychiatrieerfahrene* (those who have had experience with psychiatry). These two terms are used in German-speaking contexts in contrast to designations like “patient” and “client” that are normative within the field of (social) psychiatry. This is of no small consequence within the framework of this essay that both terms are difficult to render in English, as this essay is in part discourse-critical, and seeks to investigate / interrogate the terms *Betroffenheit* (affliction/affection) and *Psychiatriebetroffene* and privilege the latter designations over and above *Psychiatrieerfahrene*. The currently mainstream English-language designation for those afflicted or affected by psychiatry is “survivor of psychiatry,” which is in German contexts at least infelicitious, if not dangerously misleading. To my mind, the designation “survivor of psychiatry” cannot adequately differentiate between the literally murderous psychiatric practices of the Nazi regime, and the modern (social) psychiatric practices in the post-war and reform era. To claim that contemporary practices are not identical to National Socialist ones is not to ignore, however, that modern forms of treatment are often physically and emotionally painful to the people they purport to serve and are not able to adequately account for the pain caused to individuals. In other words, modern methods can indeed still be tremendously afflicting, even to the extent of decreased life expectancies.
securing the right to shape one’s own care through support structures that do not reinforce violence, heteronomy, exclusion, or cause additional suffering. Instead, each individual’s autonomous approach to self-understanding would need to inform facilitation techniques. To this end, I wish to describe two initiatives in Germany that incorporate the perspectives of those who have been afflicted or affected by psychiatry. I place special emphasis on the Berlin Runaway House, whose anti-psychiatric orientation and conception of care I am not only more familiar with, but also actively participate in as a staff member. To further explore contemporary participatory models of psychiatric care and by way of a counterexample, I will then shift to examine the “peer counselling” model (also called *Ex-In* or *Experienced Involvement*), in order to problematize some of the reform efforts within the field of (social) psychiatry. I will conclude with some thoughts on the concepts *experience* and *social self-understanding* from the perspective of critical psychology, which I believe offers a useful framework and language to discuss the role and place of the experiences of afflicted or affected (ex-) users of psychiatry.

**Runaway House Villa Stöckle**

Established in 1996 in Berlin, Germany, and emerging from and within the new anti-psychiatry movement, the Runaway House “Villa Stöckle” provides 24-hour staff assistance for up to 13 residents. In contrast to anti-psychiatry reforms of the 1960’s and 1970’s, the contemporary anti-psychiatry movement is led largely by those who have been afflicted or affected by psychiatry themselves, and who have fought for the implementation of user-led alternatives to existing (social) psychiatric facilities and practices. In 1980, individuals who had been afflicted or affected by psychiatry formed a self-help group named Lunatics Offensive Association (*Irren-Offensive e.V.*) and two years later, in cooperation with supporters, they formed a planning collective that developed two different visions for housing projects. One faction prioritized a self-help approach and preferred an exclusively self-run “Mad House” (*Verrücktenhaus*) concept, while the second group sought to connect the self-help movement and the afflicted / affected (ex-) user movement (*Betroffenenbewegung*) with professional service providers (and financiers). Their goal was to offer continuous support for people in need, while relying on the cooperation of non-user staff members who nonetheless shared an anti-psychiatric orientation. While the development of these two impulses is rather beyond the scope of this article, suffice it to say that they could not be synthesized. The latter group split from the Lunatics Offensive Association
and in 1989 consolidated to form the Association for the Protection from Psychiatric Violence (Verein zum Schutz vor psychiatrischer Gewalt e.V.), the official organization that sponsors the Runaway House today. At this time, the Runaway House is the only explicitly anti-psychiatric living facility in Germany.

Association members and co-workers at the Runaway House are tasked to improve the day-to-day lived reality of high-needs individuals who have been affected – often painfully – by psychiatry. To that end, they provide safety and support that do not rely on psychiatric interventions. Instead, the experiences collected through (self-help) projects, collectively generated forms of knowledge, and psychiatric-critical concepts inform methods at the Runaway House. With a commitment to direct-democratic and autonomous administration, a principle of transparency, and the urgent eschewal of diagnostics and coercion, the Runaway House seeks to create a non-hierarchically organized refuge for individuals who decline (social) psychiatric services. These individuals are accompanied and supported through their crises and encouraged to develop their own ways of approaching and understanding their crisis situations without psychiatric intervention.

Staff and association members at the Runaway House incorporate the experiences generated in and through the afflicted / affected (ex-) user movement to strengthen the residents’ influence within the house, at the administrative level within the association, and in terms of project design, through the implementation of a user-led approach (betroffenenkontrollierten Ansatz). In practice, this means that at least 50 percent of the staff members at the Runaway House are individuals who have been afflicted or affected by psychiatry, which generally means they have received inpatient psychiatric treatment at a clinic at least one time.

There is complete equity between staff members in regard to their wages, responsibilities and working arrangements. Furthermore, they are at no point required to actively incorporate their experiences into their work, to say nothing of being forced to divulge their stories. It is up to them to decide if,

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4 As has already been noted, the German term connotes a specific “user” who is also assumed to have been afflicted or affected by psychiatry. In all cases, the term “user-led” will refer to methods that over which those afflicted or affected by psychiatry (to some degree) control. Betroffenenkontrollierten Ansätze are also called “Consumer-Delivered Services” (or CDS) in US contexts, but the German term does not have a consumerist inflection.

5 There are two organizations for which the user-led approach is foundational in developing and executing projects for victims of violence. Wildwasser e.V. is a counselling and self-help space for women and girls who had been the victims of sexual violence as young people, and Tauwasser e.V. is a similar center for men who were likewise as boys sexually victimized. These organizations are however 100% user-led, in contrast to Runaway House.
when, and with whom they wish to share what they have undergone. Their experiences are presumed to inform their worldview, whether they wish to use their experiences as material on the job. Here it is worth noting that within the anti-psychiatry framework, clinical psychiatric experiences are de facto understood to have entailed some form of violence, though not necessarily direct bodily or psychological harm. Violence is also understood as a social and structural phenomenon, and structural and social violence, as perpetuated in and through (social) psychiatric institutions and practices, must be critically analyzed. For this reason, staff members and members of the association refer to residents’ “affliction / affection” rather than as neutral “experiences.” Also, in order to qualify to work at the Runaway House, one must be willing, whether or not one had been subject to the coercion and control of clinical psychiatry, to approach psychiatry critically. That is, one is expected to develop an awareness for interconnected forms of violence within (social) psychiatry and society at large, while also reflecting on one’s positionality relative to these forms of violence. As a Runaway House staff member, being committed to the residents in their struggles supersedes traditional formal qualifications, and the idea of “professionalism” is simultaneously revaluated.

User-led methods at the Runaway House create conditions for interacting with people who have structurally similar experiences, especially for those who have suffered from (social) psychiatric treatment or lived through “mad” (verrückte) crisis situations. Such shared experiences not only build trust, but also encourage individuals to proactively re-claim their own negative experiences of dislocation and psychological suffering, as well as of the condescending pronouncements of the (social) psychiatric establishment. Ideas of proactive self-empowerment can be put into practice to resist the normative / normalizing

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6 Structural similarities of experience are frequently refracted by social or biographic differences.

7 A hyphenated version of the German noun Verrückheit (insanity, madness) and the adjective verrückt (crazy, insane, etc.) are often used in anti-psychiatric or psychiatric-critical discourses as a way of reclaiming terms that have been traditionally stigmatizing. It is understood that the unselfconscious labelling of individuals as “insane” or “mad” is stigmatizing, and results in discrediting subjective experiences from some point outside of the subject. Using the hyphenated terms “Ver-rückheit” or “ver-rückt” intends recuperate a once-stigmatizing terminology by centering the experience of the subject, while referencing the related verbal root at play: verrücken, which simply means “to dislocate.” There are no equivalent nouns or adjectives related to historical categories of mental illness that can function in this way in English, although the terms “mad” and “madness” are similarly used in English-speaking contexts to bring the traditionally stigmatizing nature of these labels into relief, while at the same time reclaiming them for the sake of movement building and critique. In this paper the terms “mad” or “madness” will be used in the place of “ver-rückt” or “Ver-rückheit” and set off by quotation marks to mark the terminological ambivalence.
power of (social) psychiatry, for example, by successfully going off psychopharmacological treatment. Where applicable, such experiences help individuals discover resources within themselves, thereby disrupting enduring notions of helplessness attached to those who had been subject to clinical-psychiatric control.

As described above, a concept of “user-control” (Nutzer_Innenkontrolle) closely informs the practices developed at the Runaway House, where the residents also enjoy decision-making power and have opportunities to influence how they will be supported. This stands in stark contrast to the hierarchical structures of coercion and control in clinical settings. To my mind this is most apparent in attempts to reverse the paradigm of surveillance, through a commitment to transparency. At the Runaway House, the residents monitor the staff, and residents are consulted on all work-related decisions. Residents are also generally guaranteed the right to shape their interactions with external contacts. Staff members may not send out reports about the residents without inviting the residents to read over and, if requested, co-edit these communications. Residents have limitless access to their own files, and they are always allowed to attend team meetings and be present when tasks are assigned, insofar as these pertain to them personally.

All of these practices help staff members become sensitive to the ways in which support and facilitation processes are traditionally limiting. Whenever a practice is felt to be coercive or limit autonomy, residents are encouraged to interrupt these practices and collectively subject them to critique. This helps reveal implicit power dynamics between residents and staff members. At the same time, certain entrenched power discrepancies do remain intact, in addition to the fact that some individuals earn money and go home at the end of the day. For example, the bureaucratic-managerial responsibilities fall almost exclusively to staff, even when it would be in the best interest to incorporate residents in these processes. It is also difficult for residents to themselves become staff members, who in many cases, according to the rigid guidelines set by the Berlin Senate, must be certified as a social worker to be eligible for employment.

Some structural conditions that limit the Runaway House’s outreach simultaneously free it from certain constraints. The Runaway House fought a protracted legal battle to secure public financing, which to this day remains insecure. Since 1996, it receives federal support insofar as it is recognized under the social welfare law as a homeless shelter (German Code of Social Law §§ 67ff Book 12). Because of the strict criteria that govern provisions for homelessness under federal law, it is difficult for many people who seek services to get help. At the same time, however, because of its (legal) status,
the Runaway House is able to bypass hegemonic psychological and psychiatric diagnostic guidelines, which has long been the goal of the anti-psychiatric movement. There is also no demand that the Runaway house operate within any particular therapeutic paradigm. Within support and facilitation processes, staff members avoid employing traditional diagnostic techniques that psychologize and pathologize subjective experience and behaviors, techniques which people who seek services often associate with painful experiences of paternalism and discrimination. Staff members at the Runaway House consider diagnostic methods to be of little help, if not injurious, also insofar as they often misidentify and misname socially embedded experiences and actions and reinforce hegemonic power relations (cf. Markard & Kaindl, 2014).

While normative psychiatric practices and ideologies are de-emphasized in facilitating support, the (socially embedded) subjective experiences of residents are centered. As such, the residents are not classified as sick or helpless, but considered to be wholly responsible for their own affairs. They retain the right to interpret their own experiences of crisis, to set their own goals, to identify what they need and want for themselves. They also largely design their daily routines and their interactions and relationships with staff. The residencies, each unique unto itself, last from one day to as long as six months, depending on funding. Though each individual creates their own support plan, there are also some themes that are consistently incorporated. It is far too often the case that residents have had humiliating experiences in their lives, as well as in diverse social-psychiatric settings, and so it becomes important for many residents to empower themselves and to regain self-determination in respect of their everyday life and the development of a new sustainable lifestyles and living arrangements. It is centrally important for nearly every resident to be supported in organizing their finances and future living arrangements. Residents also work on examining and organizing experiences of crisis, dislocation, and pain. Some seek to go off medication or reduce their dosages. Others still try to build hope and trust, find peace of mind and safety, and uncover their needs.8

Through the support and facilitation practices that I briefly outline above, residents and staff members at the Runaway House – myself included, as I am currently employed as a staff member – try to problematize knowledge-power structures and normative expectations, to counteract the

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8 Many who suffer from the effects of (forcibly) prescribed psychopharmacological medications want to go off them, or at least reduce their dosages. There are specific difficulties associated with going off medication. Those experiences in and of themselves would need to be discussed in another context, as well as questions concerning the (material) conditions within which these experiences transpire.
social exclusion of individuals who have been afflicted or affected by psychiatry. Together, we endeavor to interrupt the ideals of social work, psychology and psychiatry that are held to be self-evident, and de-pathologize and de-personalize the problems individuals face. It is doubtless that contradictions arise, and we are confronted on a daily basis with obstacles that undermine our own anti-psychiatric standards. These include the financial instability, neo-liberal and capitalist-administrative logics, legal obstacles and the pressure to institutionally legitimize work-related decisions. Added to that, the dominance of (social) psychiatric surveillance mechanisms and a tight Berlin housing market are extremely limiting. Many residents are living precariously, sometimes for years, and are at risk of perpetual poverty, homelessness, social isolation, and being committed to psychiatric facilities. Our relative powerlessness in the face of these conditions and limitations mirrors back the limits of the kind of support structures established in the Runaway House. Encumbered by these problematic socio-political conditions, and having an awareness of relative political marginalization, the Runaway House cannot, unfortunately, provide an ideal alternative to (social) psychiatry as such, but it does offer numerous people who wish to escape from these difficulties a place to go.

**Participation**

On might interpret the history of the Runaway House and its sponsor, the Association for the Protection from Psychiatric Violence, as an ongoing process of self-understanding, whereby together, staff and residents – those afflicted or affected by psychiatry and those who are not – have learned about the pathologizing, exclusionary mechanisms of (social) psychiatric practices, as well about “madness” and mental illness. One might say it is a grassroots attempt to create a real alternative to (social) psychiatry as it is otherwise practiced today. However, this is not the case with all new, seemingly progressive developments in the field. Other modes of integrating the experiences of individuals afflicted or affected by psychiatry to modernize the practice of (social) psychiatry fall under the rubric of what is called *participation*. However, the “participation” movement is not steered from below, but instituted from the top down, and frequently in the face of internal resistance. One might notice that while certain critical positions – for example, against the objectification of individuals who have been afflicted or affected by psychiatry – are absorbed by the field of (social) psychiatry, criticisms are ultimately defanged. (Social) psychiatry has proven its
flexibility and malleability in the face of changing societal norms, without relinquishing its fundamentally hierarchical structuring principles. Radical vocabularies can simply be adopted and co-opted by those in power, regardless of the intention of the reformer who wields them. Indeed, the co-option of language norms threatens to obscure actual structures of domination and power relations.

The Experienced-Involvement (abbreviated in German usage as Ex-In) training program exemplifies the way in which the reform movement leaves hegemony undisturbed. Ex-In is a European initiative that seeks to train individuals with experiences of psychiatry (Psychiatrie-Erfahrene) to work within the (social) psychiatric health care system as “recovery companions” (Genesungsbegleiter). An important element of the training program is the collective development of so-called “experiential knowledge” (Erfahrungswissen), by way of reflecting upon and structuring personal experience together in a cohort of vocational students. This, to me, suggests that the Ex-In courses themselves have a kind of therapeutic function (cf. Achberger, 2016). While it is not possible to fully describe the content of the program or its theoretical orientation here, I would like to offer some ideas as to how the normative hierarchies within the field of social psychiatry are evident in Ex-In, and mark the differences between Ex-In and its understanding the idea of “user-control” operative at the Runaway House.

Most obviously, the employment of “recovery-companions” does nothing to interrupt the normative regulatory practices within the field of

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9 It is beyond the scope of this paper to fully explore the ways in which capitalism conditions the contemporary practice of (social) psychiatry, although one point is worth noting here. The ideological drive for a “balanced budget” and (nationalist) concerns about Germany’s global standing affect the delivery of social services in important ways. For example, “alternative” approaches to care management are often introduced and financially supported insofar as they might help sink costs. All other concerns are subordinated to this particular idea of financial sustainability, and the “good” of new approaches to psychiatric care is thus only measured according to how well cost-saving goals are met. The “integrated care” pilot program, the employment of “recovery-companions” and “peer-counsellors” as well as the financial support for “self-help” programs and the rise of volunteer-positions are indicative of the neoliberal preoccupation with cost-efficiency.

10 There are interesting parallels to be seen between Ex-In and the therapeutic models that analyze and thematize personal experience, for example within psychoanalytic training and behavioral-therapeutic training. Personal experience and self-reflection are certainly important components of psycho-social praxis of these sorts, if to differing degrees. One can see in contrast how personal experience and self-reflection play only a minor role in university courses which would qualify students to work in different care fields later. In medical school or psychological training, for example, one might even say that personal experience and self-reflection are thought to hinder appropriately professional praxis, guided by a so-called scientific objectivity.
(social) psychiatry. The former and current users of (institutional) psychiatry are still subject to restrictions and have fundamentally limited opportunities for influencing policy and decision-making. Participation in the training program also doesn’t necessarily improve employment opportunities, except then in the case of these specific, low-paid assistantships. Additionally, unequal expectations regarding privacy, personal experience and professionalism persist. Professionals within institutional settings are generally expected to keep their personal stories to themselves and maintain “professional distance.” On the other hand, it is necessary for “recovery companions” to integrate even very intimate experiences into their work: these are, indeed, what qualifies them for positions in the first place. As these two meanings of “expertise” are left un-synthesized, the scientific understanding and professional practice of “expertise” still dominates over the experiential knowledge of affliction. Structural hierarchies remain untroubled. The re-inscription of dominance and subordination not infrequently affects the worldview (and self-image) of the professionals as well as the Ex-In trainees, threatening to cement traditional notions of pathology and undermine the subject status of those afflicted or affected by psychiatry. The word “experience” itself as it is employed by the Ex-In program reflects this. In contrast to the term Psychiatriebetroffenheit preferred in critical discourses, Ex-In speaks of Psychiatrie-Erfahrung, or an “experience with psychiatry” (cf. footnote 2). In light of the history of structural and physical violence within the field of (social) psychiatry – violence that manifests within conceptual and linguistic norms – the affected neutrality of the term Erfahrung is jarring.11

It is clear that many people experience (social) psychiatric care as supportive and rewarding, and I stand in solidarity with “recovery companions” for whom Ex-In creates opportunities for social reproduction

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11 These reflections prompt several more related questions that could be analyzed. It might be asked, for example, if the use of “recovery companions” can in fact lead to more sensitivity about language use and behavior on the part of (professional) staff members, whether (professional) staff are in fact more open in cooperation with “recovery companions,” and finally how this in turn affects service-users. It would also be important to determine whether or not the use of “recovery companion” is instrumentalized to enforce compliance and the solidify normative understandings of disease, as is sometimes alleged. There is also the question about whether “recovery companions” serve a more mediating or “legalistic” function, and what that says about the relationship between professionals and those who have been afflicted / affected by psychiatry. Some sort of solution must be found to deal with feelings of resentment by which afflicted / affected individuals are thought to be generally more vulnerable and as helpers unable to distance themselves from other people’s crises (cf. Achberger & Utschakowski, 2015; Lacroix & Scmitz, 2013).
that are otherwise foreclosed to them. Furthermore, I do not wish to suggest that professionals in the practice of psychiatry do not constantly struggle to assert themselves against the overarching structures in the field of psychiatry that undermine their perspective and agency. I do however want to emphasize that thorough-going emancipatory changes within the field of (social) psychiatry – to say nothing of the abolition of the traditional concept of pathology – are not possible within the field’s framework. Radical change can only happen outside of (social) psychiatric structures, and in tandem with political attention to the societal conditions that inform the field of (social) psychiatry.

German Critical Psychology

The Runaway House and the Ex-In program provide two examples of how to integrate afflicted / affected (ex-) users of psychiatry back into psycho-social support-networks, and how these systems might be structured. I evaluate each according to their respective theoretical frameworks, which in turn have varying practical implications. While my affinity to and endorsement of the Runaway House is clear, I would like now to take a step back and develop a theory of experience (Erfahrung), society (Gesellschaft) and self-understanding (Selbstverständigung) from the perspective of critical psychology. I wish to show how critical psychology as a discipline might help us better understand what exactly the experiential knowledge of afflicted / affected (ex-) users of psychiatry means for emancipatory (peer) support-systems. This “step-back” is not a disembodied reflection; it is rooted in my own self-understanding and social positioning, and the text I write is itself part of a process of self-understanding.

The protagonists of German critical psychology have attempted to work out the psychological implications of Marx’s recognition that individuals are not just the products of their social conditions, but that they also produce them. One might say that this culminates in a critical theory of human life as it is lived. One of the major goals of critical psychology – in theory and in practice – is to stand in solidarity with individuals as they make practical changes in their lives. Support is crucial in the development of social self-understanding (Selbstverständigungsprozesse), insofar as the material world in which individuals are situated is organized along intersecting axes (e.g., race, class, and gender) of power.

Any process of self-understanding – including my own – begins with the world as it is directly experienced. Direct experience of the world, in
feeling, thinking, wanting, acting, does not posit an irreducible, impenetrable inner self. Even wholly subjective, intimate experiences of destructive intensity do not transpire in a vacuum. Like human beings, experiences (of the world, which access the world) are still socially and historically situated and constituted. Critical psychology’s conceptual apparatus helps to reconnect subjective experience and the world. More than just the complex condition of experience, the world is a network of socio-historical relationships and an ensemble of meanings that need to be deciphered. In psychological terms, this means that individuals, who only ever encounter the world in its parts and never as a whole, experience “the world” subjectively – according to their socio-biographical and material situatedness – as a specific ordering of individual and collective opportunities and impediments. This encounter (with the world) is subjective, according to the socio-biographical and material situatedness of the individual – but it is not passive. On the one hand, the world precedes the individual, but it also serves as a referent, alongside of which an individual engages in acts of world- and self-creation simultaneously. The continual and altogether ordinary processes of self-realization, i.e. the coming-to-awareness of one’s interests and needs (and limitations) leave its mark on one’s emotional state and feelings. The personal and collective opportunities for autonomy that enable individuals to realize/actualize their needs and wants, are dependent upon the specific and concrete social conditions within which we all move. In critical-psychological terms, autonomy is not merely being able to decide things for one’s self. It is much more a relational concept, one that shows the degree to which I for example either alone or collectively might influence or control my living conditions, and therewith gain mastery over feelings of anxiety, vulnerability and distrust.

An implicit provision of my argument is that self-understanding is (existentially) necessary, insofar as individual existence is mediated by the social, and individual experiences are structured by social relations. These social relations are not immediately recognizable, just as experiences, and the world itself, are not directly observable (cf. Markard, 2007). It is not immediately obvious how to live in the world; one must learn how to do it. Individuals must make sense of their experience and of the world while simultaneously failing to make sense, trying again, correcting, repeating their failures, and letting go. This is the existentially necessary process of self-understanding, by which individuals participate in social reproduction while meeting their existential needs and vital interests. The familiar scenario of wishing to sate one’s hunger helps illustrates the process of self-understanding. In order to fulfill that wish, the following questions must be
answered: what do I want to eat? Do I have enough money to get it? Where should I buy it? How will my eating now effect the rest of my day? In conditions of privilege, these questions are banal, but it is important to stress too that self-understanding is mundane process. There is also always something new for individuals to understand, even if one has had past experiences through which they gained knowledge, making an explicit process of self-understanding moot. Self-understanding will also be differently valued when individuals experience aspects of their lives as painful, violent, disorienting, inhibiting, contradictory, or inaccessible. In those cases, they will focus on other connections, which may have far-reaching consequences for how one lives and acts in the future. Social power dynamics and forms of exclusion add a further dimension to the process of self-understanding, especially in those moments when individuals look for ways to come into contact with the world and its inhabitants that don’t just reproduce the conditions that exclude and inhibit self-understanding and self-actualization. A process of self-understanding that seeks to extend possibilities for oneself and the collective would ask, returning to the hunger-example: why must people pay for food in the first place? How is this food produced? Why do some people not have enough to eat, while others enjoy incredible bounty?

Up to this point I have not described how exactly individuals understand themselves as “selves,” or in other words, how they penetrate their personal experiences and from these draw conclusions. Critical psychology theorizes that an individual’s experience is mediated through socio-historical modes of thought and communicative-symbolic forms (including musical or visual-artistic forms). In referring back to these forms – those through which experience is mediated – the individual can reflect on, organize and express their experiences. This becomes necessary whenever individuals need to clarify, understand or change anything. The socio-historical and communicative-symbolic forms are the context for experience and always precede it, while also serving as an interpretative template for one’s experiences of, and in, the world. The purpose of working toward self-understanding, either alone, together with others, or in reference to societal cumulative knowledge and its bearers, is to make new forms of action and experience possible and realizable. This is true in general, independently of whether any specific content is actually realizable. Whether a process of self-understanding is emancipatory, on the other hand, can only be judged according to the process’s content.

Looking at the experiences of psychological pain and disorientation will help illustrate my point above. What qualifies a specific experience as “mad”
is controversial. The hegemonic / normative position is that “mad” experience is the expression of a disorder, disturbance, psychosis or schizophrenia. A host of well-known and oft-criticized assumptions about the emergence, progression and treatment of illness accompanies this view. I would argue however that this interpretation - this socio-historical mode of thought, this communicative-symbolic form - fails to recognize the connections between human experiences and actions in their specificity, psychological pain and its expression, and socio-biographic context. Instead, this view depends on ideological frameworks that pathologize, biologize and essentialize “mad” phenomena. Rather, with critical-analytic tools we might better access “mad” experience. Although it is a matter of disagreement within the field of critical psychology how clarifying and concrete its interventions can be, critical psychology can account for unique attributes of human experience and brings with it other ideas about how to design (peer-) support processes. I wish to stress that experiences are never neutral and can never be immediately grasped. The thought- and communicative forms, the interpretative models, within which experiences are had and reflected upon, within which the experiences of others are understood and organized, are important in themselves and theoretically charged. It is a question of concrete life practices and societal exchanges, through which individuals examine their own experiences, which possibilities for self-understanding are opened and made accessible, which conclusions one might draw from experience, what knowledge can be processed, and if interpretations are fitting and necessary for an individual. Concrete life practices and societal exchanges also determine the subjective functionality of certain interpretations, and whether possibly contradictory interpretations are even possible. Thinking about this from an emancipatory perspective, it is clear that not all interpretations are equal. Some are applicable, and some must be contested or even negated. In our example, this means that the individual might find (or might be forced to find) the interpretation “mentally illness schizophrenia” as subjective-functional, fitting, helpful for the organization of support. However, developing connections between dis-orientating, painful experience, lived conditions and questions about adjusting or changing those lived conditions are thereby foreclosed.

An important aspect of the process of social self-understanding concerns the communicability of experience. Insofar as experiences are gained in and through language and socio-historical modes of thought, communicability is in turn ensured through these. At the same time, communication is a shared act, and communicating (through language and other forms) mediates not only the experience of self, but also of the other. In other words, insofar as
the meanings of words and signs always exceed the intentions of any utterance, an addressee is also indirectly indicated through communication. This is not to downplay communicative difficulties, but to stress that possibilities for understanding are rooted principally in human sociality and in communicating itself. Common problems that arise with intersubjective understanding – feeling misunderstood, or as if one is not able to say what they mean – would have to be addressed in the specific moment they arise by all involved. For example, the special sensible character of certain “maddening” experiences (their content notwithstanding) makes them difficult to organize with our usual language-symbolic order and communicate with others. This could potentially explain the struggle to find an adequate or satisfying language to describe such experiences, evidenced in idiomatic formulations like “being on a different wavelength” or “to be tripping.” It is possible that many words that have been used to describe “out of mind / body” experiences – hyperrealism, trance-like, madness, psychosis, etc. – are only crude metaphors or approximations for otherwise indescribable experiences.\(^{12}\)

**Discussion**

As I have tried to show, how best to analyze variously embedded experiences, and what conclusions might be drawn from them, remain open questions.\(^{13}\) Whether one develops a (political) standpoint, in relation to concrete interpersonal, social or political matters and debates remains likewise uncertain. It is generally considered to be difficult to know whether I, for example, can or want to learn from the experiences of others, or if others can make sense of my own experiences. What is worth learning in the first place would depend on (an understanding of) experiences themselves

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\(^{12}\) Involving afflicted or affected (ex-) users of psychiatry in the psycho-social treatment process is often justified in cases of “madness” with the argument that treatment helps understand mad experiences, exactly because these experiences affect intersubjective communicability. The theoretical and practical foundations of this understanding of “successful” treatment need to be investigated, and the danger of mistaking “feeling understood” for “actually being understood” seriously considered (cf. Merz 2012, p. 92f).

\(^{13}\) When structural (in this case dominate) social conditions / relations are not taken into account, experiences are often analyzed infelicitously. From an emancipatory perspective, it must also be asked whether there is a “correct” way to reconstruct these conditions and relations at all (cf. Markard 2007). On the other hand, there is no known imperative to attend to social conditions when participating in social re-productive processes while considering one’s own needs and interests.
and the standards by which they are judged and analyzed (cf. Markard, 2007). In concrete interpersonal, social and/or political engagement, it also up to all of the participants, according to their interests, to determine which experiences and what kinds of knowledge they will notice, and which conclusions they will reach in those cases.

What I have described here, in terms of the importance of the integration of those afflicted or affected (ex-) users of psychiatry in the creation of psycho-social support systems, implies a further question: how can and should something be learned in the differently situated experiences of affliction, dis-ordering psychic pain and crisis, and by whom? Conversely, should not processionals in their research and praxis acknowledge that the experiences and know-how of those who have used psychiatry and those who psychiatry has harmed would be of seminal importance and interest?

Before I discuss these questions, I would like to return to the concept of Betroffenheit, which is understood as the condition of having been afflicted or affected by psychiatry and has to do with a specific constellation of experiences. Through an exploration of the user-led methods I have described, I suggest that the condition of Betroffenheit arises from paternalism and violence, as well as from the denial of agency, the curtailment of autonomous self-determination, and the violation of physical and psychic integrity in psycho-social support structures. Of course, not all of the dimensions of pain in concrete experiences of psychiatric affliction are captured here. The experience of being committed, of being repeatedly passed along from one psychiatrist to another in the search for a cure for psychic pain, the medicalization of care, legally enforced involuntary guardianship, therapeutic settings and rules, the condescension and decision-making authority of professionals, pedagogical interventions and psychologizing interpretations, pathologizing, psychological-psychiatric diagnoses, in-patient psychiatric or psychosomatic treatment, contact with social-psychiatric services and therapy-based assisted living might also constitute Betroffenheit. Some more pervasive than others, experiences of violence or of diminished opportunities for self-expression take manifestly diverse forms within psycho-social institutions. The most notable (in the negative sense) is still the psychiatric clinic, with the intrinsic threat of serious coercive measures. As an outsider, it is not possible to generalize if and how individuals experience themselves as afflicted, or who is in danger of being afflicted, and when in such settings they do experience pain and violence. A notable tension arises between the what I as an observer, even one equipped with the tools of social-, psychiatric-, or psychological-criticism, might consider afflicting, in judgment or condemnation of
particular (hierarchically organized) support and treatment forms, and the perspective of users, who under the same conditions do not experience themselves as afflicted / affected. We learn from critical psychology on the one hand that how individuals understand and analyze their own experiences, and which conclusions they draw, isn’t irrelevant. From an emancipatory perspective and beyond, however, it is also the case that one cannot force someone to understand their own experiences as afflicting. Furthermore, even a dynamic concept of affliction / affection must contend with a social sphere riddled with all manners of power structures, leading us to a further question: how can for example pathologizing psychiatric processes afflict or affect along intersecting axes of race, class and gender?

The discussion regarding the integration of afflicted / affected (ex-) users of psychiatry in the creation of psychosocial support structures is part of a critical confrontation with the field of (social) psychiatry and its different institutions, practices, methods and forms of knowledge. For an emancipatory perspective – manifesting as anti-psychiatry or rooted in critical psychology – the status of those afflicted or affected by psychiatry is of central importance. To counteract what has been described at the beginning of this essay as the de-subjectification of victims, as well as the (internally) contradictory conception of newer social-psychiatric models in which traditional power dynamics are left untroubled, emancipatory efforts aid those afflicted or affected by psychiatry in realizing and affirming their subject status, their subjective experiences, and their basic needs for life and happiness. This has far reaching consequences in the creation of emancipatory support and facilitation processes, which, as I hope I have made clear, not only account for the differently situated experiences of affliction, “madness,” psychic pain and suffering, but also aim to not increase affliction. Such processes must also serve as a point of departure for intersectional and global-political processes of social self-understanding, between the afflicted and the non-afflicted, between professionals and non-professionals. Such processes of self-understanding that incorporate the specific perspective of those afflicted by psychiatry should not be satisfied with these kinds of binary (afflicted / non-afflicted) identity categories at all. As I have tried to show, one’s experiences and one’s political position and interests are not necessarily related. Political positions and interests instead depend upon and grow out of disagreements and coming to understanding about one’s own and other peoples’ experiences and social forms of knowledge in specific sites of sociality. Structural hierarchies and power relations do exist, but I nonetheless advocate collectively creating processes of self-understanding in acknowledgement of these conditions. It remains to
be seen how an emancipatory (political) process might overcome its inherent limitations and confront and redress existing disparities of power and control to successfully create individual and collective opportunities for self-determination.

Within the conceptual-disciplinary framework of critical psychology, I have shown that experiences – of affliction, of self-help, of “madness,” crisis or pain – are simultaneously experiences of/within specific conditions of (im)possibility for action. I think it is crucial for us to learn from these specific kinds of experiences, to question our favorite orthodoxies within the profession, and collectively create a praxis in consideration of the experiences and perspectives of those afflicted or affected by psychiatry. Such a praxis should at once respond to the character of human experience and activity, and work against the hegemonic ideas that govern theory and praxis, while also not reifying new oppressive hierarchies or transforming existing dynamics of power. Such an emancipatory praxis must be developed collectively and seek to create conditions in which the individual can, through processes of social self-understanding and facilitation, fashion new opportunities for action and experience. These in turn can help overcome and override previous experiences of suffering, crisis, disability, dis-ordering, etc., so as to enable individuals to have control over and determine their own lives. It is therefore necessary to bring existing societal conditions into the analytic framework, while fighting for social and political change. Individuals must have the opportunity to participate and design their own concrete support and facilitation processes, as is promoted through user-led methods. In other words, establishing individual and collective opportunities for self-determination in one’s personal life and in personally relevant social and communal contexts are the very conditions of possibility for overcoming anxiety, vulnerability, limitation and suffering. User-led methods give individuals opportunities for self-determination within support structures themselves, which in today’s world are indeed very rare.

Translation by Lisa Cerami

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Critical Psychology


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Neo subject-scientific learning theory: A reinterpretation

Anke Grotlüschen

Abstract
This article looks at discourses on relevant German and international theories of learning and examines various lines of criticism with regard to the subject-scientific theory of learning. These points of criticism focus chiefly on the age of the original publications, also on the word subject as a term, the question of corporeality, emotion and habitualness, the relevance of incidental learning and on the research methodology of co-research. The article will also examine moves to connect with and create distance from competing theory systems, as well as attempts to collate and pool advances in and branches of the family of theories. More recent research results are also applied which extend and differentiate between the category system of the subject-scientific theory of learning. Together, this quest for clues and analysis generate a new interpretation of the subject-scientific learning theory.

Keywords
learning theories, neo-subject-scientific theory, post-sovereign subject, qualitative research on learning

1. Why a new interpretation is required

Individuals need good reasons for learning, which then causes them to learn more effectively. This is a popular summary of the core belief of a theory of learning

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This article is a slightly revised version of the article which was published under the title “Neo-subjektwissenschaftliche Lesart einer scheinbar vertrauten Lerntheorie“ in Peter Faulstich (published) (2014): Lerndebatten: Phänomenologische, pragmatische und kritische Lerntheorien in der Diskussion. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, pp. 225 – 558.
based on the individual perspective. But is it true? And are individuals the only people who have a say in the matter? The answer is: of course not, that would be far too simple. But how can the theory of individual learning help to understand adult learning processes and where is it misleading? Is it even still relevant today?

The question of whether the theory of individual learning is still relevant, is sometimes answered with a reference to the more recent international debate. The international influence of the debate on learning theory is impossible to ignore. The roots of pragmatism, constructivism, transformative learning and communities of practice lie in North America. German approaches that are phenomenological, biographical, critical-pragmatic and subject-scientific have on the other hand only occasionally been subject to international debate. But a major paradigm shift in terms of learning theory has not been evident since the turn of the millennium. Approaches which have achieved international recognition were created decades ago (e.g., Mezirow, Lave, Wenger, Illeris, Jarvis, Engeström). Therefore, the question as to how contemporary discussions can be included into the debate on the theory of learning cannot sufficiently help us at the moment by including international approaches.

At the same time, the debate on the theory of learning is facing serious questions due to the latest discourses. The hypotheses on the quality of informal, even incidental or spontaneous learning drawn from the theory of life-long learning contradict one another in terms of the discourse on the theory of learning. On the one hand the necessity of spontaneity is stressed (Nohl, 2006) and on the other hand warnings are given about reverting to familiar territory in terms of incidental learning (Meyer-Drawe, 2012). Frigga Haug clearly criticised any narrowing down to intentional learning (Haug, 2003) and competing theories of learning also advocate the importance of incidental learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

But the issue of localising the learning process and development of competences needs to be raised again. Learning often appears to be thought of too much as a personal act and does not take account of the historical and material involvement of the individuals in terms of their social standing and class background. At the same time, there is criticism that previous approaches might not adequately examine issues regarding the subject, corporeality and emotion, habitualness and contextuality. However, this criticism is sometimes based on an unusual interpretation of the subject-scientific theory of learning. Let us summarise the points that have been criticised (such a concise description as Künkler’s is seldom):
We do have the subject-scientific theory to thank for the fact that the learning process is being talked about at all in the learning debate. However, this has occurred at the price of not just a much too rational understanding of human subjectivity and learning which seems to originate from the familiar concept of the ‘sovereign subject’, but also at the price of a systematic blindness towards any relativity of human subjectivity and learning. From this stance, contradictions in learning processes only originate from outside influences; [...] this leads to a constriction in the concept of learning which emerges from an oppositional mind-set regarding self-determination and determination by others [...] and a sacred understanding of the subject which elevates the standpoint of the subject to a quasi-religious level and declares it divine territory. (Künkler, 2008, p. 39)

Tobias Künkler took the trouble to analyse key theories from the individual perspective before passing judgement. Therefore, we should give him credit for the fact that he at least attempted to understand the theory of individual learning. In full awareness of Holzkamp’s responses, in this early article Künkler does imply a rationalism that many others do not interpret in this way (see below). He also suggests a subject detached from structures (he calls it conditions), which I believe are not the core motif in the theory of individual learning (see below). Furthermore, the research methodology used to gain access to the generalised subject’s standpoint appears to be unclear to him. If he declares a sacred superiority of the subject as the starting point, the data can of course only be interpreted by the research subjects themselves. However, as Künkler stated in the notes, only very little research work on the theory of individual learning has presented it in such a sacred superiority as he suggests. As a result, he has doubts about the dualism of expansive and defensive learning. I agree with this, as I believe I did back in early 2003 (Grotlüschen, 2003, p. 313). Even if a grey area did exist between the extremes of expansive and defensive learning, this would still be a different theoretical concept than Künkler’s with his much more differentiated analysis that he suggested in 2011 of a “related link between self-determination and determination by others“in the learning process (Künkler, 2008, p. 341). Künkler also criticises (and rightly too) any reduction to intentional learning, but on the other hand he does not criticise intentional learning here and is therefore falls behind the discourse (see Meyer-Drawe, 2012). Finally, Künkler reveals Holzkamp’s reserved concept of physicality as an element that primarily curbs and obstructs the theoretical construct of body and mind. Despite Holzkamp’s own recourse to corporeality he tends to remain one-sided, the body has more of an inhibitive than a supportive nature and seems to be something that is subordinate to the mind (see Künkler, 2014).
The reasons for some of these assumptions are possibly that more recent debates on adult education silently take some axioms for granted but no longer discuss them. Therefore these need to be revealed. This article attempts to do just that. The article will not go over the discourse in order to summarise any truths about theories from the individual perspective per se, but an interpretation of the subject-scientific theory of learning will be exposed which primarily resulted from the work on adult education at the universities of Hamburg and Bremen.

Therefore, if this interpretation integrates or rebuts more recent counter-arguments, it is understood here as a new interpretation of the subject-scientific theory of learning and is therefore called a “neo subject-scientific interpretation of the learning theory”. Research results are also added to this interpretation, for example when categorical differentiations in the theory of individual learning have emerged as a result of qualitative research into learning in adult education. These two components – a new interpretation of the word subject as a term and an expansion of the learning theory categories based on the research results – make up the new approach to the theory of individual learning.

The purpose of the following discussion of the criticism uttered is not to provide an exegesis of Holzkamp, but to convey an interpretation, which could probably be considered as a consensus underlying the research in Hamburg. As a result, this could also constitute a division in the debate of critical psychology and theory of individual learning. The core element of the theory interpreted in this way is an emancipatory one, which doubts the conventional distribution of power in the relationship between teaching and learning and elevates the structural transmission of this relationship of power to the object of the conflict and the conflict of interest too. In the approach from the individual perspective, the decision about the course content (which is traditionally the responsibility of the teachers) is a subject of negotiation between teachers and learners. In this case the people learning represent their own interests, which can also be opposed to the interests of the teachers. The conflicts of interest reflected in the pedagogical relationship are always a result of social conditions. Just as the learners can fight for their learning problems to be dealt with, teachers also have an interest in drawing from general course content which can be re-used several times over. Both sides encounter the same problem of working, teaching and learning adequately because they probably lack the time to respond to the concerns of the other party. The social conflict regarding working hours and increasing efficiency is reflected and manifested in pedagogical spheres as well. The theory of individual learning is a political one because its categories also

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2 The theory of art educator Nora Sternfeld is pursued who refers to Gramsci, Foucault and Rancière and believes that pedagogy is a genuinely political field (Sternfeld, 2009). Steinfeld does go into socio-theoretical positions extensively, but she lacks any
allow us to query social relationships as they appear in pedagogy and the conflicts in terms of hierarchy and interest which are lurking there.

The new interpretation of the theory of individual learning based on key works on the subject therefore also requires its political potential to be exposed again. The objective cannot be to elevate subjective reasons for learning, which are understood as being individualistic. If that were to be the case, Künkler’s criticism would be justified.

2. When subjects learn – misunderstandings and the limits of theory of individual learning

A common question about the concept of the theory of individual learning is the explicitly or implicitly conveyed term ‘subject’. If this question is posed from the position of a relational concept of an individual, the answer could be: Yes, when it developed the theory of individual learning definitely implied intention. No, the theory of individual learning does not conceive the subject as constitutive in the sense of relationships with an existing subject. Constructive debate could probably be conducted about this, in particular by referring to Meyer-Drawe, Ricken and Künkler.

However, this requires the subject, presented along the more recent interpretation of the subject-scientific theory of learning, to be separated from one which has to stand for an opposing character of the more recent theory of the subject, in other words a bourgeois, self-determined, western middle-class subject. This bourgeois subject is not a useful reference for a Marxist-inspired theory because it does overlook the historical and material situation of the majority of the population and cannot cover the conditionality of decisions that are allegedly subjective. As the subject-scientific theory of learning definitely developed through an analysis of Marxist theories, a different understanding of the term subject is presumed. An attempt is made to understand it, but above all to reveal a personal interpretation of an appropriate concept of the term subject in this theory. At the same time, a clear difference from a relational understanding of the term subject will remain. In my opinion, it will however be possible as a result to understand both tendencies. In the past, the subject-scientific theory of learning and a bourgeois understanding of the term subject were occasionally seen as synonyms for one another.

learning-theory and didactic element all the more. As regards the first aspect, I do not know of any theory of learning which reveals the political aspect of teaching and learning better than the theory of individual learning.
Therefore, it will be necessary to check whether various publications on the matter create a bourgeois, modern concept of the term subject – an issue which, to date, has not been adequately discussed. The argument is on two levels. First of all we need to ask what is accepted as a modern concept of the term subject and what components are actually inappropriate today. Secondly, we need to ask whether this modern understanding of the term subject is focused in the subject-scientific theory of learning and whether there are signs of a varied concept. Consequently, we need to clarify whether during eras of heightened interest (up to 2005 and up to 2015) a variation of the term subject in the theory of individual learning took place, or possibly will take place, or needs to be phrased as a new interpretation.

Modern subjects – with whom completely different theorists from Descartes to Kant to Habermas are connoted – are accused of creating an autonomous, rational, equal, dualistic, European, male, white, heterosexual subject. The next step is popularly to reject this subject as inadequate. However, I would like to make clear what aspects of this subject concept I consider inadequate today and which should be retained. As long as modern times have emancipated themselves from class-based society and religious regulations, as long as it has elevated logical arguments as tools of law and science, as long as it requires responsible conduct, equality before the law and formation of government, it does not appear to be a concept which should be renounced easily. However, distinctions do appear to be required.

2.1 The apparently autonomous subject is a socialised one

When it is assumed that the subject in modern times is autonomous (in some cases: self-determined and capable of making decisions), one argument proposed is that this term has no concept of submitting or involving the subject in their society, their habitus or personal circumstances. More recent concepts of the term subject understand the subject as both a developing and subservient being – a prominent current example of this is Judith Butler based on Michel Foucault. Others, the prime example here is Pierre Bourdieu, question how far a society with its formal openness does unwillingly ensure the reproduction of inequality by carrying out informal closing processes.

The concepts of subjectivation and habitus theory commit their concept of subject to a societal theory. Foucault’s theory of power assumes that every individual is involved in power relationships (Foucault, 1976). Foucault rejects a concept of antagonism of two opposing classes where there are powerful owners of capital and a powerless proletariat. Pierre Bourdieu and Michael Vester’s underlying theory of social background views the social model not as class
antagonism, but in three class statuses (Vester et al., 2001). In other words, the subject’s autonomy is restricted here based on different social models.

The subject-scientific theory of learning is also linked to social theory. It places a Marxist analysis of society at the beginning. It concerns socialised subjects with real interests and expanded influence on their own circumstances (Holzkamp, 1983). Therefore, subjects of critical psychology are not unfettered by conditions (as Künkler mistakenly assumes), but are always the products of social structures in which they are involved and subjected to, therefore viewing society from their own positions in the social space which serve as the premise for their ability to act. This is particularly clear in early literature on the theory of individual learning. In Grundlegung der Psychologie in 1983, Holzkamp attacks what he believes is the overly psychologically variable approach to individual psyches and contrasts it with a model of the thoroughly socialised subject. As explained in more detail below, socialisation also involves the imperceptible internalisation of social norms. Therefore, it is surprising that ten years later Holzkamp drew on another theory as a social framework for his theory of learning. He applies the power theories described in the second volume of Foucault’s famous trilogy. By referring to “discipline and punishment” he distinguishes between the types of untrustworthy disciplinary techniques in school lessons. He expands the discourse to include criticism of ideology of innate talent and school questioning techniques, as well as the difficult insinuation of proven truths.

In 1993, Holzkamp’s view of the theory of individual learning leads to the learning-theory debate on how learning subjects can deal with this social fabric in a reasoned way. Therefore, the theory of individual learning uses a socialised (1983) and governmentality-theory-based (1993) subject model. More recent research work also applies habitus-based theories (Bremer, 2007, Grotlüschen, 2010) instead of class-antagonistic or governmentality-based approaches.

In the theory of individual learning, the subject’s autonomy is however not a given, but is something that has to be achieved. In this case there is indeed a certain level of normativity and a rationale of improvement as regards the theory of individual learning. I believe however that we are not talking about the rationale of self-perfection, or the neoliberal rationale of increasing efficiency. It is much more about a materialistic rationale of improving the ability to control one’s own personal circumstances, in other words about extended (even if never full) autonomy in contrast to a dependence on the status given by birth, by employers, by parents or spouses.

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3 Holzkamp is often criticised for this decision with the result that he replies to it in a response in 1997 and gives reasons for his choice (Holzkamp, 1997b).
In the concept of the subject-scientific theory of learning, the much-discussed “extension of control possibilities” is the key reason for learning. It was often criticised because it was considered too technical, too material, and too driven by skills which could be put use. Sometimes a response to this criticism was that from an aesthetic and philosophical standpoint understanding of self and the world could indeed be understood as extended control. However, today a more materialistic nuance is focused on here. What is so characteristic about the subject-scientific theory of learning is its immanent conveyance of social conditions. These are also always linked to materialistic distributional conflicts. Therefore, extended influence on personal circumstances is always a question of poverty and wealth, of secure jobs and influence and of political codetermination.

In this interpretation of the theory of individual learning, extension of control is very much on the material side of personal circumstances. Without wanting to imply that adult education could solve all social distributional conflicts by individuals engaging in further education or training, extension of control is nevertheless the key motivation in adult learning. In other words, learning is pursued in order to enjoy security even in cases of unemployment, illness or in old age. Learning takes place in order to gain control over time, including time for further education or training, to engage in political and cultural life, or to have time for reading. Control over material circumstances also includes living space and freedom of movement, the recognition of structural associations, opportunities to define political and professional lives and the ability to define concepts in terms of families and partnerships. This also implies being allowed to bring up children to enhance their skills – and not according to specifications laid down by the department for the welfare of young people (video). This enhanced control can also include collectively regulated areas for society as a whole (which could range from retail and building cooperatives to fishing rights to Creative Commons). My interpretation is that this extension of control is not simply offered to the subject, but is something that needs to be achieved politically. Depending on the location of the socialised subjects in the social space, the forces opposing the subjects can be different, but material superiority is one thing they have in common. It is often more a globalised accumulation of capital than a political opponent in a democratic space.

Therefore, more recent debate on the theory of learning does try to re-associate learning more with experience, contexts and places of learning (Faulstich & Bayer, 2009; Faulstich, 2013; Faulstich, 2014). The debate on

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4 A video lecture in 13 parts exists in which Holzkamp explains in a highly differentiated fashion in what way a case study of practical social work includes an implied theory which is opposed to the interests of a mother and child in terms of adding to skills: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F3wu0u_7W6s.
critical psychology, published on the tenth anniversary of Holzkamp’s death, also demands a greater emphasis on contexts and structures respectively (Dreier, 2006; Baldauf-Bergmann, 2006). Consequently, there does appear to be a danger that after the turn of the millennium this societal-mediatedness of individual existence, secured for society as a whole, is forgotten due to the socio-theoretical reconnection of the theory of individual learning.

2.2 The apparently rational subject is a subject that subjectively acts reasonably

There is a tendency to consider the modern subject as a rational one. I believe that rationality as a term often has a negative connotation and suggests an exaggeratedly purposeful, calculated, self-serving and well-conceived process of decision-making. In adult education in German-speaking countries, this theory does exist (Schmidt, 2009) even if it is a controversial one.

But let us turn to the positive aspect of rationality first. I believe that this idea primarily assumes that everybody is capable of rational thought. This in turn also includes verbalising and expounding on feelings, involvement and structures, criticising arguments, which are not compelling, weighing up arguments and reconciling interests in processes of negotiation. The purpose of rationality is to control actions and it applies logic, reflection and therefore cognition.

However, the concept becomes problematic if rationality is alleged to be the only way of controlling actions. By no means is every action the result of reflection, cognition is not the basis for every decision and what appears logical can be a hopeless mess when looked at from another perspective. In my view, the subject-scientific theory of learning can therefore also not be interpreted as rational but due to decisions, which have been subjectively taken in a reasonable way. These are however also dependant to the own perspective, thus a reason for a subjectively reasonable course of action does not require any objective validity. Secondly, emotional and motivational aspects (for example in the quality of the experience of discrepancies) also accompany cognition. In my interpretation of the subject-scientific theory of learning, emotions (if they can be articulated) are also the basis of subjectively reasonable actions. If subjects for example attend a learning group because they enjoy the proximity to and attention from the other members of the group, this feeling is a subjectively logical reason for taking part in the group. Thirdly, this interpretation of the theory of individual learning does not imply that each course of action is preceded by a process of consideration. Many actions occur pre-reflectively – or Bourdieu might say habitually. Learning theories from Dewey to Meyer-Drawe to Holzkamp differentiate between problematic requests for action which cannot be mastered with the usual range of
options (experience, experience of discrepancy, inquiry) and familiar actions (habit, habitus). Subjective reason does not include these unquestioned habits, which is why it seems often so unreasonable from another perspective. From a subjective perspective it might be reasonable to get into a car despite warnings of traffic jams – even if people who are less used to cars might consider this to be extremely unreasonable. In other words, in the new interpretation from the individual perspective, restricted reasoned action due to habit or a lack of questions asked is part of the concept. It is also part of the teaching-learning relationship, which is always about expanding on the limits of reflection and gaining greater scope for action.

Therefore, I believe that this type of subject-scientific theory of learning assumes that everybody can broaden this particular horizon, debate unquestioned premises (with the help of teachers), reflect on their own habitus, or think about their own processes of suppression. As a result, subjects are capable of offering an advanced, more general rationale for why they act. Consequently, without any guidance from religious authorities or officials, people acting based on subjective rationality are capable of rejecting or interpreting their religion and negotiating their societal model themselves. The ability to think is a condition for the emancipation from a class-based society and religious dictates. As far as I am aware, the substance of this aspect of the debate is not questioned.

2.3 The irrational, suppressing, familiarised, habitualised subject

Even if in the previous section distinctions were made as regards the concept of rationality, the purpose of the following section is to take a closer look at the many elements again which are not directly associated with (subjective) logic. These aspects include irrationality, suppression, experience, familiarity, corporeality and habitus. Two ideas can be identified that get to grips with this question: First of all it is the discourse about rationale itself, which integrates the above-mentioned socio-theoretical questions. A second approach is to juxtapose the theory of individual learning with other theories. Both are considered legitimate and appropriate in order to combat the risk of the sort of learning, which is understood as being individualistic.

Modern theories can be interpreted in such a way that they are directed exclusively at self-determined, subjectively reasonable individuals. However, it is also possible to understand both of these – the capability as regards self-determination and reason – as a foundation and which are a condition for emancipation from illegitimate domination. At the same time they do not describe everything that human actions consist of. Interpreted in this way, from the, of course limited (due to the process of socialisation) perspectives of the
subjects, they would always be able to articulate what they subjectively believe is advisable. Therefore, subjects believe they have reasons for the way they act. Based on this logic, experience, corporeity, habitus, subjectification, suppression and emotion cannot be seen as complementary to the theory of individual learning, but as representing a socialisation, the limits of which subjects do not reflect on, but which however they implicitly include in their subjective logic. Holzkamp explains this concept based on the example of the subconscious in the response to various misunderstandings of the theory of learning based on the individual perspective published in 1996:

We were then quickly accused of not taking into account the subconscious level that exists in people in our theory. (Holzkamp 1996, p. 262)

It is exactly this argument that is still presented today (see Künkler above). But according to the people who created it, the rationale of the theory according to the individual perspective goes much deeper and assumes that suppression into the subconscious is an act of a subjectively logical way of life. Because as a result, any “objectionable stimuli” (ibid, p. 263) which cannot be reconciled with a subjectively sound lifestyle are removed, so that a sensible way of life can be created. If the argument is expanded to include the habitus concept from 1996, then it would be subjectively advisable to automate repeated and tried-and-tested courses of action to such an extent that they can progress in a pre-reflective manner. This process of suppression or (even physical) familiarisation is subjectively advisable, but has not been reflected on, nor is it intentional.

By applying rationality, it is now possible to ask what questions suggest the suppression or familiarisation of certain aspects of life. The question as to why is not answered fully by psychological responses, but requires a look at historical and societal relationships. At the same time habitus and suppression are attributed with the basic ability to reflect – even if this is difficult individually and is not fully possible. By applying a similar logic, emotions can be considered subjectively reasonable and can be reconstructed with hindsight as regards their role and underlying reasons for them. Experiences on the other hand have no subjective reason because these occur without any input from the subject – but the low or high level of attention we give them is also based on subjective logic.

Therefore, the new interpretation of the theory according to the individual perspective differentiates more than the rational-choice assumption: Subjects act rationally by assessing their circumstances and possibilities. It is true that there are many things they cannot reflect on because these things have long since become a habit or a matter of course (Wittpoth, 2005; Meyer-Drawe, 2012). In the theory according to the individual perspective, this aspect does not have a
A habitus-theory-based solution, but an ideological-critical one – based on the 1983 publication Grundlegung der Psychologie. Opinions may differ here, but the claim that Holzkamp hypostatises an all-perceiving subject, is no longer sustainable if this background is borne in mind. The question why subjects sometimes do the opposite of what third parties think is good for them, is answered by Holzkamp. He offers the two terms of generalised and restrictive abilities to act (Holzkamp, 1983, e.g. p. 367 cf. and 480 cf.). A generalised ability to act assumes that subjects look at social structures and act according to them. A restrictive ability to act manifests itself if subjects do not recognise what framework their lives have and consider it to be something that is taken for granted that cannot be questioned. As a result, from this perspective subjects act for understandable reasons, but involuntarily reproduce existing conditions. From a subjective standpoint, both approaches make sense and reasons are given for them. The idea of a generalised ability to act can however be interpreted as if there were a world that is transparent and can be explained in its entirety with clear contexts and without any blind spot on the part of the subject concerned.

As regards the rationale for acting, Holzkamp also argues that for a subjectively good reason anything irrational or suppressed is also pushed aside, not taken notice of and ignored. The reason is that it suits subjects to sweep aside the matters in question from their consciousness – or not even permit them to enter into it in the first place (Holzkamp, 1997b). Based on this argument, experience and corporeity, habitualness and habitus are rooted within the foundationalist discourse, not outside it. In developing habits there are good reasons that explain how they occur, why they become entrenched and why they are not currently thought through – we would quite simply not be able to deal with it.

Corporeality is found in two places as regards the theory of individual learning. On the one hand as part of personal situatedness it is encountered in the theory of learning. With a subtle hint at Merleau-Ponty, Holzkamp establishes that even thinking requires the body and that the connection is defined in corporeality (Holzkamp, 1993, see 252 cf.). Secondly, a whole chapter is devoted to motor learning. Nevertheless, I agree with Künkler’s arguments (2014) – according to Holzkamp’s theory of learning, the body clearly remains the part of corporeality, which inhibits learning and has to be disciplined by the mind. A new interpretation of the theory based on the individual perspective and relevant research would be well advised in this case to draw on phenomenological inspiration to conceptualise corporeality in a contemporary way.
2.4 Identical or different subjects and normativity

Does modern thinking consider subjects as identical and are they subjected to a uniform solidarity concept? In terms of the theory of individual learning, socialised subjects are not to be understood as heteronormative middle-class subjects, because they are subjected to societal restrictions – including exclusion, as well as distinction and suppression mechanisms. Society consists of more than a white, male middle class. Therefore socialised subjects have as many manifestations and lines of conflict as there are subjects and societal conflicts. This type of definition of subjects cannot therefore emerge from any implicit norm. In reality, due to the concept of the socialised subject, it should be possible to describe the illegitimacy of societal structures with regard to their influence on subjective scope for action, internal and external ascriptions and discrimination.

Apart from liberal accusations, the concept of equality is one that continues to be respected. After all it is all about equality before the law, in elections and in terms of access to education and jobs. Despite being fully aware that alongside this official equality, in all the areas specified, an informal equality has long run counter to the modern societal concept of formal openness, I still consider this fundamental concept to be vital. What is more, it is also applied by people who criticise it. Difference theories and post-modernism approaches usually criticise the fact that inequality is practised (unequal treatment of homosexual partnerships, of people with special needs, of working-class students in universities, of senior citizens and of migrants). In other words there is obviously a consensus as regards not practising discrimination.

But how is difference as a criticism of equality expressed? At centre stage is the criticism of informal normality constructs which dissenters, people who live their lives differently, or are of different sexual orientations are subjected to and by which they are measured and which really are often enough turned into a universally valid metric by white, male, heterosexual, young and healthy middle-class subjects. Compared with this fictive standard subject, anything that runs contrary to it is considered as not belonging or different. In terms of pedagogy for people with special needs, this discourse has been questioned for decades (see Marianne Hirschberg, 2009, with reference to Michel Foucault). In cultural and postcolonial studies eurocentrisism has been criticised since the 1970s (e.g. Stuart Hall, and continued in adult education by Alisha Heinemann 2014). Last but not least feminist theory has decried the heteronormative implication of the hegemonic concept of the subject (Judith Butler, continued in adult education Gerrit Kaschuba, Heide von Felden, Regina Frey, Susanne Maurer, Judith

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5 See also “Reasons for participating and not participating in institutionalised forms of further education and training” in this collection of articles.
Krämer\textsuperscript{6}). In contrast to the discourse on equality, differences from the norm due to advanced age are examined less, however research has also been conducted into normative images of ageing (Burkhard Schäffer). Discrepancies and stigmatisation due to low levels of literacy provide a controversial debate, which in terms of theory is inspired by the New Literacy Studies (Barton & Hamilton, 2003; Tett et al., 2006). Studies based on the subject-scientific theory of learning were also made on literacy (Nienkemper & Bonna, 2010; Nienkemper, etc.\textsuperscript{7}).

Positioning based on the new subject-scientific theory of learning requires using the diversity of the socialised subjects acting with a perspective and intentionally as the starting point for research. It would not be a case of discovering subjective sensitivities through a questionnaire (which purports to be objective) and reporting on departures of the variables from the average, but about a generalised reflection of the subject’s standpoint (Holzkamp, 1996). The difference between the subjects and the researchers too is recognised, instead of correlating everything and anyone with an imaginary normal subject. Therefore, there can no longer be any objective, abstract and universally valid research results, but justifiable and transparent subjective logic at the most.

2.5 Dualisms, transitions and blank spaces

The latent dualisms of men and women, emotion and cognition, black and white, the West and the Rest, expansive and defensive, theory and practice etc., are also popular targets as regards modern theory systems. In this case I believe it is a good idea to develop the axes, as indeed has already happened in some cases. In the subject-scientific theory of learning, the categorisation of people or groups of people is not to be understood along dualistic axes of “normal” and “different”, but via the socialised subject based on class, milieu, migration or gender, which are inherent in subjects due to the societal circumstances.

However, by separating expansive and defensive learning, the subject-scientific theory of learning has introduced two more dualistic terms, which from an empirical aspect are not sustainable. There is no clear-cut division of expansive and defensive reasons for action, but a hybrid form of the two. These are not stable, but change – and what is more, in both directions. Learning that starts expansively can slip into a defensive form. Learning that commences defensively can turn into an expansive form (Grotlüschen, 2003, p. 313). More recent dissertations on the theory based on the individual perspective therefore

\textsuperscript{6}See also Krämer “Lernen über Geschlecht in Spannungsfeldern” in this collection of articles.

\textsuperscript{7}See also Nienkemper “Strategies in the case of functional illiteracy” in this collection of articles.
tend to categorise along axes of tension instead of the form of dually separated categories (Haberzeth, 2010). In my view, research on the subject-scientific theory of learning can now do justice to transitions.

On the other hand, the subject-scientific theory of learning cannot yet provide any answer to *voids* and *gaps*, as are sometimes required by difference theories. Susanne Umbach (Umbach, 2011) discusses a link between the subject-scientific theory of learning with Donna Haraway’s characteristic of “significant otherness” which emphasises the aspect of ‘not understanding’ in particular. Since the translation of Judith Butler’s book *Undoing Gender* into German entitled *Die Macht der Geschlechternormen* (Butler, 2004, 2009) the question of gender gaps in the gender discourse (which is all too often still conducted on a heteronormative basis) has gained new momentum.

### 3. The theory of learning: consolidation and developments in adult education

Actually there are now new developments in the theory of learning based on the individual perspective which are primarily the results of qualitative work. They subdivide learning – in some cases by referring to John Dewey’s epistemological process perspective – in phases (Dluzak, 2009; Grotlüschen, 2010). Faulstich (2005, 2013) suggests developing a critical-pragmatic theory of learning. Others connect learning with social backgrounds and habitus (Bremer, 200; Bracker & Faulstich, 2012). As a term, resistance to learning is now divided up into all types of resistance to learning (Grell, 2006) and complemented by a counterpart, learning interests. A series of textbooks (on resistance to learning, places of learning, learning periods, learning fees, the desire to learn etc.) has been published for trade unions (e.g., Faulstich, 2002; Faulstich, 2012). Learning guidance and diagnostics flank learning concepts drawn up in the middle of the 1990s (see below).

Two collections of articles were published in the middle of the noughties. The 50th issue of Forum Kritische Psychologie published by Frigga Haug and Ute Osterkamp was dedicated to the 10th anniversary of Holzkamp’s death. Developments in the theories from the individual perspective were for example demanded regarding the structures of learning (Dreier, 2006). Baldauf-Bergmann also urges not misunderstanding subjects as isolated individuals (Baldauf-Bergmann, 2006). Tentative connections with competing theories of learning

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8 Judith E. Krämer’s study (in preparation and see this collection of articles) and Eva-Christine Kubsch’s current dissertation use phase models of expansive learning understood along the theory of individual learning.
remain the exception however. Faulstich and Grotlüschen discuss the concept of experience and interest between pragmatism and the theory of individual learning (Faulstich & Grotlüschen, 2006).

Faulstich and Ludwig’s collection of articles (2004), which they use to take stock at the same time, stick more closely to learning. However, they only deal with adult education. In this case the theory of individual learning is discussed from perspectives of governmentality theory (Fornecik), habitus theory (Brem), restricted subjectivity (Wittpoth), constructivism (Arnold) and the Munich interest theory (Krapp).

Following these two milestones in the mid noughties, new work is currently emerging, such as Ulrike Eichinger’s well-received book on the theory of individual learning in social work (Eichinger, 2012). In conjunction with Danish partners from Copenhagen, we are also gaining work on further education and training, operations and advice (Thomsen, 2012). This development is also leading to a consolidation of English publications resulting from the discourse on adult education as regards theories on learning and from the individual perspective.

### 3.1 Research work, distinctions and results

Many traditional issues in adult education (learning, teaching, target groups, organisation, institution, skills) are being researched with a background based on the theory of individual learning. This is Joachim Ludwig’s style as regards the development of organisation and in-company training (Ludwig, 2000). Quality-management issues have for example been established following the system of “learner-driven quality testing in further education” in the tradition of demands based on the theory of individual learning (Zech & Angermüller, 2006). Janine Rehfeld (Rehfeldt, 2012) wrote about informal learning by junior managers in the automotive industry. As regards organisational development in hospitals, Claudia Schepers has written a paper which already creates distinctions between phases of resistance (Schepers, 2009; Dluzak, 2009). In the case of in-company training planning, Martin Allespach also carries out research from the perspective of the board of the German trades union IG Metall (Allespach, 2004). With a look at works councils, Simone Hocke draws distinctions between different types of cooperative learning by interpreting conflicts as a reason for learning. She also discusses inconsistencies in the way works councils act (Hocke, 2012). Zinth presents a requirements analysis based on the theory of individual learning (Zinth, 2008).

Erik Haberzeth conducts research into the didactic perspective based on the theory of individual learning by looking at in-company training offered
Claudia Schepers on the other hand looks at resistance to learning on the part of teachers (Schepers, 2014). By looking at the perspective of casework (Ludwig, 2003) and reconciliation (Faulstich, 2003) it becomes clear how didactics with characteristics of the theory of individual learning are possible and advisable. In this case, subjects who are learning are no longer considered as people who are aware of all the limitations and course content, but as people who can definitely benefit from teachers. Faulstich says that the teachers’ job is to reconcile the interests of the people learning with the course content offered. Therefore, the concept is designed to be negotiated. Ludwig maintains that it is the people learning who submit their case and draw on the expertise of teachers and fellow learners.

As regards literacy, Andrea Linde (2008) focused her dissertation on theory of learning and literacy and also looked at the habitus theory. In terms of literacy, Joachim Ludwig’s research group also drew distinctions between different concepts (Ludwig, 2010; Ludwig, 2012b). Linking literacy research with the New Literacy Studies by Zeuner and Pabst (2011) is not strictly speaking an approach by based on the theory of individual learning, but is definitely inspired by learning theory.

It is true to say that outside in-company training and courses offered by independent institutions, learning definitely takes place, but Klaus Holzkamp does not make this type of learning the focus of this theory. However, the latest development looks at “co-learning” empirically, above all Jana Trumann who discusses learning in social movements (Trumann, 2013) or in the library (Trumann, 2009). Non-intentional co-learning is also debated as regards gender learning processes (see Krämer, in preparation). As regards developing skills, in a more recent article Langemeyer calls for the integration of skills in societal structures within which competent action is possible (Langemeyer, 2013). She quite rightly warns against an individualistic interpretation of skills and learning and shows that the theory based on the individual perspective runs counter to the “social mediatedness of individual existence”.

E-learning has been and is repeatedly discussed in terms of learning theory. The assumption that a special form of self-determination arises through e-learning has not been borne out, but the potential inherent in the theory of individual learning to explain subjective sets of reasoning (Grotlüschen, 2003). At the same time it also becomes clear that expansive or defensive reasons for learning do not emerge in their purest forms, but vary and can change too. The e-learning manual that Patricia Arnold, Gerhard Zimmer, Lars Kilian and Anne Thillosen drew up together (Arnold et al., 2004) consolidates relevant approaches. The Klaus Treumann (2002) group uses the learning theory of individual learning. Most recently they applied it with a study funded by the
DFG on learners’ orientation in e-learning (Treumann et al., 2012). The question of the quality of e-learning has been pushed for years by Ulf Ehlers – also with a background based on the individual perspective (Ehlers, 2004; Ehlers & Schenkel, 2005). As regards the question to what extent e-learning is also suitable for the disadvantaged, a series of observations were made about ten years ago in job-creation courses in which learning software was used (Grotlüschen & Brauchle, 2004; Grotlüschen & Brauchle, 2006). The target group uses social strategies to master the technology, for example by joining forces with others. A look at the perspective of the teachers, who in some cases fear that e-learning will have a massive impact on their profession, rounds off the trilogy (Brauchle, 2007). In conjunction with Petra Grell, an analysis followed later of Second Life as a place of learning, which primarily uses the interpretation based on the individual perspective of Foucault’s power techniques (Grell & Grotlüschen, 2009). When analysing e-learning didactics, Stephan Frank marginally touches on perspectives from the individual perspective too (Frank, 2012).

### 3.2 Subjects who learn incidentally

Do subjects intend to learn? The controversy surrounding intentional learning and co-learning is one of the most difficult in the theory of individual learning. As already mentioned above, several more recent analyses have also examined unintentional learning (Rehfeldt, 2012; Truemn, 2013; Krämer, in preparation). Jana Trumann reconstructs learning processes in citizens’ action groups and notices that learning is often talked about, particularly in an informal context. In her dissertation, Janine Rehfeldt defines informal learning as a *constructed learning context* with a large proportion of cooperative learning processes (Rehfeldt, 2012). As a result, she is working at an interface between existing theory of individual learning and development which she believes is necessary.

These types of learning processes inevitably take place. The question is merely whether the theory of individual learning can understand them and what their peculiarities are. One of the key characteristics is presented by Frigga Haug (2003): In hindsight, learning is often forgotten and what has been learnt is seen as something which is taken for granted. This characteristic often makes it hard for teachers to return to a state where they lacked the knowledge that the people taking part in their course or the students currently find themselves in. The existence of unintentional learning has therefore already been articulated in the

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9 In my own sample group regarding learning which was initiated intentionally (Grotlüschen, 2003) nobody talked about learning, but in fact about clicking, perusing, reading etc.
new interpretation of learning from the individual perspective, even if this did not happen until 2004. However, the key problem of unintentional learning does not lie in its entrenchment in the familiar (Meyer-Drawe, 2012). Käte Meyer-Drawe argues that it is the very incidental nature of these types of learning processes that reproduces those societal relationships, which immediately provide a suitable solution for the learning situation – without people reflecting on what this implies on the other hand. In other words, no resistance to learning occurs because there appears to be a superficial, functional solution to the problem. At the same time traditions are contributed, gender relationships reproduced, distinction mechanisms are learnt and much more, which the same person as a subject capable of reflection possibly strives to overcome. The theorisation of unintentional learning (which needs to be distinguished from incidental and informal learning) therefore benefits from criticisms from a phenomenological perspective.

3.3 Aspects of learning – resistance to learning, learning interests, learning advice, learning diagnostics

The concept of resistance to learning, published not in a text book but in a special article (Holzkamp, 1997a), is particularly absorbing. I believe that resistance to learning occurs due to conflicts that have not yet emerged between personal interests and the interests represented by the teachers or structures within the learning setting. This unmasked correlation has a crippling effect and creates resistance to learning. Resistance to learning is not synonymous with defensive learning which can occur intentionally and when all the parameters are known. Based on this interpretation, the characteristics of resistance to learning are the simultaneous effectivity of subjects and society, as well as pre-reflection. Resistance to learning is not beneficial to subjects or society. Consequently, it is not to be understood as active resistance to structures which impair emancipation. This would be the case with expansive learning or the generalised ability to act. Resistance to learning is therefore not an emancipatory act. Resistance to inadequate learning set-ups, described as student protests for example (see Ribolits, 2011), is not a case of resistance to learning, but expansive learning, as long as something can be learnt along the way.

Learning interests are therefore designed to respond to resistance to learning. Learning interests also include correlations between society and subjects, some of which can be congruous and some of which contradictory. Subjects do not have learning interests awaiting arousal from the moment they are born. Learning interests arise as a result of subjects actively engaging with
Resistance to learning and learning interests are subjectively well-reasoned acts and not something that pedagogues need to sweep aside. The brief to pedagogues is much more to unveil them from the pre-reflective space by talking to the people learning. Explaining why there is an imbalance of research into target groups, or why people reject further education or training (usually due to external influence in other words societal barriers) and why people take part in further education due to internal influences, is counterbalanced by the concept of resistance to learning and learning interests. When people reject further education or training, or refuse to participate, this is the result of action the socialised subjects take.

In addition to the key question of learning and teaching, questions about advice and diagnostics are being increasingly discussed as regards further education and training. Therefore, learning based on an interpretation of the theory of individual learning is currently being expanded to include learning advice and diagnostics. As regards career and education advice, in her dissertation Rie Thomsen from Copenhagen asks to what extent individualisation of societal problems is institutionalised (Thomsen, 2012). Henning Pätzold analyses learning advice in a narrower sense which is something the later work of Joachim Ludwig also focuses on (Pätzold, 2004; Ludwig, 2012b). In the Lernberatung und Lerndiagnostik volume Ludwig also links the two above-mentioned extensions of classical teaching and learning (Ludwig, 2012a). The diagnostic branch is currently being developed from “Formative Assessment” (Bonna, 2008) to determination of skills (Schügl, 2010; Schügl & Nienkemper, 2012) to learning diagnostics (Nienkemper & Bonna, 2010; Nienkemper & Bonna, 2011; Zimper & Dessinger, 2012).

4. Research methodology based on the theory of individual learning

A final area that Tobias Künkler has criticised is research’s understanding of the theory of individual learning. He implies that research into the theory of individual learning exaggerates the perspective of the subject. He goes on to say that this perspective is then dominated by researchers, who at the same time want to understand it fully and then blank out the now much-discussed conditions. Therefore, it is worthwhile taking another look at the conditionality and foundationalist discourse. In this interpretation, conditions do exist if they allow an issue to be explained without any reason placed in between. If we take conditions such as frost and water, the result is ice. No reasoning is required to
do this because causal chains can be created in the form of clauses that generate a consequence. (When it freezes water turns into ice). It is impossible to form a logical sentence if the word “sensibly” is placed between. (When it freezes water sensibly turns into ice). Rationality is identifiable in the following statement: If it’s cold, then it’s sensible for me to put warmer clothes on. Holzkamp concludes that social science is about reasons, not conditions. This also implies that there can be more than one reason and that reasons conflict and need to be weighed up with one another. (If it’s cold, then it’s sensible for me to put warm clothes on. But it doesn’t look that smart, so I’ll just put a few warm clothes on).

The decisive factor is that the premise does not appear to be predictable as a condition but that it becomes the reason when viewed by the subject. This occurs if the subject pays attention to a premise (cold and clothing) and considers it desirable (warmth and fashion). Therefore, in each act by the subject the conditions – which have become premises due to the subjective standpoint – are effective. Acts cannot however, in the case of causal or mono-causal logic, be predicted as the consequences of conditions. In fact in between there are inconsistencies, aspects that are overlooked, factors that are familiar, selective perception, wishful thinking and everything which turns logic into subjective logic.

Furthermore, a comment on understanding and reconstruction needs to be made. Understanding includes not understanding too. However, this is due to two components. Firstly it concerns the basic lack of knowledge on the part of subjects and the separation of subjects and their temporary externalisation in the form of interviews, texts or actions. This is one of the bases of all hermeneutics and is not questioned explicitly anywhere in the theory of individual learning – however it is not explicitly discussed either.

A second component is the concept of foundationalist discourse. If research does not understand acting subjects, the reason is that (depending on each subjective interpretation) it is not sufficiently aware of societal premises and cannot therefore understand the conclusiveness of subjective logic. The insinuation is nevertheless that the way that subjects interpret their premises allows them to make subjective sense of their action. Therefore, the theory of individual learning requires tolerance that on the one hand, even if understood in depth, the full perspective from the individual perspective can never be adopted. On the other hand it also demands that the assumption of logical action on the part of subjects (who sometimes might act in a way that is impossible to understand) is maintained.

In terms of methodology, three approaches try to do justice to these requirements. Based on Grundlegung der Psychologie (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 544 cf.) Morus Markhard (2006) calls for a concept of co-research where those on
whom the research is being conducted can be involved in developing questions, surveys, analyses and interpretations. This is more than just a mere communicative validation by interviewees, because in this case it is much more about adopting the perspective of the co-researchers when creating the questions and capturing the data appropriately. However, the attempt to conduct research on an equal footing always fails when science uses terms that the target group do not know. In other words it is not a meeting of subjects which is free of hierarchies. Consequently, this approach has seldom caught on in adult education (with the exception of Rie Thomsen).

The works quoted often use the grounded theory, which will not be explained here in detail and can be used congruently with the co-research concept. The only decisive factor is that the translation of coded paradigms also includes conditions. In the interpretation of the theory of individual learning, it does however appear to tally better with the grounded theory and to apply reasoning in the way discussed above (von Felden, 2006; Grotlüschen, 2010, p. 177).

A third approach concerns research workshops which, in addition to verbal survey tools, also make and interpret visual artefacts. They are used in the Vester, Bremer, Lange-Vester and Teiwes-Kügler group as a habitus-hermeneutics procedure (Lange-Vester & Teiwes-Kügler, 2004; Bremer & Lange-Vester, 2006). In the form of theory of individual learning they are also encountered in Faulstich, Forneck and Knoll, as well as their teams and dissertations (Faulstich et al., 2005; Grell, 2006). New developments are currently emerging (Bracker & Faulstich, 2012; Umbach, 2012; as well as Mania and Tröster in this collection of articles).

5. Conclusion: The new interpretation from the individual perspective

Subjects are socialised and learn as a result. Rationally we can also imply that all conditions do not become reasons for subjects taking action until the subjects have accepted or (implicitly) acknowledged these reasons – otherwise they are irrelevant.

As a result, if foundationalist discourse is interpreted strictly, even a material obstacle, such as a lack of a driving licence (condition), would only become relevant if it means that due to a concern about a lack of abilities, or due to the fear of being caught (condition), subjects actually did not drive their cars. In this way, based on subjective logic, subjects integrate with societal conditions (because no money to purchase a driving licence is given to them). In its original form, foundationalist discourse therefore integrates what is irrational, pushed
aside, habitualised and emotional – and societal conditions too. With this type there are no theories other than foundationalist discourse because they can be re-interpreted with a certain rationale.

Alternatively, it could be suggested that subjective reasons on the one hand could be complemented by societal conditions on the other. Consequently, many contemporary works expand the reception of the theory of individual learning to include aspects of societal theory in order to generate interpretations of research materials from them (see Bracker, Faulstich, Krämer, Bremer, Heinemann). In the new interpretation of the theory of individual learning, it is irrelevant whether the societal conditions are integrated in foundationalist discourse and only emerge through the perspective of the acting subject, or whether they are added to accompany the theory of individual learning. For research and the understanding of learning following a new interpretation of the theory of individual learning, it is primarily important to acknowledge the existence and power of the irrational, corporeality, suppression, habitualisation and emotion. In my opinion whether this happens in the first or second variation is equally acceptable.

As a result, based on the new interpretation of the theory of individual learning, learning subjects encounter teachers and institutions in the backdrop of societal conditions. It is suggested that subjects have individual abilities to learn and skills that have been gained individually, although they have to learn in societal conditions and act competently. Subjects are given careers and educational/training advice, although they have no control over their education/training and career alone. Subjects can weigh up decisions rationally, but they only attempt to do so if the familiar action taken fails. Incidental learning can be a step forward, but does not exceed the borders of what is implicitly perceived. Reasons for learning and the way learning progresses entail emotions and are subjected to restrictions in terms of corporeality. Expansive and defensive learning can occur as hybrids and change during learning processes. Resistance to learning can be subdivided in phases. Resistance to learning can serve learning interests as a complementary concept. Learning advice and learning diagnostics can be structured to follow the theory of individual learning. The concept of competence and competence models too are socialised in the interpretation of the theory of individual learning and are tied to conflicts of interest.

Adding to skills as a genuine life interest is not always manifested openly. Subjects can also stand in their own way. Nevertheless, gaining more skills – despite all the intrinsic value of education and training – always also implies a material improvement in the person’s circumstances. Subjects only have a significant reason to learn when they can anticipate this improvement as a result
of their endeavours. To be precise, a subjectively good reason for learning is only assumed here if the people learning can clearly increase their possession of societal resources. By looking at socialised subjects (at a micro, meso and macrodidactic level) research into the theory of individual learning can expose situations that lead to resistance and resistance to learning.

However (as shown by the revision of recent works inspired by the theory of individual learning) a socio-critical interpretation of the approach is required in order to counter an individualistic interpretation.

6. Appendix: Dissertations and postdoctoral theses (also) using the theory from the standpoint of the subject


7. References


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Learning practice: Discerning and conquering the subjective new

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“The contradictions are the hope”

(Bertolt Brecht GW 18, 139)

“Contradiction is the form of learning’s movement”

(Frigga Haug 2003, 212)

Abstract

This article consolidates and systematizes the fundamental questions any inquiry into learning needs to adopt, if it claims to address the topic from the perspective of action theory within critical psychology. Our starting points here are seemingly simple questions like: how does learning appear to us? When does it become a ‘problem’ – and for whom? Which contradictory societal functions of learning can we identify? These reflective recourses allow us to re/contextualize the very question, “what is learning?”. A second step reconstructs the historicity of learning – differentiating necessarily between the history of learning as a practice and the history of theorizing learning. Since both aspects – practice and theorizing – are themselves moments in a broader societal context, a next step refers to their contextualization in a learning regime. The societal contextualization forces us to question the conventional reduction of social meanings – as the genuine content of learning – to some allegedly neutral technicalities and, instead, to seek potential analytical moments of action/learning. Our reflections allow us to go beyond the restriction of conceiving of learning solely in the mode of schooling and to imagine an autonomy of learning that expands towards social movement learning such as in a specific case of ‘learning (in) solidarity’.
Keywords
societal function of learning, historicity of learning, learning regime, subjective semiosis, learning as participation in social practices, autonomy of learning, analytical moments of action/learning, social movement learning, pedagogy of dissent, schooling mode of learning, social learning barriers, life-long learning as life-sentence.

I. How Are We Approaching Learning?

It is easy to surmise that learning is omnipresent. Nowadays, not only is everyone learning, but ostensibly also everything: rats, dogs, and pigeons; organizations and systems; machines; regions and societies. The primary focus of the study of learning has traditionally been on children, learning is now also considered important when the learners are adults and seniors. Our natural potential for life-long learning is now broadly accepted, yet has also been transformed into a burden. If we want to comply with the new neo-liberal normality imposed on more and more of our lives, the updated version of learning seems to mean a generalization from opportunities for a few to a life sentence for all (Spilker 2013).

It is almost compulsory to start an academic dialog with a definition of the subject to be discussed. Conventionally, such a definition contributes a quick synopsis where the authors present their understanding of the subject matter, which neglects and, at the same time, obscures the, potentially problematic, character of the definition, itself. This common practice is misleading because the reader is left with a one-sided view of issues. The practice of offering a definition can constitute neglect and become a political ploy. Therefore, we should reject the very idea of using an overly simplistic definition of learning as our starting point. We must insist that this idea is misleading and favours hegemonic practices, supporting, as it does, various trends, theories and approaches that attempt to consolidate and impose particular perceptions (Laclau & Mouffe 1985). An authoritative approach is contingent on several omissions:

- All important (wo)men who have not had the luck to be included in the chosen definition are excluded.
- The social practices in which and through which learning takes place and emerges are also excluded.
- All the subjects (i.e., persons) called to learn, together with their needs, opinions, experiences, and concepts about learning, are absent.
To define learning comprehensively we might ask: What notion of knowledge is implicitly reproduced by the standard approach? What do we have to learn (or teach) according to the authoritative model?

A linear, mechanical conceptualization of knowing/knowledge and learning is based on a series of structural seclusions between the subjects who are involved in the production, distribution, and usage of knowledge: producer (researcher) → transformer (professor) → vehicle (student) → user (pupil at school). This model implies a certain worldview of society, the subjects, their practices and relations, and their usage of knowledge in the social world. It supports and represents an approach we could call social engineering. From this perspective, knowledge is primarily formal and authoritative (if not authoritarian): it only includes what official and authoritative sources expect as outputs. Once ‘learned,’ such knowledge ostensibly only needs to be applied. If we accept this worldview about human beings, their practices, and relations in society, we can proceed according to the given model without facing any theoretical or moral dilemmas.

If we disagree with such a worldview, however, we must think about how to approach knowledge and learning without relying on a mechanical, technocratic view of society. The mechanical worldview reduces knowledge to formal and authoritative knowledge with the help of an inversion: the outcome is presented as having existed from the beginning as a logical starting point. A historical product is transformed into a general characteristic that functions as a historical starting point and logical premise. This is an effect of societal and historical organization that includes assumptions about the division of labor. In the context of schooling, with its isolation of students and seclusion of learning from the societal practices where it is produced and used, knowledge is not understood as the historical fact it is. Learning, therefore, is not perceived as a historical product or artifact of particular social, theoretical, political contexts and systems.

With this inversion of a historical product into an a-historical generality and starting point, one can reduce knowledge to what is accepted by political, social authorities (e.g., official textbooks). Against such a backdrop, our getting-to-know-the-world is easily transformed into a faith, a doxa, which we encounter reverentially together with dominant social practices, preferably reproduction and repetition. In a model of learning confined to the reproduction and distribution of knowledge, also the human being is being subordinated in his or her epistemological relation towards knowing/knowledge.

Instead of picking up or choosing some kind of authoritative definition of learning, we can transform potential definitions themselves into starting points for the study of learning. In societies where antagonistic interests exist (such as
ours), ‘learning’ - like all social meanings (gesellschaftliche Bedeutungen) - constitutes a conflictive and antagonistic field, characterized by various conflictive and antagonistic social positions.

Re/Contextualization of the question “what is learning”?

One way to answer the question “what is learning?” without offering an eclectic and authoritative definition is to contextualize the very question. The context becomes a logical prerequisite for understanding learning (and teaching). With such a perspective we might ask:

- Which questions and problems are assumed at the beginning? Which of society’s queries are to receive an answer with the help of knowledge and learning? Which of society’s needs are knowledge and learning called to satisfy? What is the social history of these questions and needs?
- What is considered a problem or an issue, when, why and for which subjects? When does learning become problematic, for whom and why? What is learning for us?
- Which different, and perhaps contradictory, social functions of learning can we identify?

How does learning ‘appear’ to us?

When we reflect on learning, we are confronted with several oddities (or even difficulties):

- We know learning has a dual existence: it is an unplanned, spontaneous, osmotic result that comes about through our ongoing activities (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964), but it is also a particular kind of activity we must undertake, a particular labour we must carry out in order to learn (Rubinstein, 1946).
- Talking and thinking about these learning activities, we realize that different subject positions are taken with distinctive and necessary practices, which determine who does what in a specific moment.
- We are permanently confronted with an unavoidable dilemma: Is learning a good thing or is it bad? Is it positive or negative for us? Obviously, learning broadens our potential and our access to societal possibilities and resources. But learning is also experienced as a forced practice: we have to learn to reproduce ourselves socially. Thus, our learning experiences always contain both opportunities for learning and coercions into learning. We seem to oscillate between the freedom from learning and liberty to learn.
When does learning become a ‘problem’ – and for whom?

For most of us, in many situations of life, learning is not much of an issue or problem: we learn through everyday activities and through our practical experiences. Learning is directly bonded with overall, everyday *praxis*. It is, so to speak, practical learning, and it is practical also because it emerges from our practice. Hence, it is directly useful.

The ‘individual’ picture does not change if we ask the same question for the perspective of society. For thousands of years of human history, learning has not constituted a distinct problem for the vast majority of the population on our globe. During this history, an individual’s learning was situated and delimited in his or her everyday activities. It was through involvement in a particular situation that one person taught another. The teachers might have been grandfathers or grandmothers teaching grandchildren everyday skills, but anyone in the community could be a teacher. In this integrated process, the positions of teacher and student were distinctive logical positions, but there was a certain fluidity around who could or would hold one of these logical positions at any specific time.

Of course, delimiting learning to everyday practices necessitates a reduction of learning. The wealth or impoverishment of a person’s everyday practices affects the wealth or impoverishment of potential teaching and learning. When more and more people encounter increased demands and opportunities for learning in and through their everyday practices, learning becomes a delineated societal issue or problem in its own right that has to be addressed through particular social practices.

**Contradictory societal functions of learning**

From the perspective of society, learning as a particular social practice encompasses a fundamental contradiction (e.g., Holzkamp, 1993). On the one hand, learning contributes to the substantial expansion of people’s capacities and represents a potent force for the development of relationships with the world (including with oneself as part of the world). Learning, thus, constitutes a powerful lever for self-determination. Through these practices, an ever-increasing societal heritage is being transferred and distributed to following generations and other newcomers; the transfer includes conflicts around particular or proper content of this heritage.

On the other hand, due to the dominant social order in our societies, the conditions under which our learning has to be realized appear to us as something we have to want to do, as an impulse coming from outside, as enforcement, as
obligation, as a prerequisite for our social reproduction. It appears to us finally as a powerful tool for our heteronomy. The imposition here has to do with the necessity to re/produce the dominant social order, that is, to transfer the existing social relations and conditions to the next generation, including the battles about which aspects of the social order are to be transferred. We all operate within the confines of the existing social order; consequently, we also must learn to accept, adapt, or re/produce this order. We must ‘be trained’ in practices of ruling and domination, subordination, dissent, and resistance.

How long subjects have to encounter this contradiction, with both the opportunities of and the impositions on learning, depends on the organization of a specific society. This organization provides different opportunities and impositions for different subjects, thereby creating differentiated kinds of participation in the accumulated societal wealth. Consequently, the necessity to encounter and deal with this contradiction may in some situations, and for some subjects, last the duration of one’s life (e.g., life-long learning as opportunity and as imposition). On the other end of the spectrum, are all those subjects for whom the organization of our society does not provide nor foresee any participation at all, be it imposition or opportunity. These subjects are therefore released from this contradiction of learning; these subjects are – in a dual sense – free!

The contradiction itself is usually not easily visible, and, consequently, it is not easily understandable as a social contradiction. In actual social situations, the contradiction is mediated by social categories (e.g., gender). Another mediating mechanism consists of the templates for normality we follow, which include the demands, challenges, restrictions, prompts, and obstacles these templates offer. In such social situations, the contradiction is probably experienced as an individual dilemma. For instance, the individual subject may not want to learn something in order to be able to defend some other good perceived as opposing the learning that originally takes place. Consequently, learning that is realized in certain societal conditions cannot be conceived as a linear, cumulative process, but always entails and demands that the involved subjects engage with contradictions and negotiate compromises.

II. Historicity of Learning

History of learning

The constitution of a subject through his or her learning cannot be isolated from the historical constitution of humankind. In reflecting on human learning, we must take into consideration the varied and accumulated heritage on which
individual attempts at learning rely. One person’s learning is only a single event in a much larger process that, in turn, makes this individual’s learning possible. In a comprehensive understanding of human learning, with its potentialities and particularities, we can see processes of historical emergence and development. As such, human learning is a historical product as well as a historical process.

There are three distinct kinds of historicity that can be considered: The first historical step or layer refers to the natural history and phylogeny of learning. It concerns the long natural process of the emergence and differentiation of certain potentialities for individual learning. This history affects every individual organism because it belongs to a specific biological species with an inherited capacity for learning. We humans are endowed with our heritage because of our belonging to the biological species homo sapiens.1

Such a genetic-historical perspective helps us overcome certain fundamental, and popular, dichotomies that trouble the field of psychology (e.g., nature vs. nurture) and to reformulate them in a completely different direction. From an evolutionary point of view, an abstract opposition between nature and nurture - or the innate and the learned - is obsolete. Learning itself is a natural, an innate capacity or, to put it differently, the capacity for individual learning emerges from the innate. Our learning is our natural heritage (Lorenz 1964).

As we said above, the capacity for learning is specific to a biological species. But this particularity does not determine the concrete realization of learning; it is merely a potentiality. With regard to the learning potentials of homo sapiens, we have to consider an additional step or layer of historical heritage that grounds our concrete learning.

In becoming a human being, eg. in appropriating the potentials and powers of our species, a second historical consideration concerns our reflections on the heritage we gain from the history and the historicity of our societies, of our belonging to a certain society with certain historical, geographical, cultural, political, and economic characteristics. Across a societal-historical layer of time the particular contents of learning, the means for our learning, and the subjects of learning are produced, developed, cultivated, and specified. And since societal characteristics are not static, but variable and developing, our learning must be an open-ended developing process; its constraints have to be conceived and theorized as relying on these societal characteristics.

In contrast to other species’ capacity for learning, it is a fundamental characteristic of human activity and learning not only to actively adapt to pre-existing conditions and to appropriate existing social meanings and relations, but also, potentially, to change them, to create new contents and relations. The notion

1 Comparative Ethology, the respective sub-discipline within Biology was rewarded a Noble prize in 1971 for researching this particular history.
that societally produced learning is unchangeable or unambiguous is a theoretical stance in the discourse of learning, but also a political standpoint in the battle for learning and learning opportunities. For example, being on the payroll of a state apparatus which demands from its servants knowledge about how to govern and control subjects - but not about how to change social conditions and ruling relations – illustrates a type of learning that is desirable because it facilitates exploitability and governmentality (gouvernementalité; Foucault, 1991).

Theorizing learning in such a static and reduced manner is trapped in the dialectic between being paid for facilitating change, development and learning, but simultaneously being expected to avoid, to hinder too much of such learning, and with it the change and development of subjects, especially because they may empower people to develop their capacity to question and overcome their own incompetence and the dominant social order.

Scientists and researchers on learning perpetuate a social contradiction here: on the one hand, they help cultivate and develop subjectivity and subjects, so that they can be (also) exploited, while, on the other hand, they delimit [the process of] learning. The usual, dominant, and very ‘practical’ solution for this contradiction is to restrict the demands for development and change through learning to individuals, while the existing social order is kept untouchable and therefore legitimized as is.

A third historical consideration involves the emergence of learning and the learning history of the concrete individual during his or her life course. A person’s learning history is the place where the natural and societal heritage are finally actualized, realized, and transformed from something potential into something real. Through this kind of learning history, the capacities accumulated and differentiated in natural and societal history are transformed into a real social entity, a concrete person. The process of life also accumulates a double-edged heritage of learning that facilitates or hinders further learning. This third historical movement of learning is very important to consider if we want to avoid the approach to human action and learning we find in the virtual realities of certain methodological designs, which treat action and learning as separate slices of salami (Salamisierung des Handelns). Action and learning are not discrete phenomena, but rather specific moments in a personal learning trajectory, which, in turn, is a moment in an ongoing longer “stream of action” in which one participates and to which one contributes (Giddens, 1984).

**History of learning theory**

In every historical and philosophical epoch and region, we find interesting and relevant ideas and positions about learning. But until the establishment of the
social sciences at the beginning of the 20th century, these discourses were dominated by a variety of normative anthropologies about the good or bad of and in children and suitable prompts to deal with this. We have to ascertain at least one advantage of such normative anthropologies, especially since this approach was later abandoned in the switch to a social-scientific mode of theorizing learning. These anthropologies, and the resulting attempts at education, involved the child as a whole; they considered how a child develops, or should develop, as an undivided person. With the rise to dominance of the discourse of social science, the entity ‘child’ was subjected to an artificial, technocratic fragmentation. The focus of learning and the attempts at educating were then directed only at certain aspects and parts of our human hypostasis, for example, our performed behaviour and cognitive functions.

This mode of discourse actually was itself an ex post process, grounded in the massive expansion of socially organized learning and educative practices in certain regions of the world, which were now backed up and legitimized by learning theories. In this historical process, praxis (organized educative practices) preexisted, and were followed by (learning and teaching) theories suitable to conform to the particular organization of educative practices! In such a harmonic complicity between dominant educative arrangements and dominant learning theories during the 20th century, the individual was established as the untouchable primary unit of analysis, with a single individual as the start and end point of reference, who faced an individual teacher and individual evaluations. It is no surprise at all that such individuocentrism in educative praxis finally also confined learning theory to various individual or inter-personal endeavours.

It would be easy to show that the various dominant social-scientific learning theories throughout the 20th century have had strong affinities with, or even were built according to the historically dominant organisation of labour. The most famous example is the analogy between Taylorism and Behaviourism, but a close relationship could be shown also for the mainstream theories that followed historically. Basic characteristics of most learning theories relevant in the 20th century were already well articulated at the beginning of the century. A good example is L. S. Vygotsky, who died in the mid-1930s, but turned into a very popular social scientific figure only after the 1970s. Similarly, other learning theories achieved dominant status throughout the 20th century; primarily, this has not been an academic issue, imposed, for example, through theoretical competition and persuasion. Rather, the rise of learning theory to temporary prominence was and continues to be, mediated by changes in the organization of society, particularly by changes in the organisation of labour.

Just as the organization of labour and theories of learning are inter-related, individualistic and, later, mentalist conceptions of learning, together with their
lack of subjectivity and their in-humanity, were dominant throughout the 20th century and still are. These are not just bad or wrong theories to be improved by certain additions or alterations. Such a way of theorizing learning is simultaneously an epistemological and political standpoint within a given social order according to the concrete organization of labour and the positionings of the involved subjects (- including social scientists, whether intended or just factual)! Dominant learning theories uncritically take as their starting and ending point the existing practical arrangements in the central institution of organized learning – the school. This self-imposed (or uncritically accepted) confinement of learning theory to be subservient to schooling legitimizes the already existing arrangements and practices of schooling. Social scientists assume and accept particular societal demands in and for schooling and offer practical, manageable solutions to the social exclusion of certain groups of pupils (called ‘selection’) to which school contributes.

We can see from the above that theorizing human learning is not like sitting on a rock and watching the waves of life without active involvement. Theorizing learning is being part of these waves, which is participating in the stream of action. In this vein, critiques of traditional theories of learning not only deconstruct and replace thinking on the subject matter, but make detailed critiques of learning practices – self-reflective theoretical praxis included – and social consequences. True critique is not a blind reproduction of the dominant order of praxis, which, euphemistically, calls itself neutral. The different, distinct subject positions included in learning practices are often absent in traditional 20th century theorizing on learning. But this absence does not signify neutrality! The alleged neutrality in traditional theories relies explicitly on the perspective of the powerful in concrete societal circumstances, re/formulating societal demands as neutral tasks to be served, performed, and realized (e.g. as developmental tasks in modern and traditional developmental theories).

Consequently, the first task of a critical reflection on learning theory is to expose the different and distinctive subject positions and the implicit learning practices, given historical-societal organization and development. Critical theories of learning, therefore, reflect on the practices upon which learning relies, practices to which it refers, and which it facilitates - learning practices always imply an epistemological and political standpoint. Theories are part of the practical problems they aim to understand and resolve. There is no standpoint outside, or above, this stream of action.

A critical perspective considers theories and concepts as parts of social practices. Talking about learning (its problems, characteristics, needs, course, nature, etc.) thus contributes to (or participates in) a societal arena that goes beyond the limits of a particular social concept or category and touches upon all
members of society. The discourse about learning theories contributes to the
constitution of such a social arena and also offers a chance to reflect and re-
theorise our views on society as a whole:

- What is normal (learning)?
- Who is supposed to learn?
- What needs to be changed in our society in order for this to happen?
- How?

III. (Talking about) Learning is Participating in a Learning Regime

In our attempts to be human, to appropriate, cultivate, develop, and expand the
powers and potentialities that are grounded in our tripartite heritage,\(^2\) we are
participating in re/producing and changing the capacities in them. The necessary
dialectics herein is to conceive and encounter our learning in all its multiplicity
and continuity: as a means, as a way, and as an outcome of our overall activities,
practices, and actions. Learning practices are not only ‘unfolding’ the subject’s
potentialities, but, simultaneously, they also develop these potentials and produce
and create new potentials. Learning is a particular practice with which - in
changing the world - we are (also) changing the active subject. Learning
practices are those particular social practices that can also modify the functional
basis of the psychical (Holzkamp 1983, p. 156f., p. 277f.). Learning thus
intervenes on the subjective and the ‘objective’ presuppositions, the
preconditions of these practices.

Learning is a subjectively grounded activity of the individual in his/her
attempt to get to know the world and to participate and influence it. The
‘knowing (the world)’ is being realized by subjects through participation in social
practices. From this perspective, learning is a moment of the integrative social
process of transformation/education. The ‘doing of learning’ is one aspect of a
transformative relation: the ‘contents’ of this doing (training, transferring, and
transforming) are not only ‘objects’, but also relations and subjects. Learning
transforms also the epistemology (the politics) of the subjects towards the
learning praxis, together with its learning contents and with the learning subjects
themselves (ontology). An implicit restriction of the ‘doing of learning’ to the
appropriation, internalization of some ‘authoritative knowledge’ allows subjects
only the ‘training’ in a submissive, subordinating relation, or an ‘employee
relation’, if not a ‘faithful’, religious (‘hailing’) relation towards learning and
knowledge – whether learning refers to sacred writings or highly rational and

\(^2\) The natural history, the phylogeny of learning, the history and historicity of our
societies, the learning history of the concrete subject (see above).
critical textbooks and independently of the intentions of the teaching or learning subjects!

We cannot reconstruct any social practices outside of social and societal interconnections and relations, therefore we also cannot conceive particular learning practices without adequate reference to such comprehensive processes and conditions in which they are embedded. Learning practices are concomitantly moments in a learning regime. This agrees with Anthony Gidden’s (1984) notion that action is an ongoing, steady stream of action and not some kind of processed meat ready to be sliced and analysed in piecemeal fashion. Consequently, we have to approach learning as a particular trajectory within the stream of action, which, itself, is situated within the wider stream of re/producing and changing our societies (and our lives within it). ‘I am learning’ signifies, implies my participation in, my contribution to, a learning regime from/in a particular and dynamic social position. My individual learning activities affect, modify, and transform the learning regime and my position in it! Thus, individual learning activities are transformative activities in different directions, with the involvement of different recipients.

‘My own learning practices’ are always moments in a learning regime, i.e. moments in ‘my’ participation in such a learning regime. On this basis, the practices of ‘my’ learning cannot be conceived as something linear, mechanical or cumulative, but are necessary moments in/of a dialectical conflict, that is, acts in a social battlefield. ‘I am learning’ presupposes that ‘I am encountering’, ‘I am dealing with’ the contradictions inherent in this battlefield and that the outcome of my learning can only be a compromise.3

Consequently, if I want to understand my learning practices, I also need an appropriate understanding of the learning regime (included in an adequate theory about society), its components and participants as well as its organization and development. Stated differently: the understanding of my own learning practices is embedded in a more comprehensive conception and understanding of a learning regime, which, in turn, is embedded in some understanding/theorizing of society. Talking – and researching - about learning as a mere individual ‘issue’ is thus always concomitantly a politically interesting abstraction of the complexity I have to deal with by/in my learning and the compromises I am usually making in/with my learning.

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3 The lack, the missing reference to contradictions and compromises in learning arrangements, in the learning regime ‘appears’, or is articulated, in conventional, dominant learning theories only as inter-personal conflicts or as motivational problems of individual pupils (or individual teachers). In such conventional, dominant conceptualizations without contradictions, the teacher-subject is burdened to act as a behavioral manager and/or conflict manager (tamer, motivator of pupils).
Learning as/in participating means participation and contribution in a concrete, that is historical, social, technological, learning regime. In the context of such a regime, individuals subjectively identify issues for their own learning. By necessity, the learning regime intersects with – or is even included in – broader ‘schooling regimes’ or ‘schooling complexes’, as the more comprehensive context of organized transformative practices in our societies. The schooling regime, itself, is a concrete attempt at offering a practicable solution to the fundamental contradiction between learning and power. On the learning side, the issue at stake in this fundamental contradiction are the productivity and creativity of subjects as moments of our human hypostasis; how to re/organize societal relations, how to create new social forms of life and which ones, so that this productivity can be actualized, cultivated, and developed (Castoriadis 1997). The other side - the side of power - includes attempts at controlling subjects’ productivity, creativity, so as not to endanger the already existent social forms, the dominant social order. Control can refer to the channeling, suppression or even nullification of productive (subjective, social) potentials, based on the logic: ‘better destruction than r/evolution’.

Our learning is the outcome of our participation and contribution in a certain set of social practices, within given social structures and across numerous domains of social life. What we call a learning regime is the overall dynamic process that interweaves individual and social practices with social structures and values. Therefore, learning – as both a prerequisite and a product of such a regime – constitutes an unequally distributed social good.

The dominant (Fordist) learning regime in the 20th century is part of the structuring of the life course into differentiated (though historically variable) ‘stages’ or ‘phases’, each one of which allocates qualitatively and quantitatively different resources and constraints. It proposes a serial organization of the life-course into biographical chapters with distinctive sequential practices: first learning/acquiring, then working/applying. The historical epoch in which we live is a transitional period that is usually characterized only ‘negatively’ as post-Fordist. Currently, a new – a neo-liberal - learning regime is emerging (imposed by the powerful) that questions exactly the very Fordist seriality that is expressed in the organizational principle: ‘first learning, then working’. Contrary to this ‘seriality’, today, an increasingly ‘parallel’ social organization of learning/working is being proposed/imposed. But the societal demands for life-long learning are being addressed and demanded without the necessary social back-up for/during the learning practices – as it was the case in the Fordist regime where working adults supported the learning youth (usually parents

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4 „Schöpfung neuer Formen des gesellschaftlichen Lebens“ (Castoriadis 1997, 96 – about the young Marx)
supported their children). Thus, learning now exists, or is offered, less as a life-long opportunity, but appears much more as a burden on everyone as a life sentence. The new freedom of life-long learning manifests as a new coercion, as the life-long competition even between formerly non-competitive social groups (e.g. adults/parents vs. youth/children). In the new emerging learning regime, it seems that everyone must learn and work simultaneously and for all of his/her life – unless he/she is from an affluent background.

IV. Are Social Meanings Neutral Technicalities?

As mentioned before, human learning means participating in social practices as complex and contested entities; there are two methods we apply in/for this: incidental, “osmotic” (Bourdieu & Passeron 1964) learning (“Mitlernen”, Holzkamp 1993) and intended learning, as a particular form of action, as “learning labour” (Rubinstein 1946/2000). The concrete outcome of, and the prerequisites for, my doing learning are realized through the appropriation of social meanings (gesellschaftliche Bedeutungen). These social meanings are situated and distributed in a variety of societal produced tools - mental tools (e.g. concepts), social tools (e.g. persons, relations), ‘objective’ tools (e.g. external objects, things, artefacts) - and they guide, rather than determine, our actions. From such a perspective, learning means the participation in the action possibilities that are situated and distributed in these tools. The reference point for these tools, and therefore also for ‘my’ action, is the societal reality with its ambiguous, conflictual, and contradictory character, which necessarily finds its way and is articulated in the social meanings, too.

However, the conflictuality of our reality, and consequently of social meanings, does not seem to be recognized as necessary in organized educative practices nor in the dominant theorizing of learning. Rather, conflicts and contradictions have here been replaced by a neutral, technical ‘unambiguity’ (Eindeutigkeit) in the semantics of social meanings, probably in order to make understanding/learning easier. Social meanings seem to be constructed in analogy to operating guidelines for technical equipment, rather than to socially conflictual fields. This perspective only allows for learning as faithful appropriation, which follows the semantic differentiations of technical operating guidelines and leaves no room for conflictual ‘deviation’. But such ease of theorization likely is either a chimera of social scientists or a politically interested camouflage of powerful practices that make social meaning look ‘unambiguous’. This camouflage delegitimizes any ‘problems’ with, or resistance to, the easy subordination to authoritative social meanings, which, in
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turn, are merely conceived as technical operating guidelines. However, are social meanings really just as ‘unambiguous’ and seemingly facile as the operating manual for my espresso machine?

The potential misunderstanding behind such a chimera or camouflage is, however, less grounded in cognitive shortcomings or errors, but results more from our own social practices (e.g. as educators or social scientists) and from our uncritical reflection of their seemingly unambiguous semantic offering to conceptualize and practice learning. The chimera or camouflage seems rational and logical to us due to a self-misunderstanding about a concession in our own praxis as educators and/or social scientists. It is our own compromise to accept our subordination under the ‘unambiguity’ of our own employer, who expects knowledge about subjects and the control of their behavior, rather than knowledge for these subjects! And this self-misunderstanding is a ‘useful’ tool for ourselves as educators and social scientists to stay far away (at least in our minds) from the conflictual, contradictory social battlefield … as long as our own social position in this battlefield is not, itself, being questioned. This self-misunderstanding emerges also because/if we, as educators or social scientists, take the dominant learning theories (formulated potentially by ourselves) as hard evidence for social reality. In these theories, learning is conceptualized without autonomy for the learning subjects, because these theories theorize learning practices only from the perspective of the ruling institutions and thus address only one half of learning – the ‘controllable’ half. It is this self-misunderstanding - of being lubricant for the power-machine - which pushes us into the very trap we (educators, social scientists) have set methodologically for the ‘objects’ of our theoretical/practical praxis. It is, thus, a classic example of a theoretical shortcoming as consequence of a pre-decided methodological shortcoming.

We have to be cautious not to confine social meanings to the kind of knowledge that can be retrieved in some school test, not to constrict the world we need to get-to-know into a very narrow social practice. The tools we use for learning, and in which social meanings are situated and distributed, are products of societal labor; as such they are necessarily ambiguous, conflictual, even contradictory. (To name just a few examples of such conflictual social meanings: knife, gender, alienation, equality, friendship, cell-phone, …). Situated and distributed do not refer just to a semantic space here; rather, the terms connote actual social battlefields (with their differentiations) and thus also particular standpoints that are articulated in specific perspectives on interpretations of such

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5 This articulates also the ‘double edge’ of social sciences in our societies to simultaneously control and support subjects.
social meaning. An example of such conflictual social polyvalence appears in a short note from Marx’ *Paris Manuscript* about the social meaning of *alienation*: 

First it has to be noted that everything which appears in the worker as an activity of alienation, of estrangement, appears in the non-worker as a state of alienation, of estrangement.

Secondly, that the worker’s real, practical behaviour in production and to the product (as emotional state) appears in the non-worker - facing him - as a theoretical behaviour.

Thirdly, the non-worker does everything against the worker which the worker does against himself; but he does not do against himself what he does against the worker. (final paragraph of the 1st Fragment with title: “Estranged Labour”)

As young Marx points out, the social meaning of ‘alienation’ is widely considered to be a state or a condition, when, in actuality, this is only the perspective of the “non-worker”, i.e. of capital! Contrary to this dominant view, Marx suggests to approach ‘alienation’ as a process and as an activity, which is the perspective of the worker. Methodologically speaking, social meanings are not just terms that name different things; they also articulate particular social and epistemological standpoints, which include the ‘awareness’ of the subject about his/her particular position in society. From this starting point, the term alienation does not indicate a psychological (individual) phenomenon or mechanism; alienation is not a psychological concept at all (ie., a psychic state, condition, like ‘individual distress’, etc. …); rather, it is primarily to be understood as a relation(Ship) and as a social practice. Alienation is a social phenomenon and has to be understood as such.

It is exactly this ambiguity, this conflictual or contradictory character of social meanings (like alienation) that opens up a plurality of conflicting possibilities for subjects’ learning. If social meanings could really be restricted to some unambiguous ‘technicalities’ ready to be memorized, there would not be any need for empirical research into what real subjects do in their social reality.

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6 “Zunächst ist zu bemerken, daß alles, was bei dem Arbeiter als Tätigkeit der Entäußerung, der Entfremdung, bei dem Nichtarbeiter als Zustand der Entäußerung, der Entfremdung, erscheint. Zweitens, daß das wirkliche, praktische Verhalten des Arbeiters in der Produktion und zum Produkt (als Gemütszustand) bei dem ihm gegenüberstehenden Nichtarbeiter als theorethisches Verhalten erscheint. Drittens. Der Nichtarbeiter tut alles gegen den Arbeiter, was der Arbeiter gegen sich selbst tut, aber er tut nicht gegen sich selbst, was er gegen den Arbeiter tut“ (MEW EB, 522).

7 And not “attitude” - as in the “common” English translation!

8 As it is the dominant view of critical, Marxist social scientists during the 20th century.
Learning would be a mere technical process of inducing and performing. ‘Things’ would be much easier then, since they would be deducible from a thick description of social reality, readily waiting to be ‘instructed’ to the subjects. However, this scenario is far removed from our societal reality and our human potentialities! For us humans, learning is always the learning of and through contradictions; it is learning amidst socially contested meanings. The contradictions in our social reality are visible in our doing of learning, in our learning practices; they appear to us subjects not merely as ostensibly semantic gaps, waiting to be filled, like a glass of water, or a bank account.

Learning – as participation in the action possibilities situated and distributed in social meanings – thus cannot be conceived as reduced to some interiorization of a semantic variety in these meanings; rather, it requires that subjects encounter the conflicts, contradictions, battles, and standpoints included in them. The emergence of subjective sense is a productive and transformative process, which cannot be reduced to the internalization of external – supposedly neutral and technical - information! The emergence of subjective sense, itself, relies on a practice we could name, with Jens Brockmeier (1988), “subjective semiosis”. To encounter contradictions in my learning (practices) necessarily includes making compromises; potentially, it demands the removal or erosion of learning-sediments, real un-learning, but also creative and innovative solutions.

V. The Analytical Moments of Action/Learning

The confinement of learning (in educative practices and the dominant theorizing of learning) through the restriction of social meanings to technicalities about semantic differentiations is supported by a second reduction that is based on a self-misunderstanding. Our actions, as we understand them for ourselves, are comprised of different aspects or moments. For analytical purposes, these aspects can be approached separately, but psychologically they must be taken together as a distinctive, single action. The different logical components are the answers to different questions about the ‘What’, ‘Why’, and ‘How’ of a distinctive action, which include a final ‘check’ in this active process:

- The intentional (Holzkamp 1993), content-related aspects of action – the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of action, gives the direction of the action;
- The operative (Holzkamp 1993), procedural aspects of action – the ‘how’ of action – refer to the execution/performance of the action;
- The controlling aspects of the process of action.
But self-understanding for us is not self-understanding for the usual theorizing of learning! While theorizing learning without the actively learning subject, the conventional, dominant learning theories of the 20th century transfer or articulate implicitly the splitting of the ‘whole of action’ into different components (‘intentional’ and ‘operative’), but focus exclusively on the second component and prescind from the first one!

Since the end of the 19th century, such a differentiation, or splitting, of action was a fundamental and implicit moment of the Taylorist model for the reorganization of industrial labour, including all the power differentials between the participating subjects that was made possible by the social division of labour. In the years that followed, the Taylorist propositions were taken over and ‘transformed’/transported into learning/teaching devices by Behaviorists, together with the implied/facilitated ‘power shift’ between the different acting subjects via the social division of labor. Since then, this splitting of the ‘whole of action’ and the reductive focus on only one particular moment of action – the ‘How’ of action, the operative, procedural components – has been adopted (uncritically) by all dominant successor theories in the 20th century.9

The power shift made possible by the splitting of action helps educators and learning theoreticians get rid of certain practical and theoretical problems, but it burdens practitioners and theoreticians with several others; especially in the dominant educative setting of schooling. A classic example here is the issue of ‘motivation’ (posted from the ‘outside’ or better: from ‘above’), which, in this practical and theoretical context, articulates the ‘problem’ of how to ‘convince’ or force subjects to do what they – supposedly - should do, without discussing with them the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of this doing, without taking into account the subjectivity of either the learning subject or the teaching subject! This routine alienation hovers over the entire 20th century like a ghost, as a contradiction that governs all organized learning/teaching settings in our societies.

But again, the stubborn insistence of dominant theories of learning on only the ‘how-aspect’ of our learning/action is not just a theoretical reduction (or confinement) to be corrected through better formulation. Rather, it is grounded in several preexisting practical premises of dominant theorizing, where learning is conceived as only what manifests in very concrete educative settings, that is, in schooling. Another practical premise is – once more – the fact that social sciences (psychology) are serving power by answering only the questions posed by power, questions that demand ‘technical’ knowledge about how to govern, how to control subjects’ action. (This servility is considered and discussed as

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9 Against this background, it is more than understandable that Klaus Holzkamp (1993) speaks about a successful “methodological Behaviorism,” especially within its successor theories, which supposedly were ‘evolutions’ against Behaviorism.
‘scientific neutrality’.) Here, social sciences are supposed to uncritically reproduce the confinements included in the societal demands made of the learning/teaching subject – as if human potentialities were nothing more than the performance or execution of such demands. Such biased theorizing is not just a particularly bad theory; in fact, it articulates real experiences of millions of us (teachers and learners), who have to act under the confines of the dominant social order. It is not a bad theory; actually, it is a theory limited in a very particular way; it is a theory that starts with an appropriate observation of how things are, how subjects are acting under very particular historical-societal circumstances, but then converts this correct observation into a construct of how things generally are, or should be!

The question that emerges here is this: since when is it the duty of theorizing only to dress in better, i.e. scientific, clothes all that appears to us in our experiences? Such an understanding would convert theory to an additional layer of clothes, fabricated of impressive, scientific words and placed upon the surface of my experience. Such an approach, such a theory cannot be judged merely as good or bad. Rather, it makes much more difficult all attempts of human beings at understanding their world, at learning and acting in their world with the help of theories. The praxis of learning becomes more difficult with this kind of theorizing learning - the learning individuals are now doubly burdened: if they want to access the essence of all that is happening around them and is experienced by them, they have to penetrate not only the layer of their experience, but also the layer above it, the layer of ‘scientific language’.

Therefore, critique cannot be reduced to a mere theoretical deconstruction (though extremely necessary as ‘immanent critique’); rather, it has to become a practical critique as well - a critique of the theoretical praxis of social scientists. Such a practical critique of theoretical praxis has to be applied in two directions. Firstly, towards how we social scientists are trying to formulate theories which contain allegedly neutral, scientific, technical knowledge about only the How of learning of other subjects, while accepting uncritically the restrictions of/in our own praxis – as wage-labored employees. Secondly, the critique has to be directed towards our praxis as social scientists, who - through our work and in order to avoid endangering our own social positions - are making it more difficult for other subjects to learn to get to know their world (and themselves in this world), but also to change it.
VI. The Autonomy of Learning - Beyond the Schooling Mode

The complicity between theorizing education/learning in formal educative practices and the dominant social order derives from the uncritical acceptance of educational theories to deliver *tech-knowledge* (learning and teaching theories) only on the *How*, on the procedures of learning, in order to maintain the educative process as it is, with its dual goal of teaching *and* excluding learners. In the end, this tech-knowledge is a mere lubricant for the power-saturated educational machine, with the individual as unit of analysis; it does not question the dominant arrangements of these educative practices (e.g. teaching as an inter-personal procedure *in* a classroom).

Through such (theoretical/practical) ‘devices’, the dialectic between praxis and theory is reduced to a simple sequence or string of succession: first practice, then theory – or vice versa. This ‘principle of simplification’ (with its popularity far beyond educational settings) relies on and promotes a technocratic self(mis)understanding of the social sciences as social engineers and neutral servants of the dominant status quo. As social engineers, we are supposedly neutral and – hopefully - efficient problem solvers.10 This restriction of action to its procedural aspects (the ‘How’) is a consequence *and* a precondition for the standpoint of a neutral and technocratic servant of power.

This very popular self(mis)understanding of our disciplines as neutral and technocratic is quite useful in ignoring that we are part of the problem we claim to address - not just part of its solution. However, if we do not want to serve such a ‘pedagogy of assimilation’ uncritically, if we want to break up with such complicity and want to contribute to a “pedagogy of dissent” (or resistance; C. T. Mohanty 2003), we have to rethink both sides: educative practices and theorizing learning. In short, we have to restore the dialectical unit of praxis/theory.

A quite obvious place to start our reflection and to reclaim the autonomy of learning would be to remind ourselves that every action is comprised not only of some procedural aspects (about the *how* to execute, to accomplish, to carry out the action), but also of moments that concern the *What* and the *Why* - the content and the intentions of the action. Reclaiming the autonomy of learning for the developing subject thus means reclaiming not only control over participation in the process, the *How of learning*, as it is emphasized, for example, by modern theories about self-regulated learning. The autonomy of learning also consists of

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10 Beyond the obvious political/ethical critique for not giving subjects the opportunity to participate in determining the content of their learning, we also see this in arrangements where subjects are forced to learn under a confining regime, which hinders them to apply (meaning: to use and to develop) all of their human potentials by confining their action to only some aspects of it.
participation in identifying the relevant content of learning - the What of the action – as well as its social and subjective meaning (the Why of action/learning).

VII. Social Movement Learning

The self-misunderstanding that is articulated in the reduction of action/learning to some of its operative aspects, and in the acceptance of the internalization of a semantic variety as the core method for learning is more easily questioned if we take into consideration learning/transformative practices beyond the schooling mode. A social practice we can use here is activist praxis in social movements. To be more precise, we will have to talk about the learning dimensions in/of social movements (which could be named social activism learning). Here, the learning dimensions focus on people’s lives, the (social) struggles to improve and gain control over the conditions of their lives; this includes resistance against domination and ruling relations (Foley 1999).

Clearly, learning in such a conception is part of a collective changing of corresponding social conditions and relations - not as static (id)entities, but as dynamic relatedness. These changes are not (only) a particular educational scope or aim but are also an epistemological effect of the practice/learning in social movements. My learning helps me to change my positioning in the web of complex and contested social practices. My standpoint in these practices is being changed with the help of my learning/practice. My learning happens, is made possible by the collective changing of our relationship towards knowledge and social reality and thus towards our understanding of this knowledge and reality, with all the content, questions, and subjects involved.

In traditional settings, it is decided in advance and ‘somewhere else’ who is to teach and who is to learn – also what and why. Similarly, it is determined in advance who is to change and who is to facilitate or enforce the change and its direction. In contrast, in Social Movement Learning – as in all learning dimensions that conceptualize learning as participation in social practices – ‘things’ are simultaneously much easier and much more complicated. Learning as part and participation in activism is a particular dimension in/of these social practices, rather than the neutral application of educational techniques. The very process of learning includes all aspects/moments that are ostracized in dominant learning practice/theory (in the schooling mode of learning). In such a context, learning – as content and as process - is not something to be imposed upon

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11 Other expressions could be: Activist Learning, Learning and Struggle, Emancipatory Learning, Radical Adult Education, Critical Social Learning (see e.g. R. Gouin 2009).
Learning is not a technical process of instruction with fixed subject positions.

The *What is the (learning) problem?* (or the ‘learning issue’), *Why and for Who it is so problematic?* is an integrative moment of the ongoing stream of action, of the genuine learning process and not some ‘technical’, operational detail or characteristic of this process. Identifying the ‘learning problematic’, the hindrances in/for my ongoing action which I - or we – want to overcome with our learning, is itself a decisive moment of this action – though “often not recognized as learning” (Foley 1999, 66).

If we account for the dominant learning conceptions, practices, and experiences of subjects (through the schooling mode, ‘academism’, ‘from above’), the task of a ‘subjective identification of the learning dimensions/aspects’ is clearly easier said than done. Moreover, it has to be conquered: learning subjects have to liberate space and legitimation for its articulation against the dominant consciousness and self-understanding!

Learning in such a comprehensive conception is not merely a clear, unambiguous technical instrument ready to be applied to overcome a hindrance in my action, to solve a problem. If we do not want to confine learning to its operative aspects, but rather want to include them as aspects of a *learning problematic* we must overcome through further action/learning, then the very perception, the sense and awareness of what is problematic in and for my action, becomes a constitutive moment of my learning process.

The difficulty of identifying and recognizing relevant learning dimensions in our action becomes even bigger, if we do not want to confine our learning to *ad hoc* or ‘practical’ issues in our ongoing stream of action. This is so less because of some increased complexity, but rather because of the contested, conflictual, or even contradictory social field that is delineated by questions about *Who* has to learn and *Why* – and *Who does not*!

*Learning* (as a particular action, a social practice) encompasses distinct practices of the learning *subject*, before and after this learning becomes a causal effect of the (un/successful) didactic practices of the educator. This perspective implies that learning is a *social relation* – with distinct, accountable subject positions – and not a fixed technical or mechanical procedure with causes and effects. Learning is thus not just a detour, a work-around ("*Lernschleife*", Holzkamp, 1993), through which I can overcome an obstacle in my actual action. Furthermore, my learning may require the reconfiguration of *my* action as a whole; *simultaneously* it contributes to the reconfiguration of the stream of action and therefore of social practice. Learning does more than retro-act upon the ongoing action by facilitating its continuation (quasi as an applied technique, a neutral tool, which otherwise does not touch this action). Rather, learning re-
determines what the ‘whole of action’ actually is, and also who the learning subject(s) actually are or have to be. Thus, (activism) learning potentially re-constitutes the learning subject, him/herself. Learning in/of social movements produces different knowledge, needs and poses different questions, requires and makes possible different subjects and subjectivities, and seeks and has to find different solutions (Cox & Flesher Fominaya 2009).

**Learning (in) solidarity**

*Social Movement learning* is a privileged field for the reflection on those issues that are not allowed to exist in dominant educational practices/arrangements and thus cannot even become issues of their theorizing and intervention. As we have seen, in dominant educational practices there is no room for questions about the *What* and the *Why* of my doing/learning. It is thus impossible for these things to become questions for my *learning* – let alone for reflections about *teaching* these issues!

In the following section, the *claiming* and *restoring* of the *autonomy of learning* is discussed with exemplary reference to practices that support a refugee shelter in the center of Thessaloniki. This shelter was – at that time - one of the few structures that hosted refugee families in Greece and the only one in the city. It was run by an NGO and had received state support since 2000, when, in early 2010, the responsible Greek Ministry of Health stopped the funding and the administrators of the NGO, which was later proven to be corrupt, left. About 80 refugees, all families with young children, were in jeopardy of being left out in the street. In this situation, local groups resisted the closing of the shelter through a collaboration of the group *Anti-Racism Initiative*, with voluntary work and material support from hundreds of citizens and social organizations, and the mobilization and self-organization of the shelter’s residents. Not only was the management taken over, but new structural moments for the self-organization of the shelter (such as regular house-plenary meetings) were implemented - while continuing to demand accountability from the State! Amidst adversary policies, the shelter became a practical model of social solidarity – and thus also a thorn in several bureaucratic sides. Refugees and asylum seekers were not mere objects of ‘refugee administration’ (and ‘social policy’), but made their presence felt in this space, managing their own home, establishing links in the neighborhood and with other organizations, and participating actively in activities all over the city.

From the beginning, this singular self-organized refugee shelter has fought against all odds to stay open! There are many groups and persons with the particular ‘interest’ of waiting for solidarity to weaken and for the refugees’ many traumatic problems and experiences to produce situations and conflicts that
would enable local fascist groups to mobilize ostensibly ‘enraged neighbors’ against the shelter.

Based on the underpinnings of solidarity movements and the aim of a collective solidarity socialization („solidar-kulturellen Vergesellschaftung”; W. Fritz Haug 1991), we could characterize these social practices methodologically as “real-experimental” initiatives (Real-Experiment, Haug 1991). Such activist initiatives consist necessarily and always of two moves: transformative interventions and (self-)education, i.e. self-transformation or learning.

Learning solidarity presupposes and enhances the doing (application, organization) of solidarity. The process of learning solidarity presupposes and enhances the content of solidarity; and vice versa. Participation in this real-experiment in solidarity-socialization influences all participants, albeit differently depending on their social position, their subjectivities, and their evident and latent needs. The few examples that follow are from the perspective of the ‘locals’: volunteers, including refugees who have lived in town for a longer time, who participated in the solidarity practices with their particular resources (language skills, crafts, etc.) and who refer to their own potential learning challenges (as we called them), i.e. the learning dimensions, from the perspective of their own participation in these social practices. The very starting point of this initiative made necessary a great deal of social practices with their implied learning challenges for the involved participants. It was not an activity, a ‘move’ that followed a cool and thorough means-ends analysis and came to the result that the endeavor was ‘manageable’ with the already existing ‘means’ of the group (knowledge, capacities, resources) - on the contrary! The very starting point of the initiative itself included a great deal of learning that could not yet be foreseen at that moment of beginning.

We can reconstruct from the correspondence between the supporting-group-participants that one of the very first big action/learning challenges after the decision to ‘keep the shelter open’ was the collective organization of the myriad of actions and necessities required - on the basis of existing resources (including knowledge and political positions). Typical questions in the correspondence are simple, yet complex:

- What are we doing now? Probably we should define groups. But which ones are the most important?
- How can we ‘demarcate’ self-organization in an institution like this shelter?

It is not possible here to list all action problems identified as learning problematics. Rather, to give an impression of the variety of the field, we will pick a few examples of subjective challenges from the (mostly electronic)
correspondence between the volunteers. It is important to stress that every one of these examples hides, engulfs in itself, a myriad of challenges and prompts for the involved subjects:

- Accompanying refugees to their necessary contacts with authorities (police, urban administration, ministries, lawyers)
- Giving interviews to television, radio broadcasts, newspapers and journals
- Attending the meetings of the municipality council to advocate for things needed for the shelter
- Demanding and mediating for the rights of refugees in the public services domain (e.g. hospitals)
- How to write letters to companies, factories, schools, authorities etc. asking for job opportunities for the refugees, material support for the shelter, enrollment in school for children, and so on.
- How to deal collectively with issues that are laden with shame guilt, such as treating lice or scabies
- How to re-connect electric power– or how to intervene with the Public Electric Company to avoid service disruptions because of unpaid bills

As broad as the learning challenges are, the same breadth exists for potential ‘learning outcomes’ for the volunteers, for example:

- New knowledge
- Subjective development (e.g. in gender issues) – herein also identity formation
- Relationship skills
- Civic learning (e.g. competent and confident acting in town hall meetings)
- Getting to know one’s own society and its inter-connectedness

In summary: The volunteers usually do not recognize and identify the ‘problematic’ aspects in/for their action as potential ‘learning dimensions’ in/for their solidarity action – actually, it is very difficult to ‘switch’ and to see them as ‘opportunities for learning’. Usually, the learning dimensions ‘appear’ to the subjects:

- as actual action hindrances,
- as questions without (immediate) answers,
- as conflicts, contradictions
- as questions about what is right/wrong,
- as questions about what is important, what is not,
- as questions about who our comrades and who our ‘enemies’ are
- what is needed (for/from me): knowledge, faculties, abilities
• what are the impediments or disruptions and why?

Consequently, questions like *What is the (learning) problematic for me/us* have multiple faces and facets; it requires a lot of effort to get a subjective awareness of the action problems as learning challenges and dimensions – potentially *against* one’s own experiences and one’s own self-understanding. As stated previously, learning demands potentially also the removal or erosion of existing ‘learning-sediments’; it necessitates real un-learning of dominant social learning barriers (G. Mergner 1999), but it also demands socially creative, innovative solutions.

We have to consider a variety of potential difficulties that make it hard for involved subjects to identify learning dimensions in their action problems. In conclusion, we offer three examples of such difficulties in identifying learning challenges:

• There is an ‘objective’ difficulty during stressful every-day activities to exert additional effort to identify ‘problematic issues’. This is even more difficult within a claim to proceed in a democratic way, which demands extra efforts in coordination and agreement.

• The dominant self-understanding about our own action as (technical, moral) ‘application’, rather than as ‘participation’ and also as ‘self-change’, adds to the difficulties of seeing potential learning challenges for us in our action.

• *Learning* is – probably because of the dominance of the schooling mode – also loaded with a smack of insufficiency, of an individual ‘deficit’ that requires ‘correction’. This aftertaste does not help ‘me’ as acting subject to identify learning challenges for my action; on the contrary, it burdens me with more work to overcome the obstacles in my self-understanding.

In reconstructing such difficulties, it is important to recognize the explanations one records through the analysis of ‘empirical material’ as an integrated whole, to think of them integratively. Doing so is a minimal step to avoid the acute danger of imposing some ‘diagnostic expertise’ (*Gutachten*) upon subjects – and thus of identifying (once more) an instance of individual ‘insufficiency’ and ‘deficit’ that needs to be corrected by an educator.

**Acknowledgement**

This paper attempts to bring together, to complement and put the theoretical arguments of my work on a ‘critical psychology of learning’ presented partially in various occasions during the last decade in a ‘comprehensive line’ (see Dafermos & Marvakis
I am very grateful to Eva Strohm and Charles Tolman for their more than generous help in making the English palatable.

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Against *bisected* learning

Ernst Schraube and Athanasios Marvakis

**Abstract**

As modern society developed, educational theory and practice has been informed by a concept of learning that divides content and method, the “what” and “how” of the act of learning. The “what” of learning is largely taken out of the hands of the learners, while their possibilities of participation in defining the process are confined to questions of “how” to learn. Based on critical action and learning theory, we analyze in this article how such bisection of learning undermines substantially the unfolding of the human potential to learn and present an approach as well as basic concepts toward a new non-bisected language of learning.

**Keywords**

dichotomy between subject matter and method of learning, subjectivity and learning, agency, persons’ conduct of everyday life, student-centered learning, problem-oriented project learning, situated and participatory learning.

Seen from a history of science perspective, one of the most important achievements of Critical Psychology consists in developing a theoretical and methodological conception able to articulate the person in their internal relationship to the world. Human beings are not regarded as abstract, isolated individuals, but understood as unfolding their everyday life in relation to nature, culture, technology and society – an entanglement where the concept of agency is pivotal. Human beings do not only experience and act *in* the world but, on the basis of the human psyche’s particular qualities and the specific agency this facilitates, they *create* their social world in and through which they live their lives. Such a conceptual approach allows a comprehensive and integrative view of the vital dimensions in human life including the requisite preconditions for producing and appropriating the everyday world. The human ability to learn represents an essential moment in agency, a prerequisite for production as well as
appropriation. Due to the societal world’s openness and artificiality, learning – like all other dimensions of human agency – is distinguished by its openness with regards to the subject matter. Klaus Holzkamp refers to this substantial indetermination as one of the fundamental characteristics of human learning and describes it as “autarkic learning” (autarkesLernen) (1983).

Learning is initiated, above all, by the fractures and contradictions in individual and social contexts of agency. Such fractures and contradictions are nothing unusual; they have always been part and parcel of the conditions of human life. However, since the twentieth century, its extent has changed. Today, we are confronted with discrepancies which have created an ominous imbalance in the entire human context of action. The degree of this danger has been recognized in the social and human sciences, as well as the natural sciences (see e.g. Anders, 2018/1980; Haraway, 2016; Latour, 2017; Papadopoulos, 2018, or Warning to Humanity: A Second Notice, Ripple, et al. 2017, a declaration signed by over 15,000 scientists). Evidently, we have arrived at a historic point where we need to fundamentally rethink ourselves and the local and global social relations we have produced. Aside from many other things, such rethinking also requires reflecting on the way we understand learning. As modern society developed, educational theory and practice has been informed – and still is, even today – by a concept of learning that divides content and method, the “what” and “how” of the act of learning. The “what” of learning is largely taken out of the hands of the learners, while their possibilities of participation in defining the process are confined to questions of “how” to learn. We will argue that such bisection of the activity of learning undermines substantially the unfolding of the human potential to learn – something we can no longer afford in future society. Tomorrow’s society requires an educational theory and practice which contributes to cultivating a participative and problem-oriented learning, including the ability to independently identify relevant problematic issues in the contemporary world, analyze them in their contexts, and work with them critically and constructively.

**Bisected learning: Its problematic and concepts to overcoming it**

Despite all critique down the years, the model of transfer and internalization of knowledge is still widespread in educational theory and practice. Learning is regarded as accumulating and internalizing information about the external world, and a transfer of knowledge from a teacher to a learner, with the teacher defining the content of that knowledge. In this model, what the teacher teaches is what the learner learns – a notion actually distorting the practical reality of learning.
Learning is equated and confused with teaching, and such a “teaching-learning short circuit” (Holzkamp, 1993) systematically ignores the learners’ subjectivity and their world of experience and agency, setting the teacher as the decisive subject of learning. The transfer model is not problematic because it assumes teaching and learning are in some way related. Rather, the difficulty lies in assuming this connection is based on the principle of transmission, with knowledge or skills transmitted one-to-one from a knower/skilled person to someone without that knowledge/skills. This process is often explained through a mechanical analogy, where the mind of the learner is seen analogously to a computing machine with an input of information. Such information is then stored in the memory and, when needed, can be called up as an output. But learners are not machines. They are living beings who are, for all intents and purposes, the decisive subjects of the learning activity. The learning process is driven by their preconceptions, questions and curiosity, and – against the background of their lives – the content taught is very differently grasped and experienced. In other words, the subject matter of learning initiates very diverse learning processes in the learners. Any theory of learning which does not regard learning as the activity of the learner, but sees it as an isolated function, causally determined by teaching and construed as disconnected from the learner’s subjectivity and conduct of everyday life, falls short of its aim. In the transfer model, the fundamental problem is that the content of learning can only be viewed as determined by the teacher. The subject matter components of the learning process are blocked off from the learners, the “what” and “why” of learning is pregiven for learners and their possibility of influence limited to the “how” of learning, to method and performance. We refer to a theory and practice of education which reproduces such a systematic division and disconnected juxtaposition of the “what” and “how” of the learning activity as bisected learning. Rather than implying that teachers do not also have a responsibility for the content of learning, this term highlights how genuine learning (as discussed in more detail below) presupposes the possibility of learners to dispose not solely over the “how” of learning, but also the “what”. In bisected learning, the activity of learning is taken out of the hands of the learners and reduced to a dependent act, purely operational and performative, where the full potential of the human ability to learn cannot come into its own. Not only does this spoil the pleasure of learners in learning, but – as mentioned above – due to the social challenges we are facing today, we cannot afford this kind of systematic constraint on the human being’s ability to learn. But what exactly is the distortion in bisected learning? How could it be overcome and an alternative language of learning be developed?
In the tradition of Critical Psychology, learning (as already indicated) is not understood as a transfer and internalization of knowledge, but as a crucial moment in human agency and the creation of the societal world. Moreover, this moment also includes developing an access to as well as to appropriate the world, created by us as human beings through our own actions. In brief, learning is an integral part of persons’ conduct of everyday life including the development of their knowledge and agency (Dreier, 2015; Schraube & Marvakis, 2016). Based on a theory of agency and social practice, it becomes clear why learning would, as an isolated function of the mind and a purely individual process, remain underexposed. Learning is a core dimension of human action in societal context. It represents a contextual as well as a cross-contextual activity not only taking place in classrooms or lecture halls, but at very different places in social life. It is an activity which can only properly be grasped in and from its connection with the learners’ conduct of everyday life, which encompasses various psychological functions. Yet learning is not just an essential dimension in persons’ conduct of life, it is also constituted by it. Learning has its origin in the fractures and contradictions, problems, issues and dreams in our everyday activities and conduct of life, and represents a process not only based on particular learning stances, a certain cyclicalities as well as daily routines, rhythms and habits, but one that can also be actively structured, arranged and organized by the learner on the basis of their conduct of life.

Through this approach, then, learning can be grasped as theoretical and practical ways of discovering the world which are anchored in our conduct of everyday life – as a constantly ongoing process, more or less coincidental and unintended, and described as “osmotic learning” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979) or “incidental learning” (Holzkamp, 1993). In a certain sense, we can hardly avoid constantly learning – for example, simply by strolling a city’s streets, we get to know the city, even when that was not our principal intention. But learning can also be a deliberate, planned activity, an intentional process described accordingly as “intended learning” (Holzkamp, 1993) or “learning labor” (Rubinstein, 1977/1946). In this case, the starting point for the process lies in problems of human activity, in conflicts or breakdowns of understanding and it takes in the act of learning a characteristic form. An example would be a person who cannot windsurf, but would like to (i.e., this not-being-able-to poses a conflict in everyday activity), and so initiates the intention to learn.

Rather than incidental and intended learning being totally independent processes, they are two sides of the same coin and may even appear together in an act of learning (Maiers, 2019). Every human activity is imbedded in the

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1 Or with the words of Sergei Rubinstein: “Thus, there exist two forms, or to be more precise, two methods of learning and two forms of activity, which lead to the
subject’s concrete needs and reasons, and so each learning activity also has an intentional dimension. The intentionality may not be explicit, and need not necessarily be properly clear to learners themselves. Even when I tell myself that I am doing something without any definite intention – enjoying life and the journey is its own reward – this particular action is still first set in motion by an intention. The other way around, intended learning may also include accidental and incidental elements discovered quite by chance or appearing during the process – for instance, where a coincidental situation enables you to first fully grasp something clearly. Incidental and intended learning are analytical concepts accentuating different forms of the learning activity. In a more or less pronounced way, all learning activities are entangled in the learner’s intentions – whereby here intentions are not thought of in individualistic terms, as something in the subject, but as situated and as something which unfolds in and through the relationship between subject and world.

Learning is distinguished, then, by its more or less explicit intentional character. For this reason, learning is not simply a procedure, operation or activity, but an action. Learning not only has its roots in everyday action, but itself represents a particular form of action – and this is why one can rightly talk of the act of learning.

When we observe the process of human action in more detail, we notice four basic elements. (1) An element of content – the “what” of the action (for example, I need to go to the local market to buy something), (2) groundedness, the “why” of the action (e.g., I need something to eat). These two dimensions of the act, both more related to content, give the action a particular direction, creating the basis for (3) the more methodological, operative and performative elements, and the question of “how” the subject will put the action into practice (e.g., how will I go to the market? Which route? Walking or by bike?), and finally (4) an evaluative element, assessing the action and whether what it initiated was also achieved (e.g., I actually arrived at the market and could buy some food).

For analytical purposes, these four elements of the basic structure of every action can be distinguished from each other, and each considered individually. Nonetheless, in terms of the action itself, they form a logical unit. Given their internal coherence, they cannot be understood psychologically if they are separated from one another. It would make no sense to imagine an action without an element of content, since without a ‘what’ there would never be a “why”, and

acquisition of new knowledge and abilities. The one of them is addressing specifically its goal, which is the appropriation of these knowledge and abilities. The other one has the mastery of these knowledge and abilities as its result, by realizing other/different goals” (1977/1946, p. 741, translation by the authors).
without a “what”, the “why” and “how” would be left totally up in the air. Consequently, it would no longer be possible to talk of a real action in any meaningful way.

In action theory, this unit has been described in detail as, for example, in the work of Anthony Giddens. “Action,” he emphasizes, “does not refer to a series of discrete acts combined together, but to a continuous flow of conduct” (1979, p. 55). He describes the structure of the subject’s flow of action as a unity of components of content (“intentions”, “motives” including “reasons, why they act as they do”), methodological and performative elements as well as elements of “reflexive monitoring” (1979, p. 56ff; 1984, p. 3ff).

This fundamental structure of action applies equally to the activity of learning. Since, due to its intentional character, it represents a specific form of action, the learning process is also constituted by these four basic components. As mentioned above, although distinguishable analytically, in psychological terms these necessarily form a unit and only constitute a distinct act of learning as a totality. Consequently, the idea of learning as an activity where the learners can only relate to the “how” and not the “what” and “why” is conceptually nonsensical – and also illustrates why the influence of the learner on the subject matter is so decisive. Bisected learning undermines the practice of learning, and with it the actual unfolding of the human ability to learn.

In the history of learning theory, the problematic nature of the dichotomy of subject matter and method, as well as the insight into the analytical unity of these elements, is far from unknown. Klaus Holzkamp, for example, emphasized the vital importance of the learning problem and the learner’s influence on the elements of content in the learning process. Learning does not simply start when teachers place learning demands on the learners. Demands to learn only turn into a learning act when learners consciously adopt such demands as a learning problem, and they make sense for the learners themselves. The roots of learning lie in the learner’s formulation of the content of the problem (1993, p. 183ff).

Over 100 years ago, John Dewey also described the internal connection between the “what” and “how” of learning, arguing for integrating the dimension of the subject matter democratically into educational practices. Against the background of a dualist model of human being and society, widely accepted at the time, he recognized how this also reproduced a separation of subject matter and method in educational practice. In contrast, he put the case for connecting the “subject matter and method with each other” (2008/1916, p. 145), and stated: “The idea that mind and the world of things and persons are two separate and independent realms – a theory which philosophically is known as dualism – carries with it the conclusion that method and subject matter of instruction are separate affairs ... The notion of any such split is radically false” (ibid., p. 145).
For Dewey, the concept of experience provided the key to understanding the unity of “what” and “how” in learning. He regarded experience as the fundamental basis of learning, and so this was where he located his critique of the separation of subject matter and method. “Reflection upon experience,” Dewey notes, “gives rise to a distinction of what we experience (the experienced) and the experiencing – the how. When we give names to this distinction, we have subject matter and method as our terms ... This distinction is so natural and so important for certain purposes, that we are only too apt to regard it as a separation in existence and not as a distinction in thought” (ibid., p. 147). The process of learning is not based on combining subject matter and method as separate elements, but on experience as a unity in movement. “Experience,” he explains, “is not a combination of mind and world, subject and object, method and subject matter, but is a single continuous interaction of a great diversity (literally countless) of energies” (ibid., p. 147). Consequently, Dewey also fiercely criticizes the “evils in education that flow from the isolation of method from subject matter” (ibid., p. 148).

Hence, overcoming dualistic models and systematically integrating the learner’s own experience, problems and actions represents a crucial step in developing learning theory. This also clearly shows why the central subject of the learning activity is not the teachers but the learners (which does not mean that the activity of teaching is not important for learning, as we explain below). Over the last years, this fact has been increasingly acknowledged in educational research, and the discussion is ongoing over a shift in perspective and whether the focus in research should not be realigned from the teacher to the learner. In this context, concepts such as “student-centered learning” are gaining importance. The question then arises of how far these modes of thought which are trying to include the subjectivity of learners in understanding the process of learning actually succeed in overcoming bisected learning.

**Bisected learning: In “student-centered learning” as well?**

Not only have the weaknesses in the traditional understanding of learning been recognized in learning theory, but also in educational policy. For some years now, there has been agreement on the European level that “student-centered learning” (SCL) is a decisive principle in improving the quality of teaching and learning. In 2010, the European Ministers in charge of Higher Education issued a declaration stating: “We call upon all actors ... to foster student-centered learning as a way of empowering the learner in all forms of education” (EHEA, 2010, p. 2). Here, then, learners are no longer passive recipients of information, but
instead are to be taken more seriously, with their engagements and actions, differences and needs, and ought to be given the opportunity of actively shaping their learning processes including the education practice. The European Students’ Union paper on the current state of SCL notes that: “Conventional learning ... tends to consider students as passive receptors of information, without consideration of the need to actively participate in the learning process” (ESU, 2010, p. 8). In contrast, student-centered learning enables “students to shape their own learning paths and places upon them the responsibility to actively participate in making their educational process a meaningful one” (ibid., p. 9).

Such a movement towards systematically integrating learners in the process of learning including the development of educational practice sounds convincing. But it also harbors new pitfalls. Learning can be understood as solely individualistic affair of the learners, a consumer product subject to the logic of the market, where the particular significance and general social responsibility of teaching is pushed into the background, which then only appears as an accessory to learning. More than almost any other writer, Gerd Biesta has analyzed these dangers in detail. He writes of how a new language of learning can lead to a “learnification” (2013, p. 62ff) of educational practice, above all when integrated into learning-teaching relations shaped by the economics of neo-liberalism. In such a situation, the learner is turned into a consumer, and the educational institution into a service provider whose task is to offer the learners what they “need”. Biesta explains: “One of the main problems of the new language of learning is that it allows for a re-description of the process of education in terms of economic transaction, that is, a transaction in which (i) the learner is the (potential) consumer, the one who has certain needs, in which (ii) the teacher, the educator, or the educational institution becomes the provider, that is, the one who is there to meet the needs of the learners, and where (iii) education itself becomes a commodity to be provided or delivered by the teacher or educational institution and to be consumed by the learner” (2005, p. 58).

The concept of student-centered learning incorporates the subjective dimension of learning and expands the potential for learners to influence the learning process. As yet, though, such opportunities for influence have been limited solely to the operative elements, to the “how” of learning. As a result, this notion of learning remains within a framework fixated on instruction reproducing bisected learning in a perfidious way – namely, through the students’ active participation.

The bisected nature of SCL becomes clear when we consider central concepts of this approach such as “self-regulated learning” (ESU, 2010, p. 11) and the call for “self-management”. Learners are now required to independently take on themselves the functions of regulating and managing the learning
process, though without disposing over the social power to decide on the subject matter of learning. Through this implicit bisection of disposing over learning as an act in its entirety, the learners are left only with the control of implementation and, in the final analysis, conforming and submitting to the given subject matter. Even the idea of “problem-based learning”, considered a key element in SCL (ESU, 2010, p. 11), is not about issues related to the subject matter itself which students identify independently and investigate in their learning process. Instead, this is a method of integrating current issues from the real world to facilitate more effective learning (ibid., p. 11) (This may be a good idea as such, but it certainly does not imply that learners have more control over the subject matter and determining the issues dealt with in the learning process).

So, this self-regulating and self-organized learning turns out to exclusively locate the learner with the implementation of learning, the regulation of the “how” of learning, and what one ought to and must learn. Rather than this self-regulation referencing the act of learning in its entirety, it solely refers to the self and controlling the moment of implementing the learning of content that is still prescribed. In this way, SCL is less a new subject-sensitive learning theory than a shift in educational disciplinary strategies within existing structures which, though, are distinguished by the particular modern characteristic of demanding and enabling more subjectivity from the learner. When discussing the new language of learning, Biesta concludes: “Learning has to a large extent become an instrument of domestication, ... if not ... an instrument of stultification” (2013, p. 70).

Biesta’s criticism does not include any suggestions on how to further develop the concept of learning. His focus is far more on rediscovering teaching (2017). The central task of teaching, he argues, is not a transfer of knowledge and an act of controlling the learners, but to open up possibilities for students to discover what it means to exist in and with the world as subjects developing their human potential. “Teaching ... is interested in the grown-up subject-ness of students,” he notes. The question is how to create “existential possibilities through which students can encounter their freedom, can encounter the ‘call’ to exist in the world in a grown-up way, as subject” (2017, p. 6). Hence, teaching does not imply understanding the learners as consumers, but as subjects, and this, as he explains, also means, “a refusal to accept any claim to incompetence, particularly if such claim comes from the student” (2017, p. 6). By emphasizing the learners’ “grown-up-ness” as acting subjects, Biesta indicates how, from his perspective, it would be possible to overcome bisected learning – and indeed he does argue for overcoming the dichotomy between subject matter and method: “The educational question is ... never just about how to do things, but always involves judgements about what is to be done” (2013, p. 8). He then emphasizes:
“A major problem with the language of learning ... is that it is a language of process, but not a language of content and purpose. ... It is a language that makes it more difficult to ask questions about content; it is a language that makes it more difficult to ask questions about purpose; and it is a language that makes it more difficult to ask questions about the specific role and responsibility of the teacher in the educational relationship” (2013, p. 127).

When Biestawrites against learning (2005; 2006), he is not fundamentally rejecting the idea of learning, but actually argues against a theory and practice of bisected learning. Even if he does not develop learning theory further, he is well aware that every theory of teaching always requires a concept of learning – and not only because teaching itself represents a learning process, but because teaching refers to learning and the idea of two mutually independent processes would be a fiction. “My critique of the politics of learning can itself be understood as an attempt at transgression,” Biesta writes, “I still want to be open to the possibility that learning can also work for the good ... The crucial question is where learning can work for us, rather than that we have to work for learning” (2013, p. 76). We now build on such an attempt to go beyond student-centered learning and show how, on the basis of Critical Psychology and an analysis of the particular form of learning from the standpoint of the learner, a language of learning could be imagined and developed beyond bisected learning.

**Participatory and problem-oriented learning: Theorizing learning from the standpoint of learners**

Initiated by the fractures and contradictions in the conduct of everyday life, the learning process – understood as an activity of the learners – steps out of the stream of everyday action and takes a detour or “learning loop” (Holzkamp, 1993), trying to attain the knowledge or skill we are lacking – and ultimately, if everything works out, expands our everyday action and conduct of life. This detour, which is itself, as described above, a particular form of action, represents the act of learning. As Holzkamp explains: “In general terms, learning is a key means of how I cope with life, and it always becomes relevant when I ... cannot come to grips with concrete problems in the stream of action in everyday life directly, but need to insert a learning loop, i.e., take the action problem as a learning problem. Viewed in this way, learning is directly aligned with my own interests in determining the conditions of my own life, through learning I want to and have to expand my access to the relevant aspects of my everyday world since only in this way can I handle my life and ... gradually reduce the constraints on my possibilities of life. In this context, my learning actions ... are expansively
grounded, i.e. motivated by the link between learning as discovering the world, expanding my ability to influence the conditions of my own life as well as increasing life quality” (Holzkamp, 1993, p. 445, translation by the authors). Since the subject matter of learning, which Holzkamp refers to as the “learning problem”, has its roots in the learner’s conduct of everyday life, it is subjectively constituted. However, this does not mean that the learning problem implies an individualistic concept, a variation of intrinsic motivation or something similar. Instead, the formulation of the learning problem’s content arises from the learner’s social and societal world of experience and action. Due to their subjective anchoring in the world, developing learning problems can (but does not have to) require dialogue with others. Such a dialogue is not just a means to grasp and refine learning problems more precisely, nor is it solely useful as learners themselves have their own limits and are caught in prejudices and common-sense modes of thinking. Instead, it is also needed since essential learning problems profoundly relevant to society may be located beyond the learner’s immediate horizon of experience and action (Haug, 2003, 2009).

The nexus of learning problems always implies a certain degree of transcending the immediate as well as expanding horizons, a fact that in today’s extremely complex local/global world gains a new significance. For that reason, the dialogue with teachers is certainly necessary for learners to identify and develop the learning problems. Here, though, it is crucial to distinguish between demands for learning and acts of learning. Learning demands do not automatically become a learning problem and so lead to the act of learning. Learners themselves have to decide that the learning problem makes sense for them, and see they actually have something to learn through the learning act. “Learning does not simply start of its own accord,” Holzkamp underlines, “when learning demands are placed on me by some third party; my learning can by no means be planned for me over my head by some responsible instances (such as teachers or school authorities). Learning demands are not by themselves already learning actions, but only become learning actions if I can consciously adopt them myself as a learning problem, which in turn at least presumes that I realize that there is something here for me to learn” (1993, p. 184f, translation by the authors).

For Rubinstein (1977/1946) too, the activity form “learning” does not rely primarily on accidental and/or individual initiatives and necessities for action (p. 740). Learning-labor – being a moment of participation – is for him always and in multiple ways interwoven and mediated, furthermore, it is supported by a “whole societal organization” (ibid., p. 740): “The learning process does not run spontaneously. It is realized through an educational process. Learning is the one side of a substantially social process of transformation/education. A double-sided process of transference and appropriation of knowledge” (ibid., p. 741, translation by the authors) (detailed discussion see Dafermos & Marvakis, 2011).
The insight that learning needs to be understood from the content entails putting learning theory the other way round. This step is a precondition in developing a concept of learning beyond bisected learning. From here we can rethink the particular form of learning as an action in its entirety and as an activity of the learners. Since Klaus Holzkamp’s theory of learning, unlike any other, offers a comprehensive and systematic account to such a conception, we take three key concepts in his theory as a basis to delineate the contours of an understanding of learning which integrates content, reasons, method and evaluation.

Learning stance and learning principles. When learners recognize a certain learning problem as their own and, for example, plan to learn how to windsurf, this always involves a change in and realignment of their conduct of everyday life. Learners re-arrange and re-organize their everyday life in relation to what they would like to learn, and develop principles to help them learn what they want to. Each diverse learning content requires a particular learning stance as well as certain learning principles. To learn to windsurf, for instance, I need to arrange my life at least to make some time for it so I can focus on learning, and also think of the principles for how I can best learn (for example, first trying to stand on a windsurfing board in water to develop a feeling for balance). Likewise, the intention of “wanting to study psychology” implies a certain learning stance and learning principles. These, though, will be different from “wanting to learn to windsurf”, probably more complex and comprehensive since I will become a “student” and “learning psychology” will be a central plank in my conduct of everyday life. The concepts of learning stance and learning principles address the question of “how” in learning and so, in a certain sense, also include processes of self-regulation and self-organization, but relate them to the learning content and envisage the learning stance and principles starting from the learning content. Holzkamp notes: “Certainly, learning principles are closely related to regulatory learning strategies, yet in contrast they are defined by their relation to the subject matter ... Hence, for example, the principle of ‘first practice slowly’ is the result of the meaning structures attached to playing the piano. ... To realize the meaning structures of ‘high jump’, or some similar sport, ‘first practice slowly’ would hardly be a suitable learning principle. ... Only in as far as I am clear myself about the particular learning principle to be realized for the specific learning content can the question even arise of appropriate regulatory learning strategies for the most favorable approach to the related action” (1993, p. 187, translation by the authors). The question of the “how” of learning, the particular learning stance and which learning principles and strategies are appropriate is thus determined by the learning content, the “what” of learning. However, the specific structure of the “how” of learning is also dependent on the
reasons for learning, the “why” of learning. With the concepts defensive and expansive learning, Holzkamp provides a language to reflect this connection in detail.

Defensives versus expansive learning. Just as in every human action, the act of learning also has reasons. Reasons for action are always “first person” reasons, i.e., they are always “my” reasons. For example, if I want to learn how to windsurf, then “I” have particular reasons for that (and not somebody else). This does not mean, though, that I have necessarily clearly elucidated each one for myself, or that there is only one reason. Moreover, my reasons may also be different from those of a friend who also wants to learn to windsurf. In his analysis of the subjective reasons leading to the act of learning, Holzkamp distinguishes between two characteristic patterns of reasons involved in identifying learning problems and pursuing the “detour” of learning – defensive and expansive reasons for learning.

Defensive reasons for learning are related less to the subject matter than keeping negative effects, encroachments and threats at bay, or defending the possibilities in life already achieved. For example, I want to learn to windsurf because I am bored on the beach and there’s nothing else to do (so warding off the feeling of boredom), or I want to study psychology so I can earn a lot of money later (a defense against the threat of possible poverty), or I learn because otherwise I can expect certain sanctions, or I take part in a course because I need to have attended it to complete my studies. Defensive learning is primarily directly by external factors and largely removed from the subject matter itself. As such, defensive constellations of reasons can even take the extreme of hiving off the learning problem altogether, leaving just a problem of action (without a learning action), as in for instance the question: “How can I pass an exam, whether I learn something in the process or not?”

In contrast, expansive reasons for learning are related to the learning content and the subject matter to be learnt. For example, I want to windsurf because I love the sea and imagine it must be fantastic planning across the water on a surfboard; or I am interested in people and their strange doings in the world, and so I’d like to study psychology to understand that better. In expansive learning, learners accept the anticipated efforts and difficulties involved in every act of learning since they assume that an increased access to the world will, at the same time, expand their own potential to influence relevant aspects of the world and lead to greater subjective life quality. In expansive learning, the learning process is not primarily directed to external demands, but to the factual necessities which emerge in the process of engaging with the content of the learning problem and the learning object, which is still partially inaccessible. “All learning (to overcome a learning problem),” Holzkamp explains, is
“directed to expanding access to the world and increasing influence on the world, in other words, the intention itself is ‘expansive learning’” (1996, p. 125, translation by the authors).

Defensive and expansive learning represent analytic concepts, i.e., rather than being concepts to externally classify or evaluate the learning process of others, they are a means of gaining an understanding of learning processes from the standpoint of the learners. The defensive and expansive reasons for learning are not mutually exclusive; both may be present in one and the same act of learning. The subjective constellation of reasons is critical in the decision on how something is learnt – whether done as fast as possible, or whether and how far I engage with and open myself to the learning object, in brief, which learning stance is taken, and which learning principles applied. The concepts defensive versus expansive learning clearly illustrates the importance of the “why” in the way the “how” of learning unfolds.

Expansive acts of learning are future-directed; learners want to be able to do something they were previously unable to achieve. This process of “not yet knowing/being able to” but “wanting to know/be able to” comprises the decisive movement in non-bisected learning, and it unifies the subject matter and methods. When John Dewey emphasizes that learning is about experiencing constructions which require new constructions and involves the expansion and new construction of pre-understandings, he is describing the structure of this movement (1997/1936). Holzkamp identified this process with the concepts affinitive and definitive learning phases (1993), since here the aim is to grasp and realize the connections and affinities in the learning problem.

Affinitive and definitive learning phases. As the crucial movement in the act of non-bisected learning, the affinitive learning phase starts from the learning problem and the point where we, in our everyday flow of action, have reached an impasse and so take the detour of learning; we attempt to focus on the matter, think ourselves into it and give ourselves the chance to gain traction in our understanding of it. Due to the still partial inaccessibility of the learning object, the process of opening up to it constantly leads to unforeseen difficulties. For this reason, learning cannot simply be successfully achieved by straight curriculum planning and linear pursuit of anticipated learning goals. Instead, making goal-directedness an absolute often leaves one caught up in just that one-sidedness, fixations, etc. which expansive learning seeks to overcome. Consequently, in genuinely productive expansive learning the goal-directed learning process always has to be supplemented by an affinitive learning movement in the contrary direction – an explorative movement of de-fixation, a gaining of distance and overview, withdrawal, reflection, etc. As anthropologist Tim Ingold (2016) also highlights, learning is more an “attentional” than an “intentional”
process. For Holzkamp, affinitive learning phases require “the absence of threat, stress and pressures, i.e. the possibility of trust and, above all (including all of these), peace and privacy” (1993, p. 485, translation by the authors). The definitive learning phase is the complementary process to the affinitive phase, and in it we center this openness, synthesize the essential from profusion, and take the learning problem to a new level – until new difficulties arise on this level making an affinitive learning phase necessary again. Hence, affinitive learning, including this interplay with definitive learning, is the decisive movement in the learning process. It is, as Holzkamp emphasizes, the “constitutive moment in a learning stance of expansively engaging with the object of learning” (1993, p. 481, translation by the authors). Without it, there can be no real learning, no creativity and innovative thought.

In Holzkamp’s theory of learning, the main focus is on elaborating the particular form of the act of learning as a process of the learners, and analyzing this in the educational context of present school practices, whereas he doesn’t explore much the act of teaching as well as the connection between learning and teaching. Learning, however, does not exclude teaching – quite the contrary, without learning there is no teaching, and without teaching there is no learning. Teaching can become nothing short of a prerequisite for affinitive learning and overcoming bisected learning. For this reason, we conclude by turning to the concept of the fluidity of learning and teaching and why learning in a non-bisected perspective also includes understanding the internal connection between learning and teaching.

The fluidity of learning and teaching as a fundamental element in affinitive learning. In educational institutions such as schools or universities, the relations between learning and teaching have a particular form and structure, and are seemingly activities clearly differentiated from one another and bound to specific groups of people. On the one hand, there is the activity of learning, and on the other the activity of teaching. Consequently, the relationship between learning and teaching can be described in terms of the functional positions (or work-related positions) of people acting: the learners become “pupils” or “students” and those teaching are then “teachers” or “professors”. Accordingly, Holzkamp and Biesta each focus in their work on one of these activities and, in a certain sense, that also makes sense – and not just because the person’s functional position reflects the reality of today’s educational practice. It also seems appropriate since human life in the modern world has become so complex that educational institutions have become essential, places where the knowledge and skills required for sustaining and developing social life are systematically taught and learnt.
However, a glance at the history of learning shows that not all learning conditions were structured in this way. The original basic form of pre-institutionalized learning as it crystallized in people’s conduct of life and everyday practice did not constitute the relationship of learning and teaching as functional, but as logical. The learning process of individual subjects is always a social process, and situated in relation to others, whereby it develops as a constant back and forth between learning and teaching in and between people. This fluidity of learning and teaching represents a fundamental element in affinitive learning and the nucleus of a productive and vital practice of learning (for more discussion on this, Marvakis, 2014; Schraube & Marvakis, 2016).

Holzkamp does not systematically analyze the relationship between learning and teaching. However, his concept of cooperative learning already describes key moments in the transition from the more fixed functional positions to the fluid back and forth of the logical positions of learning and teaching in expansive learning. “We [use the term] cooperative learning,” Holzkamp explains, “for interpersonal learning relations in which – in the interest of unhindered expansive learning – asymmetries concerning knowledge or skills of the participants are not removed, but always accessible and liable for justification through knowledge-seeking questions. Within this process, the better arguments seem no longer be bound to the more superior person, but can shift from person to person, but also within the person” (1993, p. 509, translation by the authors).

With the development of formal, institutionalized learning conditions and educational practices, the logical and fluid positions of learning and teaching were expanded by functional positions. This was undoubtedly productive as well, bringing together those, such as faculty at universities with highly-developed knowledge and skills as well as the task of research, with those keen to learn, and it harbors a new quality and potential of expansive learning processes. This new form, though, already has inscribed in it the danger of tending to shift to understanding learning as a transfer model, a danger only further intensified by the character of the teachers’ activities as work. What is the task of the well-paid teachers? To teach the students “something” – and already we are moving towards the trap of the teaching-learning short circuit and viewing learning as a transfer of knowledge and skills from the knowledgeable and skillful to the un-knowing and un-skillful.

Yet a more detailed look at learning conditions at schools and universities shows that the fluidity of learning and teaching is certainly still one form of learning today, if not the central form. Students asked in which situations they really learn something, emphasis how, through discussions among themselves and with teachers, and reciprocal questions and explanations, they think themselves into a subject-related problem and begin to understand phenomena in
their context and connectedness. Similarly, many teachers point out that they value teaching for precisely the reason that they are constantly learning from and with their students. In fact, one can find specific university learning practices especially designed to facilitate the fluidity of learning and teaching (such as particular seminars, workshops, conferences, etc.). Hence, even if not expressly referred to in these terms, the fluidity of learning and teaching is undoubtedly a real element in today’s learning conditions, and it indicates how the subject-matter of learning can gain a new quality of momentum in the reciprocal, cooperative process of learning and teaching. In this sense, the interplay of learning and teaching provides another crucial dimension in overcoming bisected learning.

The objection might be heard here that this all sounds well and good, presented with convincing arguments, yet it remains solely on the abstract level of theory and ideas. The truly decisive factor, such an objection might continue, is reality, educational practice and learning in educational institutions – and there learning is simply structurally bisected. One might then reply, this is indeed the case, but aren’t theories and ideas also part of educational reality, and our work on the concept of learning also one aspect of developing educational practice? Moreover, in the present educational conditions, haven’t there long been practices to overcome bisected learning? As teachers and education policy decision-makers are increasingly realizing, taking learners seriously also means providing space for their questions about the content of learning. As a result, growing numbers of educational institutions are developing models which hand the act of learning in its entirety to the learners – for example, through problem-oriented project learning, successfully used at schools and universities, where the learners independently chose their own learning problem and explore it together with others in groups. Such a model includes a variety of teaching arrangements to support the project work and expand the horizons of the learners (Andersen & Heilesen, 2015a, 2015b; Schraube & Marvakis, 2016). Even if such approaches are still rudimentary, educational practice does not take place in a vacuum, but is related to the social world. In the scientists’ declaration Warning to Humanity on the present state of our world, they write: “Time is running out … soon it will be too late to shift course away from our failing trajectory” (Ripple et al., 2017, p. 1028). The problems confronting society today require the unconstrained development of the human ability to learn, including the independent identification of problems and the ability to deal with them critically, constructively, and cooperatively. One almost might mourn the fact, but it seems not impossible that non-bisected learning is the future.
References


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Expansive and restricted learning: Pervasive binaries?

Klaus Nielsen and Jacob Klitmøller

Abstract
In this article, we question the value of using the concepts of expansive and restricted learning as analytical tools for understanding learning in everyday practice. From a delineation of how these dual concepts are developed in both Holzkamp and Engeström’s theoretical work, we derive the claim that the duality embedded in the use of these concepts tends to reduce our sensitivity to the complexity and the contradiction embedded in everyday life. Consequently, we suggest that future investigations need to examine critically how dichotomized concepts are produced as part of social practice.

Keywords
expansive and restricted learning, Engeström, Holzkamp, binaries

Several current theoretical approaches to issues of learning present themselves as binary oppositions. Examples include surface and deep learning (Biggs, 1993), experiential and cognitive learning (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994), authentic and inauthentic learning (Colaizzi, 1978), and restrictive and expansive learning (Engeström, 1987; Holzkamp, 1993). In this paper, we will take a closer look at restricted and expansive learning as an example of a strong binary opposition that is formulated within the framework of cultural historical activity theory and critical psychology respectively. We will show how this oppositional pair plays an even more significant role in discussions about learning and education today (see, e.g., Daniels, 2004; Engeström & Sannino, 2010; Fenwick, 2004; FitzSimons, 2003; Foot, 2001; Haigh, 2007; Hill, Capper, Wilson, Whatman, & Wong, 2007; Konkola, Tuomi-Gröhn, Lambert, & Ludvigsen, 2007; Pereira-Querol & Seppänen, 2009; Rasmussen & Ludvigsen, 2009; Tsui & Law, 2007).

In the first section, we take a critical stance towards the binary opposition contained in the concepts of restricted and expansive learning. These concepts
are grounded in theory surrounding Marxist notions of praxis as the origin of human consciousness and needs (e.g., Bernstein 1971; Sève, 1975). Inspired by Lave (2011), we will be argued that dialectic thinking is central in a Marxist understanding of praxis. This means that we need to focus on how social practice is produced and, as part of this question, ask how dichotomies are constituted in everyday life. In other words, we should focus on “(…) asking how each is part of the production of the other” (Lave, 2011, p. 36) rather than seeing dichotomies as consisting of differences. Ultimately, we should be cautious in using these dichotomies as analytical tools for evaluating practice.

The danger we see is that the analysis of practice, as it is guided by notions of expansive and restricted learning, risks neglecting issues of contradictions and social struggles when it uses two distinct ready-made categories, one of which is “bad” and the other “good.” Though we acknowledge the intent of critiquing practice, we fear that the employment of strong and persuasive dualistic categories, like categories of restrictive and expansive learning, risks neglecting the examination of the production and reproduction of those very categories in social practice. The questions we would like to ask are as follows: 1. What is the logic on which the binary opposition between restricted and expansive learning is founded? 2. What are the consequences when we use binary logic to understand specific practice? We acknowledge both Holzkamp and Engeström’s ambitions of critically challenging and changing social practice, but wish to discuss whether the conceptual tools they offer are up to the task. We have chosen Holzkamp and Engeström because both researchers use these categories in their academic work and because both are prominent scholars within, or drawing from, the tradition of cultural-historical activity theory.

In recent years, a growing sensitivity has developed to the kinds of theoretical and conceptual tools used by researchers within the social sciences (Herzfeld, 2004; Terrio, 1999). It has been argued that these concepts or theories are themselves the results of a cultural development and need to be critically analyzed as such (Fabian, 2014). Culture is seen through theories and concepts, and we would like to argue that it is problematic to think about educational culture through strong binaries like restricted and expansive learning. Holzkamp (1993) and Engeström (1991, 1998, 2003, 2008) developed their concepts of restrictive and expansive learning based on concepts that claim to be universal when they are applied to processes of change rather than seeing them as part of historical social practice. In the case of Holzkamp, the notion of inner motivation seems to be a universal entity of the individual, while in Engeström’s theory, consciousness is seen as an unproblematic universal unit of analysis, that legitimizes the division between what counts as restrictive (reproductive) learning and what counts as expansive learning. We will argue that these
concepts are not universal entities the researcher can use to legitimize the binary opposition between restrictive and expansive learning. Rather, they are part of a particular intellectual history (for a historical analysis, see Danziger, 1997). As outlined by Stallybrass and White (1986), Western intellectual history is in itself a product of a particular development closely related to the binaries between societies understood as either modern or traditional. According to Stallybrass and White (1986), modern intellectual history is dominated by strong binaries; symbolic polarities of high and low, official and popular, grotesque and classical, are examples of strong dichotomies (pp. 16–17). Stallybrass and White (1986) suggest that dualist theories separate subject and social world (individual metaphysics and the mechanisms of the social world) and that the two fundamental categories do not partake of one another, but instead are polar opposites. The consequence of this perspective is the neglect of their interdependence in turn suppresses their connections. Binary logic comes from and sustains a social hierarchy that involves the denial of any relationship between high and low (Lave, 2011, p. 166). The central argument in this paper is that, in a Marxist frame of understanding, the focus on dialectic thinking, social contradictions, historical analysis of social practice, and notions of social production provide us with the task of analyzing, rather than essentializing, dichotomies as a part of a political economy. A number of dichotomies will be outlined in this paper; however, due to space limitations, we will focus primarily on the dichotomy of expansive and restrictive learning.

In the following section, we will take closer look at the logic models that Holzkamp and Engeström, respectively, apply, when they legitimize the binary division between restrictive and expansive learning.

About restricted and expansive learning in Holzkamp’s perspective

One of the central persons addressing the binary of learning as either restricted (defensive) or expansive is the German critical psychologist Klaus Holzkamp. We argue that the dichotomies Holzkamp develops between expansive and restrictive learning are closely related to a particular critique of an institutional educational practice, where schools tend to monopolize a particular understanding of how learning is happening (see Haug, 2009, for a critique). Holzkamp developed a theoretical redefinition of how to understand psychology as a modern science, and it is in that context that we should understand his work about learning. Holzkamp reworked and theoretically extended central ideas in Leontiev’s understanding of psychology (Holzkamp, 1983; Tolman, 2009). One part of this work addressed the phylogenetic development of humans as a
premise for understanding human subjectivity. What is distinctively human, according to both Holzkamp and Leontjev, is the ability of humans to systematically produce and use tools (Holzkamp, 1983). The evolution of this ability is the premise for human society, for potentials for division of labour, for using language and developing higher processes of cognition, and, in phylogenetic development, transforming human existence from being dependent on nature to being dependent on society. As a consequence of this development, it is no longer possible for the individual to exist outside of society, the governing processes are no longer processes of evolution, but of collective and individual history. This means that the individual’s relation to the world is mediated by societal meaning structures (social organisation, physical objects, traditions, beliefs, attitudes, etc.), and this premise has important implications for how Holzkamp understands subjectivity. Being part of society provides the subject with possibilities or “action potency” (Handlungsfähigkeit) (Holzkamp, 1983). In trying to understand the subject, Holzkamp focusses on how societal practice presents itself as consisting of possibilities for the individual. Hence, the actions of the subjects are founded on the presuppositions made available by a particular societal-historical context. In Holzkamp’s perspective, the subject is always guided by what the person expects as contributing most to his or her life. Holzkamp’s psychology is, as one of his central concepts denotes, a psychology from the standpoint of the subject. Holzkamp argues that the world is always first and foremost experienced and understood from each person’s own standpoint and perspective (Holzkamp, 1991). It is from the development of the standpoint of subject that Holzkamp develops a critical stance to other parts of psychology (e.g., behaviourism, psychoanalysis, and cognitive psychology), claiming that these psychological positions tend to understand human subjectivity as an object rather than as subjects. It is important to emphasize that Holzkamp claims that his understanding of subjectivity is not a solipsistic understanding of the individual; rather, subjectivity should be understood as being social. It is based on this insistence on subjectivity that we turn to Holzkamp’s understanding of learning.

The problem Holzkamp addresses, and which causes him to apply the binary opposition of restrictive versus expansive learning, is what he calls “the learning problem.” According to Holzkamp (1993), the learning problem is “(…) the many contradictions, dilemmas, and problems in everyday life that do not require learning but can be resolved by direct action; they are, in this sense, non-specific action problems or coping problems” (p. 122). In Holzkamp’s perspective, we solve problems in everyday life; however, we do not think of these kinds of activities as learning. The issue is that in particular institutions (e.g., schools), we use the concept of learning when we solve problems; however,
when we are outside of school, and actively solving problems, we are just being active and coping with problems confronting us, and essentially not using the concept of learning for these activities. What Holzkamp tries to do is develop a concept that can legitimize learning activities outside of school as being different from school learning activities, while still being called learning (and thus being valued as such): “From this, it follows that practical problems calling for action which might entail learning problems need not to be other-directed, as, for instance, by school” (p. 123). According to Holzkamp, essentially, there are two types of learning. One type of learning is related to the activities in school and is characterized by being other-directed. This kind of learning does not necessarily lead to enhancing a person’s action potential—that is, the potential for the person to maintain or gain influence over the conditions of his or her own life. As emphasized by Haug (2009), Holzkamp is strongly critical of schooling and suggests that they actually hinder expansive learning. The student might just be learning for the sake of passing an examination or getting better grades—institutionalized “other-directed” activities that do not necessarily lead the person to expand his or her action potential. However, identifying this kind of “other-directed” institutionalized learning opens the door to potentially identifying another kind of learning, in which the person is learning based on the person’s own interests. In addressing the learning question, Holzkamp puts it like this:

To answer these questions, I will return to our categorical differentiation of motivation and (internalized) coercion […] and point to the fact that, in principle, there are two possible forms or types of reasons for learning, depending on the degree to which it promises the potential to expand my influence over the conditions of my life and thus enhance its subjective quality, or whether it merely serves to avert further restrictions and threats to these possibilities. (Holzkamp, 1993, p. 123)

The division between restrictive and expansive learning has its roots in a differentiation between a person’s activities being governed by his or her own motives or his or her activities being governed by threat or coercion (e.g., through the threat of receiving low grades or failing examinations). This leads Holzkamp to differentiate between what he calls defensive and expansive learning. He talks about expansive learning as “the inner coherence between the enriched access to the world through learning, the increased influence upon the conditions of my life and its enhanced subjective quality” (Holzkamp, 1993, p. 123; emphasis added). Holzkamp emphasizes that he is talking about a kind of “motivated learning” grounded in an interest in increasing a person’s influence upon the conditions of his or her life situation. However, in some cases, the person is “feeling compelled to learn even though there are no motivational
reasons for my learning activities (…)” and “(...) that the person is cut off from
the perspective of a joint control over the living conditions, thrown back on
myself, controlled by immediate threats and needs. In this case, the reasons for
my actions are not expansive but defensive” (Holzkamp, 1993, p. 124).
Holzkamp’s differentiation between expansive and restrictive (defensive)
learning is essentially legitimized by another set of binary oppositions between a
person’s “inner coherence” based on the notion of motivation on the one hand
and on the other hand, feeling compelled, coerced by immediate threats coming
from the social world. Essentially, what legitimates the binary opposition of
restrictive and expansive learning is another set of binary oppositions between the
individual person and those social circumstances that, to the subject, appear
not to have the potential to enlarge the influence on one’s own existence, that is,
between the person’s internal motivation and a set of external, coercive
circumstances. In Holzkamp’s version, a sort of doubling of a duality appears:
There is the good and bad internal state (motivation as either driven by
meaningfulness or internalized coercion) and a good and bad external state of
affairs (the “ecology of the person” on the one hand and “coercive social
practices” on the other). Somehow, the latter (for instance, school practices) are
not part of ‘the world’ that learning is the enriching relation to. In the process of
criticizing the problems related to school practices, Holzkamp essentializes these
normatively. Teaching (school) becomes normatively problematic rather than one
of the processes that are simply part of a person’s everyday life and must be
conducted. Holtkamp’s strong critique of schooling as an institution for
disciplining students turns his understanding of expansive and restrictive learning
into what Haug calls an “absolutization of self-activities in learning” (Haug,
2009, p. 250). Self-activity is a key component in processes of learning, Haug
emphasizes by using the notion of “absolutization of self-activities in learning,”
while Holzkamp’s understanding of expansive learning, on the other hand, rejects all kinds of pedagogic activities that encourage, help, support, prevent, or
guide processes of learning. The strong dichotomous division of learning “(...)” misses the opportunity to think of learning as a social process, and ‘growing up
and into’ society as a laborious task (…)” (Haug, 2009, p. 252).

About restricted and expansive learning in Engeström’s perspective

Another central cultural historical theorist who uses binary oppositions is the
Finnish researcher Yrjö Engeström. Engeström uses a slightly different
vocabulary than Holzkamp. Whereas Holzkamp’s development of expansive
learning and restrictive learning came out of a critique of schooling, Engeström’s
dichotomies are closely related to the theoretical interpretation of systemic/communication theory (Bateson) which Engeström uses to develop his model of learning. Engeström does not use the notions of restrictive and expansive learning; instead, he differentiates between reproductive and expansive learning (Engeström & Sannino, 2010). Engeström distinguishes between learning that merely reproduces the social world (as mostly described in theories of cognitive psychology and situated learning) and expansive learning processes, where participants learn something new (Engeström, 1987). Engeström and Sannino (2010) define expansive learning processes as processes where “(...) learners learn something that is not yet there. In other words, the learners construct a new object and concept for their collective activity and implement this new object and concept in practice.” (p. 2) According to Engeström and Sannino (2010), expansive learning processes are qualitatively different from learning processes defined by cognitive psychology and theories of situated learning, which are dominated by a conservative bias:

In fact, from the point of view of expansive learning, both acquisition-based and participation-based approaches share much of the same conservative bias. Both have little to say about transformation and creation of culture. Both acquisition-based and participation-based approaches, the latter especially in the original legitimate-peripheral-participation framework (Lave & Wenger, 1991), depict learning primarily as one-way movement from incompetence to competence, with little serious analysis devoted to horizontal movement and hybridization (p. 2).

Fundamentally, Engeström’s idea of expansive learning is closely related to his synthesis of a number of concepts from the CHAT tradition revolving around an interpretation of Bateson’s (1972) analysis of different levels of learning. If we first take a closer look at what Engeström uses from the tradition of activity theory, we see that he includes a number of concepts from multiple sources. Engeström’s conceptual basis for expansive learning is founded on, among others, Leontj’ev’s (1978) concept of activity, Vygotsky’s (1978) zone of proximal development, Leontj’ev’s (1981) use of object orientation, Il’enkov’s (1977, 1982) analysis of transforming contradictions, Davydov’s (1988, 1990) focus on the concrete, Vygotky’s (1987, 1997) notion of mediation of action by means of cultural tools and signs, and last, but not least, Bakhtin’s (1998) idea of multi-voicedness, or heteroglossia (for an elaboration, see Engeström & Sannino, 2010). However, if we want to get a more fundamental grip on how the strong binary between reproduction and the production of the new comes into play in Engeström’s approach to expansive learning, we need to understand how Engeström is inspired by Bateson’s analysis of various levels of learning.
According to Engeström, “Bateson’s Learning III is basically the same as expansive learning activity” (Engeström & Sannino, 2010, p. 5).

Engeström’s dissertation from 1987 provides important insights into how Engeström legitimizes the binary opposition between reproductive and expansive learning. It is essentially based on a specific understanding of consciousness. Based on Bateson’s four levels of learning, Engeström (1987) argues the following:

In Learning I, the object presents itself as mere immediate resistance, not consciously separated from the subject and instrument by the learner. In Learning II, the object is conceived of as a problem, demanding specific efforts. The subject is no more a nonconscious agent but an individual under constant self-assessment stemming from the success or failure of his attempts at the solution. (p. 151)

In Engeström’s differentiation between learning I and learning II, he introduces the notion of consciousness. However, in Bateson’s original work about levels of learning, processes of communication are central, not processes of consciousness. When Engeström defines the conservative dimension of the learning process, he basically does so by the degree of consciousness. At the learning 1 level, Engeström speaks of learners as being nonconscious of the situation of which they are a part. In this sense, there is no reflection about what might be a problem. Hence, there is no sense of conscious learning. At the learning 2 level, the learner is becoming conscious of having a problem and may try to solve the problem. The learner is conscious that there are two potential outcomes: either solving the problem (success) or not solving the problem (failure). At this level, the person is not conscious of the context, but merely conscious of the problem and the potential outcomes of the problem with which he or she is faced. Again, the person is not conscious of the problems he or she has and how the context is part of the problem; hence, the person does not have any opportunity to change the situation. However, what characterizes learning 3 level is that the person becomes more conscious of the situation.

In Learning III, the subject becomes conscious and gains an imaginative and thus potentially also a practical mastery of whole systems of activity in terms of the past, the present and the future. (Engeström, 1987, p. 154)

The close relation to consciousness remains central to Engeström, whereas for Bateson, the concern is about differences in what constitutes change. It is important to emphasize that what characterizes Engeström’s use of Bateson’s levels of learning is closely related to levels of consciousness. It is the difference
between being nonconscious/partly conscious on the hand and fully conscious on the other hand that legitimizes the binary of reproductive and expansive learning. Engeström is well aware that the notion of consciousness ties his way of thinking to a very individualized perspective. To counter this potential individualism, Engeström introduces concepts from CHAT, mentioned above which turn the dichotomy of reproductive and expansive learning in a more collective direction. Leont’ev’s notion of activity systems in particular serves this purpose:

Learning III as the outcome and form of typically human development is basically collective in nature. The collective Learning III is perhaps not so dramatic as its individual manifestations. But the real production and application of world outlooks, restructuring of complex activity systems, is not conceivable in individual and drastically sudden terms alone. In periods of exceptional upheavals, such as revolutions, the collective and the individual, the profound and the sudden, the action and the activity, seem to merge, even to the point where the individual seems to take the leading role. But these are temporary phenomena. The bread and butter of human development is collective Learning III, gradual in form but profound in substantial effects. (Engeström & Sannino, 2010, p. 5)

However, even though Engeström pushes his division between reproductive and expansive learning to a more collective level by using Leont’ev’s notion of activity systems, essentially, the binary opposition is still based on cultural assumptions about consciousness and the evolution of time. As outlined by Fabian (2014), our notion of evolutionary time plays a crucial, yet often unnoticed, role in modern Western epistemology (p. 16). According to Fabian (2014), evolutionary time develops a social order embedded in the way that we imagine time sequences, locations, persons, and activities. Essentially, the notion of evolutionary time is that of a continuous movement from the fragmented and the primitive to the coherent and the civilized (Fabian, 2014, pp. 14–18). Our understanding of evolutionary time presents us with a scheme that legitimizes central concepts to our epistemological self-understanding such as development, acculturation, civilization, and modernity (Fabian, 2014). Engeström’s legitimization of the binary of reproductive and expansive learning is a typical manifestation of evolutionary time, along the lines of a Marxist perspective on history where contradictions and processes of social struggle prevail. It is founded on an idea about the person moving from being nonconscious/partly conscious (reproductive) to being conscious. It is a classical and strong binary related to a Western mindset that revolves around consciousness, which is also found in distinctions between the native and the civilized, the woman and the man, the child and the adult, the uneducated and the scholar.
Discussion

Working with strong binary oppositions as restrictive and expansive as those analyzed above presents a number of problems. One of the main problems seems to be that the concepts we are using to analyze practice claim to be universal; however, they may instead be a mirror of the contradictions and conflicts in social practice. In Holzkamp’s case, it is the institutional division between what is happening in school and beyond school that is mirrored in the concept of restricted and expansive learning. This mirroring of a particular social practice does not in itself reflect how the opposition between restricted and expansive learning has been produced by social practice, nor does it offer ways to understand the relation between, in this case, school and everyday life. Instead, they are thoroughly separated from each other. The same goes for Engeström, who, in a paradoxical way, reproduces a classic culturally embedded binary opposition between being nonconscious, unconscious, or partly conscious on the one hand and being conscious on the other.

Binaries are not a neutral tool for analyzing practice. Binary oppositions are strongly value-laden, where one binary (e.g., expansive) is attractive to realize while the other binary (e.g., restricted) is that from which we seek to distance ourselves from. In the case of Holzkamp and Engeström, different kinds of practice seem to be a priori problematic. In Holzkamp’s case, it is the institutional “other-driven” kind of learning often equivalent with school learning that is taken to be problematic, while in Engeström’s case it is the nonconscious/unconscious.

Rather than taking dichotomies as a given, we need to address them analytically. Binaries are situated and constructed categories, trajectories of which warrant investigation in terms of how they were constituted, regulated, embodied, and contested rather than being taken as always already present. What is actually the work of institutions, socioeconomic struggles, etc., presents itself as an immutable trans-historical division, as ideology that needs questioning and researching. A valuable way of thinking about ideology is to think of it as the way discursive traffic and exchanges between different domains are structured and controlled (Holzkamp, 1993, p. 195).

Lave and Packer (2008) comment that “recent attempts to develop social theories of learning assume, often unreflectively, that the lived experience so addressed is ‘everyday’ in character” (p. 17). This is how we understand Holzkamp’s division of defensive learning and expansive learning. It is this same assumption, we believe, that Holzkamp and Engeström tap into (even if Holzkamp had another division between routines of everyday life and “real life”) (see Hybholt, 2015, for a discussion).
In Engeström’s case, two separate (though connected) dualisms are apparent. On the one hand, there is the already mentioned division of action conducted with or without consciousness. On the other hand, there is the division between the social formation of practice (level III) and the retention of Bateson’s individual focus on the other levels of change. As an aside, again, the more neutral logic of sets that Bateson uses to question the concepts of change become much closer to a normative hierarchy in Engeström’s work, with the upper, consciousness-laden tiers as the better and more refined levels.

It might be worth mentioning that in Bateson’s version, Learning III remains individual, albeit limited to humans, while Learning IV is thought of as evolutionary in nature. Learning III is about changes in the results of Learning II. If Learning II is thought of, in developmental terms, to refer to the development of the habits that characterize a person as that person, Learning III is a change in that personality; the concept of “self will no longer function as a nodal argument in the punctuation of experience” (Bateson, 1973, p. 275) and “something of the sort does, from time to time, occur in psychotherapy, religious conversion, and in other sequences in which there is profound reorganization of character” (Bateson, 1973, p. 273). Not only does Engeström (1987) question the rarity of Learning III (1987, p. 148), but he replaces this still-individual level with an intersubjective one. It is unclear why he keeps the other classes but changes this one, and it is unclear why it is not rather Learning IV, if any, that should be replaced, or moved to a Learning V category. This seems to replace a discussion of logical categories and their embeddedness with a discussion of the ontological content of the various categories. How is it, for instance, that it is Learning III that is intersubjective/societal when Vygotsky (who is a central inspiration for Engeström) was of the opinion that the child is maximally social and only later develops individuality—that even the most basic interactions (Learning I) are already socially infused.

Our contention is that, to some extent, Holzkamp and Engeström—despite their intentions—reproduce a “spatial” understanding of action. For Holzkamp, it takes the form of an intrinsic connection between school and administrable plannable content and control. These dualities (of the school context and of the notion of consciousness) are reminiscent of discussions of reification. School, in Holzkamp’s case, ceases to be a context of competing interests and concerns, but comes to embody only the idea of learning as plannable. School is reified; it becomes alien from the everyday concerns of students and perhaps parents and teachers. It is contrasted with the seemingly non-reified everyday life of these same persons. Thus, Holzkamp, as quickly as he shows the problem of learning, identifies the institutionalized practice as wholly governed by this problem. The
counterpart becomes the “true” image of what constitutes “real” and “good” learning.

When discussing the concept of reification, Honneth (2005) argues that reification is best understood as a forgetting. It is the non-attention paid to the fact that all practices—and all actions in them—always already stem from collective concerns of some kind. It may very well be that (much of) school practice is “reified” in the sense of “forgetting” the intersubjective, collective activity (Tätigkeit) that has given rise to it.

References


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Remembering, rewriting, rearticulating, resituating motivation

Morten Nissen

Abstract
The article attempts to explain why people should still read Ute Osterkamp’s Motivationsforschung from 1975-6. Besides a version of the history of ‘German-Scandinavian Critical Psychology’, written from the standpoint of an epistemology of practice, this is contextualized in a ‘diagnosis’ and a rearticulation of the contemporary uses of the concept of motivation. Thus, we briefly encounter ‘self-determination theory’ and various cognitive motivation theories, but also practices of motivational interviewing, gamification, nudging, self-monitoring, and appreciation. These are viewed generally as versions of neo-liberal ‘pragmatic’ self-governance. Then theoretical sources are sought with which to articulate how they may also hold possibilities – concrete utopia - for a societalization and cultivation of self-governance. Here, Osterkamp’s theory of ‘productive needs’ for developing agency can help point to the dynamics of co-constitution of subjects and activities – when it is read as contributing to theory that addresses the complexity of ‘activities’, ‘practices’, and ‘praxis’. In the final part, implications for understanding ‘life’ as a project that seeks beyond ‘practices’ and ‘praxis’, are sketched and proposed as an alternative to the ‘phenomenological turn’ of the later Holzkamp and his followers.

Keywords
motivation, practice, praxis, activity, self, need, rearticulation, participation

Autobiographical introduction

My first serious and deep encounter with what I call “German-Scandinavian Critical Psychology” (GSCP) ¹ was in the summer of 1982 when I read Ute

¹ Some refer to ‘German’, others zoom in on ‘Berlin’, and many even limit the whole thing to ‘Holzkamp’. This is a battleground. From my perspective, the connection
Osterkamp’s *Motivationsforschung* (H.-Osterkamp, 1975, 1976). The book had a profound impact on me. By then, I had studied Vygotsky and Leontiev, and understood that the great project of tying subjectivity to societal matters (politics, economy, class) must be realized through activity, understood as practice: *Tätigkeit*. I was also learning this by engaging in student politics in a Leninist fraction (‘Communist Students’), and through my first engagement with pedagogical and therapeutic practices in the field of social work with drug users. Various impressions from reading such authors as Bertolt Brecht and Hans Scherfig², and even fragments of Marx, such as the Feuerbach Theses - and not only the 6th to which everybody referred at the time - also contributed to my readiness.

Osterkamp’s book carved my brain circuits (Luria would know what I mean) and formed my outlook to the extent that it survived as key reference through many subsequent upheavals, such as: the widespread enthusiasm with Holzkamp’s *Grundlegung der Psychologie* (Holzkamp, 1983b), which we studied intensely in the middle 80s; the critique of militant Leninism which emerged also within the communist movement and, of course, culminated in 1989; and even my later interest in Foucault, Derrida and other poststructuralists.

This may appear strange, or perhaps precisely as the result of an accidental idiosyncratic path (*-ology). I do indeed find it hard to persuade my clever students - even those very few of them who read German - to engage with the book. It is written in the cumbersome tone of the academic Marxism of the 1970s; most of volume 1 trudges through details of a natural prehistory; it seems to rest on a militant dogmatics that never stops to question vague concepts such as “the ruling” or “bourgeois society”; it does not promise the self-clarification of the subject in everyday life as a fashionably this-sided reward on the way to global revolution; and it openly declares an essence of humanity as a scientific truth which should be held against the “oppressions” of “bourgeois” psychology. Not exactly ‘sexy’ in the decades of the fallen Berlin Wall. Even Osterkamp herself seems to have forgotten the book; after 1995, Holzkamp is the main and sometimes the only GSCP reference, for her as for most other readers of GSCP.

between West German (although mostly West Berlin) and Scandinavian (although mostly Danish) academics is important, partly because, although the center was first in Berlin, it did spread to most of German-speaking Europe, a little to the Netherlands and Finland, and a lot to Scandinavia. The tradition is now probably stronger in Danish academia than anywhere else in the world. Quite a few Danish academics simply refer to it as ‘critical psychology’ (especially in Danish texts), as if this were the only kind of CP worth mentioning. Of course, I could refer to persons rather than places – except it is a main point that GSCP is a collective practice, and I suggest we question the way we have replicated patriarchal academic person-cults for the sake of (what appears to be) convenience.

² Danish fiction author 1905-1979.
This article is, in a certain sense, my attempt to explain my continued fondness for *Motivationsforschung*; to generalize that feeling and seek recognition for it as more than just a case of irrational personal history or desire. This project is also a way of presenting a version of GSCP that emphasizes rearticulation - a.k.a. immanent or affirmative critique - as a way of practicing critical psychology. For, my point is not that everything is already written in that book, and that ‘we’ should simply ‘return’ to it as a ‘true’ point of departure, purified of subsequent perversions. Rather, I aim to show that a ‘philosophy of practice’ – a trans-disciplinary work that reflexively articulates theories with practices and vice versa – suggests a way of harnessing the potentials of great works such as this, even - and perhaps especially - when they present some counterintuitive and outmoded concepts.

In the most general terms, concepts such as agency [Handlungsfähigkeit] and productive needs [produktive Bedürfnisse] amount to suggesting historicity, situatedness and deconstruction as foundational, as a paradoxically anti-essentialist essence, and participation [Teilnahme] as an anti-individualist theory of the individual; what we have here is a theory of motivation that reaches far beyond ‘motivation’. This is just what we need when we try to articulate important aspects of practices that claim to deal with ‘motivation’. And Osterkamp’s bold project of reinterpreting Freudian psycho-dynamics can be seen as one germ cell version of the kind of critical psychology I argue for.

All this became increasingly clear to me in subsequent decades, for reasons very continuous with those that had prepared me to take the book so seriously to begin with. In the course of the 1980s and later, I could dive deeper into Activity Theory and recognize there the struggle to overcome functionalism in the works of Davidov and Ilyenkov, and later those of Lave, Stetsenko, Langemeier, and others. My enthusiasm with GSCP led me to appreciate other ways to enrich and oppose its “subject-science” with a philosophy of practice, notably those of Wolf and Frigga Haug, in projects such as PAQ, PIT and, not least, memory work. When I became a researcher, greatly guided and inspired by the philosopher Uffe Juul Jensen, I was introduced to historical and contemporary versions and discussions of a theory of practice, not only in Marx and many of his followers, but also in (certain readings of) French epistemology (Bachelard, Canguilhem), Wittgenstein, the science and technology studies, and, of course, Hegel. My further involvement with social work and counseling kept convincing me that a productive dialogue could and should be established, and that this dialogue must engage with political issues of social exclusion, migration, and inequality - and, perhaps first of all, with ideology, as the (‘form-content’ of the) conceptual forms in which practices such as therapy or teaching are framed and performed.

3 *Projekt Automation und Qualifikation* and *Projekt Ideologie Theorie*
This proved an important dividing line: While the GSCP mainstream, following Holzkamp, and with my previous mentor Ole Dreier (whom, of course, I owe much) as leading figure, would reduce the concept of ideology to a name for the false or inadequate (individualist, idealist) ‘traditional psychology’ that critical psychology should replace, the Haugs (like their sources such as Gramsci and Bloch, or Bertolt Brecht and Christa Wolf) would retain it as the perpetual starting point for the self-critique that, at once, builds understanding and subjectivity. This is also the difference between a scientific realism and an epistemology (rather than only an ontology) of practice; and it largely explains why the latter version of GSCP – which is also the version I seek to expound here – develops much more through a dialogue with versions of post-structuralism, even as it also keeps referring to what appear to be ‘scientific’ proposals of ‘human essences’ such as those of Motivationsforschung.

Now I am the head of a research program on “rearticulating the formation of motivation”; and I happened to be invited to this special issue. I am of course very pleased with and proud of both events, as well as with how they may converge in the writing of this article. But what finally convinced me that a revisiting of Motivationsforschung could be fruitful is a slightly more delicate matter. This has to do with a set of issues that are present all through Motivationsforschung II but were not given a systematic treatment – although Osterkamp implied that they would be dealt with in a third volume, which was planned, but never emerged: The broadly existential issues that connect subjectivity with life: Not just life processes as the object of a scientific biology (zoë), and not even only everyday life as heterogeneous but recurrent practices of embodied subjects, but life as the implications of finitude, of the movement of human being from birth to death (bios) and of vitality as opposed (and transforming itself) to the ideal, or to the transcendent objectivity, of culture.

This is delicate for two reasons. First, because it touches on the ‘phenomenological turn’ which Holzkamp took with his Grundlegung, referring to Karl Grauman as source – but which it is hard to avoid connecting with a Heideggerian backdrop, which was, obviously, not very comme il faut on the West Berlin / West German Left in the 1980s. My intention is not to prove (or disprove) that Holzkamp was a ‘closet Heideggerian’ – who could offer concepts such as ‘Befindlichkeit’ or ‘Faktizität’ trusting that his readership would never scrutinize Heidegger’s place in their legacy – nor is it to unfold a critique of the ‘social phenomenology’ of everyday life which Dreier and many of his followers have made of ‘their’ GSCP (perhaps tracing its unacknowledged roots also through Garfinkel and Schütz to Husserl). Rather, I wish to affirm the issue as one that no real theory of motivation or subjectivity can ignore.
But this is the second reason that it is delicate: I can only offer some very sketchy concepts to address it. This is frustrating because of its important political implications. With a strong political vision - a utopia which could be seen as concrete in Ernst Bloch’s sense - the problem of alienation can be addressed in a way that does not separate culture from human being; our hope is for a cultivated society that is, at the same time, the flourishing and realization of life as existentially meaningful. But when that vision is not clearly in sight, culture is alienated as a blind, anonymous structure, standing opposed to human being, understood both as that which grounds individual life as meaningful, and as that on which any community must rest. Perhaps parts of the increased interest in Heidegger, and parts of the emergence of neo-aristotelian approaches to practice and ethics (MacIntyre and others) and of the search for an ‘inoperative community’ (Nancy, Levinas) are symptoms of the present difficulties with proposing credible visions on the political and intellectual left that might reunite human life and human being with the cultural (technological, economic, governmental etc.) structures, which seem to evolve in ways that force us to either relinquish control to them, or oppose them. If that is so, the issue of ‘life’ speaks directly to the very urgent problem of how to grapple with the current political oscillations between neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism. It is not difficult to diagnose how this duality corresponds to two opposite concepts of practice, each of which carries important insight and real force, but is often reductively taken in abstraction to the detriment of truth and ethics: either as arbitrary structures of operations, network or discourse that can be described and deployed in a meaningless pragmatics, or as expressions of essential value deeply immanent to the given or traditional, but currently eroding, forms of human life. Nor is it hard to express a hope for the overcoming of this vicious circle. What is difficult is to offer insights and concepts that actually point a way.

I am not really equipped to suggest any general solution to this predicament. I must confine myself to working on it through articulating practices of motivation, in the hope that more will be offered by the context of the present issue of ARCP.

Motivation - then and later

Osterkamp’s Motivationsforschung (MF) begins with a historical reconstruction of ‘motivation’ as a concept in theory and practice. It is not a genealogy in a strict foucauldian sense, for it explicitly traces tendencies as latent utopia, that is, as the emergent contradiction which can and should be taken up in an emancipation of ‘motivation’. In other words, it is a ‘rear view mirror
genealogy’: What is seen as historical depends on where one is heading. Osterkamp comes up with the same basic contradiction as that which Kurt Danziger (1997) would find two decades later (without referring to Osterkamp’s work): ‘Motivation’ is whether, how much and why people want to do what they are required to do; it is subjectivity appropriated as the object of governance, primarily in industry and education; but – as an object of a putatively neutral psychological science – it is conceptualized as if this framing power relation were irrelevant.

All through the ‘short 20th century’, new concepts of human needs would emerge that recognized individuals as ever more widely self-determining, in order to harness their subjectivity for purposes that were not to be questioned. Finally, the contradiction could be overcome by siding with the subjects and recognizing their need for participation in collective self-determination as true and expansive agency [verallgemeinernde Handlungsfähigkeit]; this, for Osterkamp, was the true concept of motivation, for which she reconstructed a phylogenetic and pre-historical emergence and forms of individual (more or less crippled or flourishing) development in her contemporary bourgeois society.

Before we return more to MF, let us review some tendencies in the approaches to motivation that came after it.

Almost a decade after MF, and again without referring to it, “self-determination theory” with its emphasis on “intrinsic motivation” was launched by Deci & Ryan (1985). This is currently the most widely read motivation theory that still bases on a conception of needs (we shall return to the even more dominant cognitive approach below). Intrinsic motivation is motivation directed toward aspects of the activity itself, rather than to its contingent “external” consequences such as reward or punishment. Since this internality of motives exempts them from externally modifiable incentives, it is a version of the abstract ‘other’ of coercion, and thus it tends towards either celebrating a purely subjective experience of freedom accessible within given activities: Flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996), or compromising by acknowledging a gradient between freedom and coercion (various levels of extrinsic motivation).

This distinction is ancient (it can be traced back to Aristotle’s praxis vs. poiesis), but in Deci & Ryan’s version, a modern psychology of needs explains how an activity can be intrinsically motivating: it provides self-determination and social “relatedness”; self-determination, in turn, is structured around “the activity” as whether it is chosen (“autonomy”) and mastered (“competence”). As choice and mastery of pre-given, isolated and unquestioned units, conceptualized independently of the third ‘factor’, “relatedness”, we can recognize here the liberal notion of freedom. The individual subject’s desire for such freedom is abundantly confirmed in the societies and cultures where Deci & Ryan are read.
The limitations of the implied concept of activity, as opposed to a deeper concept of *Tätigkeit* or *Handlung* as mediated, and the ensuing critique of the intrinsic / extrinsic distinction (as the expression of a division of labor since Aristotle), had already been demonstrated (among others already in Holzkamp, 1973, and of course in MF); but self-determination theory resonated with a rising ideology of self-governance in education and other fields of application of psychology. As a result, any analysis which seeks to understand some human action as motivated by a need for agency must work through a critique of ‘intrinsic motivation’, either in Deci & Ryan’s explicit formulation, or in the guise of a (not uncommon) reception of the concept of agency that reduces it of societal mediation and participation. This critique must take into account how the interpretation of ‘self-determination’ is an ideological battleground, within whichever tradition. The battle rages also in texts and debates defined as “critical psychology” and even as GSCP; conversely, even ‘intrinsic motivation’ is often used with noble critical intentions that would deserve better weapons (after all, the issue of power is visible in the concept)\(^4\).

However, what proved at least as influential was an even more radically reduced concept of freedom, which eschews ‘needs’ altogether, and thus avoids addressing power at all, hiding it behind a ‘customer- or user-friendly’ pragmatics. This is achieved with a formalization of rational ends-means structures that starts from taking ends as given, whether chosen by the subject or simply given with managerial or institutional goals. In fact, by zooming in on the operational, it was possible to work with ends given at once by individual choice and institutional or managerial goals; whether or not the two concerns clashed or coincided outside of the pragmatically circumscribed operational field could be judged irrelevant.

Albert Bandura (1977) was for long the world’s most cited living psychologist, partly because he could describe law-like mechanisms that could be identified and operationalized within such pragmatic fields. He would ‘find’, for instance, that the more a person believed that she would be able to arrive at a goal, the more likely she would try; and that earlier experience with success or failure would impact on that belief: ‘Self-efficacy’. This is utterly banal, of course, but it is translatable to the motivational technique of retrospectively mapping achievements, and setting operational targets, as small steps on a linear path toward a goal that is carefully set as ‘realistic’. For instance, the emphasis on ‘visible learning’ in school (Hattie, 2008) transforms didactics into techniques for managing the self-management of pupils on simplified linear trajectories of

\(^4\) In a recent development, it is debated whether a fourth basic need should be acknowledged, the need to do good, a.k.a. ‘benificence’ (Martela & Ryan, 2016); will this break the altruism / egotism dichotomy?
learning curriculum elements that are (in the same process) reformulated as accountable knowledge or skill: Seeing oneself represented as a green needle on the chart on the classroom wall, which has already been moved toward the star representing the learning target, is ‘motivating’ (Brøgger & Staunæs, in prep.). Similarly, in the world’s most widespread method explicitly for modifying motivation, ‘Motivational Interviewing’ (MI), this work of operationalization is performed in conversations, with an arsenal of paralinguistic devices that acknowledge a client’s preferences as stated, but at the same time rephrase them into a common sense movement – at the client’s own pace – toward ‘behavior change’ (Carr & Smith, 2014; Miller & Rollnick, 1991). This ‘works if you work it’ (as the AA motto goes), that is, as long as one does not question ‘metaphysically’ the pragmatic operationalization - or, which amounts to the same thing, as long as one only questions it in the form of another pragmatic mapping of preferences⁵.

The science of motivation proceeds mostly to differentiate theories within the ‘cognitive’ range, that is, in the operational structures of ends and means stretched out between elements of perceived reality and values attached to them. Thus, the ‘expectancy value’ (Wigfield, 1994) of an activity can be seen to differ between individuals because they attribute different expectancies and value them differently. This differentiation serves to identify motivational styles that are thought to characterize individuals as part of their overall personality. It is then the task of the teacher, manager, etc., to identify and accommodate the specific style of each person: Motivation is *customized*. Further, each person becomes co-responsible for identifying his or her motivational style: Motivation becomes an object of *self-governance* (Nissen & Sørensen, 2017).

When the concepts of motivation come alive and prove relevant in practices such as ‘visible learning’ or MI, it is possible to address the ways in which they form part of wider cultural-historical transformations of knowledge and subjectivity, co-constituting subjectivities in structures of power by directing gazes and questions, providing accessible relevances, etc. - in a word, *ideology*.

In a first approximation, ‘motivation’ can be seen to change as part of the expansion of market or market-like exchanges between providers and users. This pushes to the background the metaphysics of needs and their (evolving, contested, visibly ideological) theoretical underpinnings, and it allots another role for science. If the art of motivating consists mostly of negotiating and revising the pragmatic field of operation, a very important tool in that craft is the reference to scientific proof that it works. Empiricist knowledge, as a blend of tautologies with accountable facts (or, with Holzkamp, 1993: implicative statements disguised as empirical findings), is a key currency of any such

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⁵ The collapsing of meta-motivation into motivation is a crucial issue – see below.
exchange at the level of preferences rather than needs. However, despite its ‘no-nonsense’ democratic appeal, there is a paradoxical fetichism built into this currency.

Just as in market exchanges, quantification is an important aspect of this. Even numbers that are only trusted ‘for all practical purposes’ (Garfinkel, 1984) establish social domains free of negotiation (Porter, 1995); any number can potentially be challenged, but its pragmatic use presupposes an ongoing reference to a ‘case of the real thing’ (again, Garfinkel). The number is a place-holder for an essence. We pretend, for pragmatic reasons, to refer with it to something real, so much that the pretense becomes ‘more real than reality’ (to paraphrase Zizek). The dogmatism of this place-holder function is confirmed with a symbolic gesture toward the institution of science: Knowledge as sanctioned, ‘black-boxed’ (Latour, 1987); however perpetually temporary, ‘only’ in the realm of exchange... which is becoming everything that matters, since science is itself governed as a network of exchange rather than as production. Thus, for instance, in the scientific exchanges, MI becomes stabilized as a standard method, which can be said to ‘work’, by, conversely, accepting pragmatically the operational fields and preferences of clinicians and users that allow for standardization and thus reliable quantification (Björk, 2014).

When motivation is detached from struggles over ‘needs’, it is attached instead to ‘values’ and ‘beliefs; the latter have a different ontological status. You are free to believe anything in private, and even assert or flag your belief in public, but for this to be possible, that public, structured as trade, commands you to absolutely believe in pragmatics and worship the symbols with which it is held up (see also Nissen & Barington, 2016). Whichever beliefs or values you choose can be ever so dogmatic and even carry hopes for a different life, but they metamorphose into standard ‘value’ units that rest finally on an impenetrable arbitrariness (religion smoothly adapts to this purpose and is transformed radically in the process), until they are somehow translated into the numbers that count for real in social exchange. The apparent rationalism of cognitive motivation theory does not deny, but simply privatizes subjectivity, albeit in the next moment to objectify it in the form of ‘hyper-real’ signs (Baudrillard, 1994): standard units of referential emptiness. This is the condition on which it is recognized, that is, sanctioned as valid and – depending blindly on external contingencies – allowed to influence exchange.

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6 Cf. to this, Stiegler (2015)

7 Cf. Valverde’s analysis of how members of the Alcoholics Anonymous have translated God, the ‘higher power’ into ‘my higher power’ - this works, and it is irrelevant that one member calls it God and another calls it Allah or Buddha (Valverde, 2002).
When subjects’ preferences and values are purified of any public reference or grounding, one might think that, although they may be individually accommodated, they could not be manipulated. Yet it is precisely as pure signs of subjectivity that they open to new motivational techniques.

First, how do we know what subjects really prefer - and do they, themselves, know? The classic problem of the incongruence of rational goals or espoused values with actual behavior can be reformulated with a science of autonomous mechanisms supposed to derive from evolution and to reside in the brain. Once the subjects of a population have espoused a preference (e.g. for healthy diet), it is considered within reasonable liberal ethics to influence their behavior through such mechanisms, so that they actually do it: Nudging. For instance, smaller plates at buffets make people eat the smaller portions they claim to prefer; removing candy from supermarket aisles where people stand in line will reduce their tendency to buy the candy they claim to not want when asked in surveys. This is called ‘libertarian paternalism’ (Thaler & Sunstein, 1976).

Second, governance through self-monitoring in more or less public spaces proliferates and evolves, facilitated immensely by smart-phones and social media. Just like counselling is systematically adapted to the individual user through ‘feedback-informed treatment’ techniques to make sure users do not drop out (Duncan, Miller, Wampold, & Hubble, 2010), countless customizable self-monitoring apps motivate users by giving them just the quantified self they want (Schüll, 2016). In pragmatic terms, it seems to matter little that the counselling institution is authoritatively predefined as working for e.g. tobacco abstinence, or that the app is made strictly to facilitate healthy eating, sports, or reading; it is the user who chooses to submit to its logic, and ‘it works if you work it’.

Third, the motivation produced through monitoring devices mocks the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic when it is enhanced by gamification (Burke, 2012). Children are motivated to read by a nesting of their reading activity within a computer game where they gather cool features (e.g. caps, sunglasses) for their avatar (e.g. a cute dragon). Displacing motivation to the game – extrinsic to the point of parody – seems to drench it away from the authentic pleasure in reading or learning as such that we may hope for; this is cheating! But it ‘works’ in pragmatic terms (and this might make us wonder whether ends and means are as neatly separated as the ‘intrinsic / extrinsic’ duality seems to suggest).

Fourth, the emptiness of reference that can be objectified as numbers opens to intervention at the level of signs. Thus, as mentioned, with skillful use of paralinguistic devices, conversations can be modified toward confirming

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‘behavior change’, even as users’ utterances are accepted at face value. The pragmatics of the idea that people tend to believe what they hear themselves say (attributable to Wittgenstein) can be taken as sufficient to explain the ‘behavioral’ efficacy of a kind of practice that aims to intervene only in conversations. This is a way to articulate the workings of MI (Carr, 2013; Carr & Smith, 2014), and it is the explicit methodology of ‘solution-focused brief psychotherapy’ (De Shazer, 1991), which is probably the first counselling tradition to break completely with any kind of psychological explanation.

Finally, fifth, while all of these motivational techniques in different ways presuppose and / or perform a recognition of subjects as users, consumers etc., this recognition itself can be reduced to a linguistic device and put to systematic use. Various managerial, educational, and therapeutic methods work with displays of ‘appreciation’ (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987), which are assumed to be motivating as a mixture of a vehicle for monitoring success and social relations.

**Rearticulations - first level**

Now, while the neoliberal expansion of market- or market-like exchanges, and the move from ‘needs’ to ‘preferences’ as objects of governance, can be said to lie behind all these developing forms of practice and conceptualizations, this does not necessarily mean that the corresponding theories are the only ways to articulate them. Rearticulation is not limited to a descriptive recapitulation of evolving mainstream discourse. It can also proceed from the hypothesis that this development may be the expression of tendencies that are contradictory and include latencies for a societalization / cultivation [Vergesellschaftung] that is more substantial and ethically and politically more sustainable.

This way of thinking can be expressed with Ernst Bloch’s concept of concrete utopia, but it can also be identified in early GSCP including MF. Osterkamp’s historical reconstruction retraced the emergence of a societalized subjectivity, which would break the chains of bourgeois motivation and motivation theory because of an objective social need for collective self-determination without which industry and technology could not evolve much further. However, like many Marxist psychologists at her time, Osterkamp was limited by a quite rudimentary social theory, which tended to absolutize an undifferentiated “bourgeois society” and to autonomize productive forces and reserve them for industry and technology, narrowly conceived. In general theoretical terms, her Marxism was not economistic in the classic ‘trade-unionist’ sense or in the sense of the ‘Logic of Capital’, but, like Holzkamp and many
others, she neglected to engage with social sciences in any more than the roughest terms, mostly taken directly from Marx. As a consequence, the concrete historicity of practices, institutions and subjectivities was never much unfolded. The historical emergence and evolvement of state power and politics, social regulation and the substantial provision of education, health and social welfare institutions, as cultural achievements and as arenas for socio-political struggle – unknown, of course, to Marx – such real tendencies were never within sight. Thus, the emergence later of new public management and neoliberal governance could only be seen as the sad confirmation of a totalizing critique of bourgeois society, and in the same process, any alternatives were pushed to the realm of abstract utopia. This halted the further development of ‘immanent critique’ or reinterpretation, which Osterkamp had begun with her groundbreaking reading of Freud in MF.

Thus we must expand our articulation of tendencies in motivation. It not simply that, instead of the breakthrough of societalization which Osterkamp had hoped for, market-like exchanges returned to finally reassert the raw truth of capitalism, which Marx had already predicted. Rather, the societalized / cultivated production of individuality, subjectivity and selfhood continues to evolve in ever new contradictory forms that matter in complex and unstable ways depending on local conditions and force relations. Pragmatics can be, and often is, the main ideological form, identifiable as a dogma that rules our present post-political era and dodges any critique; which paradoxically underpins fundamentalism; and which threatens to dilute the social sciences into formalized banalities... but it can also develop into something that is better articulated as pragmatism or even as a philosophy of practice.

Evidently, any real substantiation of this claim would have to engage with practices in more specific and deeper terms than through their standard models, canonical texts, or rough descriptions. The practices should be approached as prototypes, that is, with an awareness of their situated nature and their contentious and evolving relevance (see, to this, Nissen, 2009). This is in fact an important goal of our research program, as I see it. Still, I may be able to sketch

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9 Holzkamp’s way of reading Foucault in *Lernen* (1993) is a good example. Not only did he ignore Foucault’s main point of the constitution of subjectivity in power, but he also reduced Foucault’s institutions to an ‘apparatus’ and downplayed his genealogy. This reductionist reading of Foucault was and is not uncommon, even in some foucauldian circles, but the point here is that it blocked an understanding of the historicity of institutional practices.

10 Within the GSCP tradition, one exception to this rule is Haug (1977).

11 To the issue of utopianism in GSCP and socio-cultural historical activity theory, see (M. Nissen, 2013)

12 Some preliminary examples can be found in Nissen (2014), Bank & Nissen, (2018), Nissen & Sørensen (2017).
and unfold possible rearticulations enough for them to work as ‘demands’ for corresponding conditions, at least relevant in some places.

1.

Nudging as a public health approach has been rightly criticized for the idealism in presupposing benevolence on the part of those who nudge (Marteau, Ogilvie, Roland, Suhrcke, & Kelly, 2011). But this opens in a useful way to the general question of democratic control of the ways our physical environment forms our actions and lives, with or without our reflection. The struggle over motivation is in fact also a struggle about material agencies such as product design, architecture and city planning, as proponents of ‘actor-network theory’ and ‘new materialism’ never tire of arguing (Latour, 2002).

Further, while the theories of Kahneman, Sunstein and others about an autonomous, “affective” kind of brain processes should be criticized for the usual psychological naturalism, their partial coincidence with, not only certain aspects of ‘flow theory’, but, more broadly, what has been called an ‘affective turn’ in critical social theory, should also be noted (Ahmed, 2004; Greco & Stenner, 2013; Thrift, 2008). ‘Affect’ is used here (again) to emphasize bodily materiality, process and community, as opposed to a – more or less justified – critique of the privileging of language and its agents in discourse theories. As Greco & Stenner (2015), Wetherell (2012) and others demonstrate, if this tendency to dichotomize reason from its abstract ‘Other’ is overcome, the focus on (moments of) collectively emergent affectivity is fruitful as part of a reflection on practices as processes in liminal spaces, and of how motives are formed, including those motives that challenge the ways activities are constituted (cf. also Nissen & Sørensen, 2017).

2.

The pragmatic separation of linguistic signs from their material referents opens to a converse movement: toward regarding activities as inherently reflexive because they include dealing with how they are framed or defined. This we might articulate with a performative approach. Viewing social practice as performance or drama, in various contemporary theories (e.g., Butler, 1993; Martin, 2007; Mattingly, 2010; Mol, 2008), however divergent they may be in other respects, means to assert *doing* as practical, situated and embodied, as dependent on and reproducing power, resources, identities and hopes - and at the same time as contingent and emergent orderings, which can be approached as such from the point of view of their - always contingent - narrative or discursive configuration,
their framing, their citation of categories, their enactment of a concept or a logic, etc. The performance of ‘structure’ implies a situated reconfiguration of ‘structure’, and thus its potential transformation. It also means that display and reflection are immanent to the activity, so that the structural contingency and negotiability of the activity can be addressed as part of it.

From this angle, self-monitoring techniques and devices can be approached as debatable models of activity, precisely because they are developed as relatively autonomous, reflexively applied tools. For instance, the mindless being-motivated-by-monitoring (e.g. GPS watches for jogging) may ‘work’ as the consequence of a pragmatic reduction of activity, but it may also help questioning that reduction. This could, in fact, be one perspective in the “quantified self / self-tracking” movement\textsuperscript{13}, once the hype of the new technical feasibility is over. It might also raise the question of meta-motivation: Am I motivated for being motivated (in this way)? Within a purely cognitive framework, meta-motivation simply collapses into motivation; but in a performative approach, ‘performing motivation’ becomes questionable as self-monitoring is objectified (societalized, generalized, externalized, standardized) in new ways.

Thus, for instance, the initially pragmatic ‘going-through-the-motions’ of formalized testing in schools may revert into taking seriously, and criticizing, the radical transformation of teaching and other school practices that it implies, and that is often veiled by its apparent banality. Just as Theodore Porter (1995) could show how the role of numbers in negotiations over engineering evolved differently in France and in the US, so we should keep open the question whether the standardization of ‘visible learning’ must necessarily proceed in Berlin or Copenhagen in ways that resemble American or Australian schools – or whether the stronger European traditions of cherishing ‘Bildung’, in the teaching professions and beyond, might push its concrete impact in other directions. Similarly, the above-mentioned chart with the needles represents not only each pupil, but also the class; and, like the colorful pictures often displayed on classroom walls in early school years, charts like that are likely to be visibly outgrown.

\textbf{3.}

Gamification shares with counselling traditions that highlight conversation per se (MI, or ‘solution-focused brief therapy’) the performative and potentially reflexive unfolding of the ‘as-if’ as a separate but connected activity. Of course,

\textsuperscript{13} Tracking one’s daily activities or moods by quantifiable units, mostly using smartphones. Cf. Schüll (2016)
the mainstream explanation of the link is cognitive (mental schemata are extended and modified), but let us not assume prematurely that we are obliged by that way of thinking. Instead, the ‘game’, like the ‘conversation’, can be seen as potentially motivating precisely because it is something more and something other than an inconsequential representation of the ‘gamified’ activity or the ‘issues’ spoken about.

In this, we are helped by the critiques in GSCP (Haug, 1977) of Leontiev’s (and Elkonin’s) functionalistic correction of the ‘intellectualism’ in Vygotsky’s theory of play. The reversal in play of meaning [Bedeutung] and thing, which Vygotsky noted, can only be substantial, says Leontiev, because it is a way of dealing with and appropriating culturally significant issues in practical activity (not only as a way of appropriating abstract conceptual forms); but this does not mean that play is necessarily disciplined to enact a pre-given significance. It is a drama in its own right, and it is so partly because it is semantically ambiguous. This dramatic approach to play was later unfolded in Scandinavian play studies (see, e.g. Schousboe, 2013; Winther-Lindqvist, 2009).

Another useful reference is the ‘semiotic’ emphasis in some recent social and cultural theories and philosophy. Signs are signs because they signify meaning; but signs are also artifacts with a situated thingness, so that they can, on the one hand, carry multiple meanings, and, on the other, migrate and change their meaning. Derrida’s famous statement “There is no outside-text” (2016) may seem an exaggeration (especially when read as part of a mockery with the purpose of debunking ‘postmodernism’), but the point is valid that we cannot assume to know in advance what is the relevant ‘outside’ to any text. So, too, is the understanding that textuality drenches our culture and our lives, so that it is immanent to all of our practices even as it shapes them with a logic and power of its own.

Thus, the game and the conversation may be motivating both because of their open semantics, and because they link to a myriad of other ‘as-if’ practices that may have little to do with what the game or the conversation were supposed to motivate for in the first place. But of course, this all depends on situated conditions and fields of forces and powers. For instance, as we have tried to show, the possibility of expanding a ‘treatment of addiction’ into practices of engaging with drug use as a social problem through aesthetic production depends on the counselling facility’s place in struggles over municipal and state policies - and this, in turn, circumscribes the possible implications of the ‘game’ of...

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14 Derrida’s discussion of textuality as “the orphanage of wandering signs” in Plato’s Pharmacy (Derrida, 1981) is instructive.

15 Cf. to this also Smith (2005).
‘narrative therapy’ as well as those of aesthetic practices (Nissen, 2014, Nissen & Friis, 2018).

4.

The fact that recognition can be reduced to its verbal expression and instrumentalized does not imply that such ‘appreciation’ is by definition false. Rather, these practices can often be rearticulated as attempts to engage in real struggles for recognition (cf. Nissen, 2012a). Connecting those to the idea of motivation reminds us that the social sanctioning of agency is not unrelated to its ‘actual’ unfolding, but a key aspect of it. And it impels us to engage in differential analyses of the implications of struggles for recognition other than that of the classic Marxian proletariat - such as those of women, indigenous populations, sexual minorities, and, more broadly, a citizenry that may come to include a still wider range of human beings (e.g. psychiatry users, prisoners, children, etc.). This need not imply a ‘liberal’ reduction of social justice. Each struggle is at the same time a struggle for transforming society as a whole - although each time, too, the singularity of each ‘society’, as a potentially self-reflecting agent and arena of struggles for recognition (i.e. a state), becomes visible\(^\text{16}\). Thus, an ‘appreciative / recognizing’ approach to pre-school children should be judged in the context of developments of the ‘extended family’ of the welfare state (nuclear family with an institutional network) - between concerns for parents as ‘autonomous users’ in New Public Management, and for finding new pedagogical ways to enhance agency and reflexivity (cf. Røn Larsen, 2012).

5.

The range of motivational technologies we have reviewed here are all based on the pragmatic acceptance of certain signs as absolute, as referring to an unquestionable ‘subjectivity’ (and then manipulated covertly), such as users’ first person statements or numbers aggregated in surveys or ‘quantified selves’; but our rearticulation is not obliged by such absoluteness. To be sure, any attack on, or even expressions of doubt about, such signs will encounter resistance, both because of the breach with the dogma of pragmatics, and because it infringes on the hard-won rights of the subjects in question: It will be read as misrecognition. In other words, the peculiar immunity to critique built into neoliberal pragmatics (cf. Willig, 2009) is amplified by the politics of recognition. Still, such

\(^{16}\text{The state is continuously reconstituted in such moments of (struggle for) recognition. To this, cf. e.g. Balibar (2015) or Williams (1997), rather than only the ubiquitous Honneth (1995).}\)
questioning remains a key aspect of any rearticulation. This gives us a problem that is not simply solved by the hope that people will learn from experience or from our teaching (not least since all the pragmatic techniques in different ways set out from the real problem that people would not be motivated for such experience or such teaching).

In the first instance, we might return to Marx’ insight that the educator himself must be educated, rather than believing himself to be elevated from society (3rd Feuerbach thesis). Such self-education could teach us to rearticulate even the ‘absoluteness’ of signs of subjectivity in order to overcome it. For this, we could follow Jacques Rancière (2013, 2014) in adapting an ‘aesthetic regime’ as an approach to signs, artifacts and performances on the basis of a radical ‘assumption of equality’ between the educator and the educated: Since artifacts regarded as art objects are always dissensual, that is, unite conflicting regimes of sense - conflicting ways that reason is embodied in the sensuous - they break with any assumption of identity, either with the producer’s or with the consumer’s emotion. As a kind of “social technology of emotions” (Vygotsky, 1971), then, art accomplishes a recognition of subjective experience which is paradoxically at once absolute and critical, even heretic. For this reason, ‘aesthetic documentation’ could be a useful ‘educational technology’ in such practices of rearticulation - instead of the disciplinary links from texts in (critical) psychology to education, management, or therapy (see, to this, e.g. Nissen, 2014, Nissen & Christensen, 2018).

Theory, praxis, practices and activities

But our interest here is in the role of theory. More specifically: What does a philosophy (theory) of practice contribute when it unfolds or is implied in such rearticulations of motivation? And how may Osterkamp’s theory of motivation fit into this? In the following, I will attempt to address this question. First, by sketching the conceptualization of ‘practice’ - praxis and practices - that is required, and then by explicating the implications for motivation.

‘Practice’ is a term with multiple meanings carried by many different traditions. As we have already seen, rearticulating motivation through a theory of practice means moving beyond disciplinary boundaries - into trans-disciplinary fields, or into aesthetics, politics, etc. The rearticulations we have sketched here draw on a wide range of social theory and philosophy. This should be uncontroversial from the point of view of a Marxist tradition that always had social movements (labor, socialist parties, and later feminist, peace, and green movements etc.) as vital reference points and intellectual venues outside of
university disciplines. And so, of course, the words ‘Marx’ or ‘Marxism’ should never be used as disciplinary signposts or barriers to discussions in the broad field of philosophies of practice. Allow me to set off by attempting a dialectical approach.\footnote{Again not as a circumscribed domain, but as a self-overcoming movement whose teleology only derives from reflecting its own hopes and pathways.}

Practice can figure as the Other of theory. In a dialectical approach, the proposition of a philosophy of practice implies that theory (in and for itself) develops through reflecting on its otherness, its externalization. This includes, but is not limited to, scientific procedures, empirical data etc. More generally, theory encounters itself in practice as meanings, distinctions, relations etc. with implications, relevances, etc., in short, as immanent standards (a.k.a. orderings, discourse, structures of meaning etc.). Articulating these is theorizing, but it is also itself a practice - which intervenes in practical efforts and lives and at once subsumes itself to and challenges the relevances they establish. For this reason, articulation cannot be purely descriptive. It must be regarded as normative or performative, that is, it must be judged by its possible effects - on the one hand, \textit{within} ethical frameworks, and on the other hand, for its implied transformation of such frameworks. Just as ‘motivation’ constitutes subjectivities, so does our rearticulation of ‘motivation’. In other words, we engage in ideological struggles.

At a closer look, these arguments entail a distinction between the generic ‘practice’ - sometimes referred to as ‘\textit{praxis}’ (e.g. Bernstein, 1971) - and the plural ‘practices’. This is important because it means that ‘practice’ becomes not only an ‘onto-epistemological’ category, but also a kind of objects [Gegenstände] for specific sciences [Wissenschaften] as well as for other (meta-) practices. These can then be questioned for the ways they posit or distinguish such (‘practice’-)objects, and how they deal with the specificities of their conditions, forms, etc. In this questioning, ‘\textit{praxis}’ becomes a generalizing yardstick in the critical analysis of ‘practices’: How does any specific ‘practice’ contribute to ‘\textit{praxis}’, to the overall production, reproduction and transformation of human life and culture?

‘Activity theory’ is one (trans-disciplinary scientific) tradition in which these questions have been raised and discussed for a century. But there are many other such ‘sciences of practices’. If we zoom out, we might mention ‘praxeology’ (Bourdieu), ‘social practice theory’ (Lave), ‘praxology’ (Mol), ‘action science’ (Argyris), etc., and of course earlier approaches such as ‘pragmatism’, ‘action research’, ‘interactionism’ etc. These are all attempts to theorize practice, both as ‘\textit{praxis}’ and as ‘practices’\footnote{In GSCP, there was the curious example of the ‘Praxis-Portrait’ (Markard & Holzkamp, 1989), which, despite its generic name, pointed to a specific kind of...}.\footnote{In GSCP, there was the curious example of the ‘Praxis-Portrait’ (Markard & Holzkamp, 1989), which, despite its generic name, pointed to a specific kind of...}
Obviously, however, the interest in objectifying ‘practices’ is not reserved for academic students of the Kantian-/Hegelian-/Marxist philosophical legacy, which can be traced in all these theories. It evolves in many forms where professional, institutional, or organizational practices are designed, managed, and governed, quite pragmatically, more or less independent of theoretical articulation of ‘practices’ in general or of ‘praxis’. Each kind or cultivated tradition of practice has its own conceptualization, its own ‘methodology’, taught at various schools, institutes, and colleges. Further, the recent rise in governance by standardization sets up a (more or less) specific pragmatic regime of objectifying practices independently of such particular traditions (Bowker & Star, 1999; Busch, 2011; Timmermans & Berg, 2003; Timmermans & Epstein, 2010). In this, as in most contemporary (typically, professional) conceptualizations of specific practices, the relation to ‘praxis’ as an ‘onto-epistemological’ category is missing or implicit and uncertain.

The implication is that performing ‘philosophy of practice’ means engaging in a critical dialogue with various conceptualizations of practices; that reestablishing the connection to ‘praxis’ is a key theoretical concern; and that this is itself a way to intervene practically and ideologically.

Further, it means that this dialogue must unfold at two levels, apart from the dialogue within academic theories of practice: At one level, it must engage with the language, the traditions, the institutions etc. of specific practices - such as those of schooling, psychotherapy, engineering, etc. At another level, it must deal with different conceptualizations (objectifications) of ‘practices’ as such - such as ‘evidence-based practice’, ‘benchmarking’, or ‘quality management’.

Thus, it may be that e.g. psychologists have not really thought of their psychotherapy as a ‘practice’ that participates in ‘praxis’, except as the execution of their profession or as their ‘clinic’. But this may be even less the case if it is enrolled in a regime of evidence-basing ‘methods’, or, for that matter, if they are accountable for it as a ‘task’ among others within the organizational chart of a municipality.

Motivation in practice: second level of rearticulation

These are, I believe, general concerns for a philosophy of practice. But there are more specific connections to the problem of motivation. In these, we can begin to institutionalized professional practice, mostly relevant to Western European psychologists engaged in collective self-reflection as individual ‘practitioners’.
see how Osterkamp’s theory of motivation is relevant to articulating motivational (aspects of) practices.

Motivation as a concept depends very much on how ‘a practice’ or ‘an activity’ is conceptualized. This is highlighted in current pragmatic technologies that deal with delineating, customizing, and monitoring activities and their goals. But it is foundational to motivation as such. The concept arose along with the emergence of industrial and institutional standardizations of activities that people could (should, must!) be motivated for. It is this standardization that would accomplish the stabilization of motivation as a scientific object, even as it pointed to a subjective aspect. In a naïve conceptualization, the contents of any specific motivation, and its operational differentiation and sequence, are defined by the standardized activities that people can be imagined to be motivated for. In Leontiev’s sophisticated but functionalistic theory of the structure of activity, this is turned around into the notion that ‘an activity’ is defined by its motive, which, in turn, however, is always assumed to be identical to its socio-culturally defined ‘object’ [Gegenstand] insofar as acquisition succeeds (Leontiev, 1978) – even though the concept of ‘motive’ was meant to assert subjectivity and circumscribe a psychology. The theoretical aporia is then later ‘solved’ by redefining needs and motives as ‘social’ (first of all in the Engeström tradition, see Engeström, 1987; see also Nissen, 2011). Breaking with this functionalism is, in the first place, to reconnect activity to praxis by recognizing that subjects reflect, judge, and question the constitution of activities far beyond, not only their own organismic needs and drives, but also beyond the kind of ‘self-determination’ which can be regarded as choice, control, and social relatedness. This is the important place for Osterkamp’s concept of ‘productive needs’ as the need and drive for developing agency: It conceptualizes ‘joy’ as ethical in a participatory and universalizing (Spinozist), yet historicized way (cf. Keiler, 1997).

This implies the performative self-reflexivity of activity that we mentioned above. Being motivated for something is reflecting and enjoying that ‘something’ as worth pursuing19. This reflexivity is an ongoing collective process of at once framing and affective tuning; it is immanent to any activity, and not reserved for or limited to individuals’ thoughts or feelings. The creative accomplishments, insights, necessity or political strength (etc.) of a collective activity can be experienced as joyful and engaging (or disappointing, boring, terrifying, etc.) before the various individual implications are fully reflected and felt. Sometimes,  

19 Not in itself or intrinsically, but as something that takes part in praxis: Even the buddhist monks who let the wind blow away the beautiful flower mosaic they have meticulously collected once it is finished seek to make a point about futility.
this ‘seduction’ turns out problematic or even leads to self-deceit; sometimes, it is the birth, the communal proto-form, of new individual motives\textsuperscript{20}.

In Osterkamp’s conceptualization, the socio-cultural production of motives is neither limited to the specific objects that satisfy genetically predefined (sensuous-vital) needs (such as wanting precisely a lager beer when thirsty etc.); nor do motives magically and uniformly internalize preexisting ‘social needs’. Rather, emergent motives that ‘subjectivize’ objects, goals and hopes based on ‘productive needs’ for agency respond to the dynamic emergence of those objects, goals and hopes through \textit{participation} in their emergence, in the constitution of the activities defined and redefined by them. Of course, this does not deny the ‘objectivity’ of activities as performed with culturally evolved artifacts and standards, under conditions, within structures of power, etc.; they do not emerge from scratch. Still, the key concept of ‘participation’ [Teilnahme / Teilhabe] opens to grasping the processual, open-ended, dramatic reciprocity of the co-constitution of activities and motives.

This immanence of reflexivity does not rule out the possibility of its autonomization as modelling. As Goffman (1986) has shown, the ‘upkeying’ into a ‘bracket’ where attention is temporarily devoted to display or reference is an ordinary, routine occurrence in social interaction (e.g. ironic gestures etc.); and while this goes on in the flow of almost any activity, it can also be boosted and cultivated as a practice in its own right. Further, this ‘upkeying’ can be objectified into artifacts such as text, etc., which, in turn, constitute still other activities (writing, reading, filming, etc.). The general upshot is a \textit{complex and dynamic structure of activities and artifacts that mediate and refer to each other}: The meaning and meaningfulness of one activity derives from its reference to and contribution to another activity, yet potentially also from its relevance for still other activities, present and future, and only by way of such complex (and spatio-temporally distributed) practices from its relevance for praxis and for life. This complexity and open-endedness explains the affective vagueness, ambivalence and/or volatility of proto-motives in constitutive moments, which Wetherell (2012) identifies as the rational kernel of the ‘affective turn’ in social theory. Thus, for instance, when one client cracks a joke in what is framed as a counselling activity, the laughing of the counsellor and the other clients may sanction the reconstitution (reframing) it suggests, even in a momentarily undecided direction, and partly carried by the recording of the session (we have tried to capture this in Nissen & Sørensen, 2017; see also Nissen, 2004).

\textsuperscript{20} Cf. the discussions within the Vygotskian tradition about the concept of ‘perezhivanye’, which Vygotsky adapted from Stanislavsky to signify emotions that are formed in social interaction before they are individual (e.g. Cole & Gajdamschko, 2016; Fleer, 2016).
Further, if performative reflexivity is immanent to dramatic constitutive moments at a collective level, this itself includes a reflection of individuals’ participation, which remains a key aspect of any activity. In that sense, activities are always also, and can be cultivated and specialized as, therapeutic, pedagogical practices, and/or ‘practices / technologies of the self’. A person’s participation in an activity that is framed as ‘something’ - and for that reason appoints certain positions and locations for participation - is telling of who s/he is, to him-/herself as well as to others. This, in turn, motivates him/her to adjust, reframe, transform, exit (etc.) the activity, depending on who s/he wants to be, how s/he wants to see him-/herself (his/her narrative etc.)\(^{21}\). The specialized cultivation of this aspect has unfolded most consistently in the traditions of psycho-therapy, in which the key form-aspect is the construction of a ‘therapeutic space’ in which every action is reflected as ‘telling’: that is, as a modelling of the client in which the client him-/herself participates and to which the client reacts emotionally, in an evolving looping dynamic (Bank & Nissen, 2017; Nissen, 2012b, ch. 3). But it is an aspect of any activity, and a much wider range of specific activities can be seen to cultivate it more or less. This becomes clear if, for instance, one regards movements in the psychotherapy tradition to include art, music, or drama, not as means to cure, but as ways to break with the individualizing clinical framing (cf. Nissen, 2014; Nissen & Christensen, 2018).

Osterkamp never developed her theory much in the direction of articulating ‘performativity’, ‘keying’, ‘positioning’ etc. But she did point a way. As her discussion of the willfulness [Willentlichkeit] of action (MF II, ch. 4.3.4) reveals, her theory took the subjectivity of participation beyond the dichotomizing of authentic from calculated, or, more generally, of drive from control. For her, the true motivation that opposed coercion involved willful self-control, not the pure selfless flow of immersion in activity. This amounts to a critique of Deci & Ryan’s ‘intrinsic motivation’, but it is even more fundamental and applies to a key discussion in the Marxist psychologies of Osterkamp’s time.

Osterkamp quotes Marx’ discussion of general labor in the first volume of Capital:

He (the worker / UO) not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realises a purpose of his own that gives the law to his modus operandi, and to which he must subordinate his will. And this subordination is no mere momentary act. Besides the exertion of the bodily organs, the process demands that, during the whole operation, the workman’s will be steadily in consonance with his purpose. This means

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\(^{21}\) This is particularly discussed in the tradition of ‘positioning theory’ (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999).
close attention. The less he is attracted by the nature of the work, and the mode in which it is carried on, and the less, therefore, he enjoys it as something which gives play to his bodily and mental powers, the more close his attention is forced to be (MEW 23, S. 193 / Marx 1867, vol. I, 127). (MF II, 89).

Osterkamp uses this quote to argue for the human universality of will - of disciplined, self-controlled action. This is remarkable, since the quote seems to end in just the opposition that she argues against, in the form of a gradient: The less the worker is attracted to the activity, the more purposeful will and self-control are required, and the less he enjoys the activity as the play of his own bodily and mental powers. Osterkamp acknowledges the problem that willfulness can be ‘autonomized’ under conditions of alienation, but she emphasizes the first part of the quote, which stresses willfulness as a general quality of human engagement. This reading should be seen in the context of Osterkamp’s critique of Marx (MF II, 22 ff): Since Marx did not – except in glimpses – envisage ‘productive needs’, he could not quite arrive at the dialectic of production and consumption that he aimed for, in which production could itself be also consumption, or fulfilment of needs (just as consumption is itself the final stage in production; cf. Marx, 1986). This omission leads, at times, to a reductive approach to motives as derived from immediate bodily needs, and, at other times - as in this case - to a utopian characterization of activity as intrinsically joyful once separated from external control. This sets up the bad choice between accepting the burden of culture or enjoying an anti-social emancipation - which Osterkamp then goes on to criticize in her discussion of psychoanalysis.

As I have suggested above (and in Nissen, 2011 and 2012b), the solution for Leontiev and his followers was to stipulate an ideal identity of individual motives with social goals, as unquestioned telos of development. Osterkamp’s solution was more complex and more promising, since it took off from understanding participation itself as implying critique. ‘Productive needs’ as a need for participating in preemptive collective control [Vorsorge] of life conditions, spur a development, and this includes a reflection and transformation, of the subject, of the particular practice, of the collective and of culture in general, in specific constellations. To perform critique is not to exit, to stand outside, but, on the contrary, to engage more fully in participation. This ‘critical implication’ of any practice or activity follows from its – always contested, contingent – meaningfulness as part of praxis. That implies, in turn, that it may be either immanent to any given activity, or it may be unfolded as a relatively autonomous activity, which is however still constituted as meaningful largely (but not exclusively) by its reference and contribution to the original activity. It is this core theorem which makes it possible to overcome the separation of
(spontaneous) drive from (cultivated) will, which otherwise results from a critical approach to motivation.

It also gives us an approach to the emotional valence of ‘practices of the self’ and their model artifacts. These are the practices in which, and the tools with which, willful selfhood is developed, cultivated, and acquired through participation. In a consistent practice approach, the motivated subsumption of acts to collective goals, and the reflexive ‘distance’ to immediate affects and feelings – as Befindlichkeit, in Holzkamp’s adaptation of Heidegger’s concept (Holzkamp, 1983b) – do not result automatically from participating, nor do they unfold as a separate process of ‘inner’ calculation of personal ends and means (which can then be verbalized or otherwise expressed directly as ‘reasons’ in a ‘first person perspective’). Rather, the more or less immanent and / or autonomous-but-related practices of the self are social productions of selfhood that are reflected in their implications in relation to the activity. ‘Productive needs’ make me ask “is this activity worth our efforts?”, and “is my participation worth my efforts (and the efforts of those who help me)?” - but also “is this who I want to be?” In all these aspects, our ways of asking and answering are developed in socio-cultural forms.

Thus, for instance, when Nissen22, the professor at the Danish School of Education, engages in marking scores of student papers, he has to discipline himself. He engages with mixed feelings and keeps looking for ways to change these practices to make them more meaningful. Part of why he engages in and tries to transform the activity is about the collective meaningfulness of university practices, as this is conceptualized and debated in various legal, organizational, ideological forms etc. Part of it is also the meaningfulness of his life and identity as professor. For instance, he often has to mark student papers in ‘human resource management’, but he is more attracted to an identity defined by such projects as ‘rearticulating motivation’, and ‘collective subjectivity’. Since he also wants to be a responsible colleague, however, he goes through with the activity, interrupted by renewed thoughts about how to change the syllabus and / or how to establish or shift to other teaching courses. The partly contradictory hopes of being a ‘professor in rearticulating motivation’ and ‘a responsible colleague’ are narrative constructions that do not simply reside within him. They are constructed in various conversations, through his writings and teachings, his ways of arranging his office, his lunch habits etc. etc., and of course (or so he hopes) through the recognition by relevant others through accepting his texts for publication, through collaborating on developing the research program of which

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22 I shift here to the third person to avoid and ‘exoticize’ the illusion of immediate authenticity, which often comes with the use of ‘first person’ accounts in theoretical arguments.
he is member, etc. Sometimes, they are even the object of specialized activities such as the annual ‘employee development conversation’ with his head of department.

The general point is that these activities and artifacts provide the standards with which he can relate willfully to his actions. Certainly, his standpoint in relation to those standards (cf. Nissen, 2016) is itself emergent as a situated and singular, embodied complex-qualitative emotional form of affect, dependent on their relevance and implications in terms of developing his agency as participant in praxis. But it is not an either-or, or running in parallel tracks. Rather, it is a looping dynamics. Identity narratives judged to be attractive are taken to ‘motivate’ willful action, and developing such narratives is itself motivating etc., in an ongoing process.

Thus the mediatedness of selfhood, which is emphasized in a performative theory of practice, does not annul its affectivity, nor does it require us to revise Osterkamp’s key concepts of agency, productive needs, or motivation. But it does open to further issues that Osterkamp could only hint at.

First, the relative and mutable autonomy of reflexive actions, activities and artifacts. Since full participation is reflexive and critical, motivation must unfold in continuous movements of engagement and reserve (cf. Duchinsky, Reisel & Nissen, 2018). To put it in a slogan, the highest form of motivation is necessarily fluctuating and ambivalent. Further, to the extent that reflexive or critical aspects of an activity are developed and cultivated as autonomous, they are motivated in ways that are not simply expressions of the motives of the original activity. Ugly representations of beautiful activities can be attractive because they help to reflect them critically. Further still, the set of implications and references that spurred or originally defined an activity as a reflexive contribution to a given set of activities can be altogether opened, as in aesthetics. Aesthetic representations can be attractive precisely because of their open semantics. For instance, Sieland (2015) reports of a young drug user who was attracted to the image of ‘romantic self-destruction’; he had certain literary works in mind, but he was not able to explain why or how they seemed attractive as a way of imagining himself, of attributing meaning to his drug habits. Being a ‘romantic self-destroyer’ may not have been attractive, but creating and contemplating the image was – perhaps because of its inherent useful information, too, but probably more because those latter actions implied potentials that pointed in many other directions (some of which were connected with the study of English literature, which he embarked on at the time).

What emerges, in general, is a more complex theory of why self-monitoring devices and gamification can be ‘motivating’. It is not simply that targeted information is provided to feed into internal cost-benefit ‘calculations’ of
‘expectancy values’, nor that intrinsically motivating add-on activities fool the individual into wanting to do what she otherwise would hate. Rather, it is that new, more complex activities are built, along with new forms of selfhood, and that the implications of both are relatively open.

The second set of issues concern the ‘anchoring’ of motivation: The complexities and potentialities of reflexive and multi-layered activities are important reminders of the socio-cultural mutability and formability of motives and motivation; yet in all such re-constellations and transformations, individuals retain or develop criteria for engaging. This remains the key to why we bother discuss ‘motivation’ in the first place. We have based those (mostly) on the concept of ‘productive needs’ for developing agency. This anchors motivation in some kind of ethics that is implied, emergent, reflected etc. as an aspect of the collective activity as contributing to praxis, and more or less adopted by the individual as standpoint. As I have mentioned in the introduction, this ‘anchoring’ is far from essentialist, since motivation then becomes an emotional aspect of the social production of hope. In fact, individuals are ‘interpellated’ as participants of ideologically defined projects, emergent communities of hope.

The affectivity mobilized in this process corresponds in many ways to the novelty and the openness of such hopes, and, on the other hand, their credibility spurs this affect further, yet also forms it in distinct motives. This idea may appear to suggest yet another kind of malleability of motivation as ‘social construction’; it might indeed, but that depends on how such ideological projects are established, nourished, and how they develop, transform, etc. This is, of course, historically variable, but in general terms, some such ideological projects are very overarching and stable, for instance if they are attached to professions, nation states, social movements, or (e.g. religious, pedagogical etc.) institutions of everyday life, and insofar as they deal with pervasive material constraints that appear in different ways through economy, health, military, climate, etc.

Further, however, for such projects to be motivating, be they ever so convincing on the collective level, they must also offer - at least potentially - meaningful participation for the person motivated. To some extent, this can be conceptualized, still, with reference to the internal ‘intentional’ structure of the project itself (e.g. as ‘legitimate peripheral participation’, as its ‘demands’, its ‘trajectories of participation’ etc.; cf. Nissen, 2012b, ch. 5). But this must be connected to overarching cultural narratives of identity (e.g. as professor, as Danish, as socialist, as grandfather etc.), as these are cultivated in (more or less) specialized practices of the self (counselling, autobiography, anniversaries etc.)

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23 To the reinterpretation of Althusser's concept of interpellation, see Nissen (2012b), ch. 8.
to approach, finally, the question of the individual’s motives for participation on the basis (also) of how it is ‘anchored’ as part of the person’s *life*.

Again, even if embodiment, the sustenance of everyday life, and the movement from birth to death, are (as yet) quite inevitable conditions of life, this ‘anchoring’ does not amount to an unquestionable essence. ‘Life’ is always mediated by concepts, narratives, techniques, habits and projects that make sense of, and address the constraints of, everyday life and life course, of finitude and embodiment etc. ‘Bare life’ is not an authentic substance beneath our imagined selves, but a specific socio-cultural form in which ‘life’ is addressed, conducted, handled (Agamben, 1998). This does not, however, imply that ‘life’ is irrelevant or infinitely relativizable. For instance, in Nissen (2012a), I show how the news about the pregnancy of a drug-using 17-years-old client in a street-level social work facility in Copenhagen, 1995, would change priorities, hopes, demands, subject-positions, ethics etc. for her as well as for the people and institutions around her.

However, the claim that the anchoring of motivation in collective projects and in individual life are intertwined deeply does not imply that they are necessarily commensurable; nor should we suppose that they must be ‘ethical’ in a simple or positive sense. In a nutshell, we need these considerations in order to approach deeply questions such as: How can anyone be motivated to perform a terrorist suicide bombing?

**Human needs and lives**

The case of suicide bombing is useful here for two reasons. First, it confronts us with a radical and urgent counterimage to pragmatics, revealing the deep dichotomy of the ideology of ‘motivation’ that we engage with. But secondly, it also helps us assess what it takes for praxis-based theories to really be able to overcome that dichotomy.

When Holzkamp in 1983 reintroduced phenomenology into ‘his’ critical psychology renamed as “subject-science”, this can be acknowledged as the intuition that this work somehow had to be done. Recognizing individual subjects must imply recognizing the life that circumscribes and indexes their constitution as individuals [Einzeln]: their embodiment, their finitude, and (in the Holzkampian tradition, above all) their immersion in everyday life. This claim seemed a scientifically rigorous assertion of the reality of human experience which had been neglected in the rush to overcome individualism in the 1970s.

But it was precisely this ethos of scientific realism which seduced Holzkamp and his many followers to articulate the phenomenological legacy in a
paradoxically psychologistic, individualistic and rationalistic way (as personal function, as an inner monitoring of feelings, as an a priori self-interest, as the absolute status of the first person perspective, as the hollowing-out of ‘everyday life’ to become a mantra). This is what led to the endlessly repeated issue of how exactly to relate these ‘inner’ realities with social practice; and which in many cases, eventually, tends to reduce the whole issue of historically situated social practice, struggles and contradictions, to empty catchphrases. The idea that ‘psychology’ should be founded in a new and better way to ‘grasp’ the essential reality of a given subject-matter is taken as an unquestioned premise. When ‘subjectivity’ or ‘the subject’ is then held up as the true object, the social process of objectification is ignored or rejected. The agent-subject [Subjekt] of research becomes (individualized and) identical with her subject-matter, ‘the subject’, in so far as Verständigung overcomes the error of the ‘third person perspective’, and re-presents the ‘reality’ of introspection. Objectification, in this view, equals suppression, whereas, in the practice of subject-science, it is supposed to diminish, if not premised as absent from the beginning. Ultimately, this implies that this practice cannot reflect itself except in an idealized, abstract-utopian form. I have discussed this problem in various ways through the past decades (e.g. Nissen, 2012b, chapters 2 and 8), especially as a critique of the utopianism that results from claiming a realist ‘subject-science’.

But how could this set of issues be approached, instead, in an epistemology of practice?

Attempting a dialectical reflection of the ‘kernel of truth’ in Holzkamp’s and his followers’ movement away from practice, we should grant that life is not only the object of practices, but also in a certain sense the Other to any practice as well as to praxis. An epistemology of practice must overcome itself to address life. Still, we should be clear that we who write always do it on behalf of practices and (so we hope, of) praxis. Writing and reading research and theory are practices. The self-overcoming we seek does not magically result from the textual construction of a ‘first person perspective’, which remains in any case the product of a collective practice. The ambition must be precisely to reach beyond the simple assertion of mortality, embodiment or everyday life as abstract representations of the will to transcend practice toward life - representations that are so easily misread as universals suggesting a transcendence already accomplished and static. The greatest danger lies in an abstract negation of practice.

Instead, as any self-overcoming, it should be understood as substantiated in a process of cultivation, or, in the terms of Bernard Stiegler (whose philosophy I partly draw on in this final part), of trans-individuation (Stiegler, 2013). Evolving practices with evolving technologies that constitute subjectivities anew must be
continuously expanded to face the challenges of existence in new ways. Conversely, existing human beings must always appropriate (learn, conquer and transform) new practices and technologies as new ways precisely of living. In other words, life must continuously be reconstructed as meaningful, just as meaning must be incessantly cultivated to make sense existentially\textsuperscript{24}. These processes of cultivation are themselves practical, even if they are also transcendent. It is not merely a contemplative matter of interpreting, or even just a matter of deciding (of forming a will). Cultivation is at once productive and reproductive work\textsuperscript{25}, which continuously forms the situated societal-cultural totalities within which innovation and political transformation matter and should be evaluated, even if this resituating invariably happens after the fact.

An obvious example can be found at the intersection of life sciences with politics, social work, health and psychology: Pharmacology. The history of addictions is one of efforts to regain control of lives that had been ‘improved’ by mind-altering drugs, from alcohol and opium and on to the newest medicine. Even before it formed motives that people realized were destructive, each drug had posed the question of life anew, beyond its effects and side-effects as a tool in practices. What kind of an everyday life is structured by the working-class pattern of weekend binges? What is it to grow old when hormones can prolong sexual activity? How is emotion embodied if you are chronically on tranquilizers? Etc.

But Derrida (1981) famously demonstrated that this kind of process was at play already at the cradle of philosophy, when Plato wrote Socrates’ complaint that writing and reading text (as any artificial work on language) may improve thought, memory, rhetoric etc., but also corrupted them. Plato’s abstract utopia of pure thought and pure dialogue, pure life (which has survived until today), was itself an aspect and an outcome – and testimony to the irreversibility – of the impure practice of writing philosophy. This generalizes the relevance of the ‘pharmacological’ problem: If text itself is such a pharmakon, a double-edged sword and a game-changer, this is true of all inventions. So, for instance, kids enjoy TV, computer games, smartphones and tablets, and we are then challenged to build new kinds of childhood; here, Derrida helps us realize that our urge to throw away or contain those hypomnematic tools (or ‘tertiary artifacts’, Wartofsky, 1979) to secure a pure childhood is itself already formed by them. In Stiegler’s words, the pharmacological problem cannot be dissolved, “there is no

\textsuperscript{24} I have discussed this also as the dialectics of standard and standpoint, see Nissen (2016), and as relations of reciprocal concern between subject-position and existence, see Nissen (2012b), ch. 8. To the reinterpretation of Vygotsky’s and Leontiev’s meaning/sense distinction, see Nissen (2012b), ch. 5.

\textsuperscript{25} A theoretical side-gain here is that the production / reproduction dichotomy is left far behind.
final synthesis, but a *savoir-vivre-with-its-dependencies*” (Stiegler, 2015, 130), and thus, an ongoing process of cultivation.

What incites praxis to overcome itself and deal with life is the contradiction that praxis keeps transforming and challenging the life that it cannot but reassert repeatedly as its core concern. But each time, this is a wager. There is no guarantee that evolving practices can be resituated in life as meaningful, and there is no standpoint of ‘bare life’ outside praxis from which we can judge them.

Holzkamp once illustrated the concept of “dual possibility” with the example that, facing the execution squad, one can always shout “Long live freedom!” (Holzkamp, 1983a). Did he understand that perhaps being executed might constitute a meaningful conclusion to a life as revolutionary - even if this contradicted his a priori against deliberate self-harm? Or did he realize that it could also symbolize the absurdity of some of the ways those revolutionary practices had thwarted their existential sense (learning from e.g. Christa Wolf’s *Kassandra*). Could it be both?

Like the addict, the suicide bomber is a radicalized example of a more general phenomenon, at two levels. In the first instance, the radicalized Islamist is perhaps a ‘pharmacological being’, the subjectivity of a hybrid of simplified religious dogma with Hollywood action drama, whose life has come to finally make sense as a movement toward an imminent martyrdom in which earthly concerns (e.g. for the lives of others) lose their relevance. But are we so sure it makes sense, at all? At another level, this can be an absolute dissolution of sense into meaning (of life into standards) which may be the symptom of a loss, of an inability (with those cultural repertoires) to find ways to participate in practices that might be creatively reconfigured and resituated in a life that makes sense.

Of course, this latter interpretation is normative through and through. Such interpretations are themselves performative and should be judged by their ethical implications. While the first level warns against a premature pathologization, the second maintains the task of reconstructing ethics by resituating practices and their motives, of regaining health by collectively inventing normativities in Canguilhem’s sense (Canguilhem, 1991).

I wish to suggest, in conclusion, that this set of issues, which is becoming ever more pertinent, can be addressed by a development of Osterkamp’s theory of productive needs, if this development advances and supersedes, rather than abandons, the general epistemology of practice in order to address life and existence. Basically, at issue is the further deepening and unfolding of the concept of “productive” as what shapes the need for participatory agency – as immanently critical, performative, and continuously reconfiguring meaning and sense, as grounded in and, in turn, transforming an ethics of meaning as praxis and sense as existential.
The rearticulations of current motivational practices sketched above need only be slightly expanded to demonstrate and unfold this. They are already written as immanent critiques that attempt to reconnect them with praxis by uncovering the concrete utopia of a societalization / cultivation of selfhood, which can be served if pragmatics is reinterpreted and expanded as performance - as practices that immanently include, yet may autonomize, critical reflection and display. In the self-overcoming of praxis, then, the only question that remains is how a life thus nudged, self-monitored, gamified, re-narrated and appreciated is - no more? still? again?, or finally? - a life worth living.

This, ultimately, is the deep question of meta-motivation - not as a level in formal logic, disposable in a pragmatics of affects and signs, nor as the individualized first person perspective that believes itself to be authentic, but as participating in the care of the self that is potentially societalized at a new level, as it resituates such practices of the self.

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Subjectivity and needs:  
Is Subjektwissenschaft a neo-Cartesian remake or a reasonable groundwork for a relational concept of human existence?

Bernd Hackl

Abstract
One of the recent reproaches to Critical Psychology interprets it's concept of Subjektwissenschaft as a neo-Cartesian remake which continues to claim the primordial and dominating position of the self-conscious reflective individual actor: Klaus Holzkamp's subject seems to be a "spiritual being, separated from and trapped in a body and whose primordial autonomy is only limited by this bodily constitution and an opposing and refractory world." (See full text)

However, precise reading proves that Holzkamp's passionate insisting in the crucial role of the subject results from the aim of identifying a basic subject matter of psychological reasoning and reconstructing an appropriate category for it. This point of view allows (and an extensive reception advises) to consider Holzkamp's outline of subjectivity to be a rigorously conceptualized contribution to a relational view on human existence and I am going to legitimate this reading by the example of the concept of human needs.

Referring to crucial evidences of evolution theory, Holzkamp argues that human beings take any action based on a dialectic polarity of individual and social motivation and this polarity is due to human's phylogenetic heritage. Firstly, he states a 'consuming' type of impulsion, which he names sensuous-vital needs. They secure what it takes to sustain our mere organismic survival and, thus, are aligned individually. Secondly, Holzkamp supposes a 'providing' type, which he refers to as productive needs. They motivate to perform all activities causing preventive effects in the individual, social and cultural sphere. So, productive needs lead to what it takes to organize human life-activity collectively and to go beyond the individual horizon of life reproduction. In view of this
double determination humans cannot be seen as primordially self-centered egocentric monads but dedicated by nature to long for common good and welfare. If a humane, enlightening, critical theory of human existence is missing a horizon like this it moves into troubles. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the 'economy of practice' for example, refers to human interests as defined by the necessity of accumulating social, cultural and economic 'capital' in order to barter it against means to satisfy any kind of personally felt needs. Although the concept is remarkably elucidating human motivations under capitalist circumstances, it implies that human activity generally traces back to egocentric concerns promoted by activities of economic rationality. Strictly following an approach like this we had to construe any considerate, collective, altruistic activity as an exchange of actions beyond individual advantage for some individual remuneration. We had to abandon the idea that care, work, love or belief can be treated as genuine human needs and to conceive them as investments expected to be profitable over time. So Bourdieus concept of 'interests' the horizon of which ends up with an individual strive for 'capital' cannot be adequate to a social science that has to take a look beyond recent societal circumstances. And it is a concept of needs as elaborated by Critical Psychology that prevents from the traps of a reductive neoliberal anthropology and provides a necessary completion to the arguments of Bourdieu's 'economy'.

*Keywords*
subjectivity, human needs, interests, societal nature of humans

The reception of Critical Psychology (hereafter referred to as CP in short) is accompanied by certain misunderstandings. The architectural complexity and stylistic bulkiness of Klaus Holzkamp’s theoretical outlines invite enthusiastic as well as critical truncations. Additionally, Holzkamp strictly refuses to accept any thinking taboos and this leads to disconcertment in different frontlines. To give some examples: Holzkamp’s concept of the societal nature of human beings is, inter alia, based on ethological arguments by Konrad Lorenz and insists on the genetic endowments of societal acting, in view of which Holzkamp was accused of being a biologist. He also tries to connect his concept to the tradition of Leontjew and other Soviet psychologists, thus being suspected of being a dogmatic Marxist. Last but not least, he sharply criticizes every attempt to impugn the theoretical significance of the subject and, therefore, he became criticized for being obsessed with an obsolete bourgeois subject-philosophy.

Remarks of this kind could not dissuade Holzkamp from cutting his own path and giving an impressive example of what Hannah Arendt meant by her dictum of thinking without a banister. Yet in his opus magnum, *Grundlegung der Psychologie*, Holzkamp himself reports critics who state that “Critical Psychology actually was no psychology but rather sociology, a variant of Marxist
ideology, ... nothing more than a ‘lefty dressed’ version of traditional bourgeois psychology, ... a variant of cognitivism, ... a late revenge of geisteswissenschaftliche Psychologie” (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 24). Unfortunately, Holzkamp departed from life too early, so that he was not able to comment on the reception of his work and to answer to critics by clarifying or modifying his positions elaborately enough.

In his subsequent voluminous *Lernen - Subjektwissenschaftliche Grundlegung*, Holzkamp illuminates the role of the mental activities of the individual human actor in developing capacities of acting in the world and contributing to its creation. However, the concept provides various substantial barriers and traps for appropriate understanding because crucial arguments that could prevent dualistic and substantialistic misunderstandings are not outlined explicitly, but mentioned only in references to the preceding *Grundlegung*. This may be seen as respectable, but in view of the voluminous corpus at stake (*Lernen* and *Grundlegung* together comprise about 1200 pages of high density content) has to be considered as an unrealistic strategy – at least one of providing a quick overview and preventing premature conclusions.

It may have been this fact that provoked manifold reproaches. To name a recent example: The German educational scientist Tobias Künkler explicitly takes the theoretical core of *Lernen* as a neo-Cartesian concept which continues to claim the primordial and dominating position of the (conscious decisions of the) individual actor, thereby ignoring basic insights in the situatedness, relational nature and implicitness of human acting, thinking and learning: Holzkamp’s subject seems to be a “spiritual being, separated from and trapped in a body and whose primordial autonomy is only limited by this bodily constitution and an opposing and refractory world” (2011, p. 274). I am going to show that, instead, CP presents a very sophisticated, dialectical and relational concept and I will also try to shed some light on the inestimable value of its pivotal findings by confronting it with another very famous and sophisticated concept: Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of capitals.

### I. Subjectivity: Evolutionary heritage and first-person perspective

It is CP’s main goal to overcome mainstream psychology. According to Holzkamp’s diagnosis, ‘bourgeois’ sciences of human beings strive to make these beings strategically calculable, predictable or even manageable from an outside position and so they scientifically obscure the specific problems, ambitions and personal perspectives of humans onto the world. For this reason,

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1 Quotations of German sources: own translations.
mainstream psychology – characterized by Holzkamp as control science – strictly concentrates on surveying objective effects of interventions into feelings, thoughts and acts, systematically ignoring their authors as affected and concerned subjects and, thus, violating their human dignity. This attitude is exactly what the logic of strategic acting requires (regarding a social vis-à-vis some “competing opponent” as Jürgen Habermas puts it 1989, p. 277). Holzkamp calls it the scientific discourse of determination.

It is this critical intent (and no obsession with some ‘absolute autonomy’) that can be taken as Holzkamp’s crucial reason for rooting his theory in what he calls the perspective of the subject. Holzkamp leaves no doubt that scientific thought has to be performed by scientists in terms of methodologically acquired and revisable propositions and not by ‘normal people’ in terms of some ‘everyday discourse’. However, he considers the reconstruction of topics in the line of our commonly shared everyday experience and the comprehension of the world as it appears in our concrete being and acting in the world as a reliable scientific approach.

From this point of view, there is a humane alternative to the discourse of determination: the discourse of reasonability. In Holzkamp’s view phenomenological reasoning (and that means: doing science from a first person perspective) seems to be the only proper strategy to avoid the control-perspective. In Sinnliche Erkenntnis, published in 1973, Holzkamp already thoroughly introduces the argumentative strategy of Maurice Merlau-Ponty’s Phenomenology of Perception and in a voluminous essay from 1984, he explicitly claims that CP treats phenomenological conclusions about structures of human acting as a “conditio sine qua non”, because otherwise the specific quality of human subjectivity would be neglected (1984, p. 48).

In this very line, CP elaborates the interconnections between the individual life of human beings and the societal conditions in which it is embedded and by which it is supported as well as limited. CP makes these inter-connections explicit, neither insinuating an arbitrarily oriented, completely autonomously acting individual nor restricting this individual to a mere dependent variable quasi to a side-effect of the societal process. This position is not just a postulate but the result of an elaborate reconstruction based on a historical analysis in the broadest sense possible. In view of the evolutionary phase of hominization, Holzkamp recognizes a shift “from the merely evolutionary-phylogenetic to societal-historical development” (1991, p. 53) which implies many changing principles in the life process of the highest primates. In the first stage of the animal-human-transition, a “supraindividual, collective coordination of life production, in which single individuals assume partial functions subordinated to a general goal” (ibid.) emerges co-evolving with the “development of the use and
production of tools” (ibid.). The manifold details of this transition are reported in
the initial chapters of Grundlegung, starting with the transition from preceding
forms of life to animal life and culminating in human society.

One crucial implication – and, therefore, a part of coevolutionary
developments as a whole – of the shift to supra-individual practices in connection
with tools is the inversion of the relation between goals and means: From the
moment on when the first tools are generated, the individual does not have to
search for means matching a current goal anymore but instead has to identify
goals for available means. “Whereas the instrument was earlier brought into play
in the presence of a concrete, needed object, such as a stick that serves to reach a
banana and is then discarded, a functional change in the instrument gradually
comes about in which it is produced not just in immediate connection with actual
activity, but for generalized purposes, such as obtaining fruit, and is therefore
retained, improved and so forth” (Holzkamp, 1991, p. 54).

Undoubtedly, there will still be situations in which we search for means but
what we actually find are components of the cultural inventory mankind has
acquired, materially bearing all the goals that have led to its shape and that guide
us in lines drawn by others in view of their interest in controlling and steering
their life processes. And even if we are not satisfied by these means and begin to
invent and develop new ones, we can only be successful in doing so on the basis
of the accomplished cultural state of affairs.

This concept of the relation between the outcome of productive activities
and the limited options of its use on the one hand indicates a clear distance to the
idea of an ‘autonomous individuality’. On the other hand, the concept might also
give the impression of being a closing down of human freedom, but its real effect
is quite the opposite: It is the tools, instruments, equipment, later pictures, visible
and auditory signs and, finally, language which allow for thinking selectively,
making choices and practicing alternatives. The materialization of experience in
the form of artifacts, icons and symbols, enables individual actors to terminate
their immediate connection to the world and facilitate the realization of
possibilities instead of blind obedience to coercive conditions.

Taking all these evolutionary features into account together, CP is talking
about the societal nature of human beings and, thereby, softens the strict
opposition between nature and culture which is usually assumed in traditional
sciences. The new approach to humanization shows culture as a late result of the
evolutionary development of nature and both, nature and culture, as
fundamentally interwoven and mutually determining each other.

This first sketch of CP’s theoretical concept already gives an impression of
the direction in which the interconnection between the subject and its societal
environment is dialectically composed: definitely not as ‘primordial autonomy’
which is just ‘limited’ by the body and the material world. Instead, it is a
relational autonomy, genetically fixed in origin and shaped by the circumstances,
supplied and kept alive as well as limited and torn down by its conditions,
emerging as a new feature but still resting upon all of its phylogenetic roots.
However indeed, there is something ‘primordial’ about human subjectivity as CP
construes it, and it lies in CP’s answer to the question, why human subjects
actually do what the historical analysis shows to be done ‘necessarily’ – as soon
as any strict coercion by conditions has become evolutionary transcended. Still
here, again, CP draws a dialectical picture presenting a subjective and, at the
same time, limited control over individual life processes, and this picture
introduces the crucial function of human emotions.

Why that? Don’t humans always decide rationally in view of reasons? And
doesn’t that imply being independent from pleasant or unpleasant feelings? As
CP claims, it is definitely impossible to uncouple our behavior from our emotions
felt in the here and now of a specific situation. Holzkamp calls it the “only
material a priori of Individualwissenschaft [which is synonymous with
Subjektwissenschaft – B.H.] (1983, p. 350) that as a human being I can stand “in
contradiction to my objective life interests” but not “in contradiction to my
human needs and interests I experience as my situation” (ibid.). According to this
argument, we do not carry out actions we consider to generate later satisfaction,
but actions that are triggered by our emotions here and now. And indeed: Isn’t it
a fact that so many times we already know for sure that we are acting in a way
that will make us end up badly and yet we do not change the way we act?

But how is it possible that we can feel a concern at the present moment that
we can expect not to arise until the future? In CP the essential meaning of
emotions becomes inaugurated in an evolutionary context: In this perspective it
cannot be – initially and mainly – any cognitive notice of the necessities of acting
in a certain manner (alone) upon which the actor acts, because this ‘manner’ can
only be derived subsequently from the experienced effects of already performed
activities. So, we have to presume another mediation between necessities and
activities, another reliable trigger for action and we can find it in specific
emotional impulses being provided by the genetic endowment that guarantee that
humans match the implications of their survival: They do not only have a
spontaneous impulse to eat, drink, care for a beneficial temperature and to
reproduce themselves by copulation, but also to practice all the necessary
activities of human life, such as supra-individual coordination activities, the use
of tools and language and all the learning activities required to become capable
of doing so in particular: “Humans are not satisfied when they merely reduce
particular momentary need tensions, such as hunger or sex; rather, they achieve a
fulfilled, satisfied state only when they can anticipate the possibility of
satisfaction of their needs within the prospect of a provisioned and secure individual existence, that is, when they can develop their action potency in the process of participation in control over societal life conditions” (Holzkamp, 1991, p. 60). How can we imagine the genesis of such an emotional apparatus as a feature of our genetic program?

II. Human needs between sensuous-vital and productive necessities

It is already in pre-human evolution that a double structure of emotions emerges. Animals are (and, lacking any rational reasoning, have to be) driven by emotions leading them to activities that are necessary for survival. They don’t feed because they know that, otherwise, they would die from shortage of energy, but because they feel hunger and, likewise (and additionally), they don’t hunt or collect food because they know they would get hungry later on, but because it brings them satisfaction doing so. The first type of emotions keeps animals alive in a direct way by making them receive energy from their environment and stabilizing their indispensable inner balances (feeding, drinking, keeping a beneficial temperature, sleeping etc.). Another set of emotions keeps them alive in an indirect way by making them expend energy in activities that have the effect of precaution (learning, grouping, hunting, collecting, building abodes and appliances etc.). It is crucial for survival that the second type of emotions (leading to ‘generating’ motivations/activities) is at least as strong as the first one (leading to ‘consuming’ motivations/activities). If animals became what we could call ‘lazy hedonists’, squandering what surrounds them arbitrarily and waiting for more to come without their active contribution, they would soon become extinct.

During the animal-human-transition phase emotions undergo a specific transformation, but there is no evolutionary need to quit the double structure that has had emerged previously. Rather, it is deepened, mainly by the necessity that the ‘generating’ part of motivations has to be completed by motivations leading to activities which are specific to the new form of human life-activity. The most important change that emerges in protohuman life reproduction activities leads from consuming natural stuff to producing means of subsistence. It is obvious that humans do not live in the land of milk and honey just skimming what grows around them but actively create the conditions of their life by rationally planned, collectively organized and technically mediated processes. But how could they become motivated to do what it takes to perform those activities (on a phylogenetic as well as on an ontogenetic level) before having experienced their
effects? There is only one convincing answer to this question: by feeling emotions that lead to the necessary activities.

Ute Osterkamp discusses the characteristics of human emotions in detail. She shows how the evolutionary development of the human species has to be reconstructed as the process of co-evolution of genetic programs that provide capabilities of mental and motor actions on the one hand, and emotions that impel the subjects to practice those on the other hand. Through this evolution, the permanent and cumulative expansion of species-specific activities from animal to human forms becomes secured and the typical structure of human needs established.

Firstly, there is the ‘consuming’ type of needs, labeled as sensuous-vital needs by CP, motivating for the same activities as it was the case with those performed by their subhuman ancestors: receiving digestible substances and water, the regulation of temperature, etc. The characteristic of their course is homeostatic, which means that they lead to the decline of tensions which emerged from cumulative changes of inner organismic relations or organism-environment-relations. They run “back into themselves” and “repeat themselves on the same level” (Osterkamp, 1982, p. 39). Sensuous-vital needs arise cyclically and their quality is repetitive, being once satisfied they dissolve but perpetually emerge again and proceed as they did before. They lead to what it takes to sustain our mere physical life-activity and, thus, are aligned individually.

Secondly, there is the ‘providing’ type of needs, which, according to the new species-specific activity, are referred to as productive needs by CP and motivate to perform all activities causing preventive effects. For human existence this means the following: The already highly differentiated features of the highest animal species become enhanced by the activities that are required for the new societal-cultural organization of the reproduction of life, such as the “conscious exploration and analysis of reality” and the “coping with problems in connection with participation in societal forms of reality control and the improvement of common life conditions” (Osterkamp, 1982, p. 42). So, productive needs lead to what it takes to organize our physical life-activity collectively and to go beyond an individual horizon.

The course of productive needs is characterized by continuity. They do not lead to the decline of their inherent tensions, their satisfaction does not cause an effect of saturation but might even strengthen their potential. So, their dynamics can be characterized as expansive. If we successfully communicate, learn, organize or act collectively, create or adopt science, arts, techniques or spirituality, we will be more and more motivated and increasingly absorbed emotionally by our activity. So, as a consequence, experiencing satisfaction will boost and not decline the need.
The outlined anchorage of the double structure of needs in the genetic endowment of humans does in no way imply genetically fixed needs. It is only the double structure that is unmodifiable, but it is an open structure, open to manifold varieties of situational circumstances, open to manifold variations of objects being connected with it. “Before its first satisfaction the need does not ‘know’ its object, the object still has to be detected”, as the Russian psychologist Alexej Leontjew puts it (1987, p. 181). The animal-human-transition phase is stretched over a long period of evolutionary development of homo sapiens, in which early cultural achievements function as a selective advantage. So, cultural achievements are continuously changing and replacing established features by new ones and, therefore, the needs provoking the individual's activities cannot remain unmodified and the double structure of emotionality has to become and keep open to changing references. Only the capability of connecting to any cultural evolution of social and artificial environments human history would create remains genetically fixed.

On the basis of this double structure of needs we can feel the consequences of our activities – and this means, emotionally evaluate – in the present. We are not free to uncouple from our emotions but, through symbolic means (language, pictures...), we are capable of imagining alternative scenarios including the alternative consequences they would bring about. So, our human freedom depends on the capability of imagining extensively, precisely and vividly, including a spontaneous emotional reaction to its results. Doing what will be best for us does not mean doing what we think it would be but what we feel to be according to our needs. By this we are able not only to find the best alternative but also to actually realize it.

The double emotional concept is also crucial for our understanding of social anthropology. If any human activity just went back to some egocentric motive, every altruistic, collective, considerate activity would have to be construed as an exchange: We only would get active beyond individual advantage in view of some individual remuneration and we would only ‘give’ (away from our personal consume) in exchange for an aspired ‘take’ (back into our personal consume). But can effort lead to nothing more than yield? If we accepted no motivation that transcends our self-centered ambitions as contoured by the term sensuous-vital needs, we had to abandon the idea that care, work, love or belief can be treated as genuine human needs. Instead, we would have to conceive them as investments expected to be profitable over time and any empiric intrinsic commitment would have to be theoretically unmasked as a myth. This is exactly what happens in Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of the ‘economy of practice’. So, subsequently, I will take a critical look at this theory and demonstrate the serious theoretical impact.
of CP’s idea of the double structure of human needs by showing that it provides a missing link to arguments in the line of Bourdieu’s ‘economy’.

III. Can the ownership of capital be the horizon of human needs?

It is typical for the social fields Bourdieu investigates to have established some intrinsic ideal of contributing to human life and culture as a whole and their proponents are striving for truth, morality and authenticity. Yet, one of the main assumptions of Bourdieu’s theoretical work is to consider it scientifically inappropriate to construe a social field in terms of its own self-description and to explain the activities of its actors as a result of the norms and values explicitly postulated. So, aspiring to a sustainable alternative, he tries to show that crucial aspects of the actors’ practices can be traced back to particular interests that are covered by performing the internal normative discourse. He conceptualises these interests by the terms of social and cultural in addition to economic capital.

The point of this theoretical maneuver lies in achieving a system of universal categories by which very different individual, social and societal activities should become relatable to each other. Based on this intent, Bourdieu tries to establish a “general science of the economy of practice” (2005a, p. 51) of which the main core lies in the view that any “accumulated labour, either in form of material or in internalized, ‘incorporated’ form” (ibid., p. 49) constitutes some specific efficacy to a social actor which he generalizes as an economic means. Social capital (useful ties and affiliations), cultural capital (skills, knowledge, certificates, cultural objects) and economic capital (monetary and real property) are three forms it can take and they are increasable and convertible into each other. Their exchange rate is defined by the amount of effort that initiate them: “The universal basis of value, the quantity of all equivalences, is nothing else than the working time in the broadest sense of this term” (ibid., p. 71).

The primary source of cultural capital – which I am going to discuss here in greater detail – are educational contexts, especially as given by families and schools and it emerges through the incorporation of the capability to interact with cultural objects and actors. To acquire cultural capital thus means to learn, it “requires a process of internalization that costs time to the extent that is necessary for schooling and learning. This time has to be invested personally by the investor” (ibid., p. 55). Cultural capital, however, is not just a matter of conscious or even systematically planned acquirement, it is also realized by implicit forms of socialization: Any intellectual, verbal, aesthetical, corporal or moral challenge and stimulation experienced from early childhood onwards
contributes to the accumulation of cultural value that can become operative in any later capital exchange activities.

The overall bias of this argument may be surprising: Why does Bourdieu ground the criticism of capitalism to which all his lifelong work is dedicated on a generalized concept of human pursuit as of acquiring capital? Isn’t it just one of the proto-religious beliefs of modern neoliberalism that every human being resembles a miniature company competing on an ubiquitous market, maximizing its private property and wellbeing, strictly following utilitarian motives and isn’t it exactly this anthropological myth which radically undermines equity, solidarity and a life in freedom and dignity for all in our contemporary world?

Before trying to elucidate this curiosity I want to emphasize that there are two considerable merits the concept undoubtedly owns: Firstly, it goes beyond any naive, moralistic resistance against capitalism. It can help us to keep in mind that, under the conditions of today’s hegemonic capitalism, we all are trained to follow the laws of market, to apply them to our everyday strategies and to act in view of our personal individual advantages. This may give the concept some realistic impact. Secondly, Bourdieu’s approach also goes beyond the traditional forms of structuralist and functionalist theories that used to construe humans as, more or less, naturally adapting to given circumstances and following historically preset demands without being aware of doing so and without being able to map any alternatives. Bourdieu’s actor, in contrast, follows his or her own interests, is willing to act intractably, generates alternatives and, therefore, is not fatefully dependent on passive acceptance of given social and societal settings. This gives the concept a certain dynamic impact.

In investigating a social field, Bourdieu is nothing less than ignorant about its innate discourse of norms and values. So, he discovers the fact that human actors deliberate different types of reasons. Cultural achievements, such as scientific findings, moral judgements, artistic creations, efforts of public services or accomplishments of religious communities, can, on the one hand, be motivated by vocation, by responsibility or by aspiring truth, morality and authenticity but, on the other hand, also by income, yield and increasing wealth that derives from bartering the products of activities for economic values. Bourdieu therefore describes social fields as referring to two poles of attraction: to an autonomous one, committed to intrinsic motives and an “intellectual order” that stands “in opposition to economic, political and religious power” (1974, p. 77), where the actors do not aim at economic success and to a heteronomous success, where this “success as such is a seal of quality” (2014, p. 238).

Up to this point, Bourdieu’s concept seems to show a contradictory double determination of the actor’s activities, and indeed, sometimes he talks about a “double awareness” (1998, p. 187), “two truths” (1998, p. 188), or a “double
habit” (ibid., p. 193). Still, at last the “double” solution seems to leave him unsatisfied and makes him undertake a significant turn by identifying an enigmatic process of “transformation” of the internally appreciated values into yield and wealth: In this view, it is just the pureness of the “intrinsic” quality that, in the long run, can transform itself into economic capital. Some sort of magic metamorphosis, a “symbolic alchemy” (1974, p. 92) realizes the transformation of non-economic into economic value.

The point of this conceptual shift of emphasis aims at the ‘real’ relation between field-specific and utilitarian reasoning: Investigating the Kabylian society, for instance, Bourdieu calls the intrinsic attitude of economic indifferentism a “self-deception” (1998, p. 165), “euphemism” (ibid., p. 168) and “structural hypocrisy” (ibid., p. 169). So, for the enlightened social scientist it is not just a (by whatsoever motivated) decision between two different principles anymore - e.g. if an artist produces valueless ‘art’ or profitable ‘trash’ – but a decision between two forms of one basic economic endeavor. So, this version of Bourdieu’s concept culminates in the question if an actor is aware of the fact that he/she is acting as a participant of the market or he/she is deceiving him-/herself by an illusion of some moralistic ideology.

At first glance, Bourdieu’s approach reminds of Karl Marx’s Capital. In its first volume, Marx distinguishes between the use value and the exchange value of commodities and it is not only the use of the term ‘capital’ that bears a conspicuous resemblance to Bourdieu’s distinction between intrinsic and economic forms of value: “A commodity is, first of all ... a thing that through its qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind. ... A thing’s usability makes it a use value. ... The exchange value initially appears as a quantitative relation, the proportion by which use values of a certain kind can be bartered for values of another kind” (Marx, 1867, p. 49ff). However, as this definition already reveals, it is impossible to exchange one with the other. Marx unmistakably states a total incompatibility of the two phenomena: “Being use values commodities are of different quality, being exchange values they can only be of different quantity and, therefore, do not contain an atom of use value” (ibid.). This implies that none of both is a misconception as well as none of them is the ‘real truth’. Both represent a genuine feature which becomes apparent from a certain view on the commodity.

By drawing this strict distinction, Marx obtains an instrument for analyzing the intricate process of production and circulation of capital and commodities dialectically and of critically decoding the contradictory motivations of human behavior on the individual, social and societal level. We could ascribe the same potential to Bourdieu’s concept of explaining the dynamics of a social field dialectically by two poles of contradictory attraction. However, his attempt to
finally unite both of the ‘poles’ under one common category represents a threat to this potential: If moral, artificial, educational or spiritual engagement was nothing more than some self-deceptive myth covering genuine economic motives, any bearing fundament of criticism of market-compliant anthropology could dissolve. Does Bourdieu fall victim to this risk? This question requires a very precise and thoughtful answer.

IV. Duality of motives or self-deception?

Bourdieu’s intensive work in different social fields leads him to more or less radical versions of the shift outlined above. This can be well studied by comparing two elaborated examples. Firstly, Bourdieu’s research on the production of art presents an extensive reconstruction of how the artistic field generates a system of norms that commits its production to an ideal of intrinsic value. In a voluminous study on French literature of the 19th century (2014), he deliberates on what the production of the artwork is about – from the standpoint of the immanent discourse of artistic pureness and quality. He reports meaning, structure and functions of the internal moral standards practiced by the community of artists in a precise manner. He shows how writers emancipate step by step from external obligations and how they work out the ideal of l’art pour l’art that only accepts the authority of internal ‘aesthetic’ criteria obligating artists to resist against “any other imperatives than those sedimented in the tradition of the respective artistic discipline”, as he puts it elsewhere (1987, p. 22). The artist promotes “the cult of a self-sufficient form, the enhancement of the esoteric and non-deducible quality of the creative act” and produces an artwork that has to be assessed “by the pureness of its artistic intention” (1974, p. 84).

Further, in spite of this analysis, Bourdieu detects the possibility of a transition of aesthetic value into economic value and marks its pivotal condition as the “interposed time interval” (2014, p. 238): It may take a long intermission until some return on investment will be realized but, finally, the intrinsic value turns into an economic one, whereby the “asceticism in the here and now” functions as a “precondition of salvation in the beyond” (ibid.). It is the interposed interval that “obscures the profit which promised to the most altruistic and disinterested investments” (ibid., p. 239). Bourdieu does not yet predetermine if the artist invests artistic quality in order to receive economic capital later on or if this is just some unintended consequence of the idea of artistic autonomy and quality. Anyway, it is an occurrence that does not just
happen arbitrarily and although it does not happen in every single case, Bourdieu uses the argument to unveil a secret law of societal existence.

In the version of Bourdieu’s concept of the arts, however, the innate norms and values still can be understood as a serious and necessary view on the tasks of artistic writers. Bourdieu demonstrates this by working out the artistic idea taking over the discourse of art in a very detailed and sophisticated manner. In his reconstruction he leaves no doubt that he pays every intellectual respect to what he outlines as the historical self-discovery of the artistic field. So, the concept still reflects a serious contradiction between motives that are dedicated to the satisfaction of common human needs and motives that are dedicated to the personal accumulation of means of economic exchange and, thus, follows the ‘double’ argument.

Bourdieu’s capital-theory also claims to shed light on the system of public education (see: 2004’ Bourdieu & Boltanski, 1981; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1971, 2007) as well as to provide access to its empirical investigation, and here we come across a significantly different approach. Bourdieu’s criticism of school and teachers is devastating. School is considered as nothing more but a means of indoctrination and allocation of cultural capital. To him, it seems obvious that school functions “as a big cognitive machine that reproduces preexistent social classifications by classifications that appear to be totally neutral” (2004, p. 72). Although Bourdieu appreciates that the educator’s action is “performed in the illusion of singularity and in conviction of neutrality, as a matter of fact is objectively orchestrated and objectively subordinated to the social structures, because the categories of perception and evaluation they use, are the transformed product of the incorporation of those structure” (2004, p. 73). The contradictory ‘double’ determination which still kept some dialectic tension in the field of literature, has now turned into a mere instrumental determination decorated by some speech bubbles containing naive pedagogical avowals.

Unlike his approach to the norms and values of arts, Bourdieu ignores the innate discourse of education. He seems to be absolutely uninterested in an accurate reconstruction of what educational philosophers used to outline as the ‘nomos’ of the educational field. This is remarkable because the discussion about Bildung – not least by the arguments of Bourdieu’s fellow citizen Jean-Jacques Rousseau – would have provided quite a substantial amount of fundamental self-reflection that – all in line with the discourse of French literature – lead to a system of norms that commits educational action to an ideal of intrinsic educational value, according to which education is obliged to resist against any economical, political or otherwise instrumental training that undermines the development of adolescent’s free will, a comprehensive awareness of their self
and world and an overall sense of responsibility to the dignity of all nature and culture.

Bourdieu’s crushing criticism of school does not leave any space for a serious ‘double determination’ of the encouragement of personal autonomy on the one hand and making young people exploitable for economical or political purposes on the other. In Bourdieu’s view all their ambitions are directly adjusted to the aim of acquiring cultural capital as an abstract but universal means of exchange for other forms of assets, such being socialized to their subsequent life in the higher or lower classes, depending on the amount of capital they are able to gain by heritage and individual struggle. All the humane impact of educational theory is treated as a mere technique of covering up those instrumental arrangements.

Bourdieu is a scientist of accuracy and discipline and so he does not content himself with a rough outline of a prejudice. He examines the societal system of education in various voluminous studies in which he pursues the processes of educating, schooling and qualifying in detail. Yet, he never gives up the setup of his interpretation. To give an example: The “symbolic effect of imposition” (2004, p. 59) seems striking to him when the attitudes of teachers and pupils are preharmonized by cultural provenance, for instance “when a professor of philosophy, who brings all his social unconscious into his message, talking to bourgeois youngsters who are ready to identify with it, outlines the Platonic distinction between episteme and doxa or Heidegger’s argument on the man and the alltägliche Gerede” (ibid.). But, can topics like these only be seen in the context of social selection and the appropriation of capital?

I consider it remarkable that, repeatedly, it occurs that Bourdieu implicitly documents the option of an intrinsic standard, by saying for instance: “Because, being dumbed down to its most simple expression for reasons of classroom communication”, topics like Plato’s and Heidegger’s philosophy would be reduced “to the aristocratic confirmation of the thinker’s distance to the ‘ordinary’ and to ‘common sense’ – the secret principle of professorial philosophy of philosophy and of the enthusiasm being aroused so easily in young people” (ibid.). Obviously an aspect of ‘quality’ comes up here: The simplest expression of Plato and Heidegger is definitely not what Plato and Heidegger is about. After all, studying philosophy in a non-simplified manner seems to be about more than mere bourgeois distinction and securing exchangeable capital.

And when it is “quite obvious that pure school education is not just fragmentary education or an excerpt of education but inferior education, because its components do not maintain the meaning they would maintain in an entire context” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007, p. 31), then it is just as obvious that the pedagogical transmission of our cultural heritage is not only a transmission of
some currency, but also of knowledge, insight, enlightenment, of recognizing what is going on in the world. Unfortunately, the manifold similar implicit acknowledgements remain without theoretical consequences. Bourdieu is not willing to reconstruct educational theories that would make clear what ‘inferior education’ or an ‘entire context’ could be from the standpoint of a precise self-reflection of the educational field. What is the background to his indecisive approach to the contradictions of common and particular interests, of intrinsic and utilitarian motivation?

V. Long-term-profitability and subjective needs

The core problem to be solved is the obscure theoretical relation between innate normative discourses of social fields and the economic profitability of matching their claims. At first glance, they are just two distinguishable phenomena, but as the arguments above already show: quality (as approached by innate discourses or by the category of use value) and exchangability (as approached by economic discourses or the category of exchange value) have something in common and this raises the question if there is a common category that allows for conceptualizing both of them in an integral theoretical concept. In Marx’s view we deal with two ‘sides’ of one thing, two ‘readings’ of one case, two ‘aspects’ of one reality, a ‘double’ identity – both parts of which represent a specific context of being concerned, of reasoning, of acting. Can we construe one as the product of a transformation of the other, as Bourdieu finally suggests? I think I mentioned some serious reasons against this solution. Thereby I do not intent to refuse any categorial connection at all. There is, I think, also a comprehensive theoretical option.

If I am interested in the economic value of an object or my personal activity, I do not aim at the exchange value as such because there is only one reasonable use of it: to barter it for some further use value. To maximize this possibility, my attention of carrying out the barter will be aimed at receiving a maximum of exchange value, representing a maximum of some usability in the future. By this motivation, my position (and that of my vis-à-vis) becomes an individualized one: Both of us are not focused on a certain qualitative endeavor but only on a quantitative outcome and so we do not act as two persons being conjointly engaged in a concerted activity but we calculate in view of our own advantage and, therefore, follow opposing interests. Aiming at a maximum of quantitative output leads my perception to a position segregated from the position of the other(s). Our only commonality in this arrangement is our structural enmity.
A qualitative endeavor, instead, implies in every imaginable case the activation of an element of the repertoire of human efforts to master the challenges of life, the use of human culture and, therefore, be it more explicitly or more implicitly, a shared enterprise, even if individually approached and therefore always connects us with others. To give a simple example: If we like to dance we may invite somebody to join us and if he/she accepts we are going to perform some sensitive cooperation, exiting experience and esthetic expression. This is a paradigmatic case of intrinsic motivation, because we spontaneously aspire to follow some immanent criteria of moving and we will dance as long and intensive as we enjoy it. Dancing for joy means to share the intent of having fun, but also when we read a book, sitting alone for hours and thinking about its contents in solitary contemplation, we share our activity: with the author whom we are willing to follow (or to resist) and with the community that follows or resists (the arguments of which we have adopted and share) as well as the whole human civilization that receives enlightenment by reading and thinking about books.

So, it is the principle of the barter which fundamentally individualizes the position of interacting humans and which, in spontaneous view of activities, is ‘naturally’ integrated in collective practices of satisfying human needs. This is also the core reason why any innate discourse of social fields which addresses others as fellow-subjects being engaged in shared concerns on the basis of common intents and beliefs becomes obsolete by the discourse of profitability. The latter does not refer to needs as such nor does any cultural, social or spiritual service if produced as a commodity: “Use value in the calculation of the producer of commodities only plays a role in relation to the expectations of the buyer, which have to be considered. ... From the standpoint of exchange value, the process has finished and the purpose been realized in the act of selling” (Haug, 1971, p. 16)

Here we reach the point where we can go back to the double needs concept of CP as outlined above. We can assume a pivotal analogy between Bourdieu’s and CP’s concepts: Both Bourdieu and CP try to provide a conceptual framing of the relation of individual reasons and collective activity. Bourdieu’s solution is grounded on a precise analysis of the empirical forms of commitment to collective concerns but fails to discover a genuine emotional basis of it. So, his conclusion is that a variation and recombination of immediate individual concerns and egocentric motives are the basis of ‘strategic’ maneuvers of exchanging forms of potentials which, then, are subsumable under the concept of capital. CP’s solution, on the contrary, enables one to frame empirical collective ambitions by a range of human emotions that are intrinsically directed to them and, therefore, renders it unnecessary to refer to shared agendas as some
necessarily individually aligned effort having a – more or less – unintended effect of collective benefit and being covered by a hypocritical ideology.

Anyway, before we totally refuse Bourdieu’s idea of long-term-profitability, we should take another very careful look on it. If we consider technical, cultural, moral, even spiritual human productivity being spent in homo sapiens’ previous history, according to CP’s argument, in the long run, all of them actually contribute to the overall satisfaction of individual human needs in one or another form. Planning, acting and learning with engagement and responsibility, communicating and interacting constructively, being creative and productive while ignoring sensuous-vital needs at that very moment will yet prevent from hunger, thirst, perishing by cold or heat or suffering from uncontrolled environmental effects in the future. ‘Intrinsic’ forms of being activated somehow always bear the potential for providing manifold ‘instrumental’ goods and effects. In view of this, we could at least follow Bourdieu by recognizing some overlapping function of both, intrinsic collective and utilitarian individual motivation: We are satisfied by ‘generating’ in cooperation with and for the sake of others as well as by ‘consuming’ individually – as long as both activities do not exclude each other.

At this point we can apply CP’s phylogenetic argument (as mentioned above) to Bourdieu’s concern: Productive needs did not emerge in evolution to serve some primordial ‘moralistic’ mission but as a means of leading individual organisms to activities which ensure their survival by acting precautionary collectively. However, productive needs lead to collective action only insofar as our personal sensuous-vital needs are perceivably enclosed and respected in its overall trace. Not every collective demand – as we all know from experience – has the potential to incite our commitment. A typical shared activity has to be experienced or considered as an activity that secures (also) our participation in the underlying concerns, developed goals, performed realization and generated effects of it.

Though it was no task of evolution to institute moral systems, CP’s argument is now also crucial for a concept of morals. It provides the groundwork for a concept that neither imposes moral rules in a dogmatic nor dissolves them in a utilitarian manner. According to CP’s concept of needs, altruistic action does not root in an abstract ‘moral law’ but in the impression of being concerned by a shared problem and being better off by sharing perception and solution of it. The result of this is that – participating in a mutual relationship of adjustment, assistance and solidarity – the one who gives is, at the same time, one who wins – not as some return of exchange value but as a qualitative surplus of shared human existence: Concepts like donation, hospitality, compassion, solidarity or love as well as intrinsically motivated work for high quality artistic literature or
enlightening education (as well as every other work) are no currency of investment but original sources of happiness about situational conditions that are not just compensating pain and misery but dedicated to a concept and reality of human welfare, security and dignity from which pain and misery are generally banned. So, the logic of moral action transcends the logic of an insurance where all individual contributions are calculated as collected resources for compensating fatal deficits that might occur to partaking contributors. The emotional disposition of an altruistic perspective does not motivate by the idea of getting benefits back but makes us celebrate the common certainty of having established a civilization beyond pain and misery and makes us share the joy about this cultural acquirement of humanity.

Beside this qualitative struggle of creating human life conditions collectively there is, of course, a struggle for achieving means of economic exchange by which the societal access to utility values can be organized and regulated and this also contains a struggle for cultural and social goods. So, there can be no doubt that cultural capital and social capital (in addition to economic capital) actually exist and permanently become distributed and interchanged. Many of the widespread analyses of Bourdieu and his staff bear witness to the pivotal advantage of orientation being provided by a theory of capital and its various forms. However, it confuses more than it elucidates human behavior to say that cultural or social capital is to be achieved by transformation of the outcome of intrinsically motivated, shared efforts. The logic of economy has to be traced back to the solitary, self-centered rationale of a very specific form of human acting and – quite contrary to all the neoliberal mantras we are exposed to all day long – cannot be taken as its common principle.

So, also in view of CP’s concept of needs, we can appreciate some crucial truth in Bourdieu's assumption of an innate connection between individual and collective concerns. However, in view of all the arguments spread above, I propose that it would be a less contradictory solution to talk about personal contributions to the collective organization of human existence implying precaution for individual needs as one form of human motivation and personal accumulation of cultural or social capital which implies some later exchange for economic means as another one. Human endeavor, to turn Marx’s words around, does not contain an atom of exchange value and, therefore, is absolutely un-exchangeable against any economic goods; the horizon of its ‘profitability’ is commons not capital. The genuine target of all productive, creative and moral human struggle is the desire for a shared world which secures a life in welfare, security and dignity.
References


Bernd Hackl, professor for didactics and school-research at Graz university (2003-2017), currently visiting professor at Vienna university. Main topics: relations between teaching and learning; significance of body, space and artifacts in education; functions and mutual effects between school and society; criticism of neoliberal school reform; recent monograph: Lernen, Wie wir werden was wir sind (2017).
The development of informational needs and prospects of a needs-based critique of digital capitalism

Sebastian Sevignani

Abstract
Aside from bringing media and communication as important but undertheorized topics into the field of critical psychology, this contribution proposes the notion of ‘informational needs’ as an elementary aspect of human agency. The paper first provides a critical psychological notion of human needs. It, secondly, develops an understanding of informational needs and then, thirdly, traces their phylogentical and historical development up to the current stage of ‘digital needs’. Under the current condition of a subject’s increasing dependence on digital technology there is a need to (re-)integrate information into situative knowledge and experience. Lastly, the paper explores what the notion of informational needs and more generally a historical-materialist theory of information informed by Critical Psychology (Holzkamp) adds to the critique of digital capitalism.

Keywords
Marx, Critical Psychology, digital capitalism, informatization, digitalisation

1. Introduction
This paper makes use of critical psychology to provide some foundational thoughts for a critical media and communication sociology. While this field includes quite diverse perspectives, I’m particularly interested in contributing to research that productively connects to Marx and the Marxist tradition. While the political economy of media and communication has a long-standing tradition and produces current and important work to understand the role of (new) media and (digital) communication in the reproduction of capitalist societies (see for an
DEVELOPMENT OF INFORMATIONAL NEEDS

overview Holzer, 2017; Fuchs, 2011), it however lacks social theoretical elaborations of its basic concepts such as knowledge, data, information, communication, media, publics, ideologies, etc. A more complete historical-materialist approach to media and communication would ground political economy analyses in what I call a historical-materialist theory of information (Sevignani, 2018). It is here, where I think critical psychological insights are relevant. More concretely, I follow an almost forgotten path of theorizing (Holzer, 2017; Schenkel, 1988) that tries to connect media and communication sociology to the German tradition of critical psychology that mainly builds on the works of Soviet psychologist A.J. Leontyev (1978) and is linked to the works of Klaus Holzkamp (1983; 2013) and Ute Holzkamp-Osterkamp (1990) at the Free University in Berlin (see Tolman & Maiers, 1991; Tolman 2013; Schraube & Højholt, 2015).

However, what, in turn, can critical psychologists gain from a historical-materialist theory of information? Aside from bringing media and communication as important but undertheorized topics into the field of critical psychology, I introduce the notion of ‘informational needs’ as an elementary aspect of human agency. This paper first provides a critical psychological notion of human needs. It, secondly, develops an understanding of informational needs and then, thirdly, traces their phylogentical and historical development up to the current stage of ‘digital needs’. Today, the increasing dependence on digital technology for communication strongly shapes a subject’s possibilities for attaining agency in a digital society and there is a subjective need for informational convergence. The paper ends by discussing what the notion of informational needs and more generally a historical-materialist theory of information informed by critical psychology adds to the critique of digital capitalism.

2. Needs development between appropriation and objectification

A first definition of needs, drawn from common sense, is that needs consist in a feeling of lacking something, which is accompanied by a motivation that something must be done against it. ’Need’ is a crucial concept of a subject centred and humanistic theory (Heller, 1976), which is critical insofar as it thinks about the obstacles of human flourishing.

Following Marx’s concept of man as ‘Gegenständliches Gattungswesen’ (concrete species being), humans develop through work: Subjective aspects of the individual (e.g. living labour power) are transformed into objects (e.g. a labour product) by appropriation of the external (first) nature (e.g. labour object
and means of labour). Thereby both, the objective and the subjective objects are transformed. Man-made objects (second nature) then flow into the labour process again. Through labouring on (first and second) nature, not only nature develops but also the labouring subject and his or her needs. Labouring has psychic effects. Critical psychology adds to the Marxian notion of concrete species being and the labour process, by first extending the quality of concreteness to pre-human stages of development and making it the key principle of phylo- and ontogenesis. Second, it highlights the crucial role of mediation, by assuming that the internalization of mediated external processes results in sign mediated processes internal to the subject. Third, it can subsequently develop a detailed theory of how nature transforming activities effect subjectivity, including needs, and thus substantiates Marx’s more general assumption on the psychic effects of laboring activity.

Needs are typically situated within the subject, although they have objective connotations. Marx saw the historicity and the class dependency of needs, but for him needs originate from the consumption process: “consumption creates the need for new production, and therefore provides the conceptual, intrinsically actuating reason for production, which is the precondition for production” (MEW 13, p. 624f.). Critical psychology contributes additional insights by asking: “how could humans ever get to the point that they produce the conditions of their survival socially, if there is only a need to consume socially produced goods but no need to create them?” (own translation, Osterkamp, 1990, 18). Marx did not investigate the subjective motives of social production, but critical psychology does by giving a highly differentiated and elaborated account of human evolution. It phylogenetically traces the development of ‘the psychic’ from pre-human stages to the tipping point where the concrete species being first appears, and then further to its full realisation in society. Thus, what Marx philosophically assumes, is scientifically substantiated by critical psychology with the help of anthropological insights and references to the natural sciences. In the following section, I reconstruct what this account (Holzkamp, 1983; Osterkamp, 1990) means for the development of needs.

A specificity of a historical-materialist account to human needs is that they are conceived as varying in the historical process and that no definite, ‘thick’ description of them can be given, as some influential approaches do (e.g. Maslow, 1987; Doyal & Gough, 1991; Nussbaum, 2011). Needs are always developing through social activity. While this does not necessarily imply that the notion of basic needs has no value for setting standards of what humans need for a minimum or a decent life, it rather focuses on the form needs take when we speak of specific human needs – for example in contrast to the demands of other living beings. This focus is, as we will see, expressed in the concept of
‘productive needs’ respectively agency. And, I would add, also in the concept of informational needs.

3. The development of the system of needs from pre-human organisms up to the level of concrete species beings

In the view of critical psychology (Holzkamp, 1983), we can first speak of a psyche, in a very basic sense, if the relation between an organism and its environment is internally mediated by a) orientation, b) emotion, and c) learning (see figure 1). These three aspects together form the psyche that develops evolutionarily as a mediation between activity and given objective circumstances because it provides the organism with better chances to adapt to external life conditions.

![Figure 1: A basic model of the psyche.](image)

The first psychic or internal mediation is orientation: With the development to orientation, organisms’ activities are no longer restricted to simple execution, as a second kind of activity – orientation – emerges. Execution is an activity that serves the conservation of the self and the species. Orientation is an activity that guides towards an execution or mediates execution. The environment becomes meaningful for the organism according to these two forms of activity (e.g. an object prevents an organism from drinking (executive activity), then circumventing this object is an orientational activity). A doubling of the system of needs takes place simultaneously: From now on there are needs that refer to the execution of an activity (e.g. thirst) but also needs that motivate orientational activity that is necessary to satisfy executive needs (e.g. scanning the environment for potential barriers).
The second mediation is emotion: With the rise of the psychic, meanings and emotions mediate the relation between needs and their satisfaction and form a first system of motivation. The pre-human organism has certain needs and there are possibilities to satisfy them in the environment. The organism has the basal cognitive ability to recognise these possibilities, which is the same as saying the environment becomes meaningful for the organism. Needs point to the disposition of an activity and meanings point to the relevance of an activity. Emotions evaluate meanings according to the organism’s needs. Meaning is then actualised and an activity follows or not. An object has meaning for an organism if, and only if, there is a need for it, and it is evaluated. Emotions allow problem solving if meaning and need fall apart; they allow orientation and unification in ever complex environments.

The third internal mediation is learning or the ability to develop: An organism’s ability to learn meanings of the environment instead of following fixed meanings and fixed emotional evaluations, which are determined by genes, is a significant advantage for survival in changing environments. Learning extends the range of what can potentially give meaning to the organism. Organisms are then able to learn relations of meanings, e.g. to know that five orientational steps/meanings are necessary to satisfy hunger. In these chains of meanings, it becomes necessary that the organism learns to emotionally anticipate the final satisfaction, in order to be motivated to go through the chain of steps in the first place. The new psychic quality of learning also implies that meanings are no longer clear from the outright, they must be learned now. This simultaneously means that there is now a coercion to learn to survive. Accordingly, a specific need develops in this uncertain situation that motivates learning activity – the need to control the environment.

At this stage of human evolution, the stage of higher animals and coordinated groups, tools are used to ensure the satisfaction of needs. Additionally, other animals that are identified as similar can be used as a kind of “social tool” for need satisfaction. For instance, driving in a hunting expedition only makes sense if the catch is distributed later and drivers also get a share of it. The single activity becomes meaningful only in an interindividual (chain of) activity. Individual satisfaction is only possible if there is a form of social control. The participant in this social coordination must learn that someone is rather a hunter than a driver. In this stage, the individual survival depends on successful coordination. The control needs now not only refer to an undifferentiated environment but also to the group. If coordination fails, need satisfaction cannot be guaranteed. A specific need for it comes to life, the need for control over social relationships.
After the psyche and its specific aspects have evolved and higher animals grouped together, a decisive qualitative step towards humanity, or what Marx calls ‘concrete species being’, has been made. However, two further steps must be taken to its full realisation. The first precondition for this, is an important means-end-reversal. So far, means (objects but also social tools) have meaning only within a certain activity that aims for need satisfaction. After this certain activity, the meaning of means is de-actualised, the tools disappear. Now tools are produced as a precaution. Their meaning is contained even if it is not used, tools now have a stable and socially generalized meaning. The environment is now enriched by generalized ends and affordances. A transindividual storage of the processes necessary for survival is created that can be appropriated by the descendants.

The social control need loses its reference to actuality. (Primary) needs are no longer satisfied if actual shortage and threat is prevented by social control. Control needs are now directed towards provision in relatively stable social cooperation. A need for individual participation in the cooperative-provisional production of life conditions and opportunities of need satisfaction develops. Holzkamp describes this crucial step as follows:

The general principle characterizing this development is the growth in the active appropriation of nature by means of altering, interventional objectification of generalized life-sustaining aims. The objectification thus characterized is the new societal quality of the previously described 'externalization' of orientational activities through the preparation and use of aids to action [= tool use] [...]. The process of appropriation objectification is the earliest shaping of 'labour' as the creation of use-values in human life; it is the creation of that which makes [human] life possible. (Holzkamp 1983, p. 176 as cited in Tolman, 2003, p. 91)

The second precondition is the rise of language. Holzkamp puts forward a production-based theory of the origin of language. Tools, such as a stone axe, can be used for a variety of purposes. They could, for example, cut trees, kill animals, or dig soil. The objects to which an axe was applied could be soft or hard. Some objects were easy to cut, some required substantial time and effort, and some were so hard that it was impossible even to leave a dent on them. Despite these differences, all the objects could be compared against the axe, which was an invariant component of all encounters. Therefore, the axe could be considered an embodied standard of softness/hardness. Using the axe for practical purposes to do something with an object in the environment had the side effect of placing the object on a ‘scale’ of softness/hardness. This scale emerged as a generalization of the individual experience of using the tool. Since people followed shared,
culturally developed procedures of creating and using tools, the tools could serve as an embodiment of abstract concepts based on the generalization of both individual and collective experience. In short, the cooperative tool making process leads to so called practical concepts to which symbols can be attributed. The activity to fix a roof necessitates a concept of liquid tightness. Symbols can now represent these practical concepts but allow to detach them from the immediate point of origin, which leads to the creation of symbolic worlds. However, within Critical Psychology itself Holzkamp’s production-based theory of language was challenged (referring more to Wygotski than to Leontjew) by arguing in favour of mutual development and equiprimordiality of labour and language. The argument put forward here is that not one of the means of production that archeological research has found could have been reproduced without at least a very rudimentary form of language (see Reithel, 1998; Sevignani, 2018).

4. The specificity of humans: Productive needs

At this phylogenetical level, people for the first time are able to make their own history; evolution is no longer the dominant driver of development. The integration of a substantial number of social cooperations leads to a final new quality - the rise of society. This new quality is characterised by the ‘transcending of the immediate’ (Unmittelbarkeitsdurchbrechung, Holzkamp 1983, p. 193). This means that the nexus between the production of the means to survival and their individual use/consumption is broken. Surely, there are still necessities for reproduction, but these only exist on the societal level. They only become effective on an average of all society members and no longer determine the concrete individual. An individual’s specific socio-economic position and personal condition mediates the connection between the individual and the society. Objective demands that a society has to react to if it wants to reproduce now reach meaning for the individual only if they are mediated by its specific condition of life and position in social structure. It follows that societal meanings become potentialities for the individual. Objective activity and subjective agency are now differentiated, human agency expresses a relation of possibility to the activities that must be performed in a specific society. This includes the possibility not to act.

The decisive concept that follows these complex derivations is that of ‘productive needs’ (Osterkamp, 1990) and agency (Handlungsfähigkeit) (Holzkamp, 1983). Critical psychology has convincingly shown that the ‘societal nature of humans’ (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 178) evolves phylogenetically and has
thus made a strong point to bridge not only the juxtaposition of nature and culture but also of individual and society. Although humans are set free from natural and societal determination, they do not lose their necessary relation to nature and society. Both the modified need structure and the cooperation on a societal level, are conditions of possibility for their agency. Agency, in this dialectical view, means the exercise of control by the individual over the conditions relevant to the satisfaction of his or her needs through participation in societal production. The corresponding psychic element to this situation are ‘productive needs’. Productive needs do not have a homeostatic-cyclical quality. They do not move from tension to relief to renewed tension because they have no fixed objects as a goal; rather they cause a general disposition for activity. They refer to the social form within which sensual-vital need satisfaction takes place. To speak about productive needs does not mean that there is now a need to be a productive worker; rather it means the need of individual integration and participation in social relations that enable the production, distribution, and consumption of goods.

At the societal level, sensual-vital needs - various basic needs and socially determined needs - can only be satisfied if productive needs - the participation in societal mediated provision - are satisfied at the same time. It is precisely this integration of sensual-vital needs into productive needs that marks the specific human face of need satisfaction. For instance, it is a crucial difference if bread is eaten in the condition of acute shortage or if it is consumed with the knowledge in mind that there will be bread in the coming days, too. If this guarantee exists, that is, if productive needs are satisfied, then the satisfaction of sensual-vital needs is joyful instead of driven by acute demand. The sociality of needs does not only consist of the fact that needs are socially determined but also characterized by an important change in their quality. This means that, on the one hand, human needs are not satisfied simply by giving refugees food if refugees at the same time suffer from a lack of socially mediated control over their life conditions. On the other hand, it means that satisfying basic needs by lobster, champagne, and palaces is inhuman if these satisfactions do not take place in a situation where the societal provision of these goods is sustained.

5. The development of informational needs

Information stems from the Latin word ‘in formare’, which means ‘to impress’, ‘to bring something into shape’, ‘to design’ but also ‘to instruct’, ‘to brief’, ‘to let somebody know about something’. In the first meaning, a nexus between information and making (the world, social relations) and thus the reference to
objectifying and appropriating activities is clearly visible. Information mediates a subject’s relation to the material and social world (objective). By information a subject can reproduce or map external effects through internal change and thereby react to the external world. The origin of information thus relates to the evolution of the psyche and the development of organisms that are not completely determined by the outer world. To speak of information presupposes the instances of recognizing meaning and evaluation according to given demands/needs.

Informatization is in this perspective not equal to the mechanization of the social information process that we saw from the 1970s onwards (Nora & Minc, 1981), but suggests a much broader and general process of the objectification of mental activity, knowledge, or the psyche (Boes & Kämpf, 2012, p. 320ff.). What was only in the mind and grew there due to the increasing psychic sensitivity of organisms for information now becomes (re-constructed) information again. The objectification of mental activity subsequently allows others to gain access to these informations. Without information appropriation and then objectification humans would not understand each other, and knowledge could not be shared. This refers to the second meaning of information as something that informs somebody. Thereby information (objectified knowledge) is not identical to the initial thoughts but is an incomplete reflection of it. Similarly, the appropriation of information is structured by its production process but not completely determined (Pfeiffer, 2004, p. 71). It must be deciphered in the context of the receiver’s knowledge. Informatization is a twofold activity of objectification/externalization and appropriation/internalization. From the perspective of the subject, information reduces knowledge by making it shareable, but to understand information again demands knowledge to (re-)contextualize it. Knowledge is the non-objectified form of information.

Informatization in this general meaning is the precondition for mental activity being able to exist as a particular form of human work that is relatively independent from manual work. As such it can later be subjected to rationalization and mechanization. Mental processes become independent from their authors and flow into technology, e.g. the construction of machines and the organization of work. Informatization is a process that co-originate and develops with the human ability to work on the objective world. Formalisation and informatization are necessary qualities of the development of the productive forces and (post-capitalist) societies that are based on a high degree of division of

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1 This, the close connection of information and objectification/concrete species being diverts from Hofkirchner’s universal approach to information (Fleissner & Hofkirchner, 1996; Fuchs & Hofkirchner 2002, p. 277), who assumes that information processes are also a quality of non-living matter that adapts to its environment thermodynamically.
labour and are not imaginable or desirable without informatization (Pfeiffer, 2004, p. 130; 183f.). Informatization is a general dimension of the development of productive forces, and not only of capitalism, as some commentators put it (Schmiede, 2006).

Critical psychology’s analysis of need development can be specified by considering informational aspects. I assume that informational needs are integral to orientational activity and occur first with its differentiation from executive activity. While needs develop from simple orientational demand to control demands on the pre-human stage to social control needs in the field of transgression between animals and humans to species being’s productive needs, so do informational needs (Schenkel 1988). Thus, productive needs do have an informational aspect. If the specificity of human need structure lies in productive needs and the latter are the motivational base for participation in social relations that enable to satisfy all other needs, then information processes (in its different forms) are indispensable for a subject’s agency that is only effective via its participation in determining its social conditions.

Figure 2 illustrates the parallelism of human development, including the corresponding forms of sociality and the most important qualitative steps that had been taken in phylogensis, and the evolution of the psychic. The psychic basically includes (see figure 1) two aspects: Meaning, which is the aspect that connects to the objective world (the increasingly social nature) and the aspect of needs/demands, which is the genuine subjective side within the subject that provides the background for the evaluations of meanings. Which concrete informational aspects does the development of human needs include (see figure 2)? The development can be sketched in 4 stages: First, already in the pre-human stage of development, with orientation and emotion as psychic instances that mediate the organism-world-relations, an informational need arises, and the organism now needs to be sensitive and create information to survive. Second, still in the pre-human stage, with processes of group-building and initial forms of sociality, informational needs as an aspect of the new need to control the social environment evolve into communicational needs. Bi-directional communication is the informational aspect of the social, which later develops to an informational need of language. Third, in the stage of transgression from animals to humans, the need for individual participation in the cooperative-provisional production of life conditions accompanies the evolution of simple communicative needs to medial needs that manifest in script mediated communication.
The perspective of critical psychology stresses differences in forms of human cooperation. Direct cooperation in communities differ from mediated cooperation in societies with a complex division of labour. Thus, there is an additional fourth step of the development of informational needs that points to the human stage of phylogenetical development: (Mediated) communicative needs transform into individual participation in the process of societal self-understanding. This communicative need is externalized in separate institutions - the mass media. Mass media creates and builds on a mass communicational need that is the foundation for human development into societies. The informational aspect of productive needs is the development of mass medial needs. With the ‘transgression of the immediate’, the nexus between individual communication and communication as a process of self-understanding of a society becomes problematic or loses its immediateness. The appropriation of socially mediated meanings is mediated by one’s socio-economic position and personal life condition. The individual’s relation of possibility to the whole society also effects his or her communicative relations. If, what, and how an individual communicates is no longer pre-given. The individual ability to communicate must be developed, but at the same time can be developed, because through internalization there is now a foundation in the individual need structure. Similar to the changed quality of sensual-vital need satisfaction in the light of productive need satisfaction, the quality of individual communication now depends on its integration in mass media discourses: “If one level serves the function of a necessary condition for the next higher level, then the lower level might be
influenced, shaped, adjusted according to this function by the higher level" (Fuchs, Hofkirchner, Schafranek, Raffl, Sandoval, & Bichler 2010, p. 52).

6. Informational needs in the digital era

The preceding thoughts about need development are very unspecific concerning the latest development of capitalism to its digital stage so far. As a next step, I build on the previous but now consider that digital media mark once again a change in the process of internalisation, objectification, and, consequently, a subject’s need structure. To draw a picture of this change, it is first necessary to elaborate on what the transgression to the digital age means.

6.1 The process of digitalisation

Digitalisation means a further development of the system of productive forces and a decisive phase of the process of informatization, where the computer eventually operates as the guiding technology. Computers are an outcome of cognitive, communicative, and collaborative productive activity and operate as tools that mediate human access to first and second nature. This development of the productive forces is accompanied by key qualities – further formalisation, universality and plasticity, reflexivity, and integration.

Further formalisation: We already know about the reduction of knowledge to information through objectification. The computer and digitalisation demand that information transforms again into data. Data are documented distinctions that have per se no meaning. In the process of digitalisation information is reduced to a binary logic of 0 and 1, electronic impulse or no impulse. Information consist of data that is distinct from other data due to a certain relevance or meaning that is attributed to it. Information is thus a ‘difference, which makes a difference’ (Bateson). For instance, distinctions get a first meaning if they are graduated on a scale, such as temperature. In this process, it is differences in temperature that acquire meaning. Alternatively, and this makes clear that the transformation of information is relational, temperature data/information (e.g. 37,9 °C) becomes meaningful information if it reaches a certain relevance, such as the meaning that 37,9 °C body temperature is ‘elevated temperature’. The transformation of information into knowledge is then used to contextualise elevated temperature, e.g. as a symptom of a certain disease. Data and information always must be appropriated and re-contextualised by humans. Human-computer-interactions deal with the transformation of information into data and vice versa.
Plasticity and universality: A universal machine, such as a computer that operates with this binary logic, needs an informational input “from the real world and must give back its output to the real world to fulfil its purpose within the context of the system as a whole, within the redoubled world of working on and processing symbols it is free of these limits and open to any step of work” (Schmiede, 2006, p. 337). For instance, a printer needs informational inputs and must produce informational outputs, in the form of a combination of letters that have meaning. However, the printer is not restricted to certain symbolic combinations, but is able to print any number of symbolic combinations.

Reflexivity: The universality and plasticity of computers, that is the “autonomization of the machine system” (Schmiede, 2006, p. 339) make possible that “facts and contexts are understood to be informational processes right from the beginning and are formulated and modelled appropriately; they are the starting point of processes of reorganization and technologization” (2006, p. 337). For instance, computer programs simulate the operation of a tool before it is built. The simulation shows that the tool will not be functional, and as an outcome the informational image of the tool is modified accordingly before it is built.

Integration: ICTs allow for enormous compression of time and space, they enable to bridge temporal and spatial distances by spending relatively less investments. This, together with the previous qualities, allows formerly distinct information systems (e.g. production, distribution, and consumption related information) to be integrated.

6.2 Digital needs and the internet as a medium

These developments in the system of productive forces result in the Internet as a new medium or as a new social space (Boes & Kämpf, 2012). The tool (the computer as a universal machine) becomes, if it is socially generalized and accepted, a medium (the Internet), as it happened with (body) language, script, and mass media before (Rückriem, 2015; Sevignani, 2018). When tools become media, the psychic organisation of subjects changes, and this process includes the social organisation of new media institutions as a response to newly created informational needs. We are now in this phase of transgression, but we cannot fully grasp it because we lack a standpoint of distance. It is crucial to keep in mind that potentials of the Internet that are extrapolated in the following are not yet fully realized. This is also due to antagonisms and contradictions inherent to capitalism (Fuchs et al., 2010). One way to approximate this change is to picture the new quality of digital mediation in contrast to previous regimes of mediation (Giesecke, 2002; Logan, 2002).
The decisive quality of the Internet as a medium is, first, that within this medium non-codified information, such as text, music, and video, as well as codified information, such as software code can be processed and this, for the first time in history, allows to connect the general human use of information to complex information systems via a universal medium (Boes & Kämpf, 2012, p. 325). Brey argues in this context that symbolical user interfaces for systems of codified information “make no good use of our sensorimotor abilities, and instead rely on our capacities for abstract thought. However, because people's sensorimotor abilities are usually better developed than their capacity for abstract thought, it pays to treat data and programs as manipulable, visible objects, when possible. As a result, the tendency in software development has been to devise programs in which data strings, (sub)programs and procedures are translated into visual icons and actions like clicking, ‘dragging’, and scrolling” (Brey, 2008, p. 196). Second, the Internet integrates, at least in principle, “Web 1.0 as a tool for cognition, Web 2.0 as a medium for human communication, and Web 3.0 as networked digital technology that supports human cooperation” (Fuchs et al., 2010, p. 43). Third, the Internet allows the integration of inter-individual communication, cooperation and societal mass communication. The Internet is a medium of spatial, temporal, and informational convergence.

Giesecke (2002, p. 279) argues that the pre-digital cultural era neglects qualities, such as the revaluation of non-linguistic and non-visual senses, associative, affective, and circular information processing, social self-reflection instead of individual self-experience, interaction instead of mono-directional information flows, that are now fostered by ICTs. He speaks in this context about ‘the vanishing of the central point of view’. The “central perspective solves the problem of communication about our visible environment without interaction. Hence, a third party is enabled to make the same experiences as unknown beholders have done somewhere along the way” (Giesecke 1998, 9). As such, the central perspective enabled the enormous development of productive forces and technology. However, the central perspective has simultaneously reduced multimediality, which “is one of the inborn attributes of the human being” (Giesecke, 1998, p. 13). The Internet revives multimediality and denotes the vanishing of the central point of view: “Our culture will recognize that it needs a variety of media as much as the conversation of the variety of natural biogenous spe-cies. By considering the past it will learn that all technical development has resulted in a disruption and singular use of senses and all multimedial installations reached only a percentage of possible integration and sensuality” (Giesecke, 1998, p. 15).

This kind of convergence responds to societal mega-trends, such as globalisation and reflexivity that structure our productive needs to participate in
the societal organisation and to gain agency. Reflexivity, gaining and testing new knowledge through simulation, building networks, and compressing spatial and temporal distances becomes necessary in the face of global threats, uncertainties, and interdependencies. The informational integration of cognition, communication, and cooperation thereby potentially allows for a better transformation between concrete knowledge and abstract information or data. Thus, it also allows for a better balancing of the tension between formalisation and experience because every boost of informatization brings about new subjective necessities of appropriation into concrete practical contexts. The Internet, in principle, serves productive informational needs as it allows to (re-)connect information with contextual experience and knowledge.

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Figure 3: The development of forms of sociality, media, and informational needs

Figure 3 summarises the development of forms of sociality, media, and informational needs in the human phylogenesis including the current developmental stage. ‘Digital needs’ as the latest development of the informational qualities of participating in societal organisation (productive needs) are best described as needs for informational convergence. While the quality of individual communication became dependent on its integration in mass media discourses with the rise of society and productive needs, the new need structure demands that abstract information and information distributed by mass media must re-integrate with concrete inter-personal forms of communication and cooperation.
7. Outlook: Need-based critique in digital capitalism

So far, this paper contributes to a historical-materialist theory of information by putting forward the concept of informational needs as an essential element of productive needs and human agency as critical psychology has framed it. The discussion has focused mainly on the development of the productive forces but was agnostic to the specific social relations within which the productive forces are situated. In what follows, I point to how one might use the developed concepts in a critical theory of (digital) capitalism.

The underlying assumption is that critique presupposes a notion of a good life. However, we are then confronted with the problem of essentializing a notion of what is to be considered ‘good’ and simultaneously excluding or taking on a paternalist stance to alternative views on the ‘good’. In my view, the discourse about needs nevertheless provides a sound basis for a critique of (capitalist) societies. Speaking of needs always means that they should be satisfied, and one can in turn analyse conditions within which this is impossible or impeded. The critical psychology approach to needs might provide an elegant solution to the mentioned tension between the need for imagining a good, satisfied life and the problem of paternalism because it does not focus on the content of sensual-vital or basic needs but on productive – and I would add informational – needs that must be satisfied if any other need satisfaction is supposed to be sustainable and not damaged by insecurity and fear. Thus, a need theory that borrows from critical psychology provides not a ‘thick’ but a form of ‘weak’ essentialism that is nevertheless ‘thick enough’ to serve as an anchor of critique.

From the previous discussion and within this form of ‘weak’ essentialism, I think we can gain three critical arguments:

- First, having productive and informational needs is a feature of being a human and society should ensure their satisfaction.
- Second, it is a problem if productive and informational needs are restricted and people fall back to immediate forms of need satisfaction. Restriction of these needs means that the satisfaction of all other needs becomes less secure and loses its full satisfactory quality.
- Third, informational needs themselves are not fully satisfied if society only allows to satisfy them on a less-developed level that does not coincide with the current historic level of the development of productive forces.

Before I apply each of these arguments to the condition of digital capitalism, I shortly explain what I understand as the specific quality of capitalist societies. In capitalism, individuals face two main problems – exploitation and alienation. The social mechanism of exploitation creates and reproduces unequal life-chances
and antagonistic interests among classes. The efforts and the capabilities of the (manual and cognitive) workers are turned against them as capital, which confronts them as something alien. Exploitation fuels the profit principle that exercises itself against the will of all people in competition. Living in a capitalist society means that the means of satisfaction of productive and informational needs are antagonistically distributed; it however also means that there are limits for everyone to satisfy these needs.

Individuals, after the transgression of the immediate and the rise of societies, can satisfy needs under given circumstances or satisfy productive and informational needs additionally and thereby extend the opportunities of need satisfaction in general. In whatever condition the individual may be, a space of opportunity is always available, because there is no total determination. By comprehending the societal conditions, it becomes, from the standpoint of the subject, understandable that individuals waive or limit productive and informational need satisfaction and concentrate on already existing options to satisfy their needs. In capitalism, people restrict extending their life quality by participation in creating the conditions within which they must act, because the risks entangled with this kind of agency are too high. This means that for them, there is an existential insecurity about achieving a higher level of agency that comes with the satisfaction of productive and informational needs and the threat to lose the current opportunities of need satisfaction. He or she can satisfy her needs under given circumstances or he or she can satisfy productive needs additionally and extend the opportunities of need satisfaction in general. Critical psychologists term this twofold range of options ‘restrictive’ or ‘generalised agency’ (Holzkamp, 2013, p. 23f.). The former is sustaining agency by accepting dominant conditions and making a deal with partial interest, for instance capital. Restrictive agency externalizes the costs of sustaining one’s own agency to others that lose agency. For instance, trade unions make a deal about job securization at the expense of the precarious. Capitalism’s reliance on private production and competition structurally suggests such restricted forms of agency. Restricted agency, although subjectively functional, is however not sustainable in the long run. This is because need satisfaction is still dependent on the will of others, and therefore principally combined with the fear of a situation within which it is not granted by the powerful. As restrictive agency is still agency and always involves some degree of productive and informational needs satisfaction, this critical perspective leads us away from framing individuals as deluded or fools towards their active and comprehensible participation in ideologies and domination, because there are always subjective reasons to choose restricted agency.
Many informational problems in digital capitalism could be re-interpreted in the proposed theoretical framework. I think it is useful to think about information, communication, and media in the framework of restrictive or generalized agency. Critical arguments can be gained in the face of horizon of *generalised informational agency* when people create their own or appropriate means of communication to cooperatively change societal meaning structures and generalise the conditions within which they live. This has yet to be elaborated on in detail. I conclude with application examples to illustrate the three above-mentioned critical arguments that operate with the concept of informational needs:

First, from the perspective of informational needs as a form of productive needs, which are not an ‘add-on’ but specific for humans, it becomes clear that the victimization of users in the context of privacy threats caused by commercial service providers is problematic. By victimization of users, I mean the assumption that people freely chose to use commercial social media. Consequently, they must simply accept, for instance, privacy threats that are specific to advertising based business models driven by economic user surveillance (see Sevignani, 2016), and that they are responsible for the self-management of their privacy. There is, however, as we can derive from the preceding discussion, a need for using digital media that founds a subjective force to use social media that are currently accompanied with several disadvantages mainly caused by their commercial quality. Therefore, we can assume that the exclusion from social media equals a threat to humanity today. From this derives the societal task to organize new media alternatively in a public form that do not have the named disadvantages.

Second, the problem of filter-bubbles and the reproduction of one-sided information processes can be interpreted as falling behind possible informational productive needs. Driven by interests of the advertising industry to precisely categorise, identify, and approach users, people de-couple from discourses that aim at societal self-understanding but reproduce specific class positions. This is because mass media communication on the level of society determines the possible range of contents that can be kept in a bubble in the first instance. Without the participation in societal communication and the opportunity to have a say in which meaning structures or ideologies are created, the informative value of filtered news is insecure. We can then ask, for example, to which extent social media communication enables societal communication and at what point it falls back to forms of communication that do not meet people’s societal nature. On the other hand, capital can and does make use of productive and informational needs in a restricted manner. This is sometimes discussed as the transformation of needs into desires in a consumerist culture. Desires have qualities similar to
productive needs. They do not vanish with consumption and thus constantly trigger consumption. Desiring, for instance, an iPhone promises to satisfy not only specific functional needs, but its commodity aesthetics also promise to satisfy productive needs of being accepted, connected, in control, etc. One cannot get enough of these qualities. Thus, it motivates us to buy the newest version of this device. However, this is a form of restrictive informational agency because the iPhone is still a luxury good. Not everybody can have one, otherwise it would lose its appeal. Thus, the commodity form of it cannot hold true what it promises, namely being accepted, connected, and in control.

Third, the problem of de-politisation of information processes and the Internet’s underdevelopment in terms of true informational concergence or Web 3.0 applications (Fuchs et al., 2010) could be interpreted as restrictive informational agency. The Internet potentially fosters the necessary re-appropriation of information in specific contexts and subjective knowledge but exactly these technological potentials (Web 3.0) are currently less developed and implemented. One reason for this might be that such applications could challenge hierarchical information processes and the disconnection of experience and knowledge from information. A society that is structurally based on social inequality, however, simply relies on such communicative relations (see Negt & Kluge, 1993).

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What is traumatization?
A Critical Psychological critique and reformulation

Bodil Maria Pedersen

Abstract
Inspired by critical psychology this article explores and challenges two central issues in psychology: The use of diagnoses and that of trauma. These concepts - and related practices - are not as straightforward as is often assumed in mainstream psychology. On the contrary, they have complex and far-reaching problematic implications for our understanding of agency, difficulties, dilemmas and suffering of concrete subjects, as well as for our practices. This article discusses the conceptualisation of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which is in widespread use in most countries. Using this diagnosis as an example, some problems concerning diagnoses in general are introduced. Drawing on a study of women exposed to sexualised coercion, ‘symptoms’ of PTSD are reinterpreted. Trauma is understood as processes of a personal and overpowering sense of loss of control in specific times and places, and thus as embedded in the conduct of everyday lives. ‘Symptoms’ of PTSD are therefore reinterpreted as aspects of overpowering and violent personal meanings and as situated consequences of loss of control. Violent experiences and their consequences do not simply provoke ‘reactions’, as is assumed in the use of the diagnosis. As a result, its description of recurring thoughts and feelings concerning ‘traumatising events’ may be understood as recurring specific and personal attempts at dealing with, and learning from, violent loss of control.

Keywords
trauma, critical psychology, violent experiences, conduct of everyday life
Introduction

At least since Freud, psychology has been concerned with phenomena that are conceptualised as trauma. But its preferred topics, concepts, and comprehension of diverse phenomena change over time. In Denmark, during a period where much attention was on personal development, ‘psychological crises’ was a widely used concept. This concept included much of what is today known as a trauma, such as the loss of a close relative, disease, or experiencing a tsunami, as well as the idea that this may contribute to development. Conversely, focus is now on identifying who and what is thought to be in need of professional treatment, and therefore on differentiating between what is seen as normal and what is not. Consequently, there is also a great focus on diagnoses.

The diagnosis Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, PTSD for short, has commonly replaced the concept of crisis. Before the diagnosis was developed, ‘symptoms’ were categorised through diverse concepts. Thus ‘shell shock’ was a commonly used during World War I. The concept was converted to PTSD in connection with difficulties experienced by veterans of the first Iraq war. In order to obtain compensation, insurance companies, among others, required a diagnosis. The fact that problems, in practice, are at the origins of changes in psychological theory – among these also the construction of new diagnoses – is a common occurrence. This also occurred in the study of women’s perspectives on being exposed to rape and other forms of sexualised coercion, on which this article draws. I will later return to this study; first, a little about PTSD and diagnoses in general.

The PTSD diagnosis

The concept of PTSD covers a whole range of difficulties thought to be caused by experiences of violent events, also called traumatic events. They include events that result in physical trauma, threats to one’s life, or other threats to one’s physical integrity as well as to that of others. But the diagnosis is also frequently used more comprehensively. Having difficulties, and having experienced what is seen as events similar hereto, may then be followed by a process of diagnosation - a process seen as useful and desirable by many professionals.

The ‘symptoms’ assumed to develop as consequences of the experience of a ‘traumatic event’ are largely described through 3 main categories:

- Constant re-experiences of the traumatic event
- Repeated attempts at avoiding stimuli related to the trauma
• Repeated symptoms of accelerating vigilance that were not present before the trauma

Re-experiencing is amongst other described as uncontrollable memories of the event, dreams about it or flashbacks (sudden and very vivid fantasies) of parts and/or of the whole event.

Phenomena that are described as difficulties in concentrating, experiencing oneself as an outside reality, indifference, diverse fearful reactions, and sleeping problems are several of the phenomena that are similarly understood as associated with PTSD. When they are described in connection with the diagnosis, they are classified as symptoms.

Descriptions and classifications are routinely changed in revisions of diagnostic manuals. But the sketch above covers the main themes included in the diagnosis.

Problems of diagnoses

Diagnoses portray persons’ difficulties independently of their personal perspectives, and independently of the connections of these difficulties to their conduct of life. The diagnoses describe very diverse difficulties that may have many diverse explanations, and may arise in many situated and dissimilar constellations of contexts. Thus, diagnoses do not grasp difficulties as embedded in the person’s development of more or less purposeful and intentional, personal aspects of their conduct of life. Since emphasis is on what is generalized, but not on that which is personally most important in a given time and place, implications that may be essential for a concrete diagnosed person risk being disregarded. Hence, many do not recognise themselves in diagnostic depictions. However, this is generally not considered to be a major problem. It may even be assumed to be a part of their condition: they may be seen as being in denial. Such lack of recognition is thus seen as proving that the use of the diagnosis is appropriate. Simultaneously, others that have previous knowledge about the diagnosis PTSD, and who have been exposed to experiences that are usually considered ‘traumatising’, do not understand why they do not experience the difficulties it describes. Practice as well as my study show that they sometimes even think that something is not right with their own (re)actions.

Diagnoses appear in manuals of diseases. ‘Symptoms’ may therefore be regarded as expressions of a disease. As an example, PTSD is often regarded as a non-deliberate, or even as a physiological and pathological reaction. When persons who have been diagnosed are considered as suffering from something that seems to be a disease, we are in danger of “
Nevertheless, it can at times be experienced as a relief to be assigned a diagnosis. It may be experienced as a recognition of one’s difficulties, and explanation for what is ‘wrong’. When the difficulties are considered to be a disease, one is not responsible for them, and may hope that others will be able to do something about them.

Currently, PTSD is used to characterise everything from the problems of the victims of tsunamis, the aftermaths of life in prostitution, or difficulties after rape and other forms of sexualised coercion, to difficulties experienced in connection with serious diseases. Thus, PTSD has been extended from being associated with difficulties undergone in connection with participation in war, to be linked to a long list of diverse events, situations and violent situations in of the conduct of life such as natural catastrophes, social occurrences and acts, as well as recurrent experiences in the course of lives, such as disease and death. When the diagnosis is used this broadly, more and more experiences are generalised and defined as traumatising, and are thus expected to result in PTSD. Consequently, there is a tendency to an increased use of the diagnosis, and even to a kind of circular interpretation of the relation between ‘causes’, ‘symptoms’ and diagnosis.

PTSD has been called a ‘catch all’ diagnosis by Lindner (2004), who studied its use by medical practitioners. Her informants criticised the diagnosis for blinding them to essential problems of diagnosed patients. Other practitioners have reached the same conclusion, even pointing out that a diagnosis could possibly increase patients’ difficulties. In addition to having been subjected to a violent experience that made them feel powerless, they now ‘have a psychological disease’, with regards to which they also feel powerless. Since the difficulties are mainly understood as existing inside the person, the use of PTSD as a description of personal difficulties may contribute to making their difficulties more permanent.

Normalising difficulties

But could the descriptions inherent in the diagnosis of PTSD not be of any use at all? Yes and no.

PTSD is described as a ‘syndrome’, a collection of diverse difficulties that persons may have when they have had personal painful experiences. Yet, the descriptions of the diagnosis may be useful in spotting, and normalising, such difficulties. After a violent experience these difficulties are quite common. Therefore, they can be used in understanding that others may also have
comparable difficulties. As one participant in my study said, you are not “going crazy” because you experience such difficulties, meaning you are not abnormal.

But to make use of the descriptions of the ‘symptoms’, they must be disconnected from the oversimplifications of the diagnosis, as well as from the tendency to generalise and pathologize. The ‘symptoms’ may also be embedded in what may seem to be everyday occurrences, and the ways in which ‘symptoms’ acquire personal meanings must be understood. As an illustration, a low score on an examination for a person for whom grades are very important may be involved in giving rise to experiences of difficulties similar to PTSD. Another person for whom the examination has quite different meanings will not experience similar difficulties.

**Overpowering loss of control**

The illustration above indicates that experiences of one or several of the difficulties that are described by PTSD are experiences most persons suffer from in diverse contexts in the course of their lives. In the following, I will chiefly refer to reflections that arose as part of my study with women exposed to rape and other forms of sexualised coercion.

In diagnostic terms, these women had been exposed to what would be considered a ‘traumatic event’. Consequently, they were persons whose difficulties, anguish, or agony would often be categorized with the help of the concept of PTSD. Conversely, my study draws on the personal perspectives of women. It includes experiences presented by 40 women in a series of counselling sessions, group sessions, as well as in 15 follow-up interviews.

When we examine their personal perspectives on the events, as well as which significance and implications they had, we uncover aspects of difficulties and sufferings the diagnosis does not help them or us to understand. However, such aspects may support further research into what is commonly described by PTSD.

All participants of the study experienced the situations of coercion as unfamiliar and unexpected situations, in which quick action and reflexion was necessary, and in which they were simultaneously confused as to what to do. This meant that their possible course of action and reflexions were violently reduced. The situation was experienced as a critical loss of control. But sexualised coercion and its personal meanings are diverse and not always equally personally overpowering and violent, nor in the same ways. The physical and psychological use of power by the perpetrator, and the loss of control of the victimised person exposed, may for example be very different from situated
events to situated events. Thus, the participants of the study did not all describe the situation as very physically violent. Similarly, the personal meanings of the situations changed with the course of events in the aftermaths. Some women even experienced the aftermaths as more restricting and oppressive than the situation of coercion itself. As illustrated above with the example of the low exam scores, the development of personal meanings is embedded in the concrete situation of coercion as well as in the constellations of later implications. The meanings were connected to each woman’s personal constellation of experiences and conduct of life. Hence, the women’s emotional, cognitive and more practical difficulties, and their experiences of (loss of) control, as well as the meanings they attributed hereto, were remarkably divergent. The diversity of personal meanings the women attributed to the aspect of sexualisation, were conspicuous instances hereof.

Some implications

Some of the women in the study pulled through relatively quickly; others had great difficulties over a longer period of time. Several of the women who had greatest difficulties were those who experienced several serious difficulties in their conduct of life in the aftermaths. Previous experiences with difficulties, especially such as those described by PTSD, had surprising implications. It is a frequent assumption that what is regularly defined as re-traumatisation may aggravate difficulties. Conflicting herewith, former experiences of the possibilities of dealing with such difficulties appeared to be helpful.

To be exposed to sexualised coercion had, as mentioned earlier, many and diverse practical implications for the women’s conduct of everyday life. Because they felt insecure and became vigilant, some lost their jobs. Others lost their work because employers did not want to ‘take responsibility for someone in such a difficult situation’. The same occurred in educational institutions. Many also had problems concerning living arrangements. They were short of means because of complications concerning grants as well as work, and due to expenses related to the aftermaths of the overpowering situations.

Their experiences of coercion often meant that their freedom of movement and their relations to others were seriously constrained. This was not only connected to their loss of self-confidence, but also to the changing (inter)action of others. Friends, colleagues, and families could become overprotective or, conversely blame the women for what had happened. Thus, the women could experience anger from partners or others who believed that the situation was their own fault, or even that they were lying to hide episodes of infidelity. Several
women had been exposed to coercion from friends or acquaintances and kept fearing to meet them. For such reasons, and because they, for a while, did not wish to participate in flirting and other sexualised everyday practices of their peers, many became increasingly isolated and sometimes marginalised.

Furthermore, some of the women who reported the events of coercion to the police were subjected to suspicious, time-consuming, difficult, and lengthy questioning and investigations. Some were also bullied, threatened or pursued by perpetrators or by common friends. In one case, the perpetrator and his friends ‘punished’ a young woman by exposing her to sexualised coercion once more.

Meanings are maintained and changed

For the women, such experiences in their diverse constellations were, just like the instances of coercion, unfamiliar, violent and violently constraining. Although at times less violent, over extended periods of time, this limited their conduct of everyday lives. Their agency in everyday life and their expectations hereof were affected, and they could grow increasingly insecure. As such, the experiences added force to their apprehension of experiencing further overpowering and violent difficulties. They contributed to their experiences of emotional, cognitive and other agency related difficulties, including those described by the diagnosis of PTSD.

Several months after having ended counselling, a young woman returned to the centre where the study took place. She feared that she was having a ‘relapse’. It turned out that the ‘relapse’ was only indirectly related to the experience of sexualised coercion.

Most of us recognise that an experience apparently continues to have similar and strong emotional connotations, or that a specific connotation becomes more intense. Is this brought about by our suffering from a condition that may be identified by a diagnosis? Or do our lives and the ways in which we conduct them, not rather keep our feelings and thoughts alive in patterns that we interpret as identical with – or directly related to - the original experience? The young woman above associated her current troubles to the situation of coercion, but in connection with further counselling sessions it seemed that her difficulties were more closely related to isolation, loss of orientation and self-confidence related to her giving up her studies and her job.

Most of us also recognise that situations that, at a certain point of our lives were experienced as important, sad, frightening, painful or joyous, change their meanings and implications. We often express this by saying that change comes with time, and that time heals all wounds. But time is not empty. With time we
participate in changed or new contexts. The substance and personal meanings of our experiences change with what time encompasses, as well as with our practices in time. Thus, implications of our previous experiences, like those of the woman above, acquire new personal meanings.

But experiences are not simply ‘given’ in situations. They are personally achieved: achieved in connection with situated historical conditions and with their embedded implications. We actively reflect on courses of events by drawing on previous experiences, on experiences we are having at the moment as well as on experiences we fear or wish to have in the future. This is the way we attribute them their personal meanings. This is equally valid for ‘traumatising events’, that is, for experiences related to overpowering and violent loss of agency. Thus, whether and how one is trapped in the initial meanings of violent experiences, or wither these meanings are changed and become gradually less overpowering and violently restricting, becomes comprehensible only through a non-diagnostic perspective.

**Personal formation of experience**

I write formation of meanings and experiences instead of ‘traumatising events’. I do so, because the vital issue here is not a unique event that typically causes specific and predictable individual meanings and implications. The vital issue is that completely diverse courses of events experienced by this or these specific persons may be experienced as violent losses of control and become threats to their conduct of everyday life. We therefore cannot understand personal meanings of violent experiences without appreciating how they are embedded in concrete and diverse situations such as an exam, a tsunami, or a disease. Neither may we understand them without appreciating the social meanings they are attributed in the unique situated life of a person. The constrictions and difficulties in such processes, and the meanings and implications of these processes shape persons and are shaped by persons in specific ways. For these reasons, they are also painful in specifically personal ways. A conceptualisation of this kind is essential for our capacity to help and support people in need.

Furthermore, I have used the concept of experience to emphasize that the issue represents a chain of diverse situations in which we become participants, though not always intentionally. As with other experiences, we reflect more or less consciously and deliberately on that in which we participate and have participated. If we do something as banal as spilling a glass of water, we will reflect on why it happened, and on how it may have been avoided. The more overpowering and violent the implications of situations are for us, the less
unavoidable they were and seem in the aftermaths, the more violently we may be overwhelmed by feelings, thoughts, and more or less deliberate reflexions of what happened. Such change- and development-related reflexions are sometimes misunderstood as feelings of guilt or shame.

Then, because I do not conceptualise personal suffering related to the development of knowledge and experience as signs of a pathological condition, I equally write ‘experiences with difficulties’ instead of ‘symptoms’.

**Reinterpretation of difficulties**

Returning to the difficulties described with the concept of PTSD, we may now understand them in another, more dynamic and social perspective. All women experienced unexpected difficulties after sexualised coercion; some only resolved the difficulties – among these also the ones associated with PTSD – only very slowly. For these women, sexualised coercion had many other and overpowering violent meanings and implications, like the ones described above. This is the light in which we must interpret their difficulties, as well as those of others.

Not all violent experiences have all – nor all the same - repercussions as the ones frequently connected to sexualised coercion. But many experience similar consequences such as isolation or being blamed, consequences that restrict their conduct of life and contribute to new difficulties. Additionally, violent situations, whether experienced as such by the person directly exposed to them or by others, may become what can be named *non-events*. Such situations are situations that are perceived as so dramatic that they cannot, or must not, be mentioned, or conversely that they are made light of. Simultaneously, while the exposed persons are subjected to specific forms of exclusion, the situations may also seem unreal to them. These may be followed by many kinds of social difficulties and dilemmas, especially when they, like sexualised coercion, are defined as traumatic. It is a well-known experience that relatives and friends suddenly act differently without making the reasons clear. Therefore, one may, as the women in the study describe, “get out of line” with family, friends and colleagues, in work and in leisure. If it even – like in the exam example – is an experience that is not usually considered violent and overpowering, it may be incomprehensible to oneself and others that one’s feelings and thoughts are so violent and overpowering. Consequently, these feelings may be experienced as especially painful and even shameful.

When the women, and others who have been exposed to overpowering experiences, again and again reflect on what they could have done differently, it
is frequently understood as a symptom of PTSD, or as an expression of unnecessary and unproductive feelings of guilt. But this may be re-interpreted as more or less intentional attempts at grasping what happened, as well as at changing and developing one’s experience thereof. The situations and their significance are not forgotten, but the experiences one has had may be changed into comprehension and knowledge that may be used in strategies of action. This may subsequently replace un-reflected and overpowering experiences, which continuously trigger constricting anxiety and fear.

Until we have developed strategies of action for violent situations we have experienced, we often avoid situations that may give rise to fear. When women did not know when or where the perpetrator might turn up, avoidance may represent a well-founded attempt at steering clear of unrelenting high levels of anxiety and fear, as well as at avoiding real danger. Directed at real threats, continuous vigilance may similarly be a meaningful course of action. It may be the answer to a threatening everyday life in which one’s options are experienced as utterly changed and diminished. Thus, as part of a current and situated strategy of action, it may be re-interpreted as purposeful vigilance, and not just understood as an unintended biological reaction symptomatic of a disease-like condition.

**New challenges**

Diagnoses like PTSD profess to be objective statements about persons, but because what we study are situated personal perspectives and conduct of lives, and because researchers are also situated, no body of knowledge in psychology will ever be objective.

The clinicians interviewed by Lindner (2004) were critical of the ostensible - and intended - objectivity and generalisability of the diagnosis, that is of relating to people as mere objects of study and treatment. If we, like these clinicians, understand persons as complex subjects and explore more closely what they have to tell us about their lives, we may discern narratives quite different from those we normally perceive when looking through the PTSD lens. The power of such testimonials will by far surpass the limited and limiting observations made with the use of a diagnosis.

As exemplification, we may consider a documentary aired by a Danish broadcasting station. Several years after the events, it described the aftermath of an explosion in a firework factory. Interviewed researchers concluded that many children who had witnessed the explosion still suffered from “clinical or sub-clinical PTSD”.

Subsequently, a father was interviewed. He reported that his children were now doing fine, but that it had taken a long time: in the same breath, he said that many practicalities in the life of the family, such as housing, had only been solved recently. His children had lived 3 years with the consequences of the accident. Like many of the participant in my study, they had not been able to conduct their lives as relatively safe and predictable, because their lives were not. In the context of the discussion in this article, their experiences do not appear ‘abnormal’ nor ‘pathological’.

The diverse difficulties one may experience in the wake of violent and overpowering situations are often called ‘primary traumatisation’, while those subsequently in evidence are called ‘secondary traumatisation’. This terminology corresponds with the time sequence of the experiences. But regarding their significance, the latter are at times primary. Because of the overpowering and violent succession of situations and experiences, a person is in need of holding on to or changing - in any case to re-secure - her/his perspective on her-/himself, on life, and on the conduct of their life. Doing so in a changed and changing everyday life, and in an often unpredictable reality, may become a long and winding venture. So far, this seems to have been the case for the children in the newstory mentioned above, as well as for the women exposed to sexualised coercion.

But persons who have experienced overpowering and violent situations, and who experience painful feelings and thoughts, are often expected to ‘recover quickly’. Paradoxically, they are also met with expectations of showing their feelings, talk about them, and take their time to deal with them. If they do not, what they have experienced is perceived as being ‘probably not that serious’.

My study raises an imperative question: Is the fact that our super-effective life does not give space and time for persons to be periodically less flexible and effective one of the reasons why violent experiences become overpowering? I wonder how often those exposed to such successions of experiences must suffer marginalisation?

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The contradiction between aspiration and reality in Critical Psychology

Ute Osterkamp

Abstract
As a science from the standpoint of the generalized subject, Critical Psychology demands a fundamental paradigm shift. In contrast to conventional research conducted from the external standpoint, rather than investigate ways of exerting influence on other people's modes of thought and action, the aim of Critical Psychology is to promote processes of “coming to a social understanding” about the subjectively perceived need to overcome societal conditions under which an orientation towards directing and controlling the actions of others appears to be in the natural order of things. The main subject matter of the research from a generalized subject consists in furthering awareness of the many ways in which the assumption of this task is systemically hampered. This includes the conventional opposition of individual and society and the separation of psychology and sociology. In both disciplines this systematically excludes the possibility of individuals affected by certain relevant conditions of life exerting an influence on them. It is thus also not possible to pose the question as to the preconditions that would be required to take advantage of this possibility and the many obstacles to its realisation cannot be subjected to scientific analysis. The general opposition of theory and practice has the same effect.

Keywords
societal dimension of human subjectivity, generalized responsibility, corrupting effects of restrictive conditions, manipulability and shame, self-denial and self-disciplining.

I

The importance of critical psychology is to have developed scientifically substantiated and verifiable categories, with which the specific dimension of human subjectivity and agency can be grasped. They render comprehensible the fact that humans, unlike other species, do not simply have to adapt to the
conditions they encounter, but are, within the framework of what is historically possible, capable of shaping and organizing their living conditions in accordance with their own insights and needs, which in turn will develop and concretize themselves in these processes.

This possibility as basis of human development is largely ignored in traditional psychology. As Klaus Holzkamp writes: “Individual subjectivity here is solely and one-sidedly conceivable as being determined by societal living conditions/power-structures, and thus the individual’s relations to these conditions are merely conceptualisable as relations of alignment, dependency, subjection and suffering, while the ‘other side’ – the possibility of constitutively acting on these conditions and changing them – is surely in some psychologist’s minds, but is not represented in their theoretical and methodological tools” (2013a, p. 32).

Generally, societal conditions are seen merely as an external framework of the individuals’ actions which they seek to use as efficiently as possible to their personal advantage. This orientation is rather supported than questioned by the scientific division between social and individual sciences, according to which the processes of societal and individual development can be seen and explored independently of each other. In contrast, critical psychology aims to develop a scientific approach in which the individuals are not conceived as mere products of their living conditions, but also as their self-conscious producers. As Holzkamp points out, this requires answering the question of “how, if subjectivity is seen as independent, can the difference between it and the societal conditions become reconciled with the fundamental unity of the individuals' sociality and uniqueness, which nonetheless exists?” (1979, p. 12, translation by the author).

As has become apparent in the further research process, answering this question wants a fundamental change of perspective (see for example, Holzkamp, 2013a, 2013b, 2015). In contrast to the established research from an external or observer standpoint, a psychology from the standpoint of the generalized subject – here abbreviated as “subject science” – is not interested in perfecting the methods for directing and controlling the actions of other people in accordance with ruling standards and pre-defined targets which themselves remain unquestioned. Rather, its aim is to become aware of the implicit partiality of a research that is restricted to people's observable behaviour without taking into account the concrete conditions that more or less directly require this.

Thus, seen from the standpoint of the generalized subject, the societal conditions are neither an abstract framework that defines the possibilities and limits of our actions nor are they a reality, which we can influence directly according to our personal ideas and interests. Rather, it is seen as product of our interactions with each other and thus as a basically open system. This has significant consequences for our scientific thinking. It means, first of all, that the
conditions that are determining for our acting, can, in turn, be changed by us. However, this possibility of self-conscious influence on the conditions of our development exists solely on a supra-individual level. It can be realized only if we succeed in developing ourselves into a social force under the common goal of creating the conditions for the unhindered development of all. In this sense, this possibility is not simply ‘given’ to us, but it must be gained and defended time and again against the many forms in which we are prevented from realizing it.

Such an approach differs sharply from individualist ideology, which largely determines our thinking in everyday life as well in psychology, and the implicit message of which is that adaptation to prevailing circumstances and demands is the only reasonable access to them. However, even a psychology which, in contrast to such an orientation, emphasizes the specifically human capacity to consciously influence these conditions remains within the limits of the prevailing thinking and individualistic ideology, if it merely points to this possibility without discussing the many obstacles, which hamper its practical realisation. These obstacles, however, can only be perceived and analysed if psychological science breaks with the usual division of labour, according to which it itself is responsible for the development and dissemination of critical insights, while others are responsible for their practical implementation. Hence, in a psychology that is not aimed at adapting people to prevailing conditions, but interested in the question of how the specifically human possibility of deliberate influence on our living conditions can be realized, the focus of research is on the analysis of the many forms in which the realisation of this ability is being systematically hampered. In this perspective, the usual opposition of individual and society and the individualistic ideology inherent to it prove to be crucial impediments to becoming aware of this possibility and our joint responsibility for realizing it. We have good reasons to deny this possibility if we must be afraid to be held personally responsible for its implementation. Under these premises everybody who attempts to fight the conditions of their suppression is, as already Freud pointed out, doomed to fail. “He will become a madman, who for the most part finds no one to help him in carrying through his delusion” (1961, p. 28).

The persuasive power of the individualistic ideology is evidently not least because it ‘frees us’ from this responsibility for the social conditions in which we live and act, thus protecting us from all conflicts that we would have to face if we tried to act in accordance with this responsibility. What is ‘perverse’ about the reduction of our responsibility to our personal acting is that the relief it promises to bring about is in fact the reverse. It turns out to be an unrealisable demand which is doomed to fail, since, from a subject science perspective, we can only take responsibility for our acting to the extent that we can determine the conditions that require it. A responsibility which is limited to our own actions....

...
amounts to self-discipline in accordance with to prevailing expectations and interests.

Since, however, the individualistic ideology is not only functional for justifying the prevailing power conditions but also for coping with life within these conditions, the mere knowledge of its restrictive implications is not enough to give it up. Rather, the real task is to jointly develop conditions under which we can afford to openly discuss the problematic implications of our own actions instead of denying them. Even if we have good reasons to do so, we thus nonetheless confirm the condition of our estrangement and powerlessness.

II

To be able to effectively counter the individualistic restrictedness of our thinking and acting, first of all, a scientifically verifiable concept of human subjectivity is needed, that comprises its dual nature. Here, Critical Psychology, as developed in Berlin, has done important preliminary work. The dual character is that, on the one hand, our actions are essentially determined by societal conditions and expectations, and, on the other, that the experience of our external determinateness implies the subjective necessity to overcome such a dependency. This, however, is only possible on a supra-individual level, that is, by ‘generalizing’ our possible influence on our living conditions through joining with others under this goal. However, the concept of ‘generalized’ influence on the common living conditions is only the prerequisite for the actual task of critical science. The task is to ‘publish’ the many forms in which we are prevented from such a generalization of individual experiences and possibilities.

On the other hand, as long as we have no concept of the supra-individual dimension of human agency, efforts for independence usually remain within the limits of prevailing power relations, reduced to attempts of securing our own privileges and powers over others. And only when we have a concept of this supra-individual dimension of human life and possibilities for action, we can recognize where and for what reason we fall behind this knowledge.

As a whole, subject science research is less concerned with achieving predefined abstract goals. Rather, it focuses on the question of in whose interests the respective goals are, and how far what we do corresponds to what we mean or intend to do. This requires a critical distance to our own views and actions, that is, recognizing that they are not universally valid, but relative, depending on our particular position within given power relations. In contrast to individualistic ideology, such an approach emphasizes that neither our own actions nor the actions of others are self-evident or self-explanatory. In fact, they become
understandable only in the light of the concrete conditions to which they correspond. In this sense, subject science research also differs from sociologically oriented approaches in that it does not see human action as directly determined by the respective conditions, but rather by the perceived possibilities of influencing these. Since this possibility can only be realized on a supra-individual level, the focus of this research is on the many forms in which we are isolated from each other and played off against each other so that, from the start, every understanding of the common, albeit different, restrictions of our acting and the shared interest in overcoming these restrictions is being hampered. Thus, coming to a shared understanding of the societal hindrances and constraints underlying our views and actions is a first step in overcoming the individualistic ideology and of its restrictive impact on our relations with each other and on our possibility of a self-conscious life.

Such a common understanding of the dependence of our acting from the societal conditions that require it is tantamount with the ‘objectification’ of our seemingly merely private experiences and ways of dealing with them. It makes it possible to recognize the factual interconnectedness with each other by this dependency, and implies the awareness of the shared responsibility for realizing the possibilities for a self-determined life as well as the shared responsibility for overcoming the external and internalized coercions and limits, by which such endeavours are rather hampered. It is identical with achieving the critical distance to our own thinking and acting necessary to challenge them according to their societal conditions and implications. Such an objectification is the basis for understanding our own acting as well as the acting of others, and for realizing our joint possibilities and responsibilities for developing the societal conditions in the interest of all. On the other hand, we can only accept such ‘generalized’ responsibility if we don't interpret it as a moral imperative and additional burden that we must accept for the sake of our own social recognition, but understand it as a way out of the imposed ego-centred narrowness of our life.

The concept of ‘generalized’ responsibility is a counter-concept to individualistic ideology, according to which we are only for our own actions responsible, and references to restrictive circumstances appear rather as a flimsy excuse. In contrast, science from the standpoint of the generalised subject is based on the insight that any knowledge that does not “demonstrate ad hominem” (Marx, 1970a, p. 182), i.e. which is not grounded in the individuals’ own experiences, will hardly reach them. Thus, the emphasis on supra-individual responsibility remains itself an abstract demand and within the limits of allowed thought, if it is not subjectively substantiated, grounded in experiences of the restrictedness of our own acting and in its asocial implications.
While in individualistic ideology the possibility that our actions might have consequences that contradict our intentions and beliefs is systematically excluded, this issue is at the center of subject science research. The interest is in the concrete conditions under which this discrepancy occurs and, moreover, in which it is not opportune to address it. But by privatizing it, any constructive dealings with it is prevented. It appears as a problem of our personal inadequacy that we should be ashamed of and that we seek to conceal as far as possible from ourselves and others. In this way, we are also ‘inwardly’ bound to the conditions of our humiliation, which is not least reflected in the fact that the ultimate goal of our actions is to gain social recognition. Objectifying our shame on our seemingly personal shortcomings, that is, addressing the conditions, which make us act in a way we are ashamed of, is thus a first step in being able to consciously deal with it instead of remaining ‘unconsciously’ determined by it. In this sense, Marx calls for the “revolutionary audacity” which flings at the adversaries the “defiant words”: “I am nothing and I should be everything” (1970a, p. 185). For Marx, shame is “a kind of anger which is turned inward. And if a whole nation really experienced a sense of shame, it would be like a lion, crouching ready to spring” (1970b, p. 133). The alternative would be a “modest egoism”, “which asserts its limitedness and allows it to be asserted against itself” (1970a, p. 185 and, in its wake, “infinitely proceeding division of society into the most manifold races opposed to one another by petty antipathies, uneasy consciences and brutal mediocrity” (ibid, p.177f.).

III

The individualistically narrowed understanding of psychology, which disregards the social and societal consequences of our actions as well as the question of the societal function of established psychology as a whole, implies a specific split of consciousness. This manifests itself in the separation between intentions and consequences of individual action or, more precisely, in the tendency of equating, in our own case, our intentions with the effects of our actions, while, in the case of others, we extrapolate their intentions from the results of their actions. Such a splitting is evidently facilitated by the ‘natural’ fact that the intentions that underlie our own acting are ‘closer’ to us than their results, which are primarily experienced by others, while the effects of the actions of others are more or less directly visible to us, but not their intentions.

Thus, the change of perspective required for subject science research is also required for our own thinking and acting. The overarching question that only we ourselves can answer is then of how far our acting is determined by our own
insights and interests, or defensively oriented at fulfilling external demands and outdoing others in the struggle for our own acknowledgement and the associated benefits. But also, our own insights and interests are not something that we know or ‘own’ and that we can determine at will. Rather, they are in constant change, depending on the concrete conditions, and it is a lifelong task to find out for what reason we want what, or to what extent what we do is based on our own insights and interests, or on the internalization of prevailing demands and expectations. On the other hand, the knowledge of our own interests, however vague, is necessary to face the danger of being instrumentalized for interests that are contrary to what we ourselves consider important and hope to achieve.

The self-denial inherent in the individualistic ideology entails evidently necessarily the devaluation of other; it thus contributes to normalizing societal relationships in which one’s own successes are primarily defined by the relative worse performance of others. In general, we can only address the limitedness of our actions and the impact this has on our relationships with others if they are understood as an overall problem that can only be dealt with constructively on a generalized or societal level. In this sense, a psychology from the standpoint of the generalized subject doesn’t offer abstract guidelines on how to deal with the problems encountered. It only highlights the danger that, by adopting prevailing expectations, we tackle the problems in a way that rather amplifies them than helps to overcome them.

Subject science concepts are in principle meant to examine the sociality of one’s own actions, that is, to answer the question of how far it contributes to consolidating or overcoming restrictive conditions. For this purpose, the conceptual pair of restrictive and generalized ability to act has been developed. It loses any emancipatory substance if it is used in the usual manner as a means of assessing the actions of others. Such an approach implies the necessity of clarify the question of what interest we ourselves have in the problems and in overcoming them and how this relates to the interests of the other participants, who might perceive the situation from their point of view quite differently. The task would then be to come to a joint understanding of how our different views of the problems largely depend on the societal position from which we perceive them. On this basis, the connectedness with each other would become recognizable behind all the societal divisions. In this sense, subject science research is less interested in classifying individual differences. Rather, the focus on the dependence of all acting on the concrete societal conditions allows us to recognize the many forms in which we participate in the reproduction of prevailing power relations and of our own powerlessness to them. The perception of the involvement of our actions in the existing power relations is the material basis for becoming aware of our co-responsibility for these and thus also for the
possibilities of life and action of all others. Here, too, there is the double possibility of openly addressing this powerlessness and its corruptive effects on our acting, or of negating it, thus blocking any prospect of overcoming it. Since the problems continue to persist even when we try to deny them, we tend to fall back on the usual practice of making others responsible for them and/or of justifying our restrictive acting towards them through their ‘inacceptable’ behaviour.

From a subject science point of view the idea that, unlike others, we are largely immune to the effects of restrictive conditions, points rather to the opposite, namely the internalization of the values and interests of those whose decisions largely determine our possibilities of life and action. The consequence of such an external determinateness or other-directedness of our views and beliefs is that we must ward off all experiences that might call them into question.

In this context, Freud’s concept of the superego as an internal control takes the discussion further. He sees its task in repressing rebellious impulses against the restrictions on our needs and desires and, moreover, to make us ashamed of having these at all. Such a superego, as Freud points out, primarily determines the conduct of ‘culture carriers’, that is of people who enjoy leadership positions as long as they show themselves capable and willing to enforce the interests and objectives of the dominant classes against those groups, who are expected to put these into practice. While Freud speaks of the internalisation of external constraints, Marx talks of the priest outside of us being replaced by our “priestly nature” (1970a, p. 182) This “priestly nature” manifests itself in all tendencies to distance us from those, who don’t correspond to our internalized ideas of what is ‘reasonable’ to think and do. The “bondage of devotion” is, as he calls it, replaced by the “bondage of conviction” (ibid.)

Thus, the fight against the restrictive conditions requires, as Marx points out, a fundamental change of consciousness. This cannot be achieved by adopting or propagating new dogmas, but only “by analysing the mystical consciousness, which is incomprehensible to itself, whether manifested in a religious or political form” (1970b, p. 144). Such a change of consciousness would be “a work for the world and for us. It can be only the work of united forces. It is a matter of a confession, and nothing more. In order to secure remission of its sins, mankind has only to declare them for what they actually are” (ibid, p. 145).
IV

The foregone conclusion by which the perception of the generalized ability to act is blocked from the outset includes the separation of theory and practice, which is an integral part of individualistic ideology. Due to this separation, the key issue of subject science research remains systematically excluded from scientific discussion. This is the possibility that under the pressure of circumstances we see ourselves repeatedly forced to act in a way, to which we cannot stand. The exclusion of this topic from the scientific discussion, in turn, seems to be the price that psychology has to pay as a reward for its recognition as a scientific discipline. In this view, all insights that point to the need to change prevailing circumstances are dismissed as politically motivated and therefore not scientific.

As a result of this division of labour between theory and practice the systematic collaboration in exploring the causes of the problems and the ways of overcoming them is largely excluded. What is left is the usual practice of blaming each other for the continued existence of the problems. While the theorists see the reason for the failure of their findings in practice in the practitioners’ inability to implement these according to scientific instructions and standards, practitioners see the theorists’ lack of contact with reality as key problem which they seek to compensate for by selecting from the different theoretical approaches those aspects that confirm what they are doing anyway (Holzkamp, 2013c). In contrast to such a mutual estrangement and disempowerment, in a psychology from the standpoint of the generalized subject, theory and practice do not stand in opposition to each other nor are they independent of each other. Rather, they contribute from different perspectives to our knowledge both of the subjective meaning of societal conditions and our joint possibility and responsibility for developing these towards societal relations where the “free development of each is condition for the free development of all” (Marx & Engels, 1970).

V

The basic contradiction to be tackled in a subject science approach is that, on the one hand, we can only recognize the many forms through which we are prevented from acting in accordance with such a generalized responsibility, if we have an idea of it. On the other hand, the knowledge of this generalized responsibility doesn’t transcend prevailing ways of thinking if the multiple forms in which the practical implementation of this responsibility is obstructed are obviously not of scientific interest.
As long as this question is ignored, even critical-psychological concepts remain within the limits of 'acceptable' thinking. Again, the obstacles can only be experienced if we accept our co-responsibility for the implementation of critical insights, and we will only accept this responsibility and remain obliged to it if we are convinced of its subjective significance. Concepts that are not subjectively substantiated in this way remain abstract, without personal meaning and therefore not binding; they are freely usable, applicable wherever and whenever it seems advisable.

In general, critical-psychological concepts differ from traditional concepts in that they not only consider the societal context of individual action, but also the fact that the subjective evaluation of these conditions and of their impact on our actions is not absolute, but relative, dependent on the perceived possibilities of conscious influence on them. They are meant to make us recognize the societal implications of our own actions, that is, enable us to deal with the question of how far they contribute to consolidating or overcoming restrictive circumstances. They emphasize the twofold possibility of either simply accepting the given circumstances and demands or questioning the conditions under which such an adaptation to the prevailing conditions and the adoption of prevailing beliefs seems natural. This includes also the question of the personal consequences that the two different orientations have for us and our social relationships. As a rule, such questions only arise when the prevailing explanations apparently don't help to clarify the problems and we have to look for alternative approaches to the problems.

The subject science concept of generalization, based on the knowledge of the specific human possibility and necessity of self-conscious influence on the conditions of our lives, is in distinct contrast to the notion of generalization as it is used in traditional psychology. In a subject science, it is to be done by the individuals themselves. Instead of averaging the data collected on specific aspects of individual behavior and using the average value obtained as a measure of the level of development of the behavior under investigation, subject science aims to factor in the concrete conditions to which the different views and actions correspond. The common task is then to combine the different perspectives through which we perceive the societal reality into an overall picture that is as coherent as possible. In this way, the risk becomes recognisable and thus reducible of undermining our possible influence on the societal development by mistaking our own view of it for universally valid and use it as a yardstick for judging the actions others.

In such an approach, the differentiation between researcher and the individuals used to answer the research questions is rather counterproductive. It corresponds to the power structures within scientific community that prevent any
practical thinking that exceeds the limits of what is allowed or contradicts the established scientific standards. The critical point is reached when, in preemptive obedience, the research is not limited to meeting prevailing standards and expectations, but these standards and expectations are themselves subjected to critical reflection. Seen in this light, also the talk of co-researchers at best means a liberalization of these power structures, not their overcoming. This would only be possible in an approach in which the question of how much these power structures affect the definition of the problems to be investigated is part of the research.

By contrast, in subject science approach all participants are the subject and object of research at the same time. The common goal is to reach a meta-standpoint from which it becomes possible to take notice of the societal constraints and impediments that underlie the individual’s actions and with it the generalized interest in overcoming them. From such a meta-standpoint, we are less interested in the actions of particular individuals than in the social relations among each other and the question of how different, even contradictory modes of action can contribute to the reproduction of power relations that one believes to overcome. As Holzkamp points out, “intersubjectivity itself is made into the object of structural reflection” (2013d, p. 325). On this level “I reflect the fact that, from their particular standpoints, all those involved have their own perspective on the entire scene which is absolutely on a par with my own, and in comparison to which my own view is in no way privileged or advantaged” (ibid.). “‘Systematization’ in processes of self-understanding” aims at “jointly developing a scientific language which allows a higher degree of issue-related reflectedness. One talks, in the end, about the same problem as at the beginning, but on a higher level of self-reflection and object-relatedness” (ibid., p. 338). The method appropriate to this goal is, as Holzkamp points out in relation to Marx (1970b, p. 145) that of social self-understanding.

From such a meta-standpoint it becomes comprehensible that the societal conditions are not external to us, but that we are part of them, and therefore also responsible for them. Again, only when we have a concept of the joint responsibility for the societal reality in which we live and act can we become aware of the many forms, in which we are prevented from acting accordingly. These hindrances include the taboo to talk about them and especially about their impact on our own acting. But by subjecting to this ban, we negate not only for us ourselves any subjective necessity to change the prevailing conditions, but make it difficult for others too to address the impact of restrictive conditions on their acting. Any criticism of social power structures, however, remains an empty, non-binding utopia if it is not formulated as a definite negation of our own actions within these relationships.
VI

Seen from the standpoint of the generalized subject we are not directly responsible for the restrictive impact that the prevailing restrictions have on our actions, yet for the way we handle it. We can either negate it or face the conflicts that are to be expected if we would openly ‘confess’ this. In the one case we contribute to the reproduction of the prevailing power relations and their immanent logic, according to which the problems or difficulties of dealing with them always arise through the other’s lacking insight in our personal superiority over them. In the other case, we help to ‘generalize’ the awareness of the subjective need to overcome societal condition, in which we are led to deny the restrictedness of our own thinking and acting so as not to be held personally responsible for it. However, since obstacles continue to exist especially when they are not tackled as a general problem, ultimately, we are left with the restrictive choice between two personalizing options, namely to seek the ‘guilt’ for the inadequacy of our actions in ourselves or in others. In the end, such a choice will always be to the detriment of those who are alien to us in one way or another, and this especially under societal conditions, under which ‘being different’ per se is considered suspicious.

In a subject science approach based on realizing the specific human possibility of conscious influence on our living conditions, differentiations of people according to their personal qualities and capacities are not the result, but the starting point of the research. Hence, such an approach is less interested in personal differences than in the question under which societal conditions and from which standpoint the interest in these differences appears natural. In this view the problem is not the ‘otherness’ of others, their ‘deviance’ from the norms and rules that govern our own acting and thinking. Rather, this is the unwillingness or inability to take note of the well-groundedness of the actions of others, which in turn must be examined for their societal precondition and implications. Such defensive attitude towards others entails the implicit idea that we ourselves belong to the group of those, on whom all others should orient in their own interest and which will determine all the more our thinking and acting, the less it is openly expressed. Holzkamp speaks in this context of a “centred relationship mode” (2013d, p. 332). It is, as he points out, “intertwoven on different levels with just those knowledge interests that are to be brought to light in social self-understanding processes” (ibid.). They are the “formal side of reason/meaning complexes which, in one way or the other, factually contain the exclusion, suppression, negation, disregard of the – individual or collective – other’s interests in their life and dispositive power over it” (2013d, p. 333). In this sense, Holzkamp defines all statements in which we reject actions of others
as unfounded, irrational, irresponsible, etc., as the starting point of subject
science research. To doubt that people have reasons for the way they act, how
‘deviant’ this may appear to us, is, as he points out, identical with negating their
subjectivity and right to a self-determined life. Thus, we affirm societal
conditions under which the equal rights of all people are valid only on the
condition that they behave in way that corresponds to our ideas and interests.

The necessity to recognize the reasons that make people act in the way they
do, derives from the only subject science a priori that nobody can consciously
violate their own interests (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 350). If I realize that the
devvaluation of others means the impoverishment of intersubjectivity and thus of
one’s own developmental possibilities, I will, in my own interest, try to
overcome the conditions under which this is commonplace. All actions become
intersubjectively comprehensible and explicable as soon as one considers the
concrete circumstances under which they occur.

VII

The individualistic view of human agency and subjectivity implies also a one-
sided notion of suppression. It is treated primarily as something that is done to
us, but that we do not do ourselves. Or alternatively as something that is done to
others who are unable to defend themselves against it and for whose interests we
fight, as long as they act in accordance with our own ideas and interests. There is
no language for expressing the specific humiliating experience that, in order to be
accepted by those in power, we try to demonstrate our spiritual and moral
superiority over those to whom such recognition is denied from the outset. This
distancing from ‘inacceptable’ people that is more or less directly demanded
under prevailing is generally associated with the suppression of our own
‘inacceptable’ insights and ‘deficits’ which could jeopardize our relatively
privileged position if we expressed them. In this way, we not only affirm our
alienation from ourselves and our fellow humans, but we also confirm societal
conditions in which self-disciplining and self-denial in the interest of allegedly
higher values are seen as the price for the development of individuals and of
society as a whole.

In contrast, subject science seeks to make apparent that by distancing
ourselves from others, no matter how vital this may be in the concrete situation,
we reproduce our own powerlessness towards the prevailing power relations and,
therefore, our own manipulability and corruptibility by these. In this view, the
distinction between ‘us’ and ‘other people’ is the core of our corruption. It
complies with the ideology of the anti-social nature of human beings, which must
be controlled in the interest of all. This control has then been exercised by those who, for whatever reason, are capable of the demanded self-control and thus in charge of enforcing the prevailing norms and requirements against those who are not ready or able for such a self-disciplining.

The self-denial and the feeling of shame because of this is impressively described by Didier Eribon (2013), using the example of his feelings of shame about his false social background and his false sexuality. In particular, he emphasized the social consequences of such feelings of shame, which make us not only negate us ourselves, but also those who too deviate from prevailing norms. By thus taking the standpoint of those by whom our right of self-determination is fundamentally negated, our resistance to restrictive conditions is also ‘inwardly’ broken.

VIII

As already mentioned above, from a subject science point of view the problem is less the fact that we comply with demands and orders, even if we are not convinced by them or consider these unjustified. Under prevailing conditions, this is part of normal life. This will only be a problem if we deny this and conclude from the simple fact, that we have acted in a certain way, that it must have been right. With this we are definitely got caught in the trap. We can only have such ideas if we, guided by the individualistic ideology, equate the intentions that led us to our actions with their results. Yet by doing so, the subject science task gets out from sight from the very start, which is to expose the many forms in which we not only see ourselves compelled to act against better knowledge, but also to deny this fact.

In contrast to prevailing expectations on science, subject science research does not provide solutions to problems defined by others. It starts, so to speak, a level before. A central part of this research is to examine the societal context, in which the problems arise, as well as the possible partiality of the interpretations offered. This includes the question of the conditions under which these interpretations are convincing, but also of where and when we find it helpful to be told how we should see and handle the problems encountered. Such an approach challenges, above all, the common practice in psychological research to consider only those problems as appropriate for scientific research, to which the standard repertoire of methods is applicable.

By contrast, subject science research is primarily designed to grasp the respective problems as comprehensively as possible, that is unbiased by personal interests and fears. This includes the critical reflection of the situation from
which we evaluate the respective problems and the broadening of this evaluation basis by materializing the common necessity and possibility of conscious influence on the situation within which the problems arise.

In such an approach, the usual distinction between ‘professional’ researchers, who are essentially tasked with formulating the questions to be compatible with the methods and procedures available, and the persons needed to answer questions, which have little to do with their everyday lives, is rather counterproductive. Subject science research, however, would itself remain within the limits of prevailing thinking if it fundamentally questions the justification of traditional psychology and offers itself as a universally valid alternative to it. The only subject science imperative refers to the necessity of including in the research both the clarification of our own interests in the particular question and of the problem-adequacy of the methods used.

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Part II: Refining Methodology and Research Practice
Abstract
This article examines a general question about how we in research develop the knowledge we write about and present as ‘results of research’. It scrutinizes research processes as a social practice, where several parties participate, collaborate and learn from a process where researchers involve themselves in exploring specific problems across societal contexts. In this way, the presented discussions can be seen as a critique of tendencies to approach research as an isolated endeavour, where results are produced by applying special methods and techniques that prevent influence from the social world and, in this way, creating knowledge about the world by ‘leaving it’. The article argues for approaching the development of knowledge as a social practice in itself. Research processes transcend different contexts, involve different perspectives, and the researchers seek to analyse connections in a common world by exploring how an explicit problem is connected to social conditions and interplay, thereby achieving a deeper understanding of the problem. In the article, we build on 25 years of practice research projects and involve a specific project as an example in a general discussion of the development of knowledge. Among other things, this project inspired these thoughts because of the following exchange between a researcher and some professionals from the family centre where we were conducting our research (a residential institution for families and children in trouble).

Keywords
research collaboration, co-research, practice research, theory of science, participation
It is asked how Dorte actually observes, and Dorte talks a little about participant observation, where she tries to participate as well as possible as the family's guest: “It is not a particular method – if there's anything I can help with, I do it, otherwise we chat casually. When you know the family a little, you can usually follow up on things: how are things going with this and that...? I also make appointments for interviews, where there is more time to follow up a little more systematically on things. Much of the material I use is obtained when we talk to each other in everyday situations, like while standing and stirring the pot!

The excerpt is from a transcript of a project meeting, where professionals and researchers discussed a joint research project. The professionals ask how the researcher is actually conducting her research. Their surprise and curiosity typifies the mystification that often exists around what is thought to be the specific methods and techniques of research. Similarly, the researcher’s answers raise some key questions about how the researcher participates in the field, and how empirical material is developed. These are themes we will pursue in this article.

We take our point of departure in a tradition of practice research, where the research is organized as a collaboration between researchers and various professionals working with the inclusion of children in difficulties (Højholt, 2005, 2011; Højholt & Kousholt, 2014a, 2014b). Our approach to practice research is anchored in social practice theory (Axel, 2011; Jensen, 1999; Lave, 2011, 2012) and Critical Psychology (Dreier, 1997, 2008; Holzkamp, 2013; Motzkau & Schraube, 2015; Mørck & Huniche, 2006; Nissen, 2012). The research is based on the assumption that children's problems take place in a coherent life, while the professional efforts to help the children are divided into different places, professions and responsibilities (Højholt, 2006; Højholt & Kousholt, 2018). How can different professional efforts be organized to strengthen children's possibilities for participation and learning across the children's life contexts?

We consider our collaborators in the research process as co-researchers, and this article is particularly about the interaction between researchers and professionals, and what this collaboration can mean for both research and practice development. The discussions are thus aimed at raising questions about research processes and their significance for and use in broader social changes.
Furthermore, it addresses questions we receive about what concepts as ‘practice research’ and ‘co-researchers’ might entail and how we think about the relationship between concepts, analysis and results.

The basis for the discussions is a theoretical understanding of children's difficulties connected to their life circumstances. We therefore talk about children in difficulties and emphasise understanding their personal circumstances and challenges linked to social dynamics and conflicts in societal life (Dreier, 1997, 2008; Højholt & Kousholt, 2018; Schraube & Osterkamp, 2013). Many dilemmas in the professionals’ work concerning the relationship between the users' personal problems and their social possibilities, and thus what the professional work should address, is echoed in research. Basically, it is the same conceptual dilemmas that we work with, each in our own way. That is precisely why it makes sense for us to organize a research community in which we mutually learn from each other’s approaches to dealing with common problems in a common world.

In research texts, the theoretical starting point, methods and analytical practice are often presented separately. It is in a sense artificial to present the creation of empirical material, analysis and dissemination of results as distinct phases, each with their methods or techniques, but at the same time, the researcher cannot do everything all at once. Here we will discuss the various aspects of research, precisely as aspects that merge into each other and influence each other. Still, the researchers focus differently during a research project.

The article begins by presenting discussions about the creation of knowledge and how research can be perceived as collaborative development of knowledge and mutual learning processes. On the basis of such general considerations about the theory of science, we will discuss the design and organization of our research collaboration. We then discuss how the researcher’s participation, curiosity and way of focusing, in addition to varying her attention, is also intertwined in a problem-focused and theoretical search for general connections in social practice. This leads to a discussion about how methodological differences also relate to different conceptualizations of the ‘research object’ and why a practice research approach emphasizes theoretical considerations and collaborative organization instead of universal techniques. In this way, the article discusses the connections between the research problem, the researcher's theoretical approach and the organization of research designs and methods. Through concrete examples, research processes are discussed as a social practice in which different parties interact and thereby influence knowledge, learning and development of both theory and professional practice. At the end of the article, we clarify our analytical approach and discuss how practice can influence research.
The discussions above are also about a scientific ambition for ‘transparency’ i.e. to highlight and discuss the basis and genesis of the research presented (Hiles, 2008; Olsen, 2003). Such transparency is important in relation to understanding what kind of knowledge is being contributed by research and to inspire reflections on general issues relevant to research practice (see also Haavind, 2000). Still, the challenge is to describe a research practice without making it ‘the right method’ or a ‘recipe’, but linked to a specific epistemology. The focus of our methodological discussions will to a large extent be on collaboration in research and the mutual learning that the collaboration may entail.

About creating knowledge – and doing science

Our way of organizing and understanding research collaboration as a mutual learning process is based on a specific approach to knowledge, and how to develop knowledge about human actions and common life. We will therefore present the theoretical positioning of our work and explain the understanding of social practice from which we take our point of departure.

The concept of social practice alludes to the fact that people must be understood through their interplay with other people in social and historical organizations, i.e. as participants in structures of social practice (e.g. Chaiklin, Hedegaard, & Jensen, 1999; Chaiklin & Lave, 1993; Dreier, 1997, 2008; Holland & Lave, 2001; Jensen, 1987, 1999). This understanding is important for the focus of the research. Erik Axel stresses that research must be based on an understanding of subjects, who relate productively to their living conditions together with others in a common practice (2002, p. 204). Hence, it is not the individual in isolation that is the focus or starting point of the research, but this individual's activity with others. In this sense, the practice concept shifts the focus from individuals to their common life together. This does not mean that the individual ‘disappears’. It is essential to seek out the subject's perspective on the world and to learn about the social world through how it appears to the individual (Holzkamp, 2005 (1985); Schraube, 2013). Thus, we simultaneously take our point of departure in people’s common life and seek knowledge from people's personal perspectives, i.e. from the way the individual becomes involved, takes part and develops perspectives on what is happening. A perspective is not ‘free-floating’, but localized, i.e. it is a perspective from a location in a structure, from a certain position in social practice and connected with concrete conditions and participation together with others (Dreier 1997, 2008).
The concept of social practice also concerns our conception of knowledge. The presented approach to practice research can be seen as part of a move away from philosophical standpoints, where the world's true nature can only be understood by breaking away from it, and where creating knowledge (and science) must therefore be done by separating oneself from social life and uncovering universal validity (see also Brinkmann (2012); Schraube (2015). In such an understanding, concrete circumstances become sources of error to be limited. A practice philosophy, on the contrary, suggests that general knowledge is found in the concrete and variable circumstances (Jensen, 1999, 2001). Thus, we do not see local knowledge as tied to local conditions, but as aspects of a specific practice that can teach us about general connections. This forms the basis for a fundamental break with the idea of creating knowledge divorced from practice.

Knowledge (for example about children) is generated by being involved in the world, from commitments and experiences of participating in a specific practice (Højholt, 2005; Højholt & Kousholt, 2014a). Knowledge is linked to action, to being able to do something in a certain context (Bernstein, 1971; Jensen, 1999; Lave, 2012). You could say that I get to know the world through my actions in it, and my knowledge about it and my familiarity with the world affects what I do. The researcher's understanding of the world is also developed through participation in practice. The researchers themselves are a part of the research process and must be understood as one participant among others. In this way, the research itself is a social practice with special conditions (e.g. Mørck, 2000; Nissen, 2000; for the same point in a more historical perspective, e.g. Danziger, 1990; Foucault, 1972).

The research thus creates no objective knowledge, in the sense of universal knowledge, regardless of time, place and subjective conditions. Instead, the researcher's task becomes to explore complex connections in social practice, and in relation to this, ways of analysing become central. In the analysis, the researcher conveys these connections and includes the contradictions and limitations that participants in the field emphasize related to their reasons for doing as they do.

This approach to knowledge is both part of a broad movement in philosophy and social science, and a specific theoretical proposal for overcoming the abstract and universal concept of knowledge, which is broadly criticized. For example, Michel Foucault (1972) criticizes the perception of knowledge as something universal and argues that knowledge is historically produced as part of (and for the benefit of) certain societal interests – see also Burman (2017) or Rasmussen (2003), where these discussions are raised. Uffe Juul Jensen (2001) explicates a practice philosophy approach, taking his point of departure in
Bourdieu's critique of the ‘scholastic reason’. The term scholastic alludes to the idea that learning is linked solely to education and the idea of the scientist “freed from the urgencies of the world, that allows a free and liberated relation to those urgencies and to the world” (Bourdieu cited in Jensen, 2001, p. 197). Jensen suggests that the answer to this widespread critique implies a new understanding of the relationship between theory and practice, and in relation to this the theoretical discussions appear to go in separate directions. According to Jensen (2001), Bourdieu argues that the scholastic position may be exceeded through a specific type of reflexivity and alertness to the researcher's position. Jensen criticizes this solution and argues that:

a transgression of the scholastic position requires a practice in which the relationship between theory and practice is organized differently than in the forms that have been dominant in modern society. (Jensen, 2001, p. 205, translated by authors).

Jensen thereby points out that you cannot simply reflect your way out of the problem, but in a more far-reaching way must reorganize the practical relationship between those who research and those who are being researched. Thereby, we aim to go beyond understandings and organizations of research practice, where those who are researched become objects of a research that sets the agenda from ‘outside’ and ‘from above’ (Chimirri, 2014; Holzkamp, 2005 (1985)). In a practice research approach, the question of reorganizing the relationship between theory and practice leads to an understanding of research as collaboration.

**Research as collaboration**

When we fundamentally perceive research as collaboration, it is based on a theoretical understanding that people are exploratory in their lives, in the sense that lived life, and thus also professional work, involves exploratory aspects. It can be formulated in such a way that all participants in the research process are seen as subjects in their own lives (Dreier, 2008, 2015; Holzkamp, 2005, 2013; Højholt & Schraube, 2016).

In a sense, you could say that the traditional laboratory experiments, where the starting point is that the informants or subjects do not know what the research is about (because it will contaminate their responses and reactions), can also be considered a cooperation. There are people who willingly make themselves available and try to provide the effort the researchers need, and although this is not the intention, most research participants will consider the research question,
what their efforts will be used for, and the best way for them to contribute. Participants reflect on what is happening and work together to achieve results. In practice research, we want to engage in and learn from such subjective interplay rather than minimize it.

Striving to organize research as collaboration and to involve those who take part in the research as co-researchers, is not just related to research ethics. ‘Co-researching’ or research collaboration is intended to ensure that research is better designed to deal with issues relevant to the practice explored, and that it can benefit from the co-researcher’s knowledge and curiosity. It is an effort to provide the researcher with opportunities to achieve a broader insight into human experience (Holzkamp, 2005). The concept of co-researchers is more generally an attempt to transcend the ‘othering’ that may exist in research, and to develop the relationship between the researcher and the researched from ‘they’ to ‘we’ (this links to critical discussions in feminist and/or postcolonial research of the construction of ‘the other’, e.g. Spivak, 1988; Staunæs, 2004). Still, the co-researchers are ‘subjects in their own right’ with different perspectives, standpoints and lives. It is an attempt to challenge a tendency to approach the ‘researched’ as belonging to another category and not as part of and engaged in the same problems and social world as the researchers. Such a tendency may lead to objectifying those researched as the problem to explore, rather than involving them as someone with perspectives on and experiences with the problems the research concerns. Research collaboration is not about achieving agreement, but about learning from differences.

Thus, practice research is an effort to democratize the research, where multiple parties should have an opportunity to have their say and become involved. Multiple voices being involved in the research is hardly something new. Research cannot be considered as an isolated or neutral process, since the research is dependent on both funding and the outside world's interest in and use of research results. Currently, there are demands for research to cooperate more systematically with and involve stakeholders from the world around it. This raises pertinent questions about who will have a voice in relation to this? Who will influence research questions, and who will have access to use the research results and in relation to what? Frequently, research results are included in terms of how they can be used in political or managerial processes such as control, efficiency promotion, targeting or evaluation of other people's efforts.

In the kind of research collaboration, we are suggesting here, the research findings should not be involved as a kind of judgement in relation to social disagreements but should rather be viewed as a way to gain an insight into the basis for the disputes and what they are connected with. By involving different perspectives, the research can analyse relationships between a field’s task
distribution, positions and social structures. This does not happen by raising itself above social interests and perspectives, but by exploring their reasons and grounding in social practice. In this way, the research can develop theoretical concepts and thereby develop new understandings to use in practice.

Through collaboration on related problems, it is possible to achieve a unity between knowledge development and practice development. This does not mean that researchers and other participants will perceive issues and opportunities in the same way, or that the research will take (over) the responsibility for the development of practice. Research understood as collaboration is a collaboration concerning different tasks, which have different meanings for researchers and co-researchers. It is from the differences that we can learn.

A research approach in which knowledge is developed in and through collaborative research also constitutes a critical perspective on the understanding of research as a means to change practice, where research results are regarded as a primary driver of changes in practice. Jensen formulates the criticism as follows:

Change happens in practice and not by attempts to transmit abstract knowledge gained behind scholastic bastions to the social practice.  
(Jensen, 2001, p. 217, authors' translation)

Research can contribute knowledge to practice and take part in changes in practices – but social practice is continuously undergoing change. Attempts to contribute to these processes of change must be relevant for practice and must be connected to an interest in development. How and to what extent new understandings can lead to development in practice depends on many aspects other than the specific research project. For both researchers and professionals, the collaboration is part of a wider practice, where the insights gained from research collaboration will be incorporated and put into action. The research results will have different meanings for different professionals and researchers and will be further developed and ‘put to the test’ in different contexts.

Based on these more general considerations about how research can be perceived as collaboration and a kind of collaborative development of knowledge, the following sections will provide examples of what research collaboration can lead to. We have been repeatedly surprised to find that the importance of research increasingly seems to follow its activities and the researchers’ participatory methods, rather than the ‘results’. One can say that the researcher’s theoretical concepts and curiosity are reflected in types of action and not just in speech and text.
The organization and design of research collaboration

Research can be organized in many ways, and the following presentation is not intended as a dogma for practice research, but as an example of collaboration and reciprocity in a research project.

A significant part of starting research collaboration is to create an organization that gives the researchers the opportunity to explore the issues they are concerned with. It may take time to find the most appropriate way to hold meetings, the most relevant parties to meet with, and the most appropriate places to conduct the research. In the project discussed here, we had a long preparation process, where we met with many parties from the field and heard about the initiatives they had developed to create inclusion and to integrate the family work and inclusion efforts in the school. Through this process, we learned about the field's problem areas, including the difficulties of working across different institutional contexts, e.g. with the children's common interplay in the school’s general classes, when the professionals are placed in special education arrangements with individual children who are taken out of the class. The research similarly had difficulty in working across the special education area and the general school. We also learned about how different parties wanted to use the research for different purposes, for example in connection with documentation of the efficacy of interventions and selection of standards for family therapy. This preparation is thus a key part of the research itself and involves important insights into the empirical field.

Research collaboration can be conducted in many forms. For example, children, parents and professionals will usually be involved differently, depending on what is relevant to them, and what possibilities they have to use the research. We seek to involve the professionals who work with the research’s problems on a daily basis, in a systematic reflection on preliminary analyses and results. We do this both because these parties have relevant knowledge about the problems and experience of dealing with them, and because they have possibilities to develop practice (in a different way than parents and children), and because research often confronts the professionals with critical questions and feedback, precisely by investigating the perspectives of the children and parents. If knowledge from the perspectives of the children and parents is to have a constructive significance for professional practice, it requires that the professionals themselves are involved in the analysis, and that they take part in discussions of e.g. which contexts and conditions the research has overlooked. In this way, we prioritize working to ensure possibilities for the co-researcher to also experience influence and recognition in relation to the research process.
However, there turned out to be specific challenges with regard to the organization of the collaborative research: The professionals in the different municipalities had different professional starting points and different working hours and conditions for participation in the project. As a consequence, we were unable to gather entire staff groups at the same time and had to find other ways of involving the staff who were not taking part in the project’s meetings. We find that it is a general and continuous challenge to organize research collaboration in relation to different kinds of research problems, working conditions and the perspectives of those involved.

In the mentioned project, we organized a joint project group, where representatives (mainly heads of the involved institutions) from all sub-projects (the various family classes, a family institution where families were placed full time, the general school and the psychological counselling etc.) met regularly during the project period.\(^1\) In parallel, we conducted our fieldwork and provided feedback to practitioners involved more locally. The project group met about once a month, where development processes and special circumstances, events and changes in the work of the professionals and the researchers were reviewed. At these meetings, we discussed different themes (e.g. children's communities and working with parents) and we always started by conducting a round, where everyone could talk about what had happened ‘since last time’. The significance of these rounds was often discussed, as they could be very time-consuming. However, the conclusion each time was that the specific examples that were presented in these discussions, created opportunities to learn about concrete dilemmas that appeared particularly significant for both everyday life in the professional practice, and also for the research’s preoccupation with situated meanings and problems from practice. The minutes of these discussions have been an essential part of our empirical material. We understand the importance of these rounds in relation to the circumstance that the discussions here were more concrete and based on pressing challenges. In this way, possibilities for generalizing knowledge through concrete variations seemed anchored in these kinds of shared explorations. Discussions based on selected themes tended to be more principled and characterized by promoting solutions and ‘answers’ instead of curiosity and wonder. Still, focusing on selected problems created opportunities for presenting empirical material and involving co-researchers in

\(^1\) During the project, we became increasingly aware of the importance of having employees who were more directly involved with children and families, and we therefore expanded the project group during the process. Finally, it should be mentioned that at these meetings, the project was continuously developed and reorganized. For example, new types of meetings (typically local feedback meetings, management meetings or sub-group meetings), a conference and a book were planned (Højholt, 2011).
the analytical work. In addition, the researchers get opportunities to listen to the co-researchers’ perspectives on hypothetical understandings, and how their collaborators in the professional practice find these understandings relevant – or not – and how they may have meanings or be used in practice.

In this article, we have linked knowledge to action and participation in social practice and we have emphasized that the investigation of general conditions occurs through concrete and variable circumstances. That starting point accentuates that the researcher follows the concrete and variable circumstances of the people, whose life conditions (s)he is concerned with. In other words, the researcher must take part in order to explore what is at stake in the specific practice, and how it develops over time.

However, the fieldwork must also be prepared by working on how to gain access to relevant situations and events in practice, where you can participate, and how to be present (Højholt & Kousholt, 2014a). In other words, it is about establishing a position from which to explore the specific practice. It concerns working with access to different situations in practice, as well as working with the participation possibilities as a researcher. The researcher's position is in many cases not a position that exists in advance. It must be developed as part of the research collaboration, and both parties can experience confusion and uncertainty. For example, the researchers may be concerned with how they, as researchers, might be present and take part here, and the co-researchers may be concerned with what it means for them that there are researchers present, and what they are observing. This work to create opportunities for e.g. observations and interviews, conveys something about practice structures. When you negotiate and investigate your access and presence, it is precisely in relation to the practice you are entering into, and such processes can therefore provide an understanding of the field's social structure and organization (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

The actual collaboration between researchers and co-researchers can often be confusing in connection with practice research. In one way, this confusion tells us something about how research is traditionally placed ‘outside of practice’. The researcher thus becomes an uninvolved expert or judge, whose knowledge is simultaneously abstract, mysterious (and thus not as directly applicable) and supercilious, even in relation to professionals who have worked in the field for a long time. In the kind of research collaboration, we present here, this organization and hierarchy is challenged, which initially involves some uncertainty. Our experience is that it is precisely by ‘shaking up’ and breaking with the widespread way in which professionals and researchers engage with each other, that we achieve a form of collaboration that can contribute to mutual learning processes.
An observation day

In the following section, we will provide an example of an observation process that leads to a discussion of the involvement of the researcher as a basis for mutual learning processes. It is an example that has been singled out several times by the professional (e.g. in meetings with the rest of the staff) as ‘what made the greatest impression’, as something that made a difference and provides a starting point from which the family workers can talk about their work.

The example is taken from a research project that explores the everyday life of children and parents in a family centre where they live for a period (see also Kousholt, 2012). The researcher is present at the family centre and participates in daily life in the house where the family lives. The family consists of the mother, Rikke, and the daughter Sara (4 years) and son Ole (1 year). Tove is the family worker on duty that afternoon.

At approximately 5 pm, I go over towards house 2, since I expect that Rikke must have arrived home with the children. I meet Tove on the way, who suggests that we should see if Rikke would offer us a cup of coffee. Rikke has come home. She is playing a game on the computer in the living room. Ole is playing on the floor. Tove comments that Rikke is playing on the PC. Rikke answers that she has otherwise not been playing today, since the computer ‘was down’. Tove sits down on the couch. Camilla (another mother from house 1) is sitting in a chair and watching television. Her little boy lies sleeping in a carrycot on the table.

I go out into the kitchen with Rikke, who starts preparing dinner. She has some meat in the oven, which she has prepared during the day. Rikke tells me that she has not managed to peel the potatoes today. She normally does that before she goes to collect the children, so that she only needs to turn on the pot when she comes home.

Ole whimpers a little and hangs onto Rikke's leg as she stands at the stove. I pick him up and stand with him in my arm while I talk to Rikke. Sara comes out from the room. She is wearing a red straw hat and says that it was given to her by her father. She wants to try the straw hat on Ole, who does not like having anything on his head and complains. I sit on the floor with Sara and Ole and try to help them through a game of honking the horn of a big plastic car. Sara is a little too forceful towards Ole, and I have to intervene several times to ‘shield him’. Rikke and Tove go out and smoke a cigarette together.

Tove and Rikke come back in and Rikke continues cooking. Tove sits down again on the sofa. I talk a bit with Sara, and we read a book until it is time for them to eat. Occasionally, Ole sits on my lap. Tove and I leave as they are about to eat.
When we go over to the staff room together, Tove is very preoccupied with the way I interact with the family and get involved in what is going on. Tove says that if I and Camilla had not been there, she would have withdrawn from the situation. Then she would have ‘taken up too much space’. She says that her contact with the mother can ‘harm’ the mother’s contact with the children, in the sense of her [Tove’s] presence entailing that there will be less attention for the children because Rikke engages with her instead. The situation leads to a long conversation between us, and Tove reflects on being present as a professional person contra as a fellow human being. She explains that it can sometimes be difficult to be present without interfering with what is happening, but that what she thinks is her professional task, keeps her from interfering in the situation.

The example shows a typical observation day, where the researcher takes part in what is happening in the family's daily life and talks to the children and the parents in the meantime. The example presents an opportunity to discuss both the involvement of the researcher and the family worker's understanding of her professionalism. The researcher's way of being present in the situation gives rise to a long conversation about how to be present with the family, and the significance one's presence has. In this situation, the researcher and family worker together explore questions of shared interest, questions that relate differently to their professional tasks and questions about which they have different perspectives.

The way in which the researcher participates in what is happening is different than that of the professionals. It is initially the ‘breach of expectations’ that initiates questions and curiosity for both parties and the possibility of joint exploration of what is at stake in the situation in question (Kousholt, 2016). The researcher must engage in what is going on, in a way that is both appropriate for the situation and what is at stake there, and which also offers the opportunity to pursue the purpose of the research. This means that the best possible way to engage will vary (for example, it is quite different to observe in a classroom and in a family during the ‘hour before dinner, when the children are tired’). In line with this, Darrin Hodgetts et al. (2016) write about taking part in everyday life “in a more flexible manner where we try harder to fit into everyday events” (p. 141).

In this sense, the example shows us something about the researcher's working conditions. The researcher is not required to assess or address the specific family’s problems and is therefore able to explore what is happening and what seems to be its significance for those involved. The researcher has the opportunity to focus on the children's and parents' perspectives and engagements.
At the same time, the example provides us with an insight into the family worker’s working conditions. She is tasked precisely to assess and assist. She has a duty to seek answers and find solutions. The family worker’s tasks are defined, inter alia, by others’ concerns, and she has a duty to work with the mother's parenting skills based on this concern. The different tasks of the researcher and the professional allow them to engage in different ways. The professional’s tasks are defined by, among other things, the municipality who pays the family centre and evaluates their work with the families.

The researcher’s participation and curiosity

The researcher's task is, among other things, to develop an understanding about this particular practice. This means that a researcher encounters practice with some humility and respect for those who are part of it on a daily basis and therefore know it from the ‘inside’. In this respect, the researcher is ‘ignorant’ and must engage with practice openly and curiously. This approach draws inspiration from an ethnographic open-ended and explorative approach (e.g. Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The researcher cannot know in advance. However, the research process does not stop at the co-researcher's experiences, but their perspectives set the researcher on the trail of contexts, contradictions and dilemmas that must be pursued further in the research work. The researcher is ‘new’ in the practice she explores. It is a practice she is not required to take responsibility for, or, as a consultant, to change. Rather, it is something she has the privilege to be curious about. In many ways, curiosity is a key word for this research approach. The researcher's curiosity and wonder affect how she creates material and participates in the field.

Research texts often operate with divisions between theory and the production of empirical material, but when the researcher acts in the field, a choice is also made about where she places herself and what she focuses on. These choices are connected to a theoretical search for connections through continuous analysis of examples in the empirical material. This sets the researcher on the trail of something important, which she therefore pursues in subsequent participation and analyses. The researcher's curiosity, experiences and theoretical understanding – the questions she asks and the way they change during the process – guide this process. In that way, theory is not only a tool for reflection, but an embodied practice, and a way of directing and modifying one’s participation in the field. At the same time, other more practical considerations

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2 According to an etymology dictionary ‘curious’ mean ‘eager to know’. https://www.etymonline.com/word/curious
(e.g. the researcher’s working conditions, staff issues at the participating schools/institutions) will have a bearing on what it is possible to do. The methodological choices are therefore based on both knowledge, interest and practical conditions for research practice. The researcher must therefore be able to shift her attention and her participation during the research process (Hodgetts et al., 2016; Kousholt, 2016). This may relate to both seizing the opportunities that appear ‘here and now’ in specific situations, and persistently working to achieve precisely the interview or observation that will illuminate the research problem from a perspective that seems important to explore. This implies varying one’s participation – not in a coincidental way, but in a theoretical and problem-focused way.

The research practice we are discussing here often entails overlaps between different research methods. As illustrated in the introductory excerpt from the minutes of a project group meeting, a conversation in an everyday situation is sometimes valuable interview material. Depending on the specific circumstances, it may prove useful to follow some people's concrete life practice by being present with them, and this may involve a greater or lesser degree of interaction and conversation with them (Huniche & Jefferson, 2009; Kousholt, 2016). At other times, it may be more appropriate to talk in a more structured manner. Participatory observations, interviews and meetings are different social situations, where the matter under investigation plays out in different ways. Different social situations give the researcher access to knowledge in different ways (Atkinson & Coffey, 2003). There will be different aspects of the research problem present in various contexts, and sometimes it takes time to identify them. The researcher may need to approach the problem from different angles and in different ways.

When we are concerned with participation, perspectives and reasons, it is not only a theoretical approach, it is also an ‘empirical attention’ and form of participation. It is a way to participate in practice – a way to look, ask, walk around and position oneself. The researcher's understanding is also reflected through where she looks, what she looks for, who she asks about what etc. There are reasons why the researcher in the example above, sits with the children on the floor or lends a hand in the kitchen that is linked to what she wants to understand. In Osterkamp’s words, you could say that the researcher participates on the basis of ‘emotions as action-guiding’ (Osterkamp, 1979). The point is that our theoretical understanding of the world cannot be separated from our subjectivity. In the field, you often do what ‘feels right’. The researcher's subjectivity is expressed in ways of participating that have to do with the researcher's bodily presence, her experiences and her interplay with other people. Research processes are not only an ‘intellectual’ quest for knowledge but are also an
embodied practice. The experiences (provocations, challenges, wonder, indignations, etc.) which the research process triggers, give rise to further exploration and searching for what is at stake in the practice in which the researcher is involved. Parallels can be drawn here to an auto-ethnographic tradition, where the researcher uses autobiographies (narratives on their own personal life experiences) as a means of obtaining knowledge about cultural practices (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). However, it is not the researcher's ‘introspection’ or personal life experiences we find relevant here, but the relation between the researcher's subjectivity and knowledge interest as an opportunity to seek out general relations in practice.

We have emphasized here that the researcher's curiosity is intertwined in a theoretically based search for connections. Therefore, the following section will explore the significance of theory.

From techniques to reveal internal problems to theory and collaboration

Based on conceptualizations of the relationship between people's personal reasons and their social conditions, we work with a common exploration of people’s reasons for doing what they do. This is also a discussion we find that we share with our collaborators in practice. In both the development of the professional work with children and families in difficulties, and in the exploration of the same, we are confronted with tasks linked to ideas about ‘internalised mental structures’. ‘The internal’ is presented as something we either are tasked to ‘treat’ through special programmes or techniques or, in the exploration, to reach as something untouched – again through special methods, techniques or narratives. In treatment, it may concern problematic ‘parenting skills’, ‘resistance’ and a lack of a sense of reality. In the research, it may be about describing ‘the true self’ or about getting the informant's ‘own story’ without influencing it. Mik-Meyer and Järvinen (2005)

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3 Ellis and Brochner (2000) describe the auto-ethnography as a diverse tradition, where the emphasis may be placed differently on ‘auto’ (the researcher's personal narrative), ‘ethno’ (the researcher's own experiences as access to knowledge about what is happening in the field), and ‘graphy’ (how knowledge is produced through auto-ethnography) respectively. This illustrates that the ethnographic and autobiographic aspects can have different weight within the auto-ethnographic tradition. Still, the writing and analysis of autobiographic narratives is central to this tradition.

4 Kvale (1996) illustrates this through the metaphor of the interviewer as a miner, where the knowledge one is concerned with is found inside the interviewee (like ‘hidden metal’), and the researcher's task is to identify and uncover this knowledge without ‘contaminating’ it. Danziger (1990) presents a parallel metaphor about the sleeping beauty.
describe this as an illusion of some special, detached inner part, which much research methodology is about reaching or uncovering. In this way, methodological differences relate to different conceptualizations of the ‘research object’, i.e. what is exactly the object of the research? When the object is some isolated inner part, we must find techniques to bring it out and to keep away the social impact.

Much thinking on methods is therefore concerned with techniques to control the influence that the researcher's preconceptions can have on the phenomenon that is being examined. Moreover, techniques are presented so that the researcher can ‘hold back’ in order to bring out the informant's own narrative or story about themselves (this critique is also discussed in Kvale 1996).

In both professional practice and in research practice, it is suggested that the professionalism and scientific nature respectively relate to special methods of achieving something internal, that cannot be achieved immediately – and that can appear quite mysterious. Such methods seem to entail that the internal problems should be found by separating or excluding other elements often explicated as the researcher's theoretical understandings and subjectivity.

When we present the researcher's curiosity and participation as theoretically based, it is about understanding theory as an integral aspect of all the sub-processes in research. Thus, we do not regard the theoretical understanding as something that ‘closes off’ openness, but rather as something that can ‘unlock’ our immediate understanding and open up for curiosity concerning life conditions, personal reasons and perspectives. Such an understanding can be seen as grounded in a philosophy of practice, where concepts are thought of as embodied in forms of practice and cannot be articulated a priori (Jensen, 1999).

Concepts are not seen as made beyond practice to manage and goal-direct practice ‘ahead of practice’ or to reflect, asses or deconstruct practice ‘afterwards’, but to be developed ‘just in time’ as Jensen formulates it (1999). Concepts are part of curiosity and approaches to problems and efforts in practice. In such conceptualizations, theory is understood not as something to enlighten, mirror, represent, foresee or control a reality outside theory. Rather, conceptualizations of ‘theory’ may be hinting at ways of reflecting, analysing, pointing to problematics and dilemmas for different social practices, of which the theories and research are a part.

Still, in the research process, the theoretical concepts form the backdrop for a special curiosity, in our case regarding people's participation and interplay, as well as their social conditions and how people arrange themselves in relation to these.

The above-mentioned figure on isolated internal structures is therefore far from unambiguous. In both professional work and research, there are different
forms of critique of this approach, and emphasis is placed instead on relations, interactions, systems, communications, etc. The research’s object then becomes e.g. social meanings that are created in the interaction. Drawing on interactionism (among others Becker and Goffmann), Mik-Meyer and Järvinen formulate it such that the focus is hereby changed from ‘social problems’ to problem definitions, from marginalised individuals to stigmatization and marginalization processes, from individual motivation and intentionality to social interaction (2005, p. 12). Mik-Meyer and Järvinen develop the argument with the constructivist supposition that meaning cannot be localized in the phenomenon itself (exemplified by Latour and Fairclough). By extension, they argue that one must “distance oneself from a goal that one can (and should) locate motivations and intentions in individual subjects” (ibid., p. 14, authors’ translation).

These formulations are close to this article’s endeavours, and yet there is the important difference that we seek to understand marginalization processes and social interaction through the individual's personal intentionality and based on how social problems are experienced and dealt with in the individual person's life. In order to be able to analyse problems as they are meaningful for specific people in their social lives, we need to be able to analyse personal meanings and reasons as related to social life situations, positions and standpoints. Therefore, it seems significant to adopt an exploratory approach towards individuals’ reasons for doing what they do.

Although we share the ambition to break away from locating intentions as ‘internal’ and as a matter of something that is separate from social relations, we find it problematic if the question of intentions is not raised, not explored, or is not the subject of curiosity. When the research focuses on “the creation of social identities, on the interviewees' strategies for (positive) self-presentation and on the interview’s narrative characteristic” (ibid., p. 17), it seems that the positioning and self-representations etc. are taken for granted as what is at stake for the participants. When people's intentions and reasons are not included, the ‘matter’ (the problem with which the interviewees are concerned) may disappear.

In the research practice presented here, we adopt an explorative approach to people's personal reasons, and we start from the assumption that personal reasons can teach us about social structures. In this light, subjects' personal actions, feelings and thoughts are seen as aspects of their participation in social practices.

In order to develop knowledge about the connections between personal meanings and social conditions, we are interested in people's intentions with and reasons for doing what they do. This means involving the co-researchers in the researchers’ curiosities. So, instead of techniques and rules about not influencing, we argue for an open collaboration regarding explicit research questions and common exploratory processes.
How research may contribute to social change

You see, we think that research is terribly dangerous – that is what we need to break away from. It is some people, who come and take a look at what we are doing, and they lift it up a bit and turn it around a bit, and then we get it down again and can use it if we involve ourselves in it.

(Head of family centre, the authors’ translation)

The excerpt above (which is also from the minutes of a project group meeting) indicates that the co-researchers are also inspired by involving themselves in the research. Research can have implications for practice in several ways. The significance that the research collaboration can achieve depends on how the professionals proceed with the research in their practice.

The research leaves its mark, both through the discussions and issues that are addressed at meetings, and through the researcher’s involvement in the daily life of the family centre, which was highlighted with the excerpt from an observation day presented earlier. The way the researcher here relates to the family, the curiosity regarding how they manage their everyday lives, is a curiosity to see common dilemmas in families' lives at play in this particular family. The researcher’s participation provides the family worker, Tove, with the opportunity to see the family in another way than what she is used to due to her professional tasks. Their dialogue afterwards about the family’s situation focuses on the professional practice as a condition of the family's daily life at the institution, and it inspires thoughts about how things can be done – and understood – differently.

The researcher's way of participating in practice also has significance, and the places that a researcher chooses to go to explore the research problem seems to be significant. The head of the mentioned family centre highlights e.g. that the fact that the researcher went with the children to the day-care facility and to school, directed her attention to the fact that

the children are living a life in many other places, and perhaps our work should also focus on that. Perhaps we can do much more by cooperating with some of those who are significant there.

5The idea that the researcher ‘lifts up’ and that the practice ‘brings it down’, does not harmonise well with the understanding of knowledge that we present here, but it illustrates a ‘conventional’ figure about research and reflection that we within research have tried to break away from, and to talk instead about mutual involvement and learning processes.
Such considerations are in contrast to the traditions of the family centre, which are to concentrate on family treatment (e.g. in relation to parental abilities) aimed at the relations between mothers and children in this isolated context. By going to other places (besides the family centre) in their research process, the researcher highlights possible relevant connections in the lives of the children and parents. Furthermore, she gets an opportunity to convey perspectives on the practice of the family centre from elsewhere, such as how the professionals in the day-care institution perceive the work the family centre is doing. For example, were the professionals at Sara's day-care institution in doubt about how they should contribute, what kind of cooperation they were involved in in relation to the family centre? In this way, the research collaboration can inspire reflection on the circumstances in the professional work, as it appears from a decentred perspective, from others' perspectives and tasks.

Other examples from this project could be when the researcher's curiosity about administrative referral processes as a condition for working with children in difficulties, leads to the professionals becoming preoccupied with the demands placed upon them by the municipal administration as a condition for their work (Ron Larsen, 2012, 2018). Or when the researcher explores the community in the general class as significant in relation to the special education efforts for individual children (Morin, 2008). The researcher’s preoccupation with the general classes was by no means a new focus for our co-researchers, but during the collaboration period, the work aimed at the children's schools, after-school centre and parent collaboration was intensified and the content changed.

The researcher participates from another position and often has the opportunity to traverse the divisions and structures that the professionals are placed in. It seems that it is both the researchers’ curious approach and the ‘content’ of this curiosity that can serve as inspiration. What seems to be important is the questions that we as researchers ask, what we look for and pursue.\(^6\) You can say that what the researchers are concerned with, makes an impression and become significant for the professionals. It forms the starting point for discussing circumstances in practice, which are often taken for granted or seem esoteric. Such discussions are not only a neutral reflection of practice. As we have emphasized here, they are shaped by the researcher's curiosity and theoretical understandings. At the same time, the researchers’ understanding and

\(^6\) In an evaluation of a previous practice research project, we were surprised that a day-care professional emphasized that one of the things that made the greatest impression was that ‘you have looked so much at the children’. It took a little time before we realised that it was actually the researchers' activity, spending so much time observing the children, that made an impression on someone who had worked in the field for 20 years. As the day-care professional said: “It has made me look differently at my work” (Højholt, Larsen & Stanek, 2007).
approach will be developed, challenged and qualified along the way. It is this mutual aspect that we would like to highlight and develop here, now seen from the perspective of the researchers.

**How practice may influence research**

The researcher's understanding of practice develops largely through what the co-researchers wonder about, notice and bring to the joint discussions. The co-researchers’ sense of wonder points to what they are concerned about and experience as limitations and dilemmas in their work. The example shows how the family worker’s question about the researcher's participation in the daily activities of the family, enables the researcher to learn about some important challenges in the professional work with the families, such as how professional methods in practice can be perceived as ‘straitjackets’. The researchers also learn about how the professionals’ viewpoints and understandings are formed by their professional location, conditions and tasks (e.g. the responsibility they have for creating change in the family), while the children’s life in other contexts are someone else's responsibility and are both out of sight and out of influence.

Through the collaboration with the parents, the researchers learn about family life, about how practical and relational challenges intertwine, and about conflicts and collaboration in the families. For example, Rikke talks about how it affects her relationship with her daughter that she now has a boyfriend who helps to take care of Sara’s younger brother. This illustrates how everyday practical aspects, such as the sharing of daily tasks, are very important for the relations between the parent and the child. Following on from this, the researchers become interested in the question of how to support the relations in the family through focusing more on the parents’ practical life situation – and conditions for developing as parents. This led to discussions in the research group regarding the problems related to the fact that parenting is often understood as something that primarily has to do with internal preconditions and is something you do alone. Through the collaboration, an awareness developed about how to work with the conditions for family life and parenthood such as caring for the children's everyday life across contexts (Højholt, Kousholt & Juhl, 2018; Kousholt, 2012). This means that the professional care must also be organized so that it can ‘traverse’ contexts and actively become involved in supporting children's living conditions in a complex life across contexts (see also Schwartz, 2014, 2017).

The professionals' discussions about methods (and fatigue in relation to repeatedly having to implement new methods), shifts the researchers’ focus towards how we can describe professionalism in a different way than through
new guidelines that can become ‘straitjackets’ in new ways. It follows from this that the researchers become preoccupied with how guidelines and manuals for a specific kind of treatment seem to exclude exploratory activity and the development of new understandings. It is this very notion of professionalism that we find necessary to problematize (see also Højholt, 2006; Røn Larsen, 2012). Instead of developing new methods or techniques, the research could inspire exploration, creativity and continuous development of understandings and interventions that can be relevant to the changing lives of parents and children. The researchers continue to work on how to conceptualise professionalism in a situated manner that relates to the professionals’ participation and tasks in a complex social practice.

The professionals’ efforts to develop their practice highlights how they encounter challenges in terms of how new ways of working become recognized as professional if they are not described as an established method. The researchers also become aware that the issue of being able to document work as specialized professionalism, is both vulnerable and conflictual for the professional practice.

In this way, the professionals in the project have helped to raise research questions (such as the question of the importance of documentation, an issue which is particularly addressed in Højholt (2010) and Jensen (2011). Moreover, when the researchers present material from their research (such as observations from children’s and families’ everyday life), the professionals shift their attention towards the work’s content and the contradictions in their working tasks. At the same time, the professionals ‘push’ the research towards questions like: ‘what does this insight into children's and families' daily lives and difficulties entail for our professionalism?’ and ‘How can you work professionally with the problems raised by the research?’ The researchers thus become engaged with professionalism and how conceptualizations of professionalism are important for the understandings of social problems. These movements highlight how research can have an influence on its field and, conversely, how co-researchers and empirical realizations alter research, what we refer to here as mutual learning processes.

What researchers learn is furthermore expressed in their analyses. Within the natural sciences, the results of the research are often regarded as an objective result of the controlled use of scientific methods (which others should be able to repeat, independently of time and place and participants), and thus not as something that can be characterized as a social learning process in which many different aspects come into play. The analysis process is also a social practice, e.g. influenced by what the researcher is otherwise a part of as conferences, research communities, research policy requirements, etc. (Dreier, 2008).
Analytic approach – Anchoring personal perspectives in social structures

The point of departure regarding people's participation in social and historical interplay becomes significant in relation to the analysis: When people take part in various communities, they act situated in social structures, and seen in this light, the participants' experiences can teach us about general connections. However, this does not happen merely by writing down what people do and say, but by relating this to their conditions for doing so, the meanings they ascribe to what is at stake, and the way they reason about what happens. These concepts can help to anchor the analyses of personal experiences in social practice. Concepts imply certain analytical potential. They direct the researcher’s attention to certain connections (see also Brinkmann, 2012; Schraube, 2015). The analytical approach is thus about exploring personal and specific aspects and connecting these to life conditions in a particular practice. In this way, we analyse the specific practice on the basis of the personal meanings it has for different participants and how it is part of a more comprehensive historical practice.

The article's approach to research practice does not really make sense without an analytic approach that anchors differences and conflicts and social problems in practice structures. This is also linked to a discussion of the critical project in practice research, i.e. can we be critical when we cooperate and involve ourselves so closely? We believe that it is possible, but also that the criticism must be anchored in practice, i.e. in structural, organizational, conceptual and theoretical difficulties, contradictions and conflicts. This means that the criticism should be directed towards general challenges. It is precisely the process of searching for ‘the general’ that can be said to characterize research.

Searching for general connections emphasizes the scientific challenge of involving differences and changes. In relation to generalizations, we confront the danger of reducing complexity, simplifying variations and exaggerating points. Generalizations must build on differences, variations, connections in relation to concrete situations and the historical practice these are part of. This is an analytical practice of anchoring differences in social practice and connecting them to common problems and conditions that still have different meanings to different persons (Brinkmann, 2012; Schraube, 2015)

Generalization could be seen as a way of relating different perspectives, personal dilemmas and social conflicts to the common social world in which they are embedded. Differences may teach us about connections in social life, e.g. how structural arrangement may give different participants unequal possibilities, and in this way teach us about structural connections in historical practice.

The movement from empirical data to writing an analysis can therefore also be discussed as a movement from knowing to generality. Possibilities for
generalizing involve a further search for connections in the ‘well-known’. To know something is about recognizing it in its various manifestations, to see something repeated, to know something from different perspectives and different places. Analysis is therefore about searching for dynamics and reasons and having theoretical concepts that can assist in the search for connections between, for example, reasons and conditions.

Analysing interviews or observation notes also becomes a process of ‘asking questions’ about people's lives and participation in social practice. Extracts from interviews must be analysed in connections with knowledge about people’s everyday life. If we do not ask about conditions, we cannot analyse the connections between what people do and their conditions for doing it.

The work of identifying connections in the material also occurs by working with examples. These may be examples that illustrate common connections, or where a contrast or a conflict is involved. Some examples capture the researcher's concentrated attention. They may be special in the sense that they stand out and thereby illustrate general conditions in a special way, or show something that is ‘repeated’ in various ways many times. It may concern examples where the researcher notices something immediately, but it is only possible to analyse it through a deeper knowledge of the material.

The writing process in itself is a contribution to the analytical practice. Having to disseminate the knowledge you have gained through participation in a field involves systematizing and reflecting on connections. This should not be understood as a search for the unambiguous or for what matches. Often, curiosity is directed at what does not add up in terms of dilemmas and conflicts.

The researcher will often begin by selecting large parts of her material for the analysis, while the criteria for selection (why this interview extract is important, how it says something about a person's life situation or particular perspective) is not specified. The researcher knows about many more connections and dimensions in the material than the reader, and it is only when these connections are written down explicitly that others can see analytical connections, rather than more or less random interpretations of the material. The researcher must ask herself: Why have I chosen this? What do I learn from this extract from an observation – what does it point to based on my knowledge of the field?

In the analysis, it will be important to present all of the parties concerned as having reasons for their actions, i.e. not to describe one perspective at the expense of another. The researcher's curiosity should be included throughout, also in relation to actions that the researcher is critical of. She must be inquiring and investigative: What can this be related to?
**Summing up**

In this article, we have attempted to illustrate how researchers and co-researchers work with shared problems. Although researchers and co-researchers are connected in common efforts, these efforts nevertheless have different meanings for us, and we can translate them and pursue them in different ways in terms of research practice and professional practice. One could say that researchers and co-researchers are connected through their differences, through different ways of dealing with the shared problems. Researchers and professionals and their users are both separated in different places, tasks and conditions, and connected through the fact that we have tasks in relation to each other. These tasks are not unambiguous, however. There are political, professional and scientific disputes about both the role of research in a welfare society, and how social problems should be understood.

So, not only are there differences between the researchers and the people they collaborate with, there are also plenty of differences internally between the professionals, and internally between the researchers. This is one of the things we can learn from the collaboration, that the differing and conflicting perspectives can be analysed and can tell us something about the structures in which and with which we work. We obtain an insight into how the fields we work in and across (not least the research field) are problematically organized. Issues of power, hierarchal relations and unequal possibilities are at stake in various ways, both within and across the fields we work in.

The relation between research and practice (just like the relations between different professional practices) can be organized in ways that impede collaboration and joint contributions. This illustrate structural problems: The research is very problematic linked to a number of other practices, such as professional practice which it is used to evaluate, monitor, document, manage, standardize and much more. At the same time, the division of labour is created in a historical development and is re-created and changed, and not least discussed, as we do here. In our article, we want to inspire debate about this division of labour and make a proposal to regard collaboration in research as mutual learning processes. It is an invitation to challenge narrow perceptions of what research can be, and to experiment with ways of cooperating. It is also an invitation to professionals, civil servants and other user groups to engage actively in research’s issues and processes, and thereby use research and contribute to mutual learning processes.
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Literature


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Toward a transformative-activist co-exploration of the world? Emancipatory co-research in Psychology from the standpoint of the subject

Niklas A. Chimirri and Sofie Pedersen

Abstract

With a fundamental interest in further developing and specifying the theoretical and ethical framework of Psychology from the Standpoint of the Subject (PSS), the article at hand asks: What is the PSS researcher’s position in and responsibility toward society? What does the theoretical concept of the co-researcher, which is so pivotal in this tradition, entail for conceptualizing the relationship between the academic researcher and all those others who participate from different societal positions? Is there a specific, emancipatory contribution the PSS researcher is to make to the production of societal conditions, including the production of knowledge? What is the contribution of the other co-researchers then, and how do they gain from the PSS researcher’s labor, in particular her scientific explorations of the world?

The article’s analyses delve into various versions of understanding and implementing emancipation through psychological co-research, i.e. of how PSS research differently aims at bettering one another’s living conditions. First, the original methodology developed in the Berlin context is presented, which can be roughly described as a theoretically informed dialogical exchange between academically trained people. This is secondly followed by a critique of this model, articulated by the Scandinavian Practice Research tradition and mounding in substantial conceptual and methodological developments – in particular of the understanding of the (co-)researcher relationship. Thirdly, it is illustrated that Practice Research instantiated some new ambiguities, by analyzing its methodology of fellow knowledge gaining through the lens of cultural-historical psychology and foremost Stetsenko’s texts on the researcher as a transformative activist. Finally, it proposes mutual knowledge-sharing as the primary
task of PSS co-research projects, in order to specify and nuance the co-researcher concept in relation to the conceptualization of the nominal researcher. Thereby, we intend to resurrect lively debates of PSS’ emancipatory potentials and contribute to dialogically nuancing its self-understanding.

Keywords
psychology from the standpoint of the subject, practice research, co-researcher principle, emancipation, mutual knowledge-sharing, cultural-historical psychology, transformative activist stance

The aim of bettering societal conditions via our psychological investigations is deeply embedded in the emancipatory agenda of German-Scandinavian Critical Psychology, a.k.a. Psychology from the Standpoint of the Subject (PSS). But in assuming this aim, does our theoretical framework sufficiently allow for transparently and critically reflecting on our own self-understanding and our own ‘emancipatory’ contributions to societal production and reproduction? With a fundamental interest in further developing and specifying this theoretical framework, the article at hand wonders: What is the PSS researcher’s position in and responsibility toward society? What does in particular the theoretical concept of the co-researcher, which is so pivotal in this tradition, entail for conceptualizing the relationship between the academically employed researcher and all those others who participate from different societal positions? After all, the nominal, professionalized academic researcher is mostly acting on the grounds of the very same societal conditions that her non-academically employed co-researchers are also acting on. However, some conditions are different or at least differently accentuated given the specific, labor-related position the nominal researcher enacts, for instance given the right to academic freedom secured via national and international legal documents, or the profane fact that the researcher is partly paid precisely for exploring the world in scientific ways. So, is there a specific contribution the nominal PSS researcher is to make to the production of societal conditions, including the production of knowledge, that others cannot make? What is the contribution of other co-researchers then, and how do they gain from the professionalized PSS researcher’s labor, in particular her scientific explorations of the world?

The analyses presented here first delve into various versions of understanding and implementing emancipation through psychological co-research, i.e. of how PSS research differently aims at bettering one another’s living conditions. First, the original methodology developed in the Berlin context is presented, which can be roughly described as a theoretically informed dialogical exchange between academically trained people. This is secondly
followed by the critique of this model, articulated by the Scandinavian Practice Research tradition and mounding in substantial conceptual and methodological developments – in particular of the understanding of the (co-)researcher relationship, given that all participants are engaged in conducting their respective everyday life. Thirdly, it is illustrated that Practice Research instantiated some new ambiguities, by analyzing its methodology of fellow knowledge gaining through the lens of cultural-historical psychology and foremost Stetsenko’s texts on the researcher as transformative activist. Finally, it proposes *mutual knowledge-sharing* as the primary task of PSS co-research projects, in order to specify and nuance the co-researcher concept in relation to the conceptualization of the nominal researcher. By proposing this concept, we intend to resurrect lively debates of PSS’ emancipatory potentials and contribute to dialogically nuancing its self-understanding.

**Problematicizing emancipation as conceptually mediated social self-understanding primarily aimed at academics**

Without any doubt, Psychology from the Standpoint of the Subject (PSS) has always already been promoting an emancipatory research agenda – a wish for bettering one another’s societal living conditions. But just as much as the approach has undergone a number of historical-cultural changes and developments since it was first introduced in the late 1960s and 1970s at the Freie Universität (FU) of Berlin by a group of psychologists that gathered around Klaus Holzkamp’s professorship, so has its understanding of what emancipation is, and of how it should be promoted through its research engagements, changed and developed, as an inevitable consequence of historical time.

So where do we stand today, or rather: How does current PSS understand emancipation and emancipatory research? Is emancipation still on PSS’ agenda, or how explicitly is it on PSS’ agenda? Given recent calls for further democratizing the research processes within PSS’ *Practice Research* (see Munck, 2017; Kousholt, 2016; Højholt, 2016) and for further specifying its emancipatory sustainability (Chimirri, 2015), it appears that the emancipatory agenda of PSS stepped into the shadows of other conceptual debates and developments, among others of the concept *conduct of everyday life* (e.g., Holzkamp, 2013b; Dreier, 2011; Schraube & Højholt, 2016; Bader & Weber, 2016; Chimirri, 2014; Røn Larsen & Stanek, 2015; Mørck & Celotte-Andersen, 2016). But can the latter be sufficiently conceptualized without considering its emancipatory potential? After all, the theoretical concepts of PSS carry an immanently emancipatory heritage: They were developed to assist co-researchers
in unraveling and making conscious the intricate contradictoriness of everyday existence and of one’s own self-understanding as part of contemporary societal conditions.

Accordingly, while the Marxist impetus of PSS as early German Critical Psychology was clearly shaped by the political activism of the student movement, and by its criticism of psychology as an exploitative and manipulative “control science” (see Holzkamp, 2013a, p. 45; Holzkamp, 2013b, p. 328), PSS’ project was not to smash psychology, but rather to revolutionize it by reconstructing its conceptual foundations:

“FU delegates maintained that the problem was not with psychology as science in principle, but with the powers that, as a discipline, it blindly served. They granted that the prevailing psychology was shaped by and in thrall to an oppressive and exploitive ideology, but just as a psychology had been formed to serve oppressive interests, a genuinely critical psychology could be developed to serve more broadly human, emancipatory interests. At the very least it should be possible for such a psychology to clarify just what constitutes a liberated existence and to identify the psychological processes that mediate domination.” (Tolman, 2009, p. 152; see also Tolman, 2008; Schraube, 2015)

Psychology is, in the PSS understanding, thus to be reformulated in ways that serve the respective emancipation of human subjects (see also Maiers, 1991; Tolman, 1994; Markard, 2009; Chimirri, 2015). This is primarily attained via the concepts that this tradition of Critical Psychology has developed, most prominently that of subjectivity as both constituted by societal conditions and at the same time actively co-constituting these very same societal conditions that human beings are dependent on.

In contrast to, for instance, subjectivity as conceptualized in psychoanalysis, hence, Holzkamp’s concept of subjectivity was to foreground “the human possibility of ending ... suffering by participating oneself in changing the conditions causing it” (Holzkamp, 2013a, p. 33). This reconceptualization would render it possible “to extend and complement a critique of [psychological] science with a critique of society” (Papadopoulos, 2009, p. 163), though without adhering to an emancipatory research practice that favors practical intervention over theorizing. Instead, Holzkamp and colleagues engaged in theoretical debates for over a decade, working on grounding the concept of human subjectivity in meticulous transdisciplinary phylogenetic and ontogenetic analyses, before Holzkamp came to summarize his insights in his first opus magnum Grundlegung der Psychologie (‘Foundation of psychology’), issued in 1983. In essence, the book proposes a range of conceptual developments that nuance and
specify human subjectivity, so as to assist the nominal researcher and her fellow research participants, programmatically called co-researchers, to engage in dialogue and thereby to generalize agency via processes of promoting social self-understanding (Holzkamp, 2013b). This mutual exchange of knowledge was the sort of critical-emancipatory research practice that PSS envisioned and promoted – in line with Karl Marx’ dictum that the free development of each one is the precondition for the free development of all, meaning that the aim of emancipation must (also) be the creation of societal conditions under which the different abilities of each person can thrive (Haug, 2016; see also Markard, 2013; Chimirri, 2015).

With Tolman (2003), it can be argued that PSS wanted to reconstruct psychology as moral science, which strived towards mutually educating theoretically knowledgeable, critical and highly self-reflexive moral co-researchers of human practice that would be deeply aware of and committed to their collective interdependence and to overcoming human suffering:

“[Morality] emerges only on reflection of the necessary interdependence of the individual and humanity-at-large. Our personal interests are essentially and ineluctably linked to the common interest; they are … the particular expressions of the universal human interest. To act morally, however, the person must also know of his or her interdependence with others, must understand something of his or her own humanity, must be cognizant of the possibilities for action on any given occasion, and must be able to anticipate the practical consequences of his or her action on the basis of which its morality is judged. In order to act morally, and thus ultimately in one’s own interests, one must have true knowledge, and since what is needed will not always be given in sensations, this knowledge will have to be theoretical knowledge.” (Tolman, 2003, pp. 46-47)

This understanding of emancipation as exchange of theoretical knowledge, a sort of collective enlightenment project that creates moral human subjects, was among others strongly criticized by the Scandinavian offshoot of Psychology from the Standpoint of the Subject (PSS) as introduced by Ole Dreier in Denmark: Practice Research (see Nissen, 2000; Mørck & Huniche, 2006, and Kousholt & Thomsen, 2013, for overviews). The critique suggests that empirical PSS research conducted by Holzkamp and colleagues was founded upon an academic ideal of promoting free symmetrical exchange among theoretically trained individuals within a ‘utopic’ space that itself mystifies asymmetrical power relations and conflicts of interest. As Nissen (2000) describes it, the “community of research, the project, is initiated and gathered by professional researchers”, where “[p]ractitioners, or co-researchers, individually decide to
participate. They are often students, or former students, of Critical Psychology, and either they have read, or begin by reading together, central books from the tradition” (p. 161). The discussion of everyday problems, the research cooperation, thus requires academic training, and accordingly tends to take place in university settings. This methodology inadvertently comes to define a community whose theorizing and self-understanding are artificially decoupled from other ideologically laden contexts of everyday life:

“The otherwise carefully eliminated cartesian dualism creeps in simply because the action context that realizes the ‘generalized subject standpoint’ is one of theorizing. It is in the unnoticed practical constitution of the ‘we’ of critical psychology that a purification of an abstract general humanity becomes a precondition for constituting the subject of everyday life as ‘a subject’. Emancipated from ideology, purified by transcendental categories, subjects enter a virgin level of description. This entails a utopianism, a misrecognition of partial interest and ideology … Even the most frustratingly disempowered academic dispute is a concrete utopia if it claims to ‘be’ Critical Psychology.” (Nissen, 2000, pp. 161-162)

In consequence, one of the central aims of PSS’ Practice Research is to overcome the artificial, arguably utopic separation of doing theory and of doing practice, i.e. to bridge between the production and the use of knowledge from within everyday life (e.g., Dreier, 2007).

**PSS Practice Research: Transgressing social inequalities through democratic participation across different conducts of everyday life**

As an alternative to the above described ‘utopic’ academic exchange, which was largely decontextualized and isolated from the other everyday life contexts of the participants, and which furthermore reproduced a binary understanding of the acting subject and societal conditions, Dreier, Nissen, Højholt, Mørck, and many other Danish critical-psychological Practice Researchers argued for engaging in institutionally mediated collaborations with those affected by problematic societal conditions:

“The key idea was that of a necessity of de-centering, that is, viewing and pursuing, say, psycho-therapy, not, as in traditional clinical psychology, from the exclusive angle of the (therapist in the) therapy session itself, but rather as one among the many socio-culturally interconnected action contexts in the lives of the people involved. This meant taking seriously
the users’ perspectives, not as isolated attitudes or the like, but as perspectives relevant to the development of practice, and grounded in the users’ daily lives. It also meant broadening the picture of practice to see the structures of conflictful [sic] cooperation, delegation etc. between professionals, families etc.” (Nissen, 2000, p. 163)

Most importantly, it became central to the Scandinavian developments of Critical Psychology as Practice Research from the Standpoint of the Subject to decenter their analytical focus from single institutionalized arrangements to seeing them as interrelated or connected to where and how human subjects were acting otherwise in their life. Thereby, the problems that the affected people who the researcher comes to meet could be decentered, seen in the light of problems elsewhere in their life, and consequently in relation to more generally present societal conditions.

Within the last decade, Dreier (2009, 2011, 2016) and other Practice Researchers have increasingly picked up on Holzkamp’s unfinished reflections on the concept conduct of everyday life (Holzkamp, 2013b; originally published in German in 1995¹). Holzkamp argued for the conduct of everyday life being the most elementary concept in order to investigate human subjectivity and existence, as it is able to grasp and include the cyclicity and routinization of everyday life as aspects of agency, and thus as inherently relational processes produced and reproduced across the many contexts a subject partakes in. Everyday life is thus actively done by the subject, in her effort of meaningfully interrelating and contributing to a vast number of contexts and herewith contradictory life conditions:

“The concept of conduct of everyday life sets us on track of investigating connections between structural life conditions and personal ways of experiencing and dealing with such life conditions. If we are to analyze connections between life conditions and personal reasons and meanings, we need to intensify our attention – and questions – to the complex and contradictory life conditions and (unequal) possibilities for influencing and changing them.” (Kousholt, 2016, p. 255)

The attempt of influencing and changing contradictory life conditions, however, is co-dependent of all those other human beings who contribute to practice, and of their respectively different conducts of everyday life. Meanwhile, each human

¹ See also the anthology edited by Schraube & Højholt (2016), the special issues edited by Højholt & Røn Larsen (2015) and by Chimirri, Klitmøller & Hviid (2015), as well as ongoing discussions in the Danish language journal Nordiske Udkast and the English language correspondent Outlines. Critical Practice Studies.
being contributes from an ontogenetically unique position and perspective, and we all engage in a necessarily *conflictual collaboration* (Busch-Jensen, 2013; Chimirri, 2014; both building on Axel, 2011) on at least temporarily bridging differences and working towards a common interest. For instance, Højholt & Kousholt (2011) exemplify, based on an interdisciplinary research project conducted with various researchers (from psychology, educational studies, and social work) and professionals working with the inclusion of children in difficulties (inclusion teachers, pedagogues, psychologists, and management), how the latter iteratively informed and actively co-shaped the project’s common research agenda: The professionals co-formulated some of the project’s research questions and thus main foci; the researchers’ insights were presented to the professionals, which triggered reflections of their respective professional practice; in turn, this inspired the researchers to analyze how certain understandings of ‘professionalism’ play into the social problems identified in the inclusion practice. It is this back and forth movement in the exchange of knowledge, an exchange which is always-also conflictual due to differing and at times contradictory positionings and perspectives across the many co-researchers partaking in the project, that Højholt & Kousholt (2011; see also their contribution in this ARCP volume) term *mutual learning processes*.

Methodologically, the conduct of everyday life concept similarly invites the nominal researcher to engage in such conflictual collaborations with other practice contributors, so as to investigate *from within practice* how everyday life is done differently by different human beings – given their heterogeneous understandings of what the common interest may be on the grounds of their unique conducts of everyday life, as well as on the grounds of what problems they encounter in these processes of daily negotiation, in which the different perspectives must be meaningfully connected in order to develop the fellow practice:

“Studying practices from different positions and perspectives – for example, talking to adults, children and various professionals – provides opportunities to learn about how problems and conflicts look very different from different perspectives, and thereby to analyze what is at stake in a given situation by relating the different perspectives to different positions and possibilities for influencing what is going on – and how these *differences are connected in a shared (contradictory) practice*, related to a common problem … The concepts of conduct of everyday life in conflictual social practice direct our analytical attention to such *connections* between personal dilemmas in reciprocal relations to social problems and common contradictions in social practices.” (Kousholt, 2016, p. 255)
Differences among practice participants are actively being connected across the respective conducts of everyday life in the process of identifying and potentially changing what is of more common or general interest. Differences that emerge from within meeting one another in everyday life’s (institutionalized) practice arrangements point to more general ontogenetic differences, for instance a specific constellation of intersubjective relationships across contexts, cultural inspirations including cosmological, ontological and epistemological frameworks of understanding the world.

Nevertheless, the general is always situated anew: Whatever connectivity there is across perspectives, whatever common interests and problems we can identify in practice, they are always already renegotiated according to an individual’s unique conduct of everyday life. They are connected to other contexts, to other conducts of everyday life, differently by each one of us human beings, and cast a uniquely insightful light on the ambivalences and contradictions of the social conditions we are upholding in practice. In such an understanding, differences are constitutive of the general, of the practice we share, which each one of us contributes differently to in situated ways – and this conflictual social practice with all its different constituting conducts of everyday life immanently carries a potentially transformative potentiality. With reference to Højholt (2016), Kousholt (2016) writes:

“Obtaining situated knowledge about possibilities for participation, personal concerns and struggles – as well as insight into social conflicts, how they affect us differently, and how we deal with them based on unequal possibilities for influencing them – can produce knowledge about common challenges and thereby also critiques of constrained life conditions and unequally structured social possibilities.” (Kousholt, 2016, p. 254)

Transformation through diversification of knowledge?

The transformative potentiality of PSS’ Practice Research emerges in the coming together of participants’ different perspectives on social conflicts, and in the conflictual exchange of articulating unequal possibilities for influencing them. Hence, if it was not for the maintenance of unequally structured social possibilities for influencing common life conditions, conflictual social practice would indeed immanently carry a democratizing, transformative potentiality.

However, differences or non-equalities tend to be individualized and thereby rendered immovable and unnegotiable in practice, which can deadlock conflicts’ transformative potentiality and in consequence future collaboration (Chimirri, 2014). Potential collaborators are henceforth othered, positioned as...
less valuable for a productive conflictual collaboration, be it because of their (supposed) religious commitments (see Khawaja & Mørck, 2009), their earlier engagements with the gang milieu (see Mørck & Hansen, 2015), diagnoses received and treatments prescribed (see Kristensen & Mørck, 2016), apparent age, race and gender positionings (see Burman, 2017), their family’s socioeconomic background (see Juhl, 2014; Højholt, 2016), or even the media characters and narratives they prefer (see Chimirri, 2013, 2014), etc.

Such deadlocking, individualizing preemptive categorizations of human subjects perpetuate the social inequalities that Højholt (2016) problematizes exemplarily with regard to the idea that poverty is considered generationally transmittable or socially inheritable. Even studies that do not hide their societally critical agenda, for instance of children’s unequal possibilities for participating in school, tend to reify structural problems such as poverty in the respective children: The latter are victims of the former, and their agency as well as the different ways such problems become manifest in the children’s everyday lives are lost from sight. Conflicts that emerge from within everyday life at the school, for instance, are therefore to be explored in a situated manner:

“In research, we may explore the content of these conflicts and analyze the contradictory conditions in relation to these conflicts, as well as the possibilities for cooperation that these conflicts reveal. In relation to doing so, we need, among other things, theoretical developments to conceptualize the inner connection between societal and political conflicts and contradictions in everyday life, to analyze how social conflicts also become conflictual for persons when they conduct their everyday life.” (Højholt, 2016, p. 159)

Instead of seeking universally valid, inequality-perpetuating knowledge about how certain children attract or even propel certain conflicts, or about how children’s possibilities have been determined by previous conflicts, it is the actually experienced conflicts, and how the various practice participants contribute to these concrete conflicts, that need to be analyzed. The participants contribute differently based on heterogeneous conducts of everyday life, diverging interests, knowledge, experiences, etc. Nevertheless, do conflicts in school also reveal more general aspects of societal organization, and of how contradictions are engrained in this organization, thus propelling new conflicts – e.g., due to the reification of psychological categories that preemptively oversimplify the complexity of a school conflict. Methodologically, then, the nominal PSS researcher seeks to diversify one-sided knowledge by gaining knowledge across different perspectives on a common issue.
But irrespective of such conceptual and methodological developments made in the pursuit of overcoming PSS’ utopic empirical research (sensu Nissen; see above), for instance by emphasizing how social conflicts become conflictual in different ways for different persons including the nominal researcher, an explicit call for further democratizing PSS research processes has recently been issued:

“[W]e need to arrange cooperation between research and practice in ways that inspire open and mutual exploration of contradictions in practice and support joint exploration of how to change problematic conditions. In relation to this, it is significant to democratize the research process and make room for the contribution of the people involved. A part of the research process is to work on how to arrange conditions for the participation of co-researchers, and thereby the conditions for collaboration.” (Kousholt, 2016, p. 255; see also Højholt, 2016)

Inter alia, it remains an open question in PSS’ Practice Research tradition how the researcher can best arrange the research process in ways where the researcher’s position in society, knowledge and most generally her conduct of everyday life can be rendered meaningful for the other co-researchers – in order to ground the joint exploration on a (at least temporarily stabilized) common understanding of what is at stake in the research project, and of who is contributing from what societal position in relation to what interests. Arguably, the focus needs to be directed more clearly towards the question of how to share what knowledge with whom and why, instead of how the researcher can – in the most ethical ways possible – gain knowledge about practice together with practice participants from within practice.

This relates back to one of the most fundamental questions of every human and social science: Who do we, as professionalized academic researchers, do our research for and why? And how do we contribute to reproducing arrangements that co-maintain at least some of the oppressive societal conditions that we seek to overcome? And to what extent can we actually claim to share or collaborate on an issue of common interest, when we are indeed often positioned differently in terms of our everyday life conditions? How are our research questions, analytical foci, choices of who to collaborate with, etc. connected to our respective conducts of everyday life, of how we live our lives across academic and non-academic practices? Ute Osterkamp has become a prominent advocate for considering such questions much more explicitly in PSS research, also because ongoing self-reflection and modesty separates PSS’ emancipatory project from other critical-emancipatory, academic projects:
“Not the stupidity, unreasonableness, mental laziness, irresponsibility, conformity, etc. of the respective others, but one’s tendency to thereby de-qualify these others, is subject science’s problem. This in no way implies to self-censor one’s thinking and feeling, to suppress personalized interpretations due to political correctness, but to understand this tendency in its subjective and objective function as continuously reciprocated, self-suggestive expression of dominant interests, which always includes the exclusion of others from one’s realm of responsibility, justified by assigning certain individual characteristics to these others. A critical engagement with society that does not also result from recognizing one’s own problematic behavior disentitles itself.” (Osterkamp, 1995, pp. 851-852; authors’ translation; see also Osterkamp, 2009)

It is in this critical engagement with one’s own position as researcher that PSS’ Practice Research has as of late sought inspiration in cultural-historical psychologist Anna Stetsenko’s work on the Transformative Activist Stance (TAS; see, e.g., Munck, 2017; Pedersen, 2015; Chimirri, 2014). Højholt (2011) firstly drew on Stetsenko’s work to nuance and clarify the subject-scientific concept of participation. The concept of participation was – in the PSS framework – always intended to point beyond a passive understanding of it (or ‘minimalist’ in Carpentier’s (2011) terminology), in the sense of the Danish deltagelse / partaking (for a more elaborate discussion of the concept’s history, see Chimirri, 2014, p. 117ff). But Stetsenko’s focus, on how participants (or co-researchers) contribute to the research process, also renders it possible to more poignantly ask how the nominal researcher’s conduct of everyday life actually contributes and ought to contribute to the other co-researchers’ conducts of everyday life – including how the researcher himself reproduces certain dominant structures and understandings and herewith social inequality.

Stetsenko’s work grew out of a line of cultural-historical activity theorists who at the same time carried forward and worked on revitalizing the central tenets of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), based on the philosophical writings of Marx and Hegel. Hegel (1979) suggested the term Aufhebung, to refer to the superseding transformation of dialectical relations into new higher-level forms, e.g., in relation to the developing self as an ongoing synthesis (see Pedersen & Bang, 2016a). But how has this been brought forward in current cultural-historical activity theory, and what implications might it have for the emancipatory agenda of critical-psychological co-research?
Inspirations from Cultural-Historical Psychology: From participation to activist contribution and transformation

In the earlier writings of Vygotsky, in particular, a political message that promoted solidarity and communion as part of an emancipatory approach was stressed (according to Stetsenko, 2013). This implied and put to the fore the significant role of individuals in creating their world. Participation has thus always been a central part of the conceptualization of the human lifeworld within the framework of Cultural-Historical Psychology (including cultural-historical activity theory or CHAT), as emerges from the following passage:

“[H]umans come to be and come to know – each other, themselves and the world – while jointly enacting collective practices mediated by cultural tools (starting with the tools of labor, all the way to complex symbolic systems such as language), building on efforts of each other and on achievements of previous generations, while cumulatively expanding on and amplifying these achievements. Therefore, human activity – material, practical and always by necessity social, collective processes reliant on and mediated by cultural tools – is seen as the basic form of human social life that is formative of everything that is human in humans, including their subjectivity and its forms such as the mind, knowledge, concepts, and personhood. These subjective (psychological) phenomena are understood as related to human collaborative practices/activities and evolving in their midst.” (Stetsenko, 2013, p. 3)

Drawing on Hegel’s notion of Aufhebung, Stetsenko (2013) employs the term superseding when arguing for the necessity to, theoretically, fully incorporate the interconnectedness of humans and their historically developed societal conditions in relation to our way of conceptualizing human development and societal change. She writes:

“The term ‘superseding’ used in a dialectical sense, denotes a conceptual move that does not eliminate a given phenomenon or its properties but instead, lifts them up and includes them, albeit in a subordinate role, into a new systemic whole comprised, in this case, by human collaborative practices. That is, these practices are fully dialogical and relational, yet what makes them what they are, their formative feature and character cannot be reduced to dialogicality only. Instead their formative feature has to do with people collectively and materially producing the conditions of their existence, while along the way necessarily interacting, dialoging, relating, as well as and coming to develop specifically human
Here the term ‘superseding’ is used in relation to the engaged movement towards the co-creation of future conditions: a concurrent and ongoing future-directed movement that builds on existing conditions but at the same time constitutes new conditions. This implies a politically engaged psychology that surpasses the perspectives found in related ontologies, such as, e.g., a dialogical ontology. Stetsenko has argued extensively and repeatedly for the grounding of human being and becoming in collective transformative processes (see, e.g., Stensenko, 2009, 2013), which mounded in proposing a Transformative Activist Stance (TAS). This proposition is not only a theoretical venture, but just as much the result of engagements with practice, given that it is related to practice in an imperative manner.

**Transformative activism**

TAS emphasizes a “collaborative practice aimed at changing the world” (Vianna & Stetsenko, 2011, p. 313). It was developed on groundwork laid by Vygotsky and his followers and thus builds on fundamental insights from dialectical materialism, emphasizing that humans are created qua the historical, cultural and material practice in which they participate, and that they through their participation co-create and develop themselves. Such a dialectical view of the subject co-constituting the world that the very same subject is constituted by clearly underlines the Marxian roots that both Cultural-Historical Psychology and PSS share.

In addition to these approaches, the TAS approach draws inspiration from Social Practice Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), as well as the work of Liberation Pedagogy sensu Freire (Freire, 2000). It aims at further expanding these theoretical traditions in the line of an activist approach (Vienna & Stetsenko, 2011), which implies that in relation to enforcing the view of learning as embedded in participation in community practices, it enlarges the emphasis on the way in which individuals contribute to collaborative transformative processes. This contribution is emphasized as the “constitutive ontological grounding for human development” (Vianna & Stetsenko 2011:317). TAS can thus be regarded as a simultaneous prolongation and expansion of the notion of participation in that it stresses the unique contributions to co-creative processes. In the words of Stetsenko:

“TAS highlights the notion that individuals contribute to collaborative transformative practices (in contradistinction with and a dialectical
expansion of the notion of participation) through their own unique deeds and their co-authoring of historically unfolding social practices. In this vein, collaborative practices are posited as ontologically primary, yet they are understood to be continuously and cumulatively evolving through unique activist contributions by individual participants, who always act as social subjects, and always matter in one way or another because they are directly implicated in creating their realities of existence and their development, and thus, in social transformations of the world.” (Stetsenko, 2013, p. 9)

The transformative motion and activist potential embedded in the TAS approach relates to the creation of future societal conditions, and arguably implies a moral subject (sensu Tolman; see above) committed to and participating in co-creative collective processes. The commitment is to not only participate, but to participate and take a stance in relation to creating a desirable future for oneself and others:

“[It is important to] consider not only the present communal practices and their history, but, in addition, the relevance of the forward-looking activist positioning by the learners via-à-vis the future of these practices and of a commitment to social change in order to bring this future into reality.” (Vianna & Stetsenko, 2011, p. 320; cf. also Stetsenko, 2008)

The historically grounded forward-looking or forward-directedness is also found in the very core tenets of activity theory, in relation to its conceptualizations of psychogenesis (see Leontjev, 2002). In a Danish elaboration of the works of Leontjev and colleagues, Engelsted (1989) highlights the forward-directedness as central to not only the human psyche, but also to psychology itself: Psychology begins with the phenomenon of reference to the future. He proposes the term auto-kinesis to account for this reference to the future, and suggests that the basic and primary kind of activity must be a behavioral relating-to the world. This is to describe the particular human ability to take a productive stance in relation to the world, and not only, as proposed by many other branches of psychology, to act in responsive and reproductive manners (in Engelsted’s terminology, servo-kinesis). Simply put, autokinesis implies the ability of simple organisms to self-initiate action in relation to seeking food, however it also implies the ability of humans to engage in activist transformative collective processes in relation to co-creating future societal structure – and in that very same process changing themselves (cf. Engelsted, 1989; see also Bang, 2009a, 2009b; Pedersen & Bang, 2016b). Stetsenko integrates this perspective in her proposition that identity – and thus processes of becoming – comprises of meaningful life-projects and forward-looking stances:
“Given that identity, within the TAS, is understood as having to do with a meaningful life project, it is this forward-looking stance in which cultural tools are revealed in their potential application within one’s activist pursuits that can render knowledge relevant, turning learning into a personally and socially meaningful endeavour.” (Vianna & Stetsenko, 2011, p. 320)

Stetsenko henceforth presents “an activist project of historical becoming through collaborative pursuits of social transformation” (Stetsenko, 2012, p. 144). She continues by proposing that at the very core of human development lies an “activist stance via-à-vis the world” (ibid.); this idea is based on the premise that collaborative transformative practice is the grounding for not only human Being, but also human Becoming – thereby stressing the active nature of human beings (as being constantly involved in processes of transformation). Accordingly, she critically addresses the models of personhood that are in circulation today, arguing that they have a tendency to portray individuals as not only subjected to the influence and power of outside forces in relation to which they are themselves powerless, but also that they are profoundly disconnected from other individuals and thereby to be understood as unrelated and unattached to others, if not even in dire need to protect oneself from them. She builds on the groundwork already laid in earlier publications (though this time also referring to philosophers Merleau-Ponty and Levinas) in order to establish the inherently relational character of personhood and human development. From here she suggests the logical – and necessary – step to be the dialectical expansion of relationality:

“The next step in theorizing personhood and human development after establishing their relational character is, in my view, to dialectically expand relationality through the notion that human development is an activist project that is not only imbued with dialogism, ethics, and interrelatedness but also, and more originary, is grounded in collaborative, purposeful, and answerable deeds ineluctably colored by visions of and commitments to a particular project of social transformation.” (Stetsenko, 2012, p. 147)

This dialectical expansion of relationality is thus an elaboration of the Vygotskyan project for and with psychology: Vygotsky proposed the superseding of a foundational understanding of connectivity through adaptation into an understanding of active adaption, or what Stetsenko terms “active collaborative transformation of nature” (Stetsenko, 2012, p. 148). Development can thus be
regarded as continuous transformations in relation to persons’ value-laden engagements within an individual-environment reciprocity that also, through the very same engagements, undergo changes over time. In this view, subjectivity is a (momentary) result of ongoing engagements in collective activities, and a forward-directed relatedness to the world one opts to create for oneself – and others (see also Pedersen, 2015; Pedersen & Bang, 2016a).

The emancipatory methodology of TAS

In their recount of an empirical project, Vianna & Stetsenko (2011) present how newness and transformative processes emerge among marginalized adolescents with immigrant backgrounds at a New York orphanage through Vianna’s intense and long-lasting engagements in and with practice; or in other words: how a transformative agenda became the product of collective developmental processes. Vianna’s approach to working with the boys in the orphanage transgressed the traditional clinical approach of administering individualized therapy sessions, and of focusing on the mastering of symptoms of mental illness. Instead, Vianna – taking on a TAS approach – aimed at establishing fruitful collaborative projects with the boys and thereby collective learning processes: from initial museum visits and watching movies to the establishment of a book club. After some time, as mutual trust deepened, and a sense of solidarity grew among the participants, this joint engagement was expanded into more formal collaborative learning processes as shared activity, alongside which the boys developed their own motives for actively taking part in the learning processes (more formally connected to the educational system). This meant that “collaborative learning activities became the leading activity in the group home and institutional practices geared towards control and punishment dramatically receded” (Vianna & Stetsenko, 2011, p. 327).

Given the marginalized position of the boys at the orphanage, one may here question whether the transformative activist agenda fully demonstrates its potential, in that the zone of proximal development for the boys appears almost too obvious, as an alternative to traditional treatment plans and interventions building on medical ontologies of the human being. Also, the positions of the researcher and the co-researchers are not fully unfolded as such in relation to a joint project that is equally changing for all participants, which could imply a tendency to reproducing the standard privileged positions for the nominal academic researcher or psychologist. However, it still demonstrates how psychologists with an explicitly activist research agenda may engage from within practice according to the interests articulated by the other co-researchers, and through this contribute to the co-creation of mutually explorative practices with
the potential and power to transform not only ways of participating, but also ways of being and becoming in the world and relating to the world.

The challenge – or criticism – to German Critical Psychology, as it was articulated by the Scandinavian Practice Research development of PSS, with regard to who can rightfully be qualified as co-researchers that may contribute to formulating the common research interest, is, one can argue, overcome in TAS, where collective projects are intended to be more open-ended and to a larger degree determined by the motivation of all co-researchers, rather than foremost by the academically working, nominal researchers. Irrespectively, it also here remains unclear to what extent the presence of a professionalized researcher, or otherwise engaged outsider to the practice of concern, needs to assume the central role in initiating, facilitating, or maintaining a potentially transformative project. Moreover, it posits the question – a moral and ethical one – of the nature of the societal structure and practice that we are co-creating: The future-oriented nature of the TAS proposes an open-ended ongoing process, while at the same time pre-emphasizing a moral responsibility in relation to an unknown future society. So, towards what kind of future society – and for whom – are we contributing as nominal researchers, and in what way? Is it similar to the (also largely undefined) democratically organized society that Practice Research envisions? What would a purposefully transformed, or an emancipated society look like? Or may TAS and PSS Practice Research agree that these are questions that can only emerge from within the concrete co-research processes, and need to be renegotiated across all practices one contributes to together with all co-explorers – and that thus democratizing the research process, its conceptual frame and its methodology, must be the primary aim?

Discussion: Taking a transformative activist perspective on PSS’ emancipatory engagements

We now take Kousholt’s (2016) above cited call for further democratizing the research process as point of departure for arguing that adopting a more explicit Transformative Activist Stance (TAS) sensu Stetsenko and colleagues may be helpful in pursuing this democratizing engagement. In fact, some PSS Practice Research has adopted a similar transformative agenda throughout its projects, precisely in order to render the nominal academic researcher’s relationship to other co-researchers as democratic as possible. However, we find this democratization process as envisioned in PSS Practice Research to be discursively somewhat void of some of the philosophical aspects further explicated in the TAS, which rather point in the direction of developing one
another as – with Tolman (2003; see above) – *moral human subjects*. The latter understanding of emancipation as developing morality by theorizing one another’s societal conditions together not only resonates well with Stetsenko’s view that human development is an activist project “grounded in collaborative, purposeful, and answerable deeds ineluctably colored by visions of and commitments to a particular project of social transformation” (Stetsenko, 2012, p. 147), as what is considered collaboratively purposeful to transform is ineluctably (also) a theoretical question and requires dialogue and conflictual negotiation. In this sense, it furthermore resonates well with the *mutual learning process* demanded by Højholt & Kousholt (2011; also Højholt & Kousholt, this ARCP volume; and Kousholt, 2016; see above), but, and this is where we see the primary theoretical discrepancy, only if this critical learning process explicitly acknowledges and takes as analytical starting point the researcher’s own reproduction of problematic conditions (cf. Osterkamp, 1995; see above).

Crucially, this would entail understanding the nominal academic researcher beyond her professionalized positioning as fellow human and potentially moral subject, who acts across a multiplicity of contexts far beyond the professional ones – just as much as it entails understanding the research participants precisely as subjects co-researching joint (problematic) conditions in the world, not only in their respective professionalized or otherwise institutionalized practice. Human existence, a conduct of everyday life, always already interrelates contexts and societal conditions, and merely focusing on the problems emerging from within professional-institutional contexts reduces possibilities for mutual social self-understanding. Arguably, this is what the TAS fundamentally aims at superseding: By terming the researcher (and potentially everyone else) a transformative activist, it fundamentally democratizes our point of departure – not by doing away with individual ontogenetic differences, but by critically questioning the positions and categories the current societal arrangement keeps in stock for us. These positions and categories potentially fixate and deadlock the knowledge we aim at gaining from a dialogue, instead of actively exploring one another’s curiosities and knowledge interests first, so as to potentially also question our own knowledge interest and ensuing actions in the conducts of our everyday life.

Processes of emancipatory democratization of research processes, then, require an explicitly symmetrical ontological and epistemological grounding of fellow co-researcher relations, which acknowledges one another’s interdependency not only in epistemic terms, i.e. gaining knowledge of the respective other’s perspective and conduct of everyday life, but also of actively needing to collaborate on creating optimal (democratizing) conditions for purposefully and transparently sharing knowledge with one another – for our co-
exploration here and now, as well as for the future orientations we already are negotiating and still are to negotiate. In these fellow being-becoming processes of co-exploratory negotiation of conducts of everyday life, processes that can never be fully anticipated but that we are nevertheless always already directed towards, manifold models of what a democratic co-exploration and negotiation entail are themselves up for negotiation. As can for instance be seen in a dialogic exchange between critical social theorist Axel Honneth and political philosopher Jacques Rancière (Genel & Deranty, 2016),² democratic ideals are at stake in all human relationships, and according to PSS, it is also at stake in one’s self-understanding (and thus, following Engelsted, in one’s autokinetic directedness).

Arguably, the nominal academic researcher, at least on the grounds of a transformative activist self-understanding, who may of course enact a different set of democratic ideas than other co-researchers (including other nominal PSS researchers, as can be seen in the below case examples of recent, prototypical PSS projects) given a differently conducted everyday life, should work towards explicating this philosophical-political dimension in the fellow co-exploration of everyday life. Otherwise the democratic ideals at stake cannot be co-explored and democratically negotiated amongst the co-researchers, thus reproducing an impoverished version of the conduct of everyday life, of the societal arrangements produced and reproduced, and consequently of the problematic conditions shared – for instance social inequality.

Institutionalized spaces and knowledge interests, including a professionalized academic researcher’s research questions, can certainly assist in providing optimal conditions for purposefully and transparently sharing knowledge with one another about one’s ambiguous and at times contradictory self-understanding in the conduct of everyday life, at least at the outset of fellow explorative and transformative processes: The ‘utopic’ academic exchange criticized by Nissen (2000; see above) may indeed provide inspiration for creating similar spaces of fellow dialogue as can be found in research groups etc., as for instance the ‘reflection spaces’ with Early Childhood workers instantiated by Munck (2017, pp. 63ff) as part of her PhD project at a crèche. The main problem with these ‘utopic’ contexts, on the other hand, is that they can easily become isolated from other contexts through which everyday life is conducted, and that other potential co-researchers of everyday life are shunned from emancipatory processes.

² We would like to thank Jacob Klitmøller for suggesting this reference, which could have certainly been worthwhile analyzing in depth in the context of this paper, given that it introduces into and contrasts two similarly emancipatory-critical, and yet fundamentally different approaches to doing social science – due to different underlying democratic ideals. However, that would have taken the article in yet another, more political-philosophical direction, which must be saved for another publication.
Meanwhile, the danger of isolating research processes from other contexts of everyday life is just as much looming when engaging in research processes from within institutional practice outside the alma mater. Here, the utopic exchange between theoretically trained critical psychologists is transferred to an utopic exchange between (welfare) professionals, based on their respective, societally prearranged tasks, duties and responsibilities including diverging, position-mediated knowledge interests: The nominal academic researcher gains knowledge from the other working professionals in order to pursue the academic interest of dialoging with other academics on academically relevant issues and publishing on them; in return the professionals may gain academically mediated knowledge for improving their respective professional practice. But is this emancipatory in the sense of sharing knowledge in order to improve shared life conditions for the conduct of everyday life? How is the knowledge gained relevant to other contexts one partakes in, how can this knowledge be translated into a committed, transcontextually transformative activist and thus moral conduct of everyday life? Is it necessary and possible to also put the democratic ideal, materialized in the institutional practice under scrutiny, up for a broader, potentially diversifying discussion and negotiation that supersedes the given arrangements for conducting everyday life here and now and in the future? And does that presuppose that the transformative activist PSS researcher explicitly opens up for a negotiation of one’s own democratic ideals, or is PSS’ conceptual frame and methodology bound to a specific set of ideals that just need to be rendered transparent to the other co-researchers?

A second danger consists in preemptively labeling potential co-researchers as institutionalized children, marginalized youth, psychiatric patients, technology-sceptic elderly, welfare professionals, or what not, and thereby assuming to already have gained a universally valid knowledge about the respective participants one comes to collaborate with. These categorizations and positionings may preemptively shun unthought-of possibilities for initiating emancipatory-transformative processes relevant to one another’s conduct of everyday life beyond our preassigned societal roles and labels, by collaborating with one another as fellow human beings (or transformative activists). Of course, this is not a corollary: Plenty of highly creative, collaborative and thus potentially transformative projects start out by working with pre-labelled, marginalized groups and gradually transcend related knowledge presumptions, be it in therapeutic contexts (e.g., Minken, 2002; Borup & Pedersen, 2010a, 2010b), social work contexts (e.g., Mørck, 2006; Nissen, 2012), or in educational contexts as in Vianna & Stetsenko’s (2011) case.

However, as soon as we start operating with ‘marginalized’ persons, we start thinking ourselves as ‘privileged’ researchers, and such labels can certainly
be important in order to pose critical questions to one’s own conduct of everyday life as Osterkamp (1995; see above) points out. But it should not alone guide one’s knowledge interest and ontological presumptions when engaging in collaborative practice with whomever. Otherwise, a third danger looms: That of initiating one-sided and potentially instrumentalizing interventions, which solely focus on helping the Other and thus disregard the fact that every collaboration is also intended to help oneself in transcending one’s self-understanding for conducting a more purposeful, collective conduct of everyday life. PSS Practice Research, just as much as TAS research, needs to be careful not to engage in therapeutic interventions, whose purpose “is to help clients address and overcome problems troubling them in their everyday lives” (Dreier, 2015, p. 114). The purpose of emancipatory (co-)research cannot be to help (institutionalized, professionalized) welfare users address and overcome problems troubling them in their everyday lives, as both ‘them’ and ‘we’ are always already more than users, irrespective of what societal arrangement we are constituting and constituted by. We should never underestimate the potential to supersede the ‘user’ label together with others, as we actively contribute to creating the (institutionalized, professionalized, welfare, neoliberal) societal arrangement we are part of. Quintessentially, this is what we understand the Transformative Activist Stance to want to boldly underline: We delve into every collaboration with all our existence, our conduct of everyday life, as moral subjects – and never only as ‘researchers’ or ‘professionals’ or ‘marginalized’ or ‘clients’, but as transformative activists.

An interesting example of how initial labels were superseded as part of a PSS practice co-research project can be found in Line Lerche Mørck’s recent work. Together with a former gang member, called Peter Hansen, she co-authored a piece in which they describe and theorize their collaboration over the stretch of over a year: It is entitled From rocker to academic (Mørck & Hansen, 2015; translated from Danish; see also the follow-up work: Mørck & Celotte-Andersen, 2016). Peter initially contacted Line after reading about her research on exit-programs on popular media, in which she recommended that gang members should be invited into tertiary educational institutions. Via a long process of approximating one another’s self-understanding, Line assisted Peter in partly superseding his societally marginalized position as criminal gang member towards heading to university and initiating an academic career. Without further elaboration of the details, it clearly emerges from the article that the nominal academic researcher, Line Lerche Mørck, as well as the nominal research participant, Peter Hansen, went into this collaboration on more symmetrical footing in terms of uncertainty of what to expect from one another, of what it means to be a gang member and what it means to be an academic with much
more at stake than these positionings: In our reading, they went into the collaboration together as transformative activists. Certainly, this is but one prototype for thinking TAS more explicitly (it has always already been there, we would argue) into PSS Practice Research and its emancipatory agenda, and it also remains to be seen whether and how this one-to-one collaboration may supersede the two co-researchers’ conducts of everyday life including enacted democratic ideals. However, it constitutes a noteworthy example of how a nominal PSS researcher, as a moral human being, renders her own positioning and self-understanding transparent and up for renegotiation (also amongst colleagues who may disagree with such a personal approach) in order to engage in a potentially transformative collaborative project.

**Concluding remarks**

Critical psychological *Psychology from the Standpoint of the Subject* (PSS) and cultural-historical *Transformative Activist Stance* (TAS) fundamentally share a common point of departure in Marxian thought and its emancipatory ideal that the free development of each one is the precondition for the free development of all. How this ideal is implemented, meanwhile, varies not only across these two approaches, but also within PSS and its Practice Research tradition. Generally, the understanding of emancipation as well as the methodology enacted depends on who the nominal academic researcher primarily intends to collaborate with, categorizable as: academically trained peers, non-academically working welfare professionals, marginalized youth, therapeutic clients, etc. As emerges from the discussion of PSS via a TAS lens, we argue that both approaches in essence seek to supersede such categorizations (and perhaps also the implied division of labor), in order to promote social self-understanding of the conditions we are together dependent of, and thereby to initiate, in Højholt & Kousholt’s (2011) words, *mutual learning processes*. TAS can help in rendering the point of departure for such collaborations more symmetrical, by clarifying that all collaborators are – ontologically speaking – transformative activists. Such a nuanced social self-understanding of the common point of departure would help promote psychology as a moral science sensu Tolman (2003; see above).

This would furthermore require developing better methodologies for promoting the transparent mutual *sharing* of knowledge, of one’s self-understanding, one’s democratic ideals, etc., rather than the more instrumental *gaining* of knowledge from one another primarily for one’s own (research or professional) interests’ sake. It would require establishing a different set of standards for academic knowledge production in the Social Sciences and
Humanities, via which the human being is regarded as a transformative activist subject, who constantly co-explores the world with others, thus co-shaping the knowledge base of one another, while morally committed to bettering one another’s life conditions – for the sake of one’s own interdependency with each other’s conduct of everyday life. One solution could be to couple collaborative methodologies more explicitly to all co-researchers’ conducts of everyday life, so as to be able to transparently share knowledge in situ in relation to engagements one anyway is already engaged in. By exploring how to best resonate with one another’s everyday life methodologies (or one another’s ways of approaching the world and one another), one comes to explore one another’s ways of sharing knowledge and engage with what one wants to transform in specific democratic ways.

However, this does not imply that the supposedly ‘utopic’, conceptually mediated academic exchange is entirely worthless: It may be important to uphold institutionally arranged spaces where the immediacy of experiencing everyday life is – to some degree – artificially suspended; for the sake of creating a common space for focused dialogic reflection and democratic renegotiation. After all, social self-understanding and intervention should ideally go hand in hand, and the development of practice (both ‘non-academic’ and ‘academic’!) is dependent on the development of each and everyone’s conduct of everyday life. Therefore, creating such spaces must not be limited to academia, as for instance Munck’s (2017) above mentioned ‘reflection spaces’ with daycare staff illustrate. Academic exchange may precisely be taken as example for how necessary such spaces for fellow and potentially emancipatory reflection of research questions, analytical foci, ethical reverberations, and communication of insights across other contexts are.

Emancipation entails forward-looking fellow development through individual development and vice versa, and it is fundamentally conflictual as all affected need to have a say in it. What is needed, then, is to further develop concepts for how the communicative exchange of explorative interests and ensuing interventions can be rendered more invitational, mutual, and caring, via an inherently relational and processual methodology of interrelating ontogenetically unique, but nevertheless entirely interdependent, conducts of everyday life in more generally relevant ways. Critically combining the emancipatory projects of PSS and TAS, we suggest, may offer the conceptual, ontological, epistemological and ethical-moral grounds for such a methodological development, which remain to be further elaborated.
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Mo(ve)ment-methodology: Identity formation moving beyond gang involvement

Line Lerche Mørck and Martin Christian Celosse-Andersen

Abstract
This paper describes the theoretical basis for and development of a moment-movement research methodology, based on the integration of critical psychological practice research and critical ethnographic social practice theory. Central theoretical conceptualizations, such as human agency, life conditions and identity formation, are discussed in relation to criminological theories of gang desistance. The paper illustrates how the mo(ve)ment methodology was applied in a study of comprehensive processes of identity (re)formation and gang exit processes. This study was conducted with Martin, a former member of a biker gang, as he became a research apprentice and more academically reflective, while moving beyond gang involvement.

The paper presents and analyzes a single experienced moment, referred to as “Sp(l)itting on the street”, as an empirical example of the mo(ve)ment methodology. This is a moment that captures Martin’s complex and ambiguous feelings of conflictual concerns, frustration, anger, and a new feeling of insecurity in his masculinity, as well as engagement and a sense of deep meaningfulness as he becomes a more reflective academic. All of these conflicting feelings also give a sense of being split into conflicting identities. The paper analyzes how such conflictual feelings can also be productive, producing movements and changes in identity formation, through our social practice research analysis and joint venture.

The analyzed moment is positioned within and related to broader conflictual struggles and processes (we call these “movements”), which include both continuity and change in Martin’s conduct of everyday life as he moves in and across several action contexts and practice communities.

By collectively reflecting on moments over time as part of our social practice research, we study the processes of moving beyond gang involvement; together, we produce

1 We would like to thank Bronwyn Davies, Madeleine Chapman, Morten Nissen and Ross Deuchar for good comments on an earlier version of this paper.
expanded agency and identity formation at the same time. While we research Martin’s movements from a position as a high–ranking member of a biker gang towards becoming a more legitimate member of academia, we simultaneously develop new methodologies.

**Keywords**
Critical ethnographic practice, social practice theory, critical psychology, practice research, moment-movement methodology, conflictual identity formation, double feelings, movements beyond gang involvement, gang desistance, gang exit, masculinity.

**Introduction**

“Part of critical ethnographic practice is an ongoing commitment to rethinking and redoing one’s work as ethnographer and activist. The question is how to become over the long term an apprentice to one’s own changing practice.” (Jean Lave, 2011:2)

Inspired by Professor Jean Lave’s question, we authors – Line and Martin – are committed to ongoing reflection of how we have changed our ways of thinking and working as (co-)researchers, ethnographers, activists and people, while becoming apprentices to our own changing research practice. We write this paper from the collective position of our joint venture, referring to Line and Martin in third person; however, in extracts from our empirical material, both our experiences are described through first-person accounts. We address Lave’s question from our perspectives as authors, positioned respectively as researcher and professor (Line Lerche Mørck) and as a former high-ranking member of a biker gang, co-researcher and research apprentice (Martin Chr. Celosse-Andersen). Together, we explore the theoretical development and becoming of Mørck and colleagues’ mo(ve)ment methodology (Mørck, 2014, Mørck & Hansen, 2015, Kristensen & Mørck, 2016); a methodology we have developed further in our exploration of major identity formation and the movement beyond gang involvement.

Within criminology, this practice field is conceptualized in theories of gang desistance and crime desistance. The emerging criminological field of gang desistance has called for more empirically based theories regarding the processes of identity formation relevant to the study of gang desistance (Decker, Pyrooz & Moule, 2014: 269). With this article, our ambition is to present ideas relevant to
the main target group of this thematic issue, critical psychologies around the world, but also to a broader audience of social practice researchers who work across disciplines within the social sciences, and social researchers who call for new methodologies relevant to the criminological field of crime and gang desistance. One major discussion within the different theoretical strands of crime desistance and gang desistance is what causes people’s movements beyond crime. One of the big questions is the role of intentionality: Is long-term behavioral change the result of a repeat offender’s conscious decision to “go straight” or should such change be attributed to reduced opportunities to commit crime, changed living conditions and new types of social control? (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009: 1148). We want to introduce a critical social practice theory and methodology to this discussion, by analyzing the relation between changes in human agency, life conditions and identity formation. We hereby seek to challenge tendencies within criminology to discuss causes of crime desistance as being linked to either intentionality or external conditions, moving beyond such an agency-structure dualism.

We begin this article by introducing concepts and methodologies drawn from Line’s research trajectory, which started with a deep engagement in critical psychological practice research in the 1990s. From the beginning of her trajectory as a researcher, Line was engaged in the development of theories and methodologies in a practice problematic she termed ‘learning from the margin’ (Mørck, 2000: 62). We will account for continuity and change in ways of thinking about and doing research within this practice problematic by introducing theoretical concepts and methodologies from critical psychology, practice research and ethnographic social practice theory, as well as other theories that have inspired us in the development of the mo(ve)ment methodology. Line introduced these theories and methodologies to Martin and their research joint venture; a collaboration that began in early 2014.

We will analyze this joint venture, illustrating the content and further development of various research methods we have used to explore Martin’s mo(ve)ments, including an analysis of a particular moment we call “Sp(l)itting on the street”. We will also analyze Martin’s life and learning trajectory as he becomes ‘more of’ a research apprentice and an academic. In this way, we apply the mo(ve)ment methodology to our analysis of the continuity, change and

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2 With reference to Jean Lave (2011): “A problematic includes assumptions (an ontology, an epistemology, an ethics) about relations between persons and world, the nature of human beings and how it is produced, in what terms we can know it and the nature of knowledge” (Lave, 2011: 150). “Praxis problematics are imbued with the politics of the historically, political-economically structured social-cultural world, which includes understanding “on the ground conflict and struggle for change”.” (Lave, 2011: 153).
further development of the mo(ve)ment methodology that is the central topic of this paper.

**Critical Psychological practice research**

Our research joint venture and both of our research trajectories are in continuance of German-Danish critical psychological practice research (Mørck, 2000, Mørck & Huniche, 2006, Nissen, 2000), and we employ the notions of ‘subjects’ and ‘co-researchers’. Nissen writes:

> “the ‘subjects’ whose actions we wish to understand must be ‘subjects’ in the full human sense of that word: that is, not only ‘objects’ and ‘individuals’, but also recognized and realized in our research practices as ‘agents’ and self-reflecting centers of intention and consciousness, as persons with action potency. In a word (or two), they must be recruited as participants, as co-researchers. Empirical research, then, (for, with and about humans) is necessarily a kind of cooperative introspection in a flow of action. It is we who investigate how each of us live and act, for what reasons, under which conditions etc., and we have practical reasons for doing so.” (Nissen, 2000: 153)

Aligned with Nissen’s conceptualization of the practice research tradition, Martin was recruited as co-researcher and became part of a common researcher “we”. Together, we explored problems and dilemmas “deemed relevant by the involved co-researchers” (Nissen, 2000: 154). We explored feelings and reasons to act, as well as restricted and expanded agency (a term we prefer to action potency\(^3\)) in and across various action contexts and communities. Before outlining key theoretical concepts, we want to touch upon how practice is understood in its flow, as a movement, within critical psychological practice research:

> “While the practice or the event itself is only ‘real’ in its flow, as a movement, an endless totality of transformations and reproductions, only aspects of it can be abstracted to exist as model objects, that is, in the form of the relation of representation of generalities.” (Nissen, 2009: 73)

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\(^3\) In a later collection of English translations of texts by Holzkamp titled “Psychology from the Standpoint of the Subject” (edited by Schraube & Osterkamp, 2013), the German concept “handlungsfähigkeit” is translated as agency, rather than as “action potency/potency” as in earlier translations. We prefer to use the term agency because it relates to important discussions of identity formation and crime desistance within criminological literature.
Within practice research, a practice or an event is understood as a movement, as an endless totality of transformations and reproductions. When we try to generalize about desistance processes and identity formation as movements using a practice research approach, we have to construct an analytical framework and methodology that captures and represents both transformations and reproductions of everyday life practices.

We will now outline such an analytical framework and present our ongoing development of a mo(ve)ment-methodology.

**A Critical Psychological and social practice theoretical understanding of mo(ve)ment**

During the 1990s, the founders of critical psychological practice research started to collaborate closely with the founders of situated learning theory in developing new theoretical concepts to conceptualize movements. This integration of the two approaches was placed under the umbrella of social practice theory (Mørck, 2006, Dreier, 2008, Lave, 2011). The label “a theory of social practice” was introduced early on by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 37-38) to describe an analytical perspective on learning. Lave and Wenger were:

> “Arguing in favor of a shift away from theory of situated activity in which learning is reified as one kind of activity, and towards a theory of social practice in which learning is viewed as an aspect of all activity.” (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 37-38)

The authors place social practice theory in a Marxist historical dialectical tradition that underpins social practice theory as part of a general method of social analysis, with the goal of “ascending” from both the particular and the abstract to the concrete (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 38). Jean Lave later reformulated it as follows:

> “In social practice theory, there is a term for bringing theoretically informed empirical work and empirically shaped theoretical practice into constitutive relation: “rising to the concrete” (Hall 2003, 131). […] The notion of “rising to the concrete” acknowledges the historical, relational character of changing social life, and hence the need for efforts to craft historical, relational understandings that are at once empirical and theoretical.” (Lave, 2011: 155)
From the beginning of her research trajectory (Mørck, 1996, Mørck, 2000), Line was heavily inspired by the aforementioned critical psychological practice research, as well as by Lave & Wenger’s (1991, Lave, 1997, Wenger, 1998), Dreier’s (1999) and Nissen’s (2000) analytical conceptualizations of how to study movements among communities and individuals. Line discussed these conceptualizations as part of three interconnected analytical takes on movements in her research on ‘learning from the margin’:

“This concept of trajectories (developed by Lave, 1997, Dreier, 1999 and Wenger, 1998 among others) highlights the important movements ‘across contexts’ and the movements ‘across time’. But in my opinion the theory falls short in bringing the movement ‘in societal position’ to the foreground, a movement that is very central when researching ‘learning from the margin’.” (Mørck, 2000: 76)

At the time, Line was working on an analytical tool she called “The Life Portrait” (Mørck, 1996, 2000: 76-77), developed to analyze learning from the margins alongside people and communities from the societal margins. Below, we introduce these takes, or analytical conceptualizations, for studying movements from the margins of society and explain why we subsequently developed a moment-movement methodology and introduced the parenthesis in our further conceptualization of mo(ve)ments.

**Movements in and across contexts and communities of practice**

We work in line with a critical psychological and social practice theoretical framework for analyzing movement as change in individuals’ participation across contexts of their everyday lives (see Mørck, 2000: 77). This analytical take was inspired by Dreier’s (1997, 1999), Osterkamp’s (2000) and Holzkamp’s (1998) conceptualizations of the conduct of everyday life (see also Dreier, 2008, Holzkamp, 2013). In our empirical analysis below, we apply Dreier’s (2008) analytical category of conflictual concerns. This category represents a further development of Holzkamp’s conceptualization of the structure of meanings in everyday conduct of life, which Holzkamp further divides into notions of cyclic, routine activities and real life (Holzkamp, 1998). As argued in Hybholt & Mørck (2015: 215), we prefer Dreier’s conceptualization of conflictual concerns because it facilitates a more complex analysis, based on social practice, of what matters to the subject, in this case Martin, and in relation to the various communities in which he participates, including our joint research venture. Below, we analyze Martin’s complex and conflicting concerns in relation to
these various communities, including his relationships to friends, potential enemies and to his wife. The moments and movements can, in line with critical psychology and social practice theory, be explored as a struggle between conflictual concerns, exploring how, in various relations, we produce movements as both continuity (reproduction) and change (transformation) in Martin’s conduct of everyday life.

**Movement across Time**

Movements are at the same time explored across time. Line’s analytical Life Portrait tool (Mørck, 2000), which is focused on conflictual and non-linear movement over time and on recontextualizations of meaning, related to a remembered past and an imagined future:

“The present life situation is related to a past and a future. Personal development is in general understood as including conflicts. The direction and course of a life is not straight forward but a contested, zig-zagging one, marked by progressions, retrogressions and contradictions (Dreier, 1997: 27). That is why e.g. events and experiences from the past change their meaning to the person depending on the actual life situation and the standpoint (in present time) from where it is looked upon. In other words it’s a process of continuous re-contextualizing of meaning. The important changes in the view upon the past and an imagined future give a sense to where the specific person is right now in his actual life situation. What is his or her interest and specific life orientation? What are meaningful activities for her and how does she imagine her future?” (Mørck, 2000: 77-78)

As seen below, this aspect of analyzing meaning in relation to Martin’s life interests and conflictual concerns concerning his past as a gang member, and in relation to an imagined future as an academic, is very important for Martin’s ways of relating to others in the analyzed moment “Sp(l)itting on the street”. As mentioned, Lave (1997), Wenger (1998) and Dreier (1999) all introduced the concept of trajectory, which is highly relevant to our social practice theoretical analysis of identity formation as we research ‘learning from the margins’. Below, we apply Jean Lave’s conceptualization of telos and trajectories of participation:

“[I]t singles out certain kinds of changing participation: the notion of movement in a direction, of the possibilities of going deeper, becoming more of something, doing things differently in ways that gradually change the way you are objectively, the way you are understood by others, and the
Social practice theory emphasizes the analysis of both continuity and change. The risk of reproducing gang identity is to be understood in close relation to Martin’s process of change - his wish to continue the ongoing transformation and identity formation, becoming more of an academic. Applying criminological crime desistance and identity theory (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009), Martin’s academic telos could be called a “working self” (of the present) and a ”possible self” (of the future). But the advantage of the social practice theoretical concept of academic telos is the possibility of analyzing the process of becoming more of an academic as both focusing on Martin’s and our collective present academic, reflective practice and in relation to a future possible position for Martin as a university student and graduate.

Later, we analyze the conflictual aspects of this identity formation for Martin and the conflictual and difficult process of changing his participation and becoming more of ‘an academic’ and less of a ‘gang member’.

**Movements in societal position – as expanded agency**

In Mørck (2000), Line also conceptualized a third analytical take on movement related to the question of how marginality is reproduced and/or partly transcended through reproductions of (expanded and/or restricted) agency:

> “The concept of position sums up the action possibilities of the individual by accentuating the aspects of the life situation, namely how the relation between her contribution to and the re-production of her action potency [agency] is organized through societal production (Holzkamp, 1983: 196, Mørck’s translation).” (Mørck, 2000: 77)

Within crime desistance literature, the role of human agency is a key point of discussion (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009: 1148), but Paternoster and Bushway argue that such discussions tend to be rather dichotomous or dualistic: On the one hand, so-called “structuration” theories within criminology point to structural events, such as a good job, a good marriage, reform school experiences or military service, as keys to reducing crime by strengthening social control and limiting opportunities for committing crimes. On the other hand, so-called “human development” theories within criminology emphasize human agency, choice, cognitive transformations or identity shifts as necessary for crime
desistance. The critical psychological and social practice theoretical concept of agency allows the inclusion of both changes in socially structured conditions and human intentionality in discussions of crime desistance, thereby transcending such dualistic thinking.

Mørck & Huniche (2006: 6) identify the critical psychological concept of agency as the key category for characterizing, and thus for understanding and studying, individual human subjectivity. Holzkamp conceives of agency as the individual’s personal disposal over relevant life conditions. Agency is mediated through participation in and across communities; it is (re)produced in cooperation with others and depends on societal life conditions that are historically specific. Furthermore, agency is (re)produced on the functional grounds of subjective cognition and emotion, and therefore in a close dialectic relation with societal conditions. (Mørck & Huniche, 2006: 6).

The critical psychological understanding of emotion is also connected to a “moment of human agency” (Holzkamp, 2013: 22). In our research of Martin’s change and identity formation, as he moves beyond gang involvement, the social practice theoretical meaning of moment includes aspects of concrete practice analyzed in the selected moments and understanding moment as aspects of human agency. Compared to the above-mentioned strands of criminology, which tend to emphasize cognitive transformations and identity shifts, our social practice theoretical approach emphasizes the analysis of both emotion and cognition and their relation to participation (re)producing social structure, societal conditions and positions. Later on, in the empirical analysis of Martin’s moment-movements, we analyze how the significance of a moment is (re)produced when Martin feels affected by a moment or ‘moved’. In our research joint venture we analyze the dialectic relations between these emotions, his cognitive perception of the moment and how the agency produced in the moment leads to the reproduction of marginality and/or production of expanded agency.

**Movements ‘beyond’ dilemmas, double binds and restricted agency**

Within the literature on gang or crime desistance, social researchers search for “hooks for change” (Giordano et al, 2002) or so-called “turning points” (Decker et al 2014: 275, Paternoster & Bushway, 2009: 1148) to understand the process of desistance. Traditions of critical psychology and social practice theory are also focused on finding ways to develop conceptualizations that offer a deeper understanding of movements beyond marginalization and restricted agency. This includes an understanding of the experience of being “cut off from the joint
control over the living conditions, thrown back on myself, controlled by immediate threats and needs” (Holzkamp, 2013: 124), and an understanding of how movements beyond gang involvement may be produced through embodied conflictual feelings of “stuckness” or “lack of meanings” (Mørck, 2014: 490-491). Building on German-Danish critical psychology, we emphasize the exploration of moments through (move)ment methodology as an intersubjective effort, which, over time, can open up for a deeper intersubjective understanding of restricted agency – and how we moved beyond and opened up for expanded forms of agency and learning:

“Learning from marginal positions may include both marginalizing learning, that is, being caught up in crises, dilemmas, or double binds (i.e., contradictory demands placed on actors; Bateson, 1972; Engeström, 1987), as well as expansive learning, that is, collective struggles with these dilemmas and movement beyond them. This so-called double perspective stresses the importance for research to focus on both marginalizing and expanding aspects, because both of these occasion new action possibilities relevant for practice.” (Mørck, 2010: 179)

To conceptualize this ‘movement beyond’, we apply Mørck’s (2010) further development of expansive learning, which builds on Holzkamp’s notion of expansive agency and learning (Holzkamp, 2013). Mørck (2010) defines expansive learning:

“as a dialectic of collective and individual learning. Marginalization is seen as a complex, multilayered process that has restrictive implications for a person’s societal position across various action contexts in his or her everyday life. Expansive learning, then, is a kind of learning that partly transcends marginalization through changed participation and recognition by others of participants in their changed communities.” (Mørck, 2010: 176)

Line’s conceptualizations of ‘movements beyond’ dilemmas, double binds - producing and analyzing movements as expansive learning - were all developed under the label of social practice theory. With reference to Nissen (2012) and Mørck, Hussain, Møller-Andersen, Özüpek, Palm & Vorbeck (2013), we also apply a social practice theoretical understanding of interpellation:

“We suggest analysis of both suppressive and empowering processes as interpellation (Nissen, 2012) as an important step in humanizing the subjects, and contributing to social justice (Brotherton & Barrios, 2004, Torre, 2008). In continuation of Nissen (2012), we reinterpret
Althusser’s (1972) notion of interpellation by relating it to recognition and participation within communities. We develop the social praxis theory further by theorizing how marginalizing and expansive interpellation through diverse practice ideologies is (re)produced in and across different communities. (Mørck, 2011, p. 119). [...] processes of interpellation include how powerful parties, including both us as researchers and the media, may interpellate and thereby partly move different parties in different directions.” (Mørck, Hussain, Møller-Andersen, Özişek, Palm & Vorbeck, 2013: 89)

Where Line’s early approaches to conducting critical psychological practice research leaned heavily on qualitative follow-up interviews and group interviews as the primary methods (Mørck, 1996, 2000), she later involved different co-researchers and co-authors, including students doing ethnographic social practice research. In continuation of such collaborative research joint ventures, our ambition is not only to develop new theoretically and empirically based conceptualizations of ‘moving beyond’. As demonstrated below, we also develop new methodologies, using multiple methods and developing ways of following subjects and communities across time and space, as well as their movements beyond marginal positions, rooted in ethnography and collective biography.

Critical ethnographic social practice research

Many of us have adopted the term Social practice theory and also began to work more ethnographically as part of social practice research (Mørck, 2006, Kristensen, 2013, Rasmussen, 2017); some of us also used the term “ethnographic mo(ve)ment methodology” (Mørck & Hansen, 2015, Kristensen & Mørck, 2016). Jean Lave’s critical ethnographic practice and commitment to "become an apprentice to one’s own changing practice" is an ethnographic way of both producing and reflecting theoretical changes. When one is a researcher who, like Lave (2011), is committed as a researcher to becoming an apprentice to one’s own changing practice, you also become more humble and sensitive to the specific ethnographic field of study: in our case, the broad field of ‘gang desistance’ or ‘exit processes’. Line applied Lave’s commitment to our social practice research joint venture in her introduction to the invitational workshop “From Situated Learning to Social Practice Theory - Historical Process and Practice” that we held at Aarhus University, August 22 20144. The following

quote from Line’s presentation illustrates the change she, herself, has undergone as a researcher:

“I was struck by the new feelings of deep meaning and possibilities of the common engagement in the work, which made me want to continue to work, also on my summer vacation. My research practice was changing from planned follow-up interviews and meetings – to common practice, common discussion of answers to a radio interview, common practice of helping another ‘exit candidate’ to get into open prison, as well as organizing and planning presentations together, involving my new ‘research apprentice’ in my teaching, planned presentations and articles.”
(August 22 2014, Line’s PowerPoint from the invitational workshop)

As a practice researcher, Line was also becoming an apprentice to her own learning trajectory, changing her research practice and her feelings about it: Theoretically and methodologically she still felt like an experienced old-timer, but in the complex practice field of crime and gang desistance she felt like a newcomer, whereas Martin was a highly experienced old-timer. In our ‘joint venture’ (Nissen, 2009), we were able to move into more empirical and theoretical depth’s, which also had new political and ethical implications. This joint venture expanded our agency and changed how we act as researchers as we took on more of an activist role and became more directly involved in various aspects of the Danish gang exit and prison practice:

“Discussing prison conditions for (former) gang members with my new apprentice and research colleagues working with research in prisons, I came to realize that my new ‘research apprentice’ was in many respects the knowledgeable ‘old-timer’ who knew much more about gang environments and imprisonment conditions in the many various types of Danish prisons. We researchers with years of experience and fine Ph.D.’s were the newcomers who could learn so much from this collaboration. My research apprentice [Martin] was also both old-timer and newcomer, becoming more of an academic, reading and discussing complicated English texts, becoming more of a presenter and (co-)researcher, becoming less of a member in the (biker) gang communities.”
(August 22 2014, Lines PowerPoint from the invitational workshop)

In this process and joint venture, with access to a new depth of empirical data, we also became more self-critical in our reflection on limitations and the further development of both our lived practice and the applied theory. Just like Jean Lave (2011), we also started to change, becoming more of a critically reflective research apprentice to our own changing practice. In contrast to traditions within
anthropological and other qualitative research (such as Kvale, 1996), we also became more of a collective, a “we”, doing research together and publishing together.

The next section is about this process of becoming more of a research collective, including Martin’s personal change, as he became a research apprentice in our research joint venture and reflected critically on his own changing practice.

**Martin’s movements beyond biker gang member - becoming a co-researcher and a research apprentice**

In this process, Martin became the *research apprentice*. In the collaboration with Line, he expanded his agency and, collaboratively, we started to develop new methodologies, including audio and video logs, as tools for researching the most important moments of his own process of moving beyond the biker gang environment and the sense of “being stuck”. These logs became a sort of *audio diary*, which he kept for more than three years, starting shortly after joining the Danish national gang exit program in 2014. He sent many of these audio logs to Line, who usually responded immediately with comments via email. These exchanges made it possible for us to follow Martin’s mo(ve)ments in depth, including his process/movements across contexts and communities and over time. However, these exchanges were just one of many empirical sources. Box 1 below presents the various empirical sources we produced and explored as part of our critical ethnographic mo(ve)ment methodology.

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<tr>
<td>• 2 interviews</td>
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<td>• Approximately 60 audio and video logs</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Email correspondence, including Line’s responses to Martin’s audio logs</td>
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<td>• Sms (text message) correspondence</td>
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<td>• 9 presentations, including the invitational workshop and BUPL presentations</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 3 mini documentaries produced with Fryshuset Danmark (one of them is publically available)</td>
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<td>• 2 letters</td>
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<td>• Dialogues about the newly developed gang intervention tool: ‘The Life Conduct List’</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Meetings and dialogues to produce two articles in academic journals: From biker gang member to academic (Mørck &amp; Hansen, 2015) and The life conduct list (Mørck &amp; Celosse-Andersen, 2016).</td>
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5 https://youtu.be/8r3T5eBQZGg
The change of position, from co-researcher to research apprentice, began one day in April 2014, when Martin came to Line’s office. Martin had begun a new self-reflective practice, recording moments in his everyday life, whenever he felt “struck by a situation”. He was producing video and audio logs that described important moments from his everyday life, moments marked by strong feelings, and recording them with his iPhone or using a computer just after they happened. In Martin’s words, he could still “feel the heat of the moment in his body” (Mørck & Hansen, 2015). He was a very engaged co-researcher, who also wanted to become an academic and a university student. He wanted to produce empirical material for a future master’s thesis, so he asked Line if she could guide him, to make sure that the empirical material produced was scientific and produced in accordance with high academic standards. Line guided Martin in how to construct an ‘in-depth’ situated description of the experienced moment. She gave him a book containing methodologies for producing detailed descriptions via collective biography work (Davies & Gannon, 2006).

Davies and Gannon (2006) integrate concepts of power and discourse from Foucault and position themselves within a post-structuralist feminist tradition. They explore the discursive powers of particular discourses and the modes of subjectification they entail, and they refer to Delueze’s notion of “lines of flight”. They stress that their conceptualization of “movement is thus not toward a new fixed but transformed subject”. The ideal is to produce “lines of flight”, reflecting and moving beyond normativities - in our case the good and bad, right and wrong, beings and doings in gang exit as part of the Danish welfare state, including certain rights and duties as part of the Danish national gang exit program. Davies & Gannon argue:

“It is that visibility that makes transformation possible, not just for ourselves as individuals, but of our collective discursive practices, of our social contexts, of our capacity to imagine what is possible.” (Davies & Gannon, 2006: x6)

The way we use the parenthesis in “mo(ve)ments” was also inspired by the introduction to the book “Doing Collective Biography”. Davies and Gannon:

“We use the term mo(ve)ment to bring together this detailed attention to particular remembered moments with the possibilities of transformation, within the ethical reflexive research practice that we call collective biography.” (Davies & Gannon, 2006: x)

6 Page x is part of the Prologue, written by Davies and Gannon (2006).
Like us, Davies and Gannon:

“write and reflect on moments of being, on the ambivalent, slippery subject-in-process [...] captured in the remembered moment of being, transformed in a process of telling and writing and reading that moves us in a variety of ways.” (Davies & Gannon 2006: x, their emphasis)

Davies and Gannon (2016) are inspired by Haug and colleagues (1987), who work along a historical dialectical materialist Marxist psychology, the German critical psychology, but they also integrate concepts of power and discourse from Foucault (Haug 1987: chapter 3). However, in contrast to the post-structuralistic feministic tradition in Davies and Gannon’s work (2006) and Haug et al (1987), we did not meet as an organized group doing collective memory or biography work. Our (re)presentations and reflections were part of an ongoing dialogic exchange within our social practice research joint venture, as well as a byproduct of our dialogues when doing other academic activities together, such as (re)presenting our research joint venture at research seminars, courses for doctoral students and other broad academic communities including other researchers and doctoral students as dialogical participants.

In the following case, “Sp(l)itting on the street”, it becomes apparent how we apply conceptualizations introduced by critical psychology and social practice theory, in our analysis of mo(ve)ments, as well as the work of Davies and colleagues. We follow this up with critical reflections on ethical dilemmas and action possibilities.

“Sp(l)itting on the street”

The following transcribed excerpt from an audio log recorded on October 21 2014 represents a moment. It is significant for several reasons: It captures aspects of a (former) biker gang member identity that Martin named “Jack”, including the various expectations and interpellations Martin would have been compelled to realize from a position as a leading biker gang member. But in October 2014, Martin was no longer a gang member, so the represented moment also captures the contradictions and conflicts of change in relation to very different “significant persons”7, such as his wife, potential enemies, such as other gang members selling drugs and actively showing their disrespect, as well as former allies, such as a former member of Martin’s old gang and his girlfriend. In this way, the

7 The Danish term "betydningsfulde andre" (Mørck, 2006) means people of special significance for the person.
moment also captures important aspects of transforming the hard, embodied masculinity related to gang identities (Flores, 2016, Søgaard, et al. 2015). This reproduction and transformation was conducted vis-à-vis very different persons while Martin was changing identity; therefore, it reflects his ties to very different conflictual relations and communities:

"I've just backed the car out and I'm about to drive off when three young guys walk by. One of them is an immigrant with an attitude that I immediately recognize from the gangs. They all look like lads about 18-20 years old, and I assume that they are working in [area], where marijuana is being sold. One of them, the immigrant, the guy with the biggest attitude, the alpha-male in their small group, is looking at me, keeping eye contact, then looks away and spits demonstratively on the ground in front of the car. [Martin's wife Christine] looks at me immediately and I know ... [Martin pauses and sighs]. I then look at [Christine] and say to her, "Wow, just imagine if that had happened a year ago." My usual behavior would have been to stop the car, jump out, walk over to him, punch him in the face and completely smash his friends. [...]

However, I'm not doing that today. While they are passing by, I'm saying to [Christine] that I have to admit that I have a lot of conflicting thoughts right now, to which she replies: "I'm not going to think less of you if you don't act on it". And that got to me a little. Because I can't help thinking that, by bringing it up, that might be exactly what she is going to do (think less of me). Why else would she think of it in the first place? I choose not to do anything, and I do not feel the urge to either, to be honest. [...]

Later, I'm meeting up with a guy named [Morten], an old [ex-biker gang member, who has also left the same gang], at the gym. We work out at the same place. I mention the situation to him, and he says: "Oh - and then they got smashed" and I answer: "no, they did not actually." [Morten then asks:] "Well what did you do?" [Martin:] "I did not really do anything". [Morten:] "Oh - you didn't do anything at all?" [Martin:] "No I sure as hell didn't." [Morten:] "Well they should have gotten their faces punched in." And during this whole time, his girlfriend is standing next to him, observing the conversation between [Morten] and me. I was [in a superior position to Morten] before, so I know very well what I would have expected and what would have happened in the past, so I tell him that if I had wanted to do it, it wouldn’t have been a problem. Because that's how I've handled the situations in my adult life, so I'm used to it. Only it would mean taking a path that would lead me somewhere else than where my goal is. But he doesn’t understand. And at that point, when I sense that I can’t make him understand and I sense that he is wondering whether I’ve gone soft, I say: "it might have to do with the fact [Morten] that they are so young; had it been someone your age who acted this way, then I would
have crushed his face with a weight." (Audio log excerpt: October 27 2014)

The splitting: as conflictual identity formation and conflicting concerns in the conduct of everyday life

Our analysis of Martin’s conduct of everyday life and the reasons for his actions includes how he describes his former “biker gang member identity” and the comments and expectations from his wife and from Morten regarding this former identity he calls "Jack". From an identity theory perspective of desistance (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009), one might deduce that Martin reflects from a present “working self”, who has a goal of becoming “a possible positive self” - the critical, reflective academic. Analyzed from our social practice theoretical perspective, Martin is, at the same time, being and becoming more of a critical, reflective academic through his participation in the research joint venture with Line. Through our common production of conference papers and articles, Martin is actively engaged in a critical, reflexive process where he puts his former identity as biker gang member in a box – referring to it as “Jack”. Martin explains in the log that he normally opposes the idea of categorizing people as “former gang members”. But in the logs, these meta-reflections help him to work consciously to divide himself into these two identities in order to become less of a biker gang member. Through the continuous critical, reflexive work, he hopes to avoid reproducing the former "biker gang member identity", thereby becoming more of a changed "Martin", becoming more of an academic who acts reflexively and more neutrally in conflict situations. Martin’s reflexive practice is carried out when he produces audio logs, such as the log named "Sp(l)itting on the street". In another audio log, he also describes a new aim of critically evaluating every situation he experiences in order to reflect on his different action possibilities and where they will lead him. Martin is also becoming more reflexive as a result of his concern to avoid limiting his movements towards becoming a university student and an academic. Furthermore, it is an important concern of Martin’s not to engage in the reproduction of his former identity as a “leading biker gang member”. Martin arrives at a deeper understanding of himself and his transformation process by reflecting on his feelings in relation to the reasons for his actions and his change of agency:

"I used to have a very intense feeling that, if something had to be done, it had to be done here and now. And that was very important to me, it could not wait, which is why I sometimes did some crazy things. But I don’t have that feeling now". (Mørck & Hansen, 2015: 279, our translation)
This kind of intersubjective sharing of thoughts and feelings is also emphasized in research on community-based gang desistance processes as crucial in identity formation and movements beyond gang identities (Arocha, 2015).

Martin analyzes the content and the directionality of the movements and teloses, that are an extension of his concern of becoming someone who, in conflict situations, reacts more reflective and calmly. By reflecting on and describing this change as part of a research process, Martin also produces a change of action reasons by giving the reflective, academic telos power and new meanings.

**Movements and intersubjective sharing – as indicating a telos**

The directionality of movement towards 'more calm' and ‘more of an academic’ is prominent in the expanded agency that Martin exercises when he goes home and records a log about the situation. This telos is also evident in Martin's longing, striving and hoping that the lack of a sense of bodily desire and the continuing reflexive attitude towards his conflicting feelings in relation to others' reactions (his wife Christine and the former biker gang member Morten) are signs of him moving in the direction of becoming more of an academic and less of a biker gang member. In the log he further reflects upon his identity formation, how he used to be driven by his bodily feelings and dominated by a biker gang masculinity to act “here and now”, to reproduce power and respect. Now his agency has changed, becoming more critical, more reflexive in conflict situations, and he shares his thoughts and feelings with Christine as the situation occurs, and later with the former biker gang member. In our analysis and representation, this is contrasted with Jack’s kind of agency, where power would be exercised through physical superiority and the verbal demonstration of his potential for violence. Martin reflects upon how the dialogue with these significant persons contributes to a feeling of a new duality. He feels a longing for a more unambiguous rejection of agencies and reproduces, in that moment, his old biker gang member identity. He longs for recognition of the positive in his critically reflective and expanded agency. It frustrates him that the former biker gang member, Morten, does not recognize and understand his reasons for action, his new concerns, even though he tries to explain them. Within this lack of recognition and understanding of his transformed identity, he ironically partly reproduces a restricted agency - the hard embodiment of gang member identity - by having to prove that he has not “gone soft”. Here we analyze how (the reflection on) “hard” and “soft” masculinities (Flores, 2016) are part of the
conflictual process of transformation and reproduction of agency when moving beyond gang identities. Martin reproduces a distinct biker gang member masculinity, which contains power positioning as the dominant alpha male and demanding respect. Martin reflects upon how frustrating it is that he still needs to position himself as dangerous and strong towards the former biker gang member Morten at the gym. He makes a mental note to strive to become someone who will act more calmly the next time he encounters people from the old gang, although they may interpellate him as a (former and hard) biker gang member. This calmness would be in line with the academic reflexivity to which he aspires. Martin also notices that the reactions of Christine and Morten frustrate him more than the situation with the “spitting alpha male” itself. Here, we note that relations to certain people are more significant to Martin than others.

This process of meta-reflexivity might appear to reflect cognitive self-monitoring skills learned during various cognitive rehabilitation programs; however, because these reflections are shared in our research and in a scientific article, they become an example of academic reflexivity.

**Social self-understanding and/or identity formation?**

Building on the work of Dreier, Holzkamp and Mørck (2006: 44-47), we further develop a critical psychological conceptualization of social self-understanding:

“Holzkamp’s (1998: 21) and Dreier’s (2001: 52) conceptualization of coming to an understanding with yourself and others, are developed further by adding how the person is interpellated as part of different communities and action contexts, therefore the adding of the “we”.”

(Mørck, 2006: 44, our translation)

The significance of “others” (other people) and “communities” is understood in relation to the process of identity formation: “Coming to an understanding with yourself, we and others”. In line with Mørck (2006), Martin’s significant others can be persons, relations and communities, such as his former “gang family”, his present “family” with his wife, as well as the academic community of practice developed with Line. These are all relations and communities that really matter with regard to Martin and his identity formation and include conflictual processes of being moved in different directions.

In earlier publications, we mainly used the critical psychological concept “social self-understanding” (Mørck & Hansen, 2015, Kristensen & Mørck, 2016, Hybholt & Mørck, 2015). Previous drafts of this article attempted to understand ‘Jack’ (the former gang member, performing hard masculinity), ‘Martin’ (the
whole person – across past, present and future) and ‘Peter’ (the academic, authoring scientific papers) as different (past, present and future) selves, thereby analyzing his change as a process of developing new self-understandings. In some ways, this early take bore similarities to Paternoster and Bushway’s (2009) identity theory of crime desistance; like them, we differentiated between a former self (as “criminal offender”), the working self (located in the present and under transformation), and the future, possible self (a self to which a person aspires). In other words, in this representation, it was possible to be or perform different selves at the same time. Paternoster and Bushway (2009: 1103) describe their identity theory as “more cognitive, individualistic, and forward-looking” when compared to other desistance theories within criminology, sociology and social psychology. In our present version of a social practice theory of identity formation, we want to develop a theoretical conceptualization where aspects of a former “hard” masculinity and a future “reflective academic” can be present simultaneously, interpelled by significant others and critically reflected and performed by Martin in and across contexts of his everyday life. In contrast to desistance theories within criminology, we would like to contribute a theory of a person’s mo(ve)ments that stresses the significance of the communities in which the person participates. We also want the theory to be more explorative, not reproducing dualistic tendencies within criminology or making crime a primary focus. Within the criminology literature, we see a strong tendency to reproduce analysis around a single primary axis – always returning to the question of whether you are still a criminal offender or a “non-offender”, promoting a movement towards a so-called “conventional identity” (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009: 1106), living a conventional life validated and accepted by “conventional others” (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). If we want to understand Martin’s identity formation, whereby he, among many other changes, is becoming more of an academic and less gang involved, these concepts fall short. Martin’s participation, movements and telos are not conventional at all. We need a more explorative – non-dualistic – theory to grasp the content of his identity formation.

Instead of conceptualizing an inner or “cognitive” representation of a conventional, possible, future self as source of motivation (as in Paternoster & Bushway, 2009), we want to conceptualize a notion of identity formation, where identity is explored and produced in and through personal participation in societal practice. Therefore we suggest a focus on the content in his trajectory, exploring his feelings and engagements, his change in concerns and belongings. Instead of splitting up the identity in different selves or measuring the changing percentage of gang involvement, we explore how certain moments affects and moves him in different ways and sometimes also in conflicting, opposite directions. Building on Dreier (2001), Holzkamp (1998, 2013) and Mørck
(2006), we emphasize the *intersubjective coming to an understanding* as an *endless process*, where it is not a question of whether you reached a ‘full understanding of yourself’, nor a question of ‘reaching a better understanding of yourself’. Instead, it is the conflictual processes of feeling “split”, the feeling of being drawn or interpellated in different and perhaps opposite directions, and the tensions and the contradictions in practice that we want to capture with our social practice theoretical concepts of identity formation.

Etienne Wenger also uses the terms identity, engagement and belonging in conceptualizing identity formation as a duality of both reification and participation (Wenger, 1998); an approach we apply below.

**Identity formation as processes of engagement and (be)longing**

In the following, we also draw upon social practice theoretical conceptualizations of (be)longing as longing for belonging (Hansen, 2011), including those (Kristensen, 2013) that integrate Bronwyn Davies’s notion of belonging as longing to feel ‘at home’ (Davies, 2006).

Martin’s representation of the conflictual moment indicates a *longing* to be surrounded by people who recognize his changed and expansive agency and his more reflective and calm way of responding to conflict situations. Martin longs to be interpellated and recognized in this transformed identity. He is working hard to reject an interpellation in the (former) biker gang identity. Maybe that is why he finds himself more “safe and at home” when sharing and reflecting on his identity formation at our research seminar and PhD courses. As part of such academic communities, he is with others who value and reproduce critical, reflexive agency. It might be a paradox that Martin feels at home and safe in academia, while many other students experience anxiety when presenting and performing in an academic context. But maybe the feeling of safety is (re)produced because, in contrast to many other contexts, Martin has yet to meet significant others within academia who try to interpellate him into the hard, gang member masculinity.

The very accurate and nuanced reflection of these complexities replicates the fact that Martin is aware of future battles within his conduct of everyday life. Engaging in these battles in a reflexive manner enables a reproduction of expanded agency as part of his conduct of everyday life. By his engagements in recording and our common exchange and reflection of the audio logs, Martin continues to move towards becoming more of an academic, being more reflexive. He can also use these experiences and representations of ways of producing
expanded agency in future double-bind situations, where significant others may try to interpellate aspects of a hard gang member masculinity.

Producing expansive agency through reflections of “hard” masculinity

In Søgaard, Kolind, Thylstrup & Deuchar (2015), we also noted some similarities among former gang members in their ways of reflecting hard masculinity, and our analysis in this article. Here, some of the young men in the boxing and rehabilitation project ‘New Start’ made creative use of negative media discourses about the ethnic minority ‘gangster’ and ‘jackal’ in an attempt to reposition themselves as reforming adults. Instead of challenging the veracity of these constructs, they actively disidentified with the gangster, and particularly the ‘jackal’. They constructed a devalued ‘jackal masculinity’ associated with their adolescence, criminality and moral dubiousness, and an elevated notion of ‘reformed masculinity’ associated with maturity, self-control and (moral) agency (Søgaard, Kolind, Thylstrup & Deuchar 2015: 10-11). Like the young men in Søgaard, Kolind, Thylstrup & Deuchar (2015: 10-11), Martin’s categorization of Jack serves to mark critical and reflective distinctions between Jack/Martin, jackals/non-jackals and past/present (masculine) identities and figures as central in desistance narratives. As we see in our analysis of an audio log from 5 June 2014, Martin’s reflections also have similarities with the young men’s reformatory narratives emphasizing personal responsibility, determination and will. The audio log represents a continuity in the conflictual concerns and in Martin’s academic concerns. Martin describes the content and hence the conflictual directionality of his expanded agency, which moves him beyond gang membership:

“I used to be very aggressive and very rash; if someone said something to me, I reacted very quickly and would put people in their place. I don’t mean physically, but if someone annoyed me, I would respond very quickly and I got angry easily. I think it was mostly because I was stressed out and because being [in Jack’s position] forced me to run everything in a dichotomous manner, where it was all black/white, either/or - everything had to be done by the book. If someone made a mistake, my response would be swift and severe. Now that I am no longer in the [gang], I don’t feel the need to be that way anymore. And that suddenly makes me appear more understanding and accepting and less aggressive. It makes me appear more flexible and kind, but all of this also makes me look scared. As if quitting [the gang] leaves me no choice but to be nice” (Audio log, 05/06/14)
Martin is reflecting on a, for him, rather new concern to find a new and respected masculinity: "I am more susceptible to situations that would undermine the authority I have left". This is something that is also present in his reflections in the log about his encounter with the former biker gang member [Morten]. Martin continuously uses the moment-movement methodology in order to relate his transformation and reproduction of identity, as well as his conflictual change of masculinity:

“[I think] that I get angry because they move something within me that makes me feel insecure and then I respond by overcompensating and becoming even more angry. And I become aware of it by talking to Line about moment-movement methodology [...] which I’m now using to describe the situations; that this is an important situation because I act in a way which is very unfortunate and of course I have to learn why. Why was I so pissed off – and now I have an idea of why...” (Audio log 5/6/2014)

Martin is thus conscious of how rejecting the hard embodied gang masculinity that gave him special authority creates a new sense of uncertainty, which also produces anger. However, in the same log, Martin also plants the seed for a new type of academic, reflexive masculinity that, by and large, is recognized within the new academic communities, of which he is in the process of becoming a legitimate member:

"This thing, to sit here at …22:16 and I have had a long working day at [construction project]. The feeling of sitting here now and it is all quiet and I work on the computer and prepare myself for the lectures ... it does something ... it gives me a feeling that it would be possible for me, in addition to an academic education, to do more work in this genre. That somewhere out there, there is a possibility for a civil future for me.” (Audio log 5/6/2014)

Thus, Martin is not only becoming more reflexive, more academic in conflict situations, he is also slowly learning how to avoid reproducing the gang masculinity. He expands his agency by analyzing the recorded audio logs, reflecting on new and conflicting concerns while he is still able to physically recall the feelings he experienced in key situations. But what really gives him hope regarding the possibility of a future as a civilian is when he sits in silence and works on the computer. He feels hopeful when he sits there preparing the lectures he is going to present with Line. It gives him a feeling that he can be more than just a student, that he can become someone who critically reflects on
his transformation, applying academic theories. Such activities give him an extraordinary sense of meaning, offering hope and expanding his agency. In the next section, we will see how these activities also produce legitimacy and societal recognition within his new academic communities.

**Expansive interpellation: Objectification and reification as a legitimate and productive person**

Rooted in critical psychology as integrated within social practice theory, our study of movements beyond gang involvement is also about analyzing the possibilities for producing expanded agency in the new communities of practice in which Martin is engaged in. We analyze how concrete possibilities play a significant role in moving him beyond specific dilemmas with which he struggles in his process of major identity formation. The action possibilities and movements beyond marginalization contain elements of reification (Wenger, 1998) that provide the movements beyond marginalization with extra power. According to Wenger (1998), participation and reification are prerequisites for the meaningful negotiation and development of new meaning. Wenger’s concept of reification refers to both a process and its product (Wenger, 1998: 60). In our case, reification manifests both in the research process and the products it generates: audio logs, academic presentations, recorded videos, interviews, a movie, articles, presentations, and other publications from which students can learn. These processes of reification, and our participation in the creation of the various research products, have an impact on our joint production of meaning and on Martin’s experience of what is meaningful.

The involvement in collective projects, pursuing common interests, helps Martin to make sense of his new conduct of everyday life and, to some extent, move beyond the feeling of being positioned as a passive receiver of welfare state services and stuck as part of the Danish national exit program. Martin highlights:

“This whole thing, to be involved in different projects, it gives me the feeling of a small victory – the affirmation that I actually have something they can use. That I have something to offer in this unknown area in which my new life is going to take form. And I feel that such small victories lead to others. So it works really well. And now I will try to actively seek out further opportunities to engage in more projects.” (Audio log, 05/06/14)

Mørck et al. (2013) analyze how former gang members and others in marginal positions can be interpellated in practice communities and thus produce new
knowledge by contributing productively with lectures, important critical perspectives and knowledge at the so-called ‘gang seminars’ held at Grundtvigs Højskole. Martin has presented at one of these gang seminars, and he has also produced documentary films with Line and other participants in these communities:

"I am told that I am contributing. At the point I am currently at, I really have no idea of what I'm doing. I am surrounded by all these highly educated academics and I am stumbling about, but I am told that what I bring to the table is contributing and that makes me happy. Because, in the meantime, it helps me that I feel that I am in fact contributing with something." (August, 2014, A film 'The lived ethics'- used by Line and Martin in their courses to teach about ethics)

This quote illustrates Nissen’s point about how subjectification and objectification/reification processes are a part of recognition and interpellation into positions of responsibility. In line with Nissen (2012), Martin describes a kind of "suspense." In the previous quote, we see how recognition includes power relations, where Line and other parties in academia validate and define Martin as a subject who is contributing in relevant and academic ways. The quote also illustrates how the very meaning becomes evident later on behalf of the collective, which is developing at the same time (Nissen 2012: 170-171). In the same film about ethics, Martin also refers to Jean Lave's recent article (Lave, in press, 2019) when he says "I'm learning what I'm already doing". Martin continues:

"It's kind of like what I think I'm doing together with Line at the moment. Most of what we are doing is something we create together. Some of it we already know, but suddenly we are adding theory to what we already know. We are creating a community of practice, her and me. And we have started to expand the community of practice, so that you [two of Line’s former master thesis students and the leader of Fryshuset Denmark] are also a part of it. We are in the process of creating something new. For me to create something and be part of this community of practice, that’s something I can understand using theoretical perspectives from Ole Dreier and critical psychology - how one’s movements and being part of a collective process, how that affects me. This community of practice allows me to orient myself towards the new collective, instead of my old community. Sometimes, when I just do not know what to do, then I have this goal on the horizon that I would like to reach – and that makes me

8 Nissen’s term objectification (Nissen, 2012) has many similarities to Wenger’s concept of reification (1998).
focus on what I should do for now in this context." (August 2014, Martin, the documentary 'The lived ethics')

Martin employs theoretical perspectives while he learns and while he transforms and participates in the creation of academic products. Thus, together with Line and others, he comes to new understandings about is own process, including his movements beyond marginalization and the important ups and downs during what might be the most difficult period of his life.

**Intersubjective validation as an important part of identity formation**

Martin mentions several times how the process of learning is expansive and challenging when he actively participates in lectures, where his process of transformation is also brought into focus. His participation involves speaking in front of hundreds of graduate students as part of the module “Knowledge in Practice” at Aarhus University: "My body wants to walk out of the door up there," Martin says as he stands there, but he stays put and keeps talking. He seeks out the challenge and produces expanded learning and expanded agency as a legitimate participant of this new practice community. As an example, he volunteers to present what his group (six researchers and a few students) have talked about as part of their group work during a workshop with Jean Lave. Afterwards, he sends a text message to Line: "I was pretty nervous - but I guess there is a reason why it is called expansive learning". He makes the presentation in English in front of scholars and academics with many years of experience. Later that evening, he sends another text message:

"Hi Line. I am leaving. Thank you for today, the workshop was a really good experience. It was everything I hoped it would be - so thank you for making it possible." (text message, 22/08/14)

Line and Martin continue to put their joint experiences into words in a series of email exchanges. Line mentions that a doctoral student had said that it was “really cool” that Martin had made the presentation at the workshop and she would have liked to have told him that. Martin responds:

"It's nice that people from the outside can see a development, in addition to my own experience of it. I also think it makes it easier for outsiders to relate to our research / development of our community of practice when they get it presented the way you did in the lecture, or by watching the documentary we are currently working on. Sometimes it can be difficult to
make the theoretical part, and how it is implemented in our work, understandable. (Email from Martin to Line, 23/8/14)

Although these academic activities are demanding, participating in workshops and documentaries gives Martin a good feeling. This 'good feeling' also reflects a partial movement beyond the very difficult life situation he was in at that time (Mørck & Hansen, 2015). For four years, we have focused on this kind of collective-based expansive learning in different communities. The following excerpt presents Line’s reflections after a doctoral course, titled “The Psycho-Politics of Self-Exposure”, where we (Line and Martin) made two joint presentations. After the course, we organized a dialogical activity, exchanging our experiences in letters written “to us”. This is an excerpt from Line’s letter to this collective “us”:

“I actually learned something new from our exchanges and the comments from the listeners: I learned that Martin had also moved and grown stronger and more comfortable in representing himself, us, and his former and 'other' self, that we called Jack in the paper [an earlier version of this paper]. This was the first time in our presentations that Jack was represented as an integrated part of himself - Martin - becoming the new and integrated old self - moving beyond marginalization and demonization. In this way, we were also touching upon the core of our research into exit processes as major identity formation, exploring important theoretical and empirical findings and generalizations together with the broader "us" of the doctoral course. Morten’s conceptualization of the process of objectification and subjectification as prototype (Nissen, 2009), and as an alternative type of scientific generalization, was coming alive in the room and with us.” (Line’s letter to the “us” of the doctoral course: “The Psycho-Politics of Self-Exposure”, September 2017)

We also presented our research during another doctoral course Line arranged with Klaus Nielsen, Jean Lave and Ross Deuchar in 2014, which gave rise to a discussion of ethical dilemmas that we used to make a documentary about “lived ethics”. In the final section of this article, we want to discuss such ethical dilemmas and how the collective reflections during the doctoral course engendered further development of social practice ethics as an alternative to contemporary/institutionalized ethics (Badiou, 2002, Davies, 2011: 108).
Ethical dilemmas and movements through productions of new standards of social practice ethics

Researching major identity formations of former (biker) gang members during gang exit processes and exploring mo(ve)ments beyond is also about handling highly sensitive representations of personal changes in the conduct of everyday life. To maintain high ethical standards, we had to carefully consider various ethical dilemmas in relation to both the dominant institutional ethical standards and the imperative of enabling a safe exit, conducting research with Martin and expanding his agency in ways that could move him in directions he found meaningful, becoming a legitimate member of society.

In papers, films and presentations, we have shared our process of how to rethink the institutional ethical standards and develop new forms of social practice ethics. We will share some of these developments and actions possibilities that we think others, who also want to conduct some variation of mo(ve)ment methodology and social practice research from the societal margin, may find relevant.

Our joint venture was special in that Martin not only became a co-researcher, he also became a co-author. In our first papers and a scientific article, Martin used the alias “Peter Hansen” (Mørck & Hansen, 2015). However, his anonymity was challenged from the start because we had developed a gang intervention tool, the Life Conduct List, and were teaching courses together, for which Martin used his own name (see http://lifeconductlist.dk/). As such, many people were able to find out that Peter Hansen was an alias. It was also impossible to secure full anonymity when Martin and Line presented their research in person at conferences and teaching various courses. As our collaboration developed into a partnership, we also had to develop situated ethics allowing researchers and co-researchers (former gang members) to participate from alternative and multiple positions. This complex theme is discussed in greater detail elsewhere (Mørck, 2016: 9-11 Mørck & Hansen, 2015: 8-11, 22-23, Khawaja & Mørck, 2009). Summarized briefly, we developed a form of social practice ethics that involve ongoing reflection on the following questions:

“What are the dilemmas and possibilities of institutional ethics compared to alternative social practice ethics? Reflecting on (co-)researchers’ positioning, agency and feelings, when do we/they feel engaged, involved or used? How do we produce research that also expands possibilities in practice, such as contributing to concrete movements beyond marginalization, radicalization and/or gang involvement?” (Mørck, 2017)
Within our new standards of social practice ethics, anonymity and consent became a situated question of ‘in relation to whom’ where the concrete meaning and consequences for Martin were discussed. In that way, we discussed anonymity and consent in relation to each context and to the sensitivity of the topics presented. We also continually made decisions regarding when, and in what contexts, Martin could participate under his own name, and which topics to avoid. For security reasons, we only researched his exit process, rather than analyzing anything from his time within the gang environment. When using Martin’s own name, we had to consider very carefully if there was any part of the analysis that risked reproducing the marginalization, stigmatization and demonization that is linked to gang labelling.

The reproductions of hard masculinity and the reflections of “Jack” are the part of the paper where we might potentially risk reproducing marginalization and stigmatization. However, by illustrating how these reflections are part of Martin’s personal development and his movements beyond gang involvement, we believe we avoid these risks. Martin’s reflections about Jack also serve as an indicator of the directions of his changed masculinity. Jack comes to exist as both a discourse and possible interpellation of what is expected of a leading member of a biker gang. But Jack’s agency and representations of hard masculinity are also critically reflected as aspects of the former gang identity. Martin represents the formation of his new identity, an academic and reflexive self, who is able to reflect on and integrate his old critical reflective identity Jack. By representing Jack and his “hard” masculinity in a discursive ‘box’ analyzed in relation to restricted and expanded agency, Martin actively and consciously produces his ongoing personal development and moves beyond the gang identity.

**Ethical principles of ‘giving back’**

Drawing on Swartz’s principle of ‘giving back’ (2011), we also reflected on standards of “intentional ethics of reciprocation”; that is, finding ways to ensure that research treats participants fairly and is beneficial to research participants. Line’s way of ‘giving back’ was to conduct “just in time” dialogues in the moment when Martin was caught up in double-bind situations. The continuity and common ‘just-in-time’ engagement helped deepen our understandings of the complexity of the common and specific aspects of the dilemmas and double-bind situations, helping Martin and “us” to reflect, pause and transform them into new

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9 "Just in time"-dialogue consists of concrete and practice-oriented knowledge exchanges about situations “here and now” that may be a meaningful, difficult or problematic part of the everyday life, of the other. (Mørck & Østergaard, 2017)
situations, providing space for the production of expansive agency as part of Martin’s conduct of everyday life.

Another aspect of reciprocation and giving back was marked by our joint ownership and control of the production and storage of our empirical material about our research joint venture and Martin’s everyday life and exit process. By registering Martin as a researcher with the university’s Board of Ethics, we formally secured and continued a dialogical practice of shared control of the process of creating the boundaries between what is to be kept as private material and what is to be published in various media.

These social practice ethics encouraged us to think less rigidly and less absolutely about institutional ethics, caring more about how to design our various projects with respect to the critical psychological notion of common interest (Mørck & Hansen, 2015, Osterkamp, 2000, Mørck, 2017). On the one hand, we assessed common interests by dealing with ethical concerns about identifying especially sensitive empirical data that may involve risks for participants and making sure that such data are not made public. On the other hand, we also identified the key knowledge that, when published, could nuance and thereby expand and change real-world approaches to gang exit processes, as well as expanding the ways we conduct research within academia, and legitimizing new kinds of research. Our hope is, through knowledge exchange, to change the world for the better in the common interest (Mørck, 2016).

Conclusion

This article had two interconnected aims. Firstly, we wanted to conceptualize a mo(ve)ment research methodology and illustrate how to apply it when researching identity formation and expansive learning in relation to movements beyond gang involvement. Secondly, we wanted to contribute to the development of a social practice theory of identity formation; a theory able to grasp the complex and conflictual processes when people and communities move beyond marginalization or gang involvement.

Contributions to a mo(ve)ment methodology

Theoretically and empirically, we have conceptualized a mo(ve)ment methodology with specific relevance for studying people and communities, analyzing conflictual mo(ve)ments beyond marginalization. We conceptualized the mo(ve)ment methodology as an interdisciplinary approach that combines critical psychological practice research, anthropological critical ethnography,
social practice theory, feminist humanistic interdisciplinary traditions of collective biography and collective memory work. Our focus on mo(ve)ments beyond marginalization also makes our contributions highly relevant for other kinds of critical social studies, that share the emancipatory goal of social justice.

We illustrated Jean Lave’s (2011) critical ethnographic ideal of rethinking and redoing one’s work as researcher and activist and of becoming an apprentice to one’s own changing practice. We analyzed the continuity, change and further development of the moment-movement methodology and illustrated how it can be applied in the ‘in-depth’ study of significant moments, emphasizing the conflictual aspects of identity formation, exploring conflictual feelings and an emergent insecure masculinity that is part of a movement beyond the hyper-masculinity related to gang identities (Søgaard, Kolind, Thylstrup & Deuchar, 2015).

We explored how to produce expanded agency, reflexivity and new action possibilities as part of collaborative research joint ventures. We demonstrated how our production of expansive agency is linked to our collaborative creativity, applying and developing social technologies and research methodologies. We used the collaboration around these co-creations of ‘the new’ to follow and explore in greater depth Martin’s transformation of identity.

**Contributions to a social practice theory of identity formation**

We presented the critical psychological theory as a basis for the critical psychological conceptualization of ‘coming to an understanding of yourself and others’ (Holzkamp, 1998, Dreier, 2001). We integrated this within a social practice theoretical understanding of identity formation, with a special focus of how to ‘move beyond’ dilemmas, double binds and other aspects of marginalization. In our earlier work, we mainly used the critical psychological notion of ‘coming to an understanding of yourself, we and others’ (Mørck, 2006, 2014, Mørck & Hansen, 2015, Hybholt & Mørck, 2015, Kristensen & Mørck, 2016). However, through our prolonged and ongoing process of exploring the struggles and processes of ‘moving beyond’ involvement in a biker gang, we learned that we also need to integrate other theories to understand the process of identity formation in greater depth, both theoretically and empirically. In this article, we were inspired by research about masculinity and conceptualizations of embodied feelings of (be)longing from both criminology, social practice theory and post-structuralist and feminist traditions. We also integrated social phenomenological conceptualizations of the complex contradictions in life, such as double-bind situations (Laing, 1967). This helped us grasp ‘the being’ and ‘the embodied experience’ on the edge of existence, as we explored the embodied
struggles on the margins of society as well as the emergent processes of meaning-making when one becomes a legitimate member of ‘our society’. This interdisciplinary take, integrating aspects of several theoretical understandings into our critical psychological and social practice theoretical understanding of identity formation, helped us arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the complex and conflictual aspects of Martin’s process of becoming more of one thing (an academic) and less of another (a gang member). It was of particular help in understanding the ‘in-depth experience’ of the most difficult embodied moments on the margins as part of Martin’s gang exit process. Nevertheless, social practice theory and critical psychology were the most important theoretical sources when analyzing the ‘movements beyond’ marginality.

For a long time, we struggled to decide whether to employ Mørck’s (2006) critical psychology-inspired concept of ‘coming to an understanding of yourself, we and others’ or the shorter social practice theoretical concept of ‘identity formation’ when we write about ‘social self-understanding’. We considered both concepts relevant, as the two theories are equally integral to our theoretical and analytical understanding of Martin’s mo(ve)ments. Both critical psychology and social practice theory contributed to our basic understanding of identity and change as both transformation and reproduction. Both theories contributed equally to our underlying theoretical approach to mo(ve)ments that need to be studied across time, in and across contexts and communities, and with a special focus on how to move beyond marginal positions. We ended up choosing the concept ‘identity formation’ as part of the title of the article and as the primary term in the article for two reasons. We analyzed ‘S(p)litting on the street’ using both conceptualizations, initially focusing on the notions of self and self-understanding. However, we found that applying the notion of self reminded us of certain theories of personality that view personality as comprising multiple selves (as seen within postmodern psychology or diagnostic psychiatric versions of personality theories). This was a tendency and similarity we wanted to avoid. Furthermore, the notion of ‘identity formation’ simply sounded better in the title. Therefore, this became our preferred concept in this article, even though ‘coming to an understanding of yourself, we and others’ is still a core part of our approach to processes of identity formation.

Finally, when doing mo(ve)ment research on major identity formation in movements beyond gang involvement, we also need to critically reflect upon how we can avoid marginalizing, stigmatizing, delegitimizing and criminalizing those involved. We argue in this article that our way of researching expansive learning, and applying this mo(ve)ment methodology in research joint ventures, is one good way to transcend the risk of reproducing marginalization. We also reflected on ethical dilemmas, suggesting that we need to formulate new
standards for social practice ethics that are more suitable and relevant for this kind of ‘in-depth’ research into identity formation with former gang members. In line with other researchers who study ethics in practice (Deuchar, 2015, Swartz, 2011), we argue that we need to challenge and move beyond institutional standards for ethics when we conduct research alongside people in vulnerable positions. This is a topic we plan to explore in greater depth in future publications.

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Line Lerche Mørck is professor at Aarhus University, with special responsibilities in ‘Major identity formation, expansive learning and belonging - movement beyond gang involvement and radicalization’. She has been researching marginalized young people and adults, their everyday lives, learning and transcending marginalization within various educational and social fields, including social street work in relation to street riots and gang conflicts. In her Danish book “Boundary Communities” she developed a social practice theory on how to support learning and partly transcend marginalization through overlapping communities, which are constituted across ethnic and social differences. From 2019 she is leading a new 3 year project about “Community building – developing holistic, community-based preventive approaches”. The project explores how inclusive community building may prevent marginalization and produce movements beyond societal tendencies of ethnic and social polarization.

Martin Christian Celosse-Andersen is a former high ranking member of an international biker gang and he has been Line’s research apprentice for five years. Together they have published three scientific articles, they have developed methodologies, such as mo(ve)ment ethnography and the Life Conduct List, which is both an approach within social work, and a methodology for research and documentation of change in everyday life conduct used within preventive social work. Martin has also organized a platform, where people from different societal margins and
others are doing presentations about their life changes, and he also using his own personal history to do dialogical work to produce societal change of the exit and prison systems in Denmark.
What’s Up? The possibilities of subject-scientific practice research in social work: A methodological ‘explorative report’

Ulrike Eichinger

Abstract
The article introduces a qualitative study of the structural change of social work in Germany from the standpoint of professional practitioners. The focus of the presentation is on the depiction of the project’s subject-scientific foundations, its research-methodological challenges, and new possibilities explored in particular. Finally, central findings are presented, illustrating (1) the historical-structural challenges in social work and (2) the spectrum of possibilities through which to address them. For the practical transfer of these findings, different settings were identified and applied. In conclusion, the range of possibilities for action is discussed in the context of social work’s so-called ‘punitive trend’. Against this contemporary backdrop, further research is needed to better understand processes of orientation and acquisition of professionals in social work.

Keywords
practice research, research-methods, social work professionals, reason patterns

Introduction

Practice research in the field of social work has undergone considerable differentiation over the last several decades, generating numerous insights with the intention of contributing to a progressive professionalisation of the sector.

1 Translated by Loren Balhorn and Jan-Peter Herrmann
That said, what exactly counts as progressive remains highly controversial, as do questions of epistemological, theoretical, conceptual and methodological foundations. To uncover the specificities of a subject-scientific research perspective, it is useful to first assess existing research experiences and make them accessible for discussion. In this spirit, the following article attempts to illustrate, in an exemplary fashion, the possible utilisation of subject-scientific principles for conceptualising practice research. The example selected for this case study is a qualitative survey of the general framework of social work from the perspective of professionals (see Eichinger, 2009). The study allows us to both demonstrate the challenges related to research practice, as well as introduce tried and tested methodological procedures. Subsequently, the main findings are summarised with particular focus on the relevance of wage labour conditions. Finally, the applicability of these findings to (transfer-) settings in support of an emancipatory-transformative practice is outlined.

**Research project design**

The research project’s point of reference was the neoliberal shift in social values, which champions the self-responsibility of society’s individual members and emphasises the centrality of civil society organisations, which ought to be supported rather than inhibited by social policy measures such as the provision of social work (see, among others, Leisering 2003, p. 172). The restructuring of the general framework of social work in line with international trends occurred in Germany, on the one hand, through the economisation of social services over the 1990s. At the same time, the country witnessed a programmatic reorientation of social work around the concept of the activating state. Thus, although the realignment of social policy dates back roughly 20 years, its implications for social work continue to be heatedly and controversially discussed even today (on theoretical and practical projects of critique, see Kessl, 2012; Bund demokratischer Wissenschaftlerinnen und Wissenschaftler e.V., 2016). The topically pertinent research project presented here focuses on the perspective of professional practitioners asking: *how, and at which levels do structural changes become palpable for professional social workers?* And: *given the new corresponding challenges, which modes of thought and action do they utilise or develop?* The study sought to identify established modes of thought and action as variants of processing or coping with certain social contradictions.

In developing a theoretical foundation for the research project, terms and concepts from critical psychology were drawn on as tools of thought and study. Critical psychology, as a Marxist science of the subject, conceives of
professional practitioners as individuals (see Holzkamp, 1985, p. 355) who are forced to act within existing balances of forces, conflicts, and contradictions (due to their objective determination), which in turn shape the general frameworks (through the subjective determination of action premises) in which they act (see Markard 2015, p. 46). The object of science conducted from the standpoint of the subject is not individuals and their modes of thought and action, but rather ‘[…] the concrete living conditions in their subjective meaning, i.e. the social reality as perceived by individuals depending on their specific situation and the social interpretations and action possibilities available to them’ (Osterkamp, 2001, p. 8).

To individuals, social structures offer both limitations to and possibilities of action from which they select those, which appear useful for their specific needs, thus establishing them as their own personal (action) premises. The basic assumption that humans do not consciously act against their own vital interests implies, in terms of academic language’s reason discourse, that there can be no such thing as irrational or illogical behaviour, but rather only actions which are not yet understood and thus can become the object of practice research. By reconstructing so-called ‘reason patterns’, it becomes possible to discern: why do I rationally think and act – given my location- and position-specific living conditions, interests and sensitivities – in the way I do? The subject-scientific approach can be used to reconstruct the relationship between (institutional) conditions and action possibilities and sensitivities. According to Markard and Holzkamp (1989, p. 7), this facilitates ‘analysing everyday problems, fears, disappointments […] with view to their real causes and thus […] their changeability as well’. The study’s focus was placed on practical knowledge, conceived of in critical psychology as (social-subjective) knowledge of context and contradictions to be reconstructed. With regard to content, it encompasses the ‘results of analysing problematic professional constellations and their solutions’ (Ulmann & Markard, 2000, p. 223). Data evaluation aimed to produce historical-structural insights, in the sense ‘that hypothetical – cross-case – statements are made possible in a way that allows for establishing the corresponding links wherever the identified dimensions occur’ (Markard, 1993, p. 36).

Knowledge of context and contradictions derived from these more general statements can become transformative knowledge of professionals’ spaces of opportunity. This is the case if knowledge is seen as useful in the discovery of alternative views or modes of action in current practice situations directly tied to work with users and recipients, or in shaping the organisational design. The key feature of science from the standpoint of the subject is object adequacy (Gegenstandsadäquatheit, see Markard, 2009, p. 266). Object suitability is often
discussed as a quality criterion in qualitative research as well (see Steinke, 2000, p. 326). In line with its conception of the subject, the subject-scientific approach obliges researchers to allow those studied – in our case, professional practitioners – to participate as co-researchers in the methodological realisation of the research project to the greatest possible extent. The methodological principle of participation pertains to both the selection of the problem being studied as well as the process of data collection and analysis. This modus operandi should not be understood as an attempt to deny researchers’ interests. Instead: ‘The problem to be investigated may not remain a problem of the researcher alone, but must be a problem of the affected party, or rather must be formulated in cooperation with those affected in such a way as to make clear that it is also their problem’ (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 544-545).

As a precondition of successful interviews, this meant the study had to acknowledge the changes occurring for workers in this sector and perceive them as such. Granting opportunities for participation is thus not some vague emancipatory gesture, but in fact rests on a specific understanding of the object of study (see Markard, 2009, p. 277). With regard to the tension between authenticity and structure in research project design, it must be noted that the perspective on a given field of study through use of the selected subject-scientific research perspective naturally becomes decidedly more structured. According to Holzkamp (1983), it is imperative to determine whether a research idea is productively compatible with the subject-scientific understanding of the object of study – or rather, the pertinent categorical determinations and thus specific epistemological interests related to it – at the beginning of the research process. Such a structured view simultaneously reinforces an openness for each subject-perspective’s relevant context of meaning and its embeddedness in social conditions.

**On methodological principles in the research routine**

In the framework of partially standardised problem-centred interviews, (mostly) social workers and educational staff with advanced degrees were surveyed through a specific script (see Witzel, 1982). Interviewee selection was guided by the principle of ‘maximal contrast’ (Kleining, 1995, p. 226), designed to detect the greatest variation in working conditions rather than attain statistical representativity.

\[ ^2 \text{Specifically, my selection criteria – by which I sought the utmost possible contrast – included the type of employer, how a position was financed, employment status, workplace function, as well as aspects such as work experience and private obligations.} \]
concept of the *social mediation of individual existence*, the distinction between *social action possibilities* and *individual realisation conditions* was essential. According to Holzkamp, the latter must be ‘explicitly known and taken into consideration with regard to their content, as they belong to the “constitutive factors” determining my respective empirically ascertainable affectivity/action capacity, for only this way can the mediatedness of “my” action with social action possibilities become palpable for me as the basis of generalisation’ (1985, p. 549).

Prior to the actual interviews, short questionnaires were sent out to ensure the conditions of realisation. The material analysed in the stricter sense comprised a total of 15 interviews. Data evaluation focused on the practical occupational challenges and conflicts with regard to their structural interlinkage in the context of ongoing change. The basic framework of the qualitative content analysis comprised, with reference to Mayring (2005), a set of preliminary (working) categories determined by the current state of the field (for example, empirical studies). Additional (primary) categories were derived from the sample. The concept of co-researchers was implemented through *communicative validation* (see Groeben & Scheele, 2000) during the process of data evaluation. This procedure is designed to improve the authenticity of the data collected and limit researchers’ privilege of interpretation. Moreover, it is not assumed that whatever is first stated is automatically the most authentic information, nor that these data are the most reliable (see Markard 2000, p. 228). Specifically, this meant that the written transcripts of the interviews (including potential follow-up questions) were returned to respondents to allow them to specify or amend their statements. For an inter-subjective research process with the aim of helping respondents to better understand and develop themselves, it generally seems wise for co-researchers to adopt central subject-scientific categories (see Holzkamp, 1985, p. 543). That said, this seemed quite unfeasible given the scope of this study – a doctoral thesis – and was thus neglected from the outset for pragmatic reasons. Communicative validation, then, proved problematic. To begin with, not all interviewees managed to read the transcript in their limited amount of free time. Those who did responded only to say they saw no need for any changes. The small number of follow-up questions I included, however, were answered by all respondents with only one exception. Some admitted to difficulties reading

Concrete sampling was composed of skilled labour forces from across the country employed by public and/or independent private providers. Their positions are partially funded by grants and subsidies, as well as compensation for services rendered. Their fields of activity include child and youth services (e.g. outpatient social-pedagogical family assistance, stationary assisted living, and public youth work), assistance for the mentally ill, addiction treatment, ex-offenders’ assistance, caring for the homeless, as well as the area of training, advanced training and further education.
the transcript due to their own clumsy formulations. One interviewee wrote: ‘To put it bluntly, I’m somewhat embarrassed by my text.’ Another aspect of the responses potentially crucial to the project was that some viewed their statements as highly controversial and doubted I could guarantee 100-percent anonymity, expressing fears that the case study’s planned publication could endanger their job.\(^3\) Taking the co-researchers seriously, then, required – given the openness many exhibited in this regard – that the remaining evaluation process take their perceived vulnerability into methodological account. Against this backdrop, I developed an assessment strategy of ideal-type reason patterns with the aim of ‘not ascribing people […] to certain types [of ideal-type reason patterns, U.E.]’, but to illustrate ‘the variants of processing a given situation of social contradiction’ (Bader, 1987, p. 150).

The experiences described in the interviews formed empirical anchor points in the sense of individual cases, through reference to which the ideal-type reason patterns were constructed. In this case, grasping the context of meaning between the individual features of an ideal-type reason pattern required construing possible links between premises and causes based on empirical data and identifying their specific functionality and contradictoriness. The process of devising a typology was divided into four steps, as suggested by Kelle and Kluge (1999, p. 75). The first step was dedicated to the elaboration and establishment of relevant comparative dimensions: which aspect(s) of structural change do respondents perceive as most central? How are these changes assessed? How is the mode of appropriation with regard to these changes justified? What purpose can be identified? Which lines of conflict and hitherto undetected aspects can be identified? The second step involved distinguishing commonalities and differences between individual cases. Key to the reconstruction of both was less the presence of identical wording so much as a correspondence between the content of respective responses. In a third step, five preliminary ideal-type reason patterns were developed in the sense of working hypotheses. These were then condensed and more precisely defined by drawing on data from all of the interviews. Finally, the individual ideal-type reason patterns were described.

The co-researcher principle was primarily implemented through data validation in the form of a ‘member check’. Furthermore, interviewee feedback was taken into account in the further development of the method of interpretation, albeit not in a participatory manner. The doctoral thesis containing the results was presented to other social work professionals at two meetings, leading to a discussion with the aim of validating the results through other actors.

\(^3\) Historically speaking, the existential dimension of this concern is absolutely understandable, as conditions on Germany’s labour market were rather unfavourable in this service sector at the time data were collected.
in the field. Meeting participants indicated that they had ‘found themselves’ in and ‘felt understood’ by my deliberations.

**Key empirical findings**

The study’s findings suggest trenchant lines of conflict in the context of the neoliberal order of social work from the standpoint of professional practitioners. With regard to social working conditions, interviewees described instances of de-solidarisation among colleagues and processes of flexibilisation and even precarisation in their workplaces. Although change(s) may manifest in differing ways across individual work situations, the *key challenge* facing professionals is to develop practices which both serve the *preservation of an institution* and *secure one’s personal livelihood*, as well as account for *professional-ethical responsibility* – three objectives with the potential to come into increasing conflict with one another. However, the professional, or rather occupational reality under wage-labour conditions is heavily underemphasised in favour of professional ideals, even in more prominent contributions to the debate around social work’s mission and public mandate (see Eichinger, 2017). It can be established that, based on the science of the subject approach,

1. it is possible to posit assertions concerning historical-structural requirements and challenges in social work. Furthermore,
2. the range of modes of dealing with these changes can be deduced. Based on the range of alternatives, it becomes clear that there is an always (somewhat) limited variant, albeit potentially aimed at transformation – to which I return at a later point.

Reflecting the general ambivalence towards workplace alterations on the part of workers themselves, the modes of coping present among respondents range from ‘I remain open and take a positive attitude because I consider the innovations to constitute an advancement and/or may avoid negative sanctions in this way’ (RP 1) to ‘I rely on guerrilla tactics, as this allows me to at least mitigate the negative effects of change’ (RP 3), and even such reason patterns as ‘I adopt a critical stance towards the innovations in order to recognise negative developments and, if needed, push for structural improvements’ (RP 5).

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4 In the case of individual portraits, one method of conclusive validation could have been self-subsumption under (certain) reason patterns.
### Overview of Ideal-Type Reason Patterns (RP)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RP 1</th>
<th>RP 2</th>
<th>RP 3</th>
<th>RP 4</th>
<th>RP 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Remain open and retain a positive attitude</strong></td>
<td><strong>Perseverance – rulebook slowdown</strong></td>
<td><strong>Guerrilla tactics or the strategy of passive resistance</strong></td>
<td><strong>Being pragmatic and supporting the individual</strong></td>
<td><strong>Being critical and advocating for structural improvements</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Outdated structures are broken up, opening up opportunities for further professional and personal development</td>
<td>- Refusal to implement reforms, as primarily negative effects are perceived</td>
<td>- the experience of difficulties caused by the changes, and the lack of prospects to participate or sit them out, leads to resignation</td>
<td>- doing whatever is possible, despite things being 'as they are now’</td>
<td>- both opportunities as well as negative consequences are taken into account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Flexibility and openness is vital to persist and develop</td>
<td>- Changes are professionally inappropriate, lead to a deterioration of working conditions</td>
<td>- Lacking a formal mechanism of participation, loopholes on the fringes of legality are utilised to mitigate negative effects</td>
<td>- victories may be won in individual cases</td>
<td>- criticism and further development are perceived as both possible and necessary</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- success in individual cases preserves work morale</td>
<td>- dissatisfaction with the status quo, or rather the degree of realisation of professional expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- advanced training allows for additional personal security</td>
<td>- should the workplace level offer only a limited degree of participation, activity on political levels becomes all the more important</td>
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</table>

Concerning the choice between different modes of coping effectively taking place in everyday life, the question arises as to whether historical-structural contexts of meaning assume central relevance in everyday processes of orientation. In considering, or rather accentuating the various options for action, recurring concerns about one’s own job emerged as a relevant aspect (see, among others, Eichinger 2009, p. 178). A (recent) study of social work in communal
refugee housing also points to the relevance of the wage labour condition when professionals develop ways of dealing with their specific professional-practical challenges (see Eichinger & Schäuble, 2018).\(^5\)

Specific problems can be expected should the reason patterns (see table) result in a certain action practice, all of which were mentioned by respondents themselves. The first reason pattern, for instance, may favour dismissing the problematic consequences of change. If it is assumed that the new requirements can be accommodated individually, this may encourage a drive towards continual self-optimisation, which in turn can lead to outright self-exploitation. Behaviour guided by pattern number three, then, may entail considerable psychological strain due to the fear of being caught or violating one’s own ‘standard of correctness’. Furthermore, the risk involved in openly addressing forms of coping with change on the threshold of illegality brings with it the danger of atomisation. A practice oriented around the fifth pattern appears attractive only to those with sufficient resources at their disposal who wish to invest them in this way, particularly as the risk of losing one’s job due to recalcitrance should not be underestimated.

In retrospect, and in light of the insights gained, it seems safe to conclude that the decision to change the subject-scientific research method while simultaneously retaining – out of pragmatic, or rather ethical considerations – the reason discourse’s academic mode of thought and language has stood the test. Thus, although the project may have failed to live up to the potential of subject-scientific action research guided by the principle of the unity of cognition and practical change (see Fahl & Markard, 1999), at the same time, as Markard points out (Markard 2009, p. 277), the regulations of subject-scientific research are not intended to prevent research but rather optimise it to the greatest possible extent, motivated by the specific epistemological interest as such.

\(^5\) These findings merit further consideration in light of current analyses of the establishment of disciplining-responsibilising professionalisation patterns in social work (see Lutz et al., 2013). These studies address an ‘in whatever form that may be – increasingly rigid, or “tougher” dealing with [users’] behaviour in defiance of expectations and norms’ (Dollinger, 2011, p. 26). In one study, employees whose context of service provision included low wages, fixed-term contracts and a low level of work satisfaction, provided information, which could be regarded as punitive attitudes more frequently (Dollinger, Oelkers, & Ziegler, 2014). According to Hirtenlehner (2010, p. 214), the immediate (personal or social) economic situation is less relevant in this regard than the extent of the corresponding uncertainty and anxiety.
Transferring results: Professionals in dialogue

Due to the fact that the fundamental possibilities of the co-researcher concept, the principle of the unity of cognition and practical change, were only realised in the context of the doctoral thesis to a limited extent, the question of utilising our findings for professional practice arose following the project’s conclusion. The results briefly outlined above do not constitute immediate transformative knowledge relevant to occupational practice. It is thus essential for (subject-scientific) practice research to ask how acquired knowledge can become an impulse for the self-understanding of one’s own conscious and unconscious involvement. So far, various sites of transfer, ranging from ‘classical’ workshops to performative approaches – namely a (forum) theatre project devoted to social work (directed by Stephan Antczack) – have been explored as ‘practice spaces’ for naming, discussing and reflecting upon familiar thought patterns and action practices, as well as trying until now unexplored possibilities. What became most evident on these occasions was that there are even more individual and collective reason patterns, or coping strategies, in the field of social work. In my view, it is particularly instructive to consider the broad empirical scope in order to keep the awareness of alternatives alive. If a sensitivity for or even an existing knowledge of the respective functionality of specific existing practices exists, this may represent an initial transformative step as well as the precondition for dialogue across partially shared and organisable interests. It would indeed be illuminating to initiate a conversation with the attendees of the events mentioned above concerning what significance the impulses they experienced had or have for their professional practice. The development and trial of a systematic method for the determination of utility for an intervening, transformative practice is yet to be accomplished.

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6 With the exception of some deliberations on utilising the findings for supporting workplace health, as legally stipulated by the European Union (see Eichinger 2009, p. 196).
7 Other strategies included, for instance, the individual exit strategy of not even entering the occupational field after completing the degree due to unattractive working conditions and the dim prospects of realising professional expectations, up to the collective ‘self-liquidation’ of a provider with the readiness to re-found itself should the required resources become available once again.
8 In this regard, concepts or methods on the organisational design could be examined.
Outlook

The presented findings underscore how useful it can be for practice analyses to systematically elaborate both objective meaning (such as institutional/organisational contexts of providing basic services, the professionalisation of social work) as well as personal meaning (such as biographical experiences, physical capacities/limitations, social relationships) with view to thought and action premises. As it were, (partially unconscious) processes of orientation require more attention in the context of subject-scientific practice research, namely through:

1. conscious perception of possible meanings relevant to orientation, either out of curiosity or caused by a specific action problem (need for orientation),
2. the evaluation of meanings relevant to orientation (emotional/cognitive) with regard to their degree of utility, as well as
3. the appropriation (including in the sense of dual possibilities; see Holzkamp, 1985, p. 355)/non-appropriation itself (see also, among others, Marvakis, 1996, p. 70).

A more conscious exploitation of spaces of opportunity entails the option of perceiving and responsibly taking seriously one’s own role in shaping the status quo. The corresponding self-educational processes may prove both relieving and disappointing, as what is desired may not be attainable for the time being. At the same time, however, once practices in which I limit myself and I limit others become apparent, they could serve as an encouraging point of reference – including, perhaps, with a chance of experiencing, addressing, discussing, and maybe even intelligently expanding these limitations more consciously. At any rate, the preceding reflections on the instruments of institutional analysis developed in the context of subject-scientific research in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as more recent work in organisational sociology, by all means merit further elaboration elsewhere.

Furthermore, an examination of the relevance of specific contexts of service provision such as precarious employment conditions is needed for the selection of action possibilities. For example, do responsibilising-disciplining attitudes become attractive for professionals when conditions 1) cause insecurity and 2) there is no perceived better and simultaneously feasible alternative?
References


Critical Psychology and biography research: Individual life stories, collective dimensions of experience and societal reality*

Grete Erckmann

Abstract
In Critical Psychology biographical research has so far appeared only marginally. Key considerations on human biographies have been developed, but a subject-scientific approach of biographical research has not yet been developed. Klaus Holzkamp distinguishes between phenomenal and real biography. The ‘phenomenal’ is the biography as it is experienced by the subject herself. The ‘real’ biography captures the living conditions, abilities, needs etc. of a person together with the inherent opportunities and limitations at each point in time. From a temporal point of view, there is a reality of a person which transcends the mental state of the subject, but which only selectively becomes reality for the subject and necessarily goes beyond it. Biographical research in a subject-scientific sense therefore refers to research with the aid of the analytical categories “real/phenomenal biography”.

After an introductory positioning of a possible subject-scientific approach to biographical research, the second part of the paper is dealing with the question about what is and can be understood as a ‘biography’ and which new possibilities are offered by the categories of Critical Psychology in this context. Five theoretical horizons are presented and discussed in order to develop some kind of theory-led grid for analyzing concrete biographies in subject-scientific projects of biographical research. As an illustration the biography of the fictional person Amal is analyzed in part three. It is necessary to create a theoretical framework for subject-scientific biographical research before questions of research methodology and methodological procedure can be

* In this text the pronouns “she”, “her” and “herself” are gender-inclusive, in quotes from other authors the traditional gender-inclusive “he”, “him”, “his” and “himself” are used.
discussed. A short conclusion of essential methodological and methodical considerations is given in the fourth part.

Keywords
biography research, biographical research, subject-scientific research, critical psychology, phenomenal biography, real biography

I. Introduction

Autobiographical statements are a natural part of everyday human living together. In everyday conversations between people experiences are exchanged; when they meet, people tell each other stories from their lives and in this way take an interest in the lives of others; they receive and give advice in various life situations. Social institutions also require episodes of biography – mostly with special emphases – at job interviews or police interrogations for example. On special occasions, such as weddings, birthdays or anniversary celebrations it is not unusual for speeches to be made which feature (auto-) biographical elements. In social networks and on Internet blogs it is common for biographical content to be presented, orchestrated in the media, shared more or less publicly and commented on by others. Every person has a biography, which she can communicate, one she can also recount and she also does that frequently in various contexts and with different intentions and emphases.

Intention, purpose, as well as individual or collective function and objectives can therefore be very heterogeneous when biographies are compiled and recorded. The life stories of rulers have already been the subject of historiography for centuries (cf. Alheit, 1985). “To be looked at, observed, described in detail, followed from day to day by an uninterrupted writing was a privilege. The chronicle of a man, the account of his life, his historiography, written as he lived out his life formed part of the rituals of his power.” (Foucault, 1977, p. 191). By contrast, the life histories of ‘ordinary’ people only became the focus of attention much later and with another objective. When with the dissolution of status-based society ceremony, “in which status, birth, privilege, function are manifested with all the spectacle of their marks” (Foucault, 1977, p. 192), became ineffective, it was necessary – as Michel Foucault says – to find new methods of control and domination, which to a certain extent exist to this day. “It is no longer a monument for future memory, but a document for possible use. And this new describability is all the more marked in that the disciplinary framework is a strict one: the child, the patient, the madman, the prisoner, were to become, with increasing ease from the eighteenth century and according to a
curve which is that of the mechanisms of discipline, the object of individual descriptions and biographical accounts.” (Foucault, 1977, p. 247). Of course, not every interest in the biographical processes of ‘ordinary’ people can necessarily be reduced to an interest in control and discipline. “Just as the bourgeois drama leaves the ‘courtly’ and focuses on the tragedy of the bourgeois individual, the biographical method could provide validity to the simple life, the discredited life of the ‘proletariat.’” (Alheit, 1985, p. 101).

The invention and constant development of sound recording equipment at the end of the 19th century also greatly facilitated the entry of autobiographical statements into the scientific context. With the aid of recorded and transcribed narrative biographical interviews and thematic biographical group discussions, it was now possible to allow the most diverse social groups to express themselves with their concrete life conditions and their collective history. The transcribed word could be systematically analyzed and interpreted.

Autobiographical statements as empirical material refer to concrete facts; they contain observations, introspections, experiences, memories and happenings. They provide information about the person, her inner conditions, but also about the world she lives in, the real historical contexts, the living environment(s), the social space and the (affective) meaning for the person. Biographical research thus contains “the possibility of a political learning process. The autobiographical memories of ‘ordinary people’ are a piece of real history of daily routine, of work and life – a ‘history from below’” (Alheit, 1985, pp.130). The quite specific opportunity contained in biographical research is to gain access to collective dimensions of experience and realms of possibility through the life histories of individuals. “This methodological ‘hope’ rests on a certain theoretical understanding of ‘biography, more specifically on the autobiographical recapitulation of life history: It is not conceived as an ‘individualized’ result of mental processing detached from its social constitutional context, but as the current result of a development process in which social reality and the individual mental structure are linked in a complex interaction. This dialectic becomes concrete also – or precisely – in the uniqueness of a biography” (Alheit & Dausien, 1985, pp. 47).

A classic of biographical research in sociology is the migration study "The Polish Peasant in Europe and America" by Thomas and Znaniecki (1984) at the University of Chicago during the years 1918/1920. The study contains, among other things, the biography of a Polish migrant to the USA. The background to this scientific interest was the large immigration movement with the subsequent social problems in the USA at the beginning of the 20th century. As a result, the

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biographical method gained acceptance in the so-called ‘Chicago School’, as one opportunity to gain information about the social living environments of different milieus through the subjective perspective – on the topics urban areas/slums, crime, prostitution, family disorganization and later on the ‘race issue’. In this process, however, any systematic analysis of the objective processes of change in (American) society was set aside. “The great significance attributed to the subjective definition of the situation for the real social reality (Incidentally, a theoretical attitude with a high affinity to symbolic interactionism and the more recent phenomenological interpretative sociology of Alfred Schütz), suggest the possibility that through comprehensive evaluation of subjective documents – here specifically ‘life records’ – generalizable parameters for social aid and control will be developed” (Alheit, 1985, p. 105). At the end of the 1930s the change in the economic situation in the USA and the reinvigoration of nationalist ideas in view of the imminent entry into the war prompted an increasing interest in quantitative studies on a social scientific basis. The social problems of the 1930s and related research were something to be left behind (cf. Alheit, 1985, pp. 102).

In German-speaking countries there was no comparable consistent tradition of biographical research ‘from below’. Self-affirmation of the bourgeoisie was always a stronger motive for research than the research of social problems (Alheit, 1985). The beginning of biographical research in psychology and sociology within a university context dates back to the early years of the 20th century. Freud (1905, 1910, 1939) presented for the first time biographical analyses at the University of Vienna – for example, those of Leonardo da Vinci or Moses. The focus of the psychoanalytic approach is on significant experiences in childhood and youth, which are regarded as being constitutive for the entire biography. It is a matter of individualized mental processing. In this context Holzkamp (1995) also speaks of a “colonization of childhood” by psychoanalysis, insofar as there the life path seems to be determined by childhood.

The first works in the 1920s and 1930s, which take the entire lifespan into consideration, can be traced back to Bühler (1933) with her publication “Der menschliche Lebenslauf als psychologisches Problem” (“The course of human life as a psychological problem”). In her remarks she concentrates principally on the older age as a lifespan. For this reason, she is also regarded as a pioneer of gerontopsychology.

With National Socialism biographical research came to a sudden end in the German-speaking countries. The conception of human beings as learning subjects shaping their lives actively and substantively by confronting social

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2 On the debate in critical psychology with psychoanalysis see also: Aumann,(2003) and Holzkamp-Osterkamp (1976).
conditions contradicts the hegemonic National Socialist ideologemes of race and heredity.

In the 1970s biographical research gained a renaissance in West Germany and on an international scale and still plays a role in sociology, psychology, pedagogy, education science and history. There is also more recent biographical research on, among other things, sociopolitical topics – with reference to the National Socialist period (inter alia Rosenthal, 1986, 1990, 1997; Schreiber, 2005), to Israel/Palestine (inter alia Rosenthal, 2015; Bar-On, 2001, 2004), on workers’ biographies (inter alia Alheit & Dausien, 1985; Alheit, Dausien & Förcken-Erbrink 1988), to right-wing extremism (inter alia Kötting, 2004; Inowlocki, 1988, 2000), to migration (inter alia Apitzsch, 1990; Juhasz & Mey, 2003), on gender relations (inter alia, Dausien, 1996) – to name just a few examples. The extent to which socio-cultural contexts and social conditions should be integrated is subject to controversial discussions. Various tendencies have crystallized which primarily differ on how and whether they conceive the relationship of social reality, individual (experienced and narrated) biography and experience and take them into account in their analysis (on this cf. Juhasz & Mey, 2003; Alheit et al., 1985; Rosenthal, 2005).

In Critical Psychology biographical research has so far only appeared marginally (cf. Weber, 2016). Admittedly, key considerations on human biographies have been developed, but the attempt to develop a subject-scientific approach of biographical research has not yet been undertaken. In general, Critical Psychology as a Marxist science of the subject provides categories, which allow to conceptualize the above-mentioned mediation between individual and society and to analyze it in up-to-date empirical studies (Holzkamp, 1985, 1993; Markard, 2009). The individual human existence is mediated by society as a whole, which means that individuals not only live under conditions, but also actively produce them and are able to act on them in order to change them. With the aid of the central category “capacity to act” it is possible to discuss the relationship between opportunities to act and obstacles to action and how these are mediated through relations of domination and power. Problems of subjective lifestyle between adaptation and resistance can in this way be broken down and analyzed. By ‘restrictive capacity to act’ is meant setting things up under the given conditions, which also includes the potential to harm oneself and others. One therefore contributes to the reproduction of the existing relationships of domination in order to deflect the threat to one’s own capacity to act in the short term, but not to abolish it. ‘Generalized capacity to act’, by contrast, highlights the utopian potential, without which an emancipatory perspective cannot be pursued. “The generalized capacity to act is something that cannot exist, instead the point is that we participate in the struggle for the possibilities of human
emancipation and in the battles for it and deal with the psychological issues that arise in this context: on the one hand with the question of which demands are being made on the people (without therefore already assuming that one knows how they should deal with them), and on the other hand, with the question of investigating empirically how they should deal with them in reality” (Markard, 2015, p. 53).

After this introductory positioning of a possible subject-scientific approach to biographical research, it is important to clarify – in the second part – what is and can be understood by a ‘biography’ and which new possibilities are offered by the categories of Critical Psychology in this context. Five theoretical horizons are presented and discussed in order to develop some kind of theory-led grid for analyzing concrete biographies in subject-scientific projects of biography research. As an illustration the fictional biography of the person Amal is analyzed in part three with the help of these five theoretical horizons. It is necessary to create a theoretical framework for subject-scientific biographical research before questions of research methodology and methodological procedure can be discussed. A short conclusion of essential methodological and methodical considerations is given in the fourth part.

II. What is a ‘biography’? A definition attempt

'Biography' is composed of the Greek words βιογραφία, from βίος, bios “life” and -graphy from γράφειν, gráphein “scratch, paint, write”.

Firstly, there is, of course, a ‘biography’ as a text with a narrative character – for example the result of a research process of a literary reconstruction with the goal of publication. But there is also life as a biography to be carved out with an interior and an exterior aspect. The exterior aspect here means biography as movement, as a ‘resumé’ in a geographic, socio-cultural and historical space. The interior aspect understands biography as an experiential context (Schulze, 2006). “A biography is, as we have said, the life movement of a person in a socio-cultural space and in historical time and the experiences he gathers in the course of his life arise from his engagement with his environment. The decisive significance we bestow on the biographical subject in this context should also not be understood in such a manner that he reaches his decisions alone and independently. On the contrary, many biographically significant decisions are made by others and have to be acquiesced to and endorsed by the ego. Thus, biography must of necessity always be considered to relate to society and to be embedded in society” (Schulze, 2006, p. 45). Biographies always contain – according to Alheit (1990) – both emergence and structure. We gather our
experiences against the backdrop of existing socially mediated structures of knowledge. However individual experiences can also revise, change and further develop long-established structures.

The knowledge of the world is linked in a biography with self-knowledge through the deals of the subject with the world, in which she lives and moves, in other words, with those sections of ‘society’ relevant for her life.

Holzkamp (1985) distinguishes between the phenomenal and the real biography. The phenomenal is the section of her real biography experienced by the subject. “My own past is given to me as characterized by earlier opportunities, their realization or ‘non-realization’, as well as by the ‘unavailable’ facts limiting these opportunities, which I was at the mercy of, this in relation to both my earlier living conditions (in their ‘situational’ circumstances) and my own mental state, my abilities, my intentions, my plans etc., whereby also the emotional aspect of the earlier opportunities and their limitations belong to the experience of my own past” (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 337). Correspondingly, the phenomenal biography is not something static which is merely extended in the course of life, but rather it changes with the present mental state and thus with the person. “On the current stage of development of the individual and the resulting relationship of personal/situational and real life circumstances/person depend to what extent the restructuring of the individual's phenomenal past from the present actually provides a more significant, more correct and more fruitful view of myself on the basis of the increase in my own experience for the expansion of my capacity to act or to what extent a falsification of my past, for example to justify limited personal capacity to act, has prevailed in my present behind my back” (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 338). For example, it may appear quite functional to a mother who has just given her 5-year-old daughter a slap on the ear to justify her own childhood and the fact that her own mother viewed slaps on the ear as a legitimate parenting tool, with the statement that “it didn’t do us any harm.” In the course of doing so, she has to block out the feeling of injustice that she experienced at the time in the many situations where with stinging cheeks and tears in her eyes she was angry about the abusive misuse of power by her own mother.

In contrast, by real biography are meant a person’s real living conditions, abilities, needs etc. with the inherent opportunities and limitations on opportunities at each point in time. Taking into account the temporal point of view, there is a personal reality which transcends the mental state of the subject, but which only selectively becomes reality for the subject and necessarily goes beyond it. This real biography, which does or did indeed exist, can only be approached in the context of biographical research – proceeding from the (phenomenal) biography narrated and compiled together in the research.
procedure. An interdisciplinary socio-theoretical analysis of the living conditions with the inherent opportunities and limitations, an analysis that goes beyond what was narrated, is indispensable here. It is not just a question “that situations should be taken into account, but that the situations to be taken into account are integrated into overarching structures which must be comprehended; otherwise the ‘situations' cannot be comprehended.” (Markard, 2015, p. 50).

Through my ‘attitude’ to my own life history, just as it appears in biographical life narratives, the relationship between my real and my phenomenal biography “from the respective current location of the subject I myself can become part of my ‘phenomenal’ view of the world and myself by relating my previous assessments of opportunities to act and limitations to such action to the ‘actual’ opportunities and limitations: At that time I still believed that in this or that profession there really were opportunities for me, that these and those skills could be developed by me in some specific manner, that I would get over these and those emotions (jealousy or similar) but now I know that I assessed my situation and myself incorrectly (or vice versa, at that time I mistakenly I did not see these and those opportunities, I still underestimated myself and my skills etc.).” (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 337).

Biographical research in the subject-scientific sense therefore means research with the aid of the analytical categories “real/phenomenal biography”. It is a question of approximating the real life conditions, skills, needs etc. with the inherent opportunities and limitations of the person (real biography) through the remembered, narrated, experienced (phenomenal) biography that has been jointly compiled and by drawing on, among other things, findings gained through interdisciplinary social analysis or other social-scientific research projects, in order to be able to understand and comprehend why at various stages in her life she acted/thought/felt this way and not some other way. At the same time, this opens up the opportunity for her to gain new insights though the joint analysis and reflection on her previous life in relation to her current view of the world and herself.

Schulze (2002) formulates five theoretical horizons, which biographical research in general can help to unlock. With respect to the development of a subject-scientific biographical research these horizons can be taken as a starting point in the following to discuss also further (theoretical) conceptions with emphasis on the analytical possibilities, which are provided by the categories and theories of Critical Psychology.
1. Theoretical horizon: The individual subject

The subject appears in two ways in a biography. On the one hand, it is the “I” that is narrating, remembering and reacting in memory to her life. On the other hand it is the “I” that experienced what she is narrating and what she is narrating and in the past learned, acted, reacted to various issues, happenings and decisions made by others and has led her life right up to the present where the biography is being narrated (cf. Schulze, 2002).

Rosenthal (1995) distinguishes between the ‘narrated’ and the ‘experienced biography’, which in her judgment are “in a mutually constitutive relationship” (Rosenthal, 1995, p. 20). In the phenomenological tradition she assumes that “objects in the normal sense of the word disappear, and all that remains are noemata, the world as it really is is eliminated, it remains the world as it appears at the time” (Gurwitsch, cited from Rosenthal, 1995, p. 27). Accordingly, the researcher’s perspective focuses on the biographical material presented to the researcher. “The experienced biography (life history) can be understood neither as a constantly recited object that is remembered and presented differently depending on the perspective and mood of the autobiographer, nor as an object that can be constructed arbitrarily by attention” (Rosenthal, 1995, p. 20). The way the experienced life story is presented to the researcher and the way she is associated with the life story being told are for Rosenthal the central issues, which are reflected in her method of evaluation (Rosenthal, 2005). With this settlement it is possible to approach both the experienced life story and the life history being narrated in terms of Gestalt theory, because it is now only a matter of taking things in the way they present themselves to consciousness – in this case the consciousness of the researcher. Questions about social conditions, about relationships of power and domination today and back then, about the interaction between the researcher and the biographer, about differences between memory, experience and social reality, about different today’s perspectives on childhood/youth back then etc. cannot even be posed at all within this paradigm.

Bourdieu (1990) speaks of a ‘biographical illusion’ when ‘life history’ is spoken of in the context of biographical research – without differentiating between experienced life history and life history as narrated. “To produce a life history or to consider life as a history, that is, as a coherent narrative of a significant and directed sequence of events, is perhaps to conform to a rhetorical illusion, to the common representation of existence that a whole literary tradition has always and still continues to reinforce” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 2). Bourdieu is of

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3 In the following the person whose biography is being considered is designated the “biographer”, i.e. the “bearer of the biography”.
the opinion that the proper name as an arbitrary imposition is the only thing that holds an identity together. As an institution it is extracted from changes and from place and time. It guarantees the constancy of a person through all social and biological changes and at the same time conveys no properties. “So the proper name is the support (one would be tempted to say the substance) of social identity (what is called l’état civil in French), that is the support of the set of properties (nationality, sex, age, etc.) attached to persons to whom the civil law associates legal effects, which are instituted under the appearance of a mere record by the acts of social identity” (Bourdieu, 1990, pp. 3-4).

If, however, one assumes that with their plans, intentions and interests people (can) relate consciously to themselves and their world (cf. Holzkamp, 1985, 1993; Markard, 2009), every lived biography also displays an internal consistency that can be reconstructed. This does not happen – as elaborated by Rosenthal – in the form of a Gestalt presented, but also not only – as stated by Bourdieu – by means of a proper name. As ‘centers of intentionality’ subjects relate to themselves and the world and do not confront it in a neutral manner. All actions are related to conditions but that does not mean they are caused by them: For people (objective) conditions are significant as an ensemble of opportunities to act and obstacles. Against this backdrop, in Critical Psychology ‘premises’ are understood to be meanings subjectively accentuated in accordance with the interests and needs of the individual. In subject-scientific (biographical) research it is accordingly a matter of working out or reconstructing premises-reasons-connections, more concisely, rationales. It follows that life is not a history, not a sequence of “cause (immediate or final) and effect between successive states“ (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 2). But biographical events are also not – as stated by him – mere “investments and moves in social space, or more precisely, in the different successive states of the distribution structure of the different types of capital which are in play in the field considered.” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 6).

By contrast, the “life history being narrated” is really “a history” – namely one about one’s (own) life as experienced. As with all impromptu narratives it is subject, according to Schütze (1976), to various ‘narrative constraints’ (cf. also Rosenthal, 1995, 2005). These are rules for narrating facts, events, circumstances, sequences, which must at the very least be observed if the listener(s) is/are supposed to be able to understand and comprehend them. Schütze distinguishes the ‘Gestalt closure constraint’, the ‘condensation constraint’ and ‘detailing constraint’. A story, which has been started, is supposed to be told to the end with all the necessary details. Since the time available to tell the story is not the same as that available for experiencing the corresponding episode in life, in every narrative it is a matter of condensing the experience to the essential, subjectively significant details. In addition, it is not
sufficient to mention just key points of the earlier events and list them one after the other. References, relationships and, where appropriate, people must be introduced, which are necessary in order to able to organize the story so the listener can understand it.

Which sequences from the experienced biography are told in the survey situation, which are left out, abridged or presented in great detail can be rooted in the setting of the interview, in the interaction with and the perceived closeness to/distance from the interviewer and/or the life situation from which the interviewee’s previous life is being narrated and reflected. The location of the interview, the interviewer with her social position and situation (gender, ethnicity, class, etc.), which may mean a distance from/closeness to the interviewee, and knowledge/lack of knowledge of research interests of the interviewer may be related to the emphases the interviewee focuses on when telling her life history. The manner in which each life episode is reported, narrated or presented may also be connected with current issues in the life of the interviewee at the time of the interview. This becomes especially evident in the extent to which the biographer goes into detail, in what she starts and ends with, and the selection of topics, which are addressed or avoided. Which biographical sequence is structured more as a report, as a narrative or as an argument may provide information about what (emotional) significance the sequence has for the biographer and what its connection is with the complete story (on this cf. also Rosenthal, 1995, 2005).

The ‘experienced biography’ can – as presented in the following paragraphs – be analyzed in terms of the thematic fields of biographical learning, the biographical process and historical change, which leaves ‘traces’ in every life history.

2. Theoretical horizon: Biographical learning

Learning is a central element of everyday life. What is special about biographical learning is that it is discontinuous; “it blends events from the far past with later and present ones, and it combines apparently far-flung and varied contents into one meaningful complex” (Schulze, 1985, p. 46). Biographical learning processes are – according to Schulze – complex, long-term and establish a connection between the learning history of the human species and the learning processes of single individuals.

Biographical learning processes are often triggered by experienced contradictions and irritations. These can be environmental changes, political upheavals and technological achievements just as much as accidents or the loss of important attachment figures. Generally speaking, it is a matter of ruptures in
the established order, which has been accepted as valid – the subject is unable to progress further using her previous strategies for coping with life, activities or routines. With Holzkamp (1993) learning is conceived as an opportunity to open up or unlock the world and thus to extend one’s subjective ability to act. This learning world insight is based on the general interest of the human being in gaining control over her living conditions. This extension of control through learning is accompanied by an increase in subjective quality of life. The dominating reason for learning world insight lies in overcoming the individual subjective restrictions on control and living opportunities.

In his learning theory Holzkamp (1993) refers to learning processes ‘in general’ without explicitly formulating a biographical perspective. Rather he is concerned with developing a subject-scientific learning theory through a confrontation with traditional learning theories; a theory that proceeds from the subject who wants to learn with her motives and interests. He analyses individual learning processes, which arise because of a problem regarding action. By this is meant exactly those irritations, ruptures, discrepancies, conflicts, happenings mentioned above, the resolution of which is not possible through normal action because of contradictions, obstacles or dilemmas. Therefore a “learning loop” is hived off from the original problem and a learning action is incorporated.

In contrast, under biographical perspective Schulze (2005) conceives what is called a ‘biographical learning field’, which is also characterized less by a goal aspired to than by a problem, a sustained topic encompassing offers and resistances from the living environments. “It emerges, grows, stagnates, shrinks, extends itself or relocates itself. It is interrupted, pushed to one side and reactivated” (Schulze, 2005, p. 47). It is embedded in comprehensive collective learning fields, which may stand in a certain hierarchy to one another, one which can change, they may compete with one another or be linked in the course of life. Some can only be discerned temporarily in the life history, others dominate the entire life history and are linked, for example, to occupation, special commitment or similar things. “A biographical learning field is always something additional. It floats on the surface of normal life like an oil stain or an oil slick, fed by the learner’s energy, which flows into the field, and borne by the tension, which builds up again and again in the interaction with certain contents. The interaction is continually interrupted by necessary or diversionary transactions and their contents include only a limited segment of the social reality in which the individual exists” (Schulze, 2005, p. 55). Biographical learning processes are integrated and, at the same time, integrating learning processes which accumulate a wide variety of everyday learning processes.

In addition to the processing of contents from the biographical learning fields in every life there is the matter of organizing everyday routines and
securing a living, processes which in turn are accompanied by countless learning processes.

Holzkamp distinguishes fundamentally between ‘incidental learning’, which accompanies more or less any action, and ‘intentional learning’, which occurs as a result of a focused action mediated with a problem. Intentional learning is present “when the learning intention also includes gaining a permanence that goes beyond the particular situation and the accumulation of what is learned, i.e. what is acquired is not immediately lost again, but remains transsituationally in such a way that it can now be used in future at this new level” (Holzkamp, 1993, p. 183).

The reasons for learning can be of an expansive or a defensive nature. Expansive reasons for learning are present when for the subject “in view of a certain learning problem the inner connection between the learning information about the world, the expansion of control and increased quality of life can directly be experienced or expected” (Holzkamp, 1993, p. 190). Thus through learning the subject gains information about the real contexts of meaning. Defensive reasons for learning are present when the subject turns to a learning topic in order to ward off a threat to her quality of life and imminent limitations on her opportunities to act. The subject feels justifiably forced to learn because she has to reckon with an adverse effect on her quality of life if she refuses or neglects to learn.

The actual learning actions – whether they are a result of expansive or defensive reasons for learning – derive from the particular learning topic, i.e. from the contradictory social meanings, which as a rule are laden with conflict. The tools used here are the product of social labor. “Methodologically speaking, social meanings are therefore not just names that signify different things; they articulate simultaneously specific social, political and epistemological standpoints, including the particular consciousness of the subjects concerning their particular position in society” (Marvakis & Schraube, 2016, p. 207). Therefore learning also always means grappling with socially contested meanings and thus with contradictions, struggles, standpoints and collective conflicts.

Learning always happens through participation in social practices, which are complex and contested (cf. Marvakis & Schraube, 2016). The relationship of biographical learning and institutionalized learning plays an important role in this context. Institutionalized, collective learning fields “bundle together a large number of individual learning processes and subordinate them to guidance, but also control, monitoring and evaluation through teaching, in which learning processes already carried out by other members of society are preserved, transmitted, compressed and consolidated” (Schulze, 2005, p. 50). The question
whether there is a match between the individual learning fields and the institutionalized learning fields is an open field for discussion. According to Holzkamp, it is a matter of whether the subject also wants to learn, what she is supposed to learn and what she can do within an institutional framework. However, collective learning fields do not necessarily need to be institutionalized, they can also be (sub) cultures, certain places, districts or virtual and real spaces.

Through learning it is not only possible to change and extend behavioral and imaginative options of individual people but also those of a group of people or even those of humanity as a whole. "The question of the universal significance of individual learning is the supra-individual effect of individual learning processes: Does the learner personally adopt just one of the many options already preformed in the collective universes, or does he/she add a new one? That is the question" (Schulze, 2005, p. 60). However, which individual learning processes are accumulated in collective learning fields is contingent on continuous social processes of negotiation. In particular, which learning contents have their place in institutionalized learning fields is embedded in concrete relationships of power and domination with specific interests, which have to be analyzed in each case.

Biographical learning is not planned in advance, but forms an understandable context, which can only be linked and restructured in retrospect, i.e. by means of reconstruction and reflection. This continuous process of self-reflection as part of biographical learning also incorporates the collective history, which involves the individual history. Biographical learning processes can only be captured and reconstructed by memory. “But how can we know whether a behavior is changed on a lasting basis? During the process it is difficult to judge, particularly when it stretches over many years. Only when the change becomes clearly evident and the result has found its overt expression in the life history, i.e. only in retrospect is it possible to review the entire process” (Schulze, 2005, p. 46).

Accordingly, from the standpoint of the subject ‘education’ can be defined as “all processes of the reflexive formation of experience and knowledge, which make up the life history of this particular concrete subject. In this formation process cultural and social patterns of experience are actively processed and formed and transformed in a particular manner in each case into a ‘structure of biographical knowledge’” (Dausien, 2001, p. 70).

3. Theoretical horizon: The biographical process

The progress of the entire biographical process is in itself a central topic in biographical research. In this context the question has to be answered, at what
time a person can shape her biography herself in the first place and which additional prerequisites must at least be achieved in the ontogenesis. Undergoing these biographical processes can be comprehended in very different ways from a developmental psychological perspective – as a series of developmental crises with Erikson (1973), as developmental tasks with Havighurst (1972) or as the processing of critical life situations with Filipp (1981), to name just a few examples. Fundamentally, ontogenesis can be understood as a series of phases which supersede one another, of steps which build on each other or as maturation, i.e. as following an internal program largely without external influences – depending on the conception of humanity and the theoretical school (cf. Montada, 2002). Following Holzkamp a general criticism of this developmental psychological perspective applies, that, on the one hand, it conceives of the development of the child as it were “isolated from its real social reference to the world and to itself” (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 498) and, on the other hand, leaves out what is called the dual aspect of ontogenesis in research. ‘Dual aspect’ means: First there is childhood as lived and experienced by the child, and then there is ‘childhood’ as interpreted from the standpoint of the adult as an earlier phase of life but one which still has significance for ‘adult life’. “Then again, ontogenetic personal development is to be analyzed additionally from the standpoint of the subject affected as in each case my childhood/youth, i.e. as the early period of my biography, which will characterize me as long as I live and which will have an influence on my current opportunities for action and life” (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 497).

For the analysis of biographies, it does, of course, make a difference which conception of humanity and which theory of ontogenesis the research is based on, or in a nutshell: what life is all about. Holzkamp places the human need for improvement of living conditions and extension of control through participation in the social process of sustainment of life – which appears subjectively in the event of corresponding obstacles - at the center of ontogenetic development. Development of the human individual always encompasses “the resolution of developmental contradictions with, in each case, a personal pole of contradiction and a situational pole of contradiction which is located in social conditions of life” (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 433). The impulse for further development is provided by “operative influence on objective social reality” (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 437) and by the corresponding resistances. It is precisely these objective conditions of life that are changed in the course of ontogenesis. The framework of control and life of small children is at first limited to everything that is near them, as a rule the domestic space. The radius becomes successively greater as a result of the increasing (motor and cognitive) skills and knowledge, which enable the child, on the one hand, to have experiences outside the domestic space and, on the
other, to submerge into ever more mediated semantic structures of her living environment – to the same extent the support required from the attachment figures/parents for social participation decreases. In the course of this, development occurs in confrontation with contradictions. Even if, at first, the child’s life and her opportunities for control and participation are limited to a relatively small sphere, nevertheless social conditions, relationships of power and domination intrude into this ‘private’ space. “The social relationships of oppression are not suspended at any time during ontogenesis, but are present for the child from his/her very first day, only initially just in a more or less non-specific form conditioned by the mode of contact to the world” (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 458). There are, for example, limitations on their opportunities to act, which attachment figures/parents are subject to, which at first also play a role for the children in the domestic sphere.4

Holzkamp distinguishes three types of process in ontogenesis: generalization of meaning, breach of immediacy and replication of the ability to act. “The sequence here does not imply a chronological determination of when, at what age, each of the following process types will be achieved. Nor do they contain ideas any stages or phases of development determining the overall development, which are temporally predictable from one another. Ultimately, it is not even specified here that the course of development of each prior process type has to be finally completed before the next process type can begin” (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 424). However, it follows logically that the sequence of the process types is irreversible because they build upon one another.

When the child is born, she first goes through a sort of preliminary stage before she starts to gain orientation – with the initial goal of elementary satisfaction of her needs and, subsequently, of expanding her framework of control. The term ‘generalization of meaning’ implies, that the ‘were-made-for’-ness of objects is understood and the utility value of the object is realized. It must be understood that the chair was ‘made’ in a historico-social process in order to be sat upon, the toothbrush in order to clean one’s teeth, and the mop in order to clean the floor. With respect to interpersonal relations the child must understand the social intentionality of human interactions and learn to realize them. Through this the relationship between child and adult gains an interactive level. The child understands that adults consciously relate to the world and themselves with plans and goals. In this way she gains the opportunity to consciously influence the intentions of the adult herself. The first yardsticks for evaluating the activity of adults are developed. The child’s vulnerability is reduced by the possibility of social influence. “The child draws a picture ‘for’ his father, with bricks he builds a house that the others should look at and find good; this includes the practical

4 Cf. on this Markard (2018) on childhood in this issue of ARCP.
insight that one can influence the intentions of others with reference to one’s own control of conditions/satisfaction of needs by such ‘efforts’. In accordance with the new level of reciprocity of social intentionality it also in this way becomes comprehensible, that others in the living environment of the child also do things for the others. One adult bake a cake for the others, repairs the television set so that ‘we’ can all watch the Muppet Show again; (…) When the cake is on the table or the television is ‘running’ again, the others are happy, and therefore I am also happy about this” (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 451). In this phase the development of the child depends initially very strongly on the supportive measures of the attachment figures/parents. However, the child is increasingly involved into everyday things as soon as she deals properly with the things in her living environment and understands that the adults not only use the objects in accordance with their “were-made-for”-ness, but also their use is intentional, that the adults are pursuing a purpose with them. The criteria for evaluating the activities of adults continue to be refined in the child.

Through this expansion of the living environment the opportunity arises, analogous to the process type ‘breaching the immediacy’, of comprehending the mediatedness of opportunities for human action. Experiencing the relationship of opportunities and obstacles, and thus the limitedness of opportunities for control, by social structure becomes more present. It is a matter of recognizing that existence is not the product of individual activity, but is a result of “social functional interaction” (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 489). Social structures become particularly present with entry into social institutions such as kindergarten and/or school. The mediatedness of human existence within social realms of possibility then becomes particularly tangible (and comprehensible). The teacher, for example, invokes the school rules and cannot simply do with the pupils what she – and possibly all of them – would really like to do. Also the pupils cannot simply go home without any consequences because they have no interest in the content of a lesson. School attendance is compulsory.

Only the experience of herself as a center of intentionality, one which itself relates “to the world and itself consciously with intentions, plans and resolutions” (Holzkamp, 1993, p. 21) makes conscious behavior with reference to social conditions possible and thus the conscious creation of one’s own biography. Only with the understanding of the total social mediatedness of one’s own existence does development lead to the process type replication of the ability to act, which lasts a whole lifetime. With the aid of the analytical category ‘restrictive vs. generalized capacity to act’, which was outlined above, it is possible from this process type to break down all actions, decisions and learning processes.
4. Theoretical horizon: The concrete living environment and the social space

In every biography one learns a great deal about the social milieu and the socialization and living conditions of a person. It is possible to gain an insight into the transformations of the social general – such as gender, ethnicity, age group, nationality, religion – into the specific general, into the concrete living environment. Under ‘particular general’ Schulze (2002) combines the insights which one acquires through biographical research into the ‘small living environments’, i.e. into the social milieu of families, of a cultural minority, of an occupational group, of an association, of a community etc. This living environment “must not be misunderstood as a ‘topos’, as a specific place which is qualitatively distinct from other localities or segments of life. The living environment is a set of pre-conscious, semi-conscious orientations and structures, which may potentially be brought to full consciousness, a ‘knowledge resource’ which may not necessarily be reflexively available, which a social actor can access in order to move without problems in his everyday life” (Alheit, 1992, p. 44). In biographical narratives it is not just a matter of a sober description of the living environments, but also always of an evaluation and the meaning these have for the subject. “The living environments present themselves simultaneously together with their undertones and overtones, together with their fears and expectations, the opinions, histories and fantasies, the secrets and promises, the resistances and forces which have accumulated in them and coalesced with them” (Schulze, 2002, p.142). In every biography there are goals aspired to, well thought-out actions, ideas generally collectively shared about a ‘normal biography’ and ideas about a ‘good life’ which are, as a rule, specific to one’s gender, class, culture, and era, which one grapples with – and which, in the final analysis, have to be determined new for each person. Each living environment appears in a biography as a dynamic process in which the subject tries to get out of it, to change it, is rejected, is attracted by others. Demotion, promotion, gain, loss, impotence, power are topics to be found in biographies. In addition, in every life there are experiences, decisions taken by other people, which may have far-reaching consequences for one’s own life. Therefore it is always possible to work out a difference between the possible and the real biography. Under the possible biography, can be conceived everything which would basically have been possible for the concrete person in her particular position, situation, time and thus in her living environment.

The experiences of the biographer must be analyzed within the framework of biographical research by attempting to reconstruct precisely this mediation relationship between the immediate living environment where the experiences are made, and the social system which, in turn, structures the living environment.
“The unclarity of social structures certainly does not now mean that it is impossible to experience them; instead it only means that experiences, insofar as they are not analyzed for these moments, are being analyzed incompletely and wrongly. Social structures inevitably ‘intrude’ into the direct experiences of individuals in the living environment” (Markard, 2009, p. 87).

5. Theoretical horizon: Historical change

Biographies contain information about the change in the situation of an individual person in the changing human society. A biography always starts at a particular point in time in history where there are ways of life and living conditions that are typical of the time. Among these are technological achievements just as much as the specific contents and topics that preoccupy people. “Biographical developments themselves change with the historically modified ‘learning tasks’; in the context of concrete biographies structure and emergence do not form a ‘pre-stabilized harmony’, but an area of tension which alters the biography” (Alheit, 1990, p. 28). Concrete biographies are also always positioned in historico-social space with regard to dimensions of social order and difference such as class, ethnicity, gender, cultural affiliation and sexual orientation (cf. Dausien, 1996, 2001). Ways of life and conditions of socialization, which are typical of the time period, are described and commented on.

Schulze (2002) has worked out three constellations in which historical change can appear in biographies: Firstly, in the manner in which the biographer moves in historical space and attempts to get her bearings within it, such as, for example, how she tries to emancipate herself from the dominant conditions, acquiesces to them, comments on them, criticizes them or compares them to the current conditions at the time of the data collection. Secondly, it is not a rare occurrence in biographies that ‘history’ forces its way into individual biographies. Revolutionary historical processes, a dictatorship, a decree, a political decision, war, persecution etc. suddenly play a large role in the living environment and the subject must respond and find a way to deal with it. Thirdly, there are changes affecting all living environments such as globalization, modernization, technical achievements etc. which bring profound changes, a change in the spaces of opportunity and the restrictions on opportunity.

In the following chapter we introduce the fictional biography of Amal, which is intended to serve as a clarification of these theoretical horizons. It will

5 Unfortunately, at the time of writing no material from a subject-scientific biographical research project is available. This fictional biography is solely intended as an illustration; it is neither exhaustive, nor does it encompass all possible hypotheses and
become clear that these levels are not absolutely distinct, but they do accentuate relevant aspects.

III. Case study: Amal

If the subject-scientific biographical research with Amal had taken place in reality, it had to be oriented on the following two overarching methodological requirements (cf. Allespach & Held, 2015).

1. Technical versus emancipatory relevance of social-scientific research:

Referring to Jürgen Habermas Holzkamp (1970) distinguishes between the 'technical' and the 'emancipatory relevance' of psychological research. Compared with the technical (rulers’) interest in the control of social processes “a piece of research is relevant for emancipation insofar as is contributes to the self-enlightenment of the person about his social dependencies” (Holzkamp 1970) and to liberation from them. The object of research is not the subject herself, but rather the world as the subject experiences it. “For this reason subject-scientific statements are not statements about people, let alone classifications of people (e.g. as lacking in concentration, see above), but statements about experienced – and potentially generalizable – opportunities to act and limitations on action” (Markard, 2000, par. 18).

2. Co-researcher principle:

People are not researched, instead they stand alongside the researcher on the research side. They are conceived of in the research process as “co-researchers” (Markard, 2000, par. 29): “This principle of participation of those concerned in the research project (prescribed for all more specific methodological principles) highlights a central difference of the subject-scientific approach compared with variable psychological control-scientific procedures: Subject-scientific categories, theories and methods are not theories, methods etc. about those concerned, but for those concerned” (Holzkamp, 1985, pp. 543). The interpretations. All details, persons and institutions are fictitious: The “fiction” has been constructed to be close to what the author observed while executing the profession of a street worker working with teenagers, their mothers and daughters. In countless situations, discussions, incidents, parent interviews and excursions the author experienced the multifaceted collective problems of women who grow up in Arab communities in a large German city.
involvement of the co-researchers in the processes of evaluating and interpreting the data is thus included and is an essential part of the research setting.

In the following remarks on the fictional biography of Amal, however, the possible interpretations and the directions that can be explored further are merely described and interpreted from the standpoint of the equally fictional researcher. These are extracts from possible observation protocols, memos, paraphrases of interview sequences, and initial interpretations. The potential opinion of the co-researcher Amal, her opinion of the remarks and her own interpretations have not been presented or invented for pragmatic reasons. The goal and aspiration of this case study focuses on illustrating the theoretical horizons rather than demonstrating the entire research process.

At the time of the interview Amal is 35 years old, mother of four children and divorced. She was born and grew up in a large German city.

“When they were themselves teenagers, Amal’s grandparents were expelled from an Arab country where their ancestors had lived from agriculture for generations. Her parents grew up in a refugee camp in a neighboring country, got married there and finally migrated to Germany.

“At the age of 17 Amal herself was married to Ali, who at that time was 35 years old. In the first years Amal made a great effort to settle into ‘married life’ with Ali and to find ‘happiness’ there. In the course of the years her suspicions that Ali was cheating on her were corroborated. There was a big crisis in her marriage. Through female friends she got to know a women’s center with a very easily accessible psycho-social counseling service. With the support of the counselors she finally separated from her husband.

“Today Amal is divorced, a single mother and works in an emergency shelter for refugees as an office assistant. In addition to her office work she interprets interviews between the non-Arabic-speaking social workers and the Arabic-speaking refugees.”

1. Analytical horizon: The individual subject/the narrated life history

a) Setting of data collection:

Amal reconstructed her biography in a biographical interview carried out by a woman with Western, European female socialization, who grew up in Germany and does not have a migrant background.

“I was looking for contact with Muslim women living in Germany through the women’s center which, by chance, Amal was also frequenting regularly. For a foundation I am carrying out a study on ‘the living environments of Muslim women in Germany’. I myself studied Islamic Studies and during this course I spent some longer periods researching in
various Arab countries. I disclosed this in the preliminary discussions before the interview and introduced myself and my project. (...) Amal consented to the interview. Her open manner of speaking about these very private thoughts, decisions and doubts in the various phases of her life suggests that she considers me, on the one hand, a person that she can trust to be careful with her biography and, on the other, that I have sufficient prior knowledge about Arab culture, religious and cultural rituals and differences in different countries in order to be able to categorize and understand her problems, difficulties, doubts and fears appropriately. Also the fact that I have been socialized as a woman myself makes access easier to Amal’s world, which is permeated by traditional role models, separation of the sexes and patriarchal family structures. At the same time, however, she also sees me as a person who is clearly outside her community, one who knows this community abut, is not part of it. I have the impression that, on the one hand, this makes it easier for her to speak openly about her conflict and doubts within the community but, on the other, it also inhibits her at the start of the interview from ‘westernizing’ her doubts and fear and thus to forgetting or denying or openly broaching as an issue the origin/home of her grandparents, something we do then talk about in the course of the interview.”

The life history would presumably have had another emphasis if the interview had been conducted by Muslim, older/younger or transsexual man who had been socialized in the West, or a Muslim, veil-wearing woman who had only been living in Germany for a short time, or a young girl who had been socialized in the west freshly graduated from university without prior experience with and in Arab Muslim and working-class living environments. Many different constellations could be constructed, inter alia along the social dimensions gender, ethnicity, culture or class and corresponding to these hypotheses could be formed about possible emphases and topics which are not or cannot be addressed without inhibitions or only with great effort in order against the background of these scenarios to work out the specifics of the constellation in which the biography was actually reconstructed.

b) Current living situation:

Amal is narrating her biography not only in a specific situation, but also from a current living situation.

“Amal is right at the start of her independent life as a divorced single working woman with four children. The ‘great catastrophes’ have not happened, which she had been very afraid of for years and which were the reason why for a long time she had not even dared to consider leaving her husband. Many things are still unfamiliar; in many things she is uncertain
and regularly seeks support in the women's center with its psycho-social support service. But she feels more and more comfortable in her 'new life'."

From this perspective she reconstructs her former life. Her narration of her life with its thematic emphases would presumably have looked different if she had not found work so quickly in the emergency shelter for refugees, if her husband had refused to pay maintenance or had even wanted to take away her children, if the family court had had to be called in, if her family had not accepted her decision or had threatened her with violence, if as a result she had had to seek protection in a women’s refuge, if the women’s center had suddenly been closed because of economy measures etc.

2. Analytical horizon: Biographical learning

Various learning fields can be detected here.

"In Amal’s biography there is one very dominant cultural theme, a learning field which runs through her whole biography. It involves the role of a Muslim Arab woman, the German-born daughter of traditional parents, who is seeking to liberate herself from her foreignness resulting from a traditionally assigned role with a very rigid strong and powerful 'normal biography' without losing her cultural affiliation in this process. How can a life in the diaspora/in exile look like – between adaptation to values and traditions of the 'new home', 'the country where her family found asylum', and resistance through conservation of traditions and customs from her country of origin.

"In addition to this there is a social theme, a learning field which involves relations between the sexes. From a marriage molded by patriarchal family structures and sex role models, a marriage which was unsatisfactory for both partners, Amal is attempting to find a way out and to build herself a more self-sufficient and independent life.

"A further learning field subordinate to both of these arises from her low level of (formal) education. Amal does not have a school diploma. As a result of her lack of formal educational qualifications, she is initially denied the opportunity to start an apprenticeship or traineeship, to pursue a job with correspondingly better pay and with personal fulfillment. Together with the counselors from the women’s center she is developing and trying out (in the form of internships) possibilities of finding a wage-paying job which she can do without formal qualifications, one which corresponds to her interests and enables her to participate in social life.

"This is followed by the learning field 'single working mother' who from now on has to perform not only the necessary reproductive work but also has to work as a wage laborer. Responsibilities in the family have to be arranged differently. (...)"
“In Amal’s living environment numerous resistances can be detected for the learning fields, but also many resources. The strict culturally mediated ideas about marriage, the family and the allocation of sex roles, which stand above the individual and her needs, have not constituted a breeding ground for her movements to free herself from her marriage for a long time. Only when through a friend she meets ‘like-minded’ women in the women’s center and can express her suffering, be heard and receive support for her efforts, can the learning field develop. Many small learning processes can take place now:

“This women’s center with its psycho-social support service can be recognized as a collective learning field. It matches Amal’s learning fields very well.

“Amal is not the only woman in her neighborhood/city facing these problems. The operators of the women’s center/the city administration have recognized this and offer support and space for precisely these learning fields, which in their opinion can offer support to women in similar circumstances.”

3. Analytical horizon: The biographical process

With reference to her biographical process the following aspects can be mapped out:

“In Amal’s biography the collectively shared ideas about a ‘normal biography’ specific to her culture and sex are very dominant. At first she fits in, tries to find the ‘happiness promised to her’ and strives to be a good daughter, wife and later mother.”

Early childhood:

"Amal’s childhood takes place to a great extent in the family/in the home. She was born into a very traditional family with patriarchal family structures. She has ten brothers and sisters, five older sisters, two younger sisters and three younger brothers. In the family’s three-bedroom apartment there was a bedroom for her parents, a living room, a room for her brothers and she shared one with her sisters. In Amal’s memory her mother was almost always at home. Amal can remember that when she was a small child, her mother cooked herself and did the shopping for the whole family and left the house to visit friends and relatives. Later her older sisters took over the cooking and shopping. Her mother developed backache and pains in her joints, which got worse and worse in the course of the years and only left the house very reluctantly. From a certain point onward she spent almost the whole day in the living room on the couch, received visits from her older daughters who were already married along with her grandchildren, watched Arabic-language television programs and
drank tea. Often other women from the neighborhood came to visit. Her father was rarely at home. He worked in a large bakery and had to leave the house very early in the morning while everybody was still asleep. After finishing work he regularly visited a café with his friends before coming home exhausted, ate a small snack, played a bit with the children and went to bed early. (..)

School days:
"Also entering school as a social institution which would potentially be better suited than the domestic space/family for experiencing the mediatedness of human existence can hardly be recognized or perceived by Amal as such. This would also have been accompanied by the opportunity to expand her subjective control over social conditions. Even in school she spends most of her time with members of her family. She is so strongly involved in family life with its allocation of roles and tasks that school, learning, education a school diploma and later an apprenticeship or traineeship collide too violently with the strict clear and powerful ‘normal biography’ of an Arab Muslim woman, which is lived in her family and for which she receives social recognition: As a girl Amal was expected to come home immediately after school and stay there. In school she was not a particularly good pupil. However, she loved going to school because she could meet her girlfriends there. Her best school friends were her cousin and the daughter of a friend of her mother’s who both joined her class. By contrast her brothers were mostly sent out again immediately after school into the courtyard to play football, to let off steam. (..)"

Engagement and marriage:
"Only when she became engaged to Ali was she allowed to leave the house in the afternoon in the company of her fiancé. The marriage was arranged by both families. She and Ali agreed. At that time Ali was 35 and was an employee by a second-hand car dealer. She was 17 and had just left school – but without a school diploma. The period of the engagement was the most pleasant time of her life. Everything changed. She got recognition from other women; Ali gave her expensive presents and took her around the city. She alone decided how the apartment should be furnished, her wedding dress was beautiful, many envied her. The wedding itself was a lavish feast, for a whole day she was the centre of attention, like a ‘real princess’ (..)"

Important events/experience:
"A girlfriend took her to the women’s center which was to become an important support for her future life, but at that time it had absolutely no
significance for her. Only later does she resort to the women’s center and its counseling service and receives support from other women in similar situations and from the professional counselors. She begins to reflect on her life and confronted with other lifestyles she eventually decides to confront the conditions, which limit her and demean her so strongly. Above all, this is the confrontation with ideas about family, marriage, relations between the sexes, the dominant standard ideas and role models.”

4. Analytical horizon: The concrete living environment and the social space

Through Amal’s life narrative we receive a glimpse into various living environments.

“First of all, we learn a great deal about the everyday life of a family in Germany whose ancestors come from an Arab country (“Well with us, with us in such an Arab family there are different rules than with the Germans”), what is called a ‘cultural minority’: In Amal’s memory there was always a lot of things happening at home, it was noisy, there was lots of laughter, scolding and gossip. There was lots of cooking, baking, cleaning and tidying; beds were made and mattresses laid on the floor when relatives stayed for the night. As her sisters gradually got married and moved out, she took on more responsibility for the household and her younger brothers and sisters and nephews and nieces, who often came to visit. (…)

Secondly, we learn a great deal about everyday married life in an arranged marriage – the loyalties and the niches: She experienced her first discrepancy after the wedding when the whole hustle and bustle and the attention were over. Probably unconsciously, she had assumed that things would continue like that, that this was the start of a wonderful married life. But often Ali stayed away in the evenings with his friends in the café. She was at home on her own, looked at a lot of television, cleaned the apartment until it sparkled and tried to keep Ali longer at home by always cooking new meals. Only the birth of her first son regained for her again the recognition she had experienced at the wedding. She got lots of visitors, Ali doted on the little boy and stayed home in the evening more frequently. She had a lot to do looking after the baby. After having and raising three children – two boys and a girl – in the course of the years, the birth of her last daughter was not without problems. It was clear that she would not be able to bear any more children. After each birth Ali had again been at home more frequently at first, particularly at the weekends he looked after the kids a lot and spent a lot of time especially with the boys. After the birth of her last child, however, the amount of time he spent at home grew less again, in the evenings he often did not come home until
very late. For some time she had suspected that there was another woman behind this. There were indications – strange perfume on his clothes, the frequent business phone calls when he left the room; in a funny way he was much more attentive to her. Frequently he brought her small presents or took her in his arms. She did not dare to talk to him about it, her fear of the ‘truth’ was too great. She was certain he would not leave her, he was too attached to his children and his sense of duty and his fear of disappointing his and her families were too great. (…) Thirdly, we receive a glimpse of everyday life in an urban housing development, what is called ‘social housing’, and into the family life of a working-class family in the city with all its joys, worries and difficulties: Only years later – in the meantime she was going regularly in the mornings to a women’s center that had opened on the housing estate – did the latent conflict with Ali come to a boil again. A girlfriend had taken her there. Mostly she met with other women there for breakfast while the children were at school or in the kindergarten. One morning a friend told her that she had seen Ali with another woman, on very intimate terms in a café. (…)"

5. Analytical horizon: Historical change

There is a series of global historical events that Amal has to relate or which her ancestors had to relate and which have consequences for Amal’s life.

“Amal was born in Germany as the daughter of parents who themselves were born in a refugee center in an Arab country: The circumstances of her ancestors’ expulsion is one such “historical event” which is of significance in Amal’s biography to this day and to which she has to relate. There is a collective narrative about this expulsion. It followed a war, a so-called ‘man-made disaster’. Her parents’ migration to Germany was not, or was only partly voluntary. Admittedly, it was her parents’ decision to come to Germany, but the fact that they had to decide at all where they could or wanted to live in future and that this ‘freedom to decide’ was very narrowly limited because of their refugee status is connected with the expulsion of her grandparents.”

“Her grandparents were – like very many other people from this region – expelled violently from their country of origin because another nationality claimed to their country and seized it. Both families, which came from the same village, were made homeless from one day to the next and had at first to move into a provisional refugee camp – within sight of their house, which they were not allowed to enter any more. At first all the families in the refugee camp assumed, that it would be a temporary situation and that they would soon be able to return to their houses (…)"
"Further historical events which happened during her life were wars, massacres and dictatorships in the Middle and Far East as well as North Africa, which resulted in the flight of very many people. This happened precisely at the time Amal separated from Ali with the aid of the women’s center and was looking for a job. In Germany a large number of people were being sought who spoke Arabic and other languages from the war zones and crisis regions and/or were familiar with ‘the culture’. People with a migrant background from Muslim countries received a very different type of attention and social recognition in the ‘care professions’, but also in other jobs in shelters for refugees. This so-called ‘language and cultural competence’ suddenly became more important as a qualification for a job in this field than formal educational qualifications (but not for allocation to wage-scale groups and thus for pay). (...)"

"After gaining more and more confidence – first through small jobs as a home help and a child minder – and coming into discussion with other working women, she finally mustered up her courage and applied for an advertised job as an office clerk in an emergency shelter for refugees. She immediately clicked with the manager of the shelter. He accommodated her by splitting the advertised full-time position into a half-time position as an office assistant for Amal and a half-time office clerk position for another applicant with the appropriate formal qualifications."

IV. Conclusions regarding methodology and method for subject-scientific biographical research

Based on the analysis of the biography of the fictional person Amal an attempt has been made to illustrate which areas and horizons can be examined more closely to arrive at an understanding of the reasons why during the course of her life a person acted, felt and thought exactly the way she did in the situations described. It is very much dependent on the specifics of the concrete life narrative and of course on the research interest and questions which theoretical and/or analytical horizons have the greatest weight and promise to provide insights. They can be used as a theory-led grid which constitutes a sort of counter-balance in order to prevent one from becoming stuck on one direction or another, or trying, in the course of one’s own learning process, to grasp the biographical context, always taking the whole into consideration again and again.

There are a number of conclusions regarding the method arising from the theoretical horizons described above for subject-scientific biographical research, which can be formulated as theses:
1. The narrated life history:

Taking the first theoretical horizon outlined above into account, it is necessary to document the situation(s) in which the life history is being told in as much detail as possible. Especially illuminating for later analysis can be the researcher’s observations, irritations and reflections on the interaction experienced. These include the entire ‘common history’ from the first contact, the run-up to the narration of the life history and the editing, the discussions, remarks, interactions which take place before the recording device has been switched on and after it has been switched off. Field notes can be very helpful; they can then be transferred to and tidied up in memos/observation protocols. Information about current living conditions, the topics, problems and interests should also be recorded in written memos, particularly if these do not appear in the narrated life history. The researcher herself is part of this process in which the biography is reconstructed.

2. Biographical learning:

The problem with biographical learning processes is that, as a rule, they are not described as such by the biographers themselves. The attention is focused on the contents, the actions, the conclusions, the expansion of control gained, but not on the learning process itself. Schulze (2005) has attempted to identify learning processes based on the autobiography of Marc Chagall. “First of all, we must develop a sort of feel for process of the biographical process, for its characteristics, outlines and conditions. There are what could be called signatures resulting from our understanding of learning: ‘For the first time’ and ‘Again and again’ or ‘From then on’ or ‘Earlier...’ and ‘Later...’”. In Chagall’s biography we frequently encounter such designations of a particular point in time” (Schulze, 2005, p. 46). However, these are – as Schulze says – only indications of starting points, stages in the learning process, but it is important “that one is able to see the contours of the complete learning process as if it were a bird’s eye view of the course of river” (Schulze, 2005, p. 46).

In this phase of the data evaluation it is therefore a matter of looking at the entire narrated life history again and not losing oneself in analysis of details. What overarching topics are there which appear again and again in different manifestations and forms in the various phases of life? What differentiates the way they are handled? Is it possible to identify a "higher level" from which the biographer reacted to problems regarding action in later phases of her biography compared with earlier ones? What is new?
3. The biographical process:

Narratives about the biographer’s childhood should be particularly taken into account with regard to the process types formulated by Holzkamp. From what point is it possible for adolescents to ‘relate to’ in the first place? “For the adult his childhood is firstly a particular part of his earlier life which, on the one hand, he ‘remembers’ more or less well in various episodes and of which he ‘knows’, on the other hand, that he ‘developed’ there under certain living conditions and social-institutional relationships into what he is today: this ‘adult’. (...) In each case his childhood appears to him as something past and done with which one now no longer cannot change in any way” (Holzkamp, 1985, pp. 498). The reconstruction of the biography also contains the opportunity to develop a conscious relationship to one’s own childhood through narrating and jointly analyzing it. “To overcome the “hostility towards oneself” represented by restricted ability to act I must also gain a conscious relationship with my own childhood, i.e. I must be able to see through my modes of experiencing/coping during early childhood to the past premises of their subjective merit/functionality; and thus realize that I am no longer a child and, insofar as I attempt to cope with my problems in a ‘childish manner’, I am barring the way to objective and subjective improvement of my life circumstances” (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 506). However, a biographical interview is not a therapeutic process. Therefore, to what extent space can be given and taken for analysis of childhood in the research process and to what extent this is desired – by the biographer/co-researcher and the interviewer/researcher – must be negotiated in each individual case and is also dependent on the ‘gravity’ of the person’s childhood and on the biographical topics.

4. The living environment and the social space:

As a rule, additional interdisciplinary social analyses are necessary in this step. “In other words, one can understand a trajectory (that is, the social aging which is independent of the biological aging although it inevitably accompanies it) only on condition of having previously constructed the successive states of the field through which the trajectory has progressed. Thus, the collection of objective relations link the agent considered – at least in a certain number of pertinent states – to the collection of other agents engaged in the same field and facing the same realm of possibilities” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 6). Or to put it another way: “The necessity of this detour through the construction of space seems so evident as soon as it is stated – who would think to recall a trip without having an idea of the landscape in which it took place?” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 7). It can be helpful in
this step to develop hypotheses about a possible ‘normal biography’ – as close as possible to the data by systematically reworking the sequences where the biographer addresses the desires, fantasies and expectations others have for her and her life.

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How to generate evidence for the emergence of new psychological forms: Grundlegung der Psychologie and its contribution to method

Wolff-Michael Roth

Abstract
One of the important, but perhaps less appreciated, contributions of the Grundlegung der Psychologie is the articulation of a method suited to provide evidence for the emergence and dominance of qualitatively new psychological functions and behaviors. The method is grounded in materialist dialectics generally and the laws of (a) the transformation of quantity into quality (and vice versa) and (b) the interpenetration of opposites, specifically. The purpose of this article is to present the methodical precept, which may be unknown in the English-speaking world in the context of the description of (a) relevant and interesting psychological phenomena encountered by educators on a daily basis and (b) a catastrophe-theoretical (mathematical) approach for classifying morphogenetic events in the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. The discussion is concerned with highlighting some important theoretical and empirical issues.

Keywords
dialectical materialism, dialectical laws, quantity, quality, psychological functions, development vs. learning

In the opening section of Grundlegung der Psychologie, Klaus Holzkamp (1983) notes that one of the special contributions of Kritische Psychologie is its method, which is designed to establish a categorical basis for psychology that has paradigmatic character. Grounded in materialist dialectics, the method is adequate for working out the development of new dominant psychological
functions on the basis of, and overturning, previously dominant functions. The method is part of a project of providing psychology with a scientifically founded, categorical basis. Despite the important role that method plays in the Grundlegung, many studies under the influence of (social) constructivism do not attend to the requirements that psychological functions have to be plausible on cultural-historical grounds. Researchers therefore have to show accounts that attempt to show how qualitatively new psychological functions emerge on the grounds of old functions, which are sublated while the new psychological functions become dominant. The method can be traced historically from G. Hegel to F. Engels’ statement of the law of the transition of quantity into quality, a statement that was taken up directly in the social psychology of L. S. Vygotsky (1997a), who exhorted psychologists to write their own Das Kapital. The purpose of this contribution is to exhibit the methodical precepts of the Grundlegung in the context of two concrete vignettes where developmental phenomena are apparent. I begin by describing the two cases and then articulate basic principles of catastrophe theory, which constitutes a discourse and method that combines quantitative and qualitative reasoning into a system that can be used to classify morphogenetic phenomena, that is, phenomena where qualitatively new forms arise. I then articulate the five steps that a dialectical materialist account of the emergence of new psychological functions requires consistent with the methodical approach of the Grundlegung, steps that should be heeded by every qualitatively working researcher. This method of describing the emergence of new forms (morphogenesis) turns out to be a special (psychological) case within a more general catastrophe-theoretic discourse. I conclude by pointing out a specific lacuna in Holzkamp’s formulation, elaborate on the differences between a Hegelian and Spinozist Marxian approach to the study of psychological phenomena, and consider some implications for differentiating learning and development, the latter of which may be studied under the aegis of the zone of proximal development.

Quantitative and qualitative changes in psychological phenomena

In this section, I present two case studies in which the emergence of qualitatively new phenomena has been observed. The cases serve as the empirical backdrop and material for establishing the conceptual and methodical precepts for the study of morphogenetic phenomena, defined as phenomena in which quantitative variation leads to leaps to qualitatively new features.
Case 1: Reasoning on the balance beam

As part of a design experiment on teaching a unit on simple machines to 11–12-year-old elementary school students (6th and 7th grade), we interviewed students prior to beginning the unit. The interviews involved questions about equilibrating a balance beam. Given a weight hanging at a particular distance from the fulcrum, students were asked where a second, different weight should be hung on the opposite side to bring the beam into balance. The interviewer creates a balanced beam by placing 2-unit weights at 2-unit distances on each side of the device. The interviewer then holds the beam, removes one of the unit weights on the left side of the beam and asks the student (Aslam) where to place the remaining 1-unit weight to make the beam balanced (Figure 1.a). Aslam suggests moving the weight by one distance unit to the 3-unit distance from the fulcrum. He explains that because 2 weight units plus 2 distance units yields 4, which is the same that is obtained when a 1-unit weight is placed at a 3-unit distance. After another task of the same kind, the interviewer turns the balance beam around where there are no distance marks. He places the 2-unit weight at a certain distance and then asks Aslam where the 1-unit weight should be placed on the opposite side of the beam (Figure 1.b). The student suggests that because the 1-unit weight is only one half of the other, it should be placed twice as far (“because you doubled the weight”). The interviewer turns the beam around again, places a 2-unit weight at a 6-unit distance and asks, where to hang the 3-unit weight. Aslam suggests where the beam reads “4,” and, when asked, says, “You do three times that” while pointing to the 4-unit distance. He then suggests, “take away one-third” because the weight on the other side is “one-third less.”

In this situation, we observe an example of reasoning on the balance beam that Inhelder and Piaget (1958) theorized to be Level II-B in his developmental scheme, additive reasoning at the concrete operational level. In the second part of the session, Aslam was using both a multiplicative and a ratio scheme, the latter constituting reasoning at level III-A (formal operations) in Piaget’s developmental stage theory. In this theory, such developmental changes are the result of biological processes, including that of accommodation and assimilation. Whenever an existing (mental) schema is appropriate, new situations can be understood in terms of it and assimilated into a person’s set of experiences. When existing schemas are inappropriate, a conceptual reorganization may occur, an accommodation, such that the new situation can be assimilated to the newly created schema. Although the new schema clearly is qualitatively different, it appears to be another schema that increases the totality of schemas available to the person. Biologically, then, development has been reduced to a series of quantitative changes.
Figure 1. Two conditions for the balance beam task. a. The beam has equidistant markers and numbers. b. The beam has no markers.

The two processes may be understood as quantitative and qualitative changes in the historical trajectory of the person. Thus, assimilation is simply an accretion of a new situation and forms of knowledge to an existing class of experiences. Accommodation creates a qualitatively new class with the current experience as its first member. Thus, in the case of Aslam, Piagetian researchers might have described the observation as the spontaneous creation of the multiplicative and ratio schemes of reasoning, corresponding to the qualitative turnover from the concrete operational stage II-B to the formal operational stage III-A. Subsequent work within this paradigm formalized such changes in terms of the person’s information processing capacities. In one theory, development was theorized in terms of the mental short-term memory capacity thought to increase from 0 to about 8 or 9 units (Pascual-Leone, 1970). In this approach, changes are incremental, therefore quantitative, and the qualitative aspect of the stage-wise developmental theory had disappeared. In another theory, the stage-wise aspect was retained to explain the qualitative changes in behavior, whereas changes within a stage were theorized in terms of quantitative accretion of (mental) short-term storage space (Case, 1985). In all three approaches, development is treated in terms of the “maturation of the nervous system” (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958: 337), though these authors recognize that “the nervous system can do no more than determine the totality of possibilities and impossibilities at a given stage” (337). The physical and social environment has the function of accelerating or retarding the maturation rate.

A very different approach is taken in cultural-historical psychology, which adheres to the Marxian principle that “the essence of man … is the ensemble of societal relations” (Marx & Engels, 1978: 6). Thus, whereas human life certainly is a manifestation of biology, societal relations (culture) are the origin of what makes humans different from other animals (Vygotsky, 1997b). Therefore, qualitative changes in human behavior are not merely biological, though
necessarily enabled by them. Instead, when a person—in Vygotsky’s discussion, virtually always children generally accompanied by teachers or more capable peers—engages in joint labor (behavior) with another person, then that relation may later show up as the individual labor (behavior). Thus, when Vygotsky writes about the growth of logical memory, he points out that there are not only quantitative changes, but also qualitative changes of the function of remembering in terms of “its composition, structure, and method of action” (Vygotsky, 1998: 98). The joint labor provides for a zone of proximal development, where qualitatively new forms of acting arise out of participation in some task. Participation in the relation and individual contributions to joint actions necessarily are at the person’s current developmental levels; but that participation provides for a changeover to a qualitatively new level. Importantly, whereas changes prior to the developmental change were incremental, development itself is characterized as a qualitative change, a transition between qualitatively different forms of behavior. Thus, following the changeover, subsequent incremental change will take a very different form from that which had taken place prior to the qualitative leap. It is therefore important to differentiate between cumulative, quantitative change within a form of behavior and transformative and revolutionary change that leads from a first to a second, qualitatively different form of behavior.

Case 2: Revolution of teaching

A well-researched area of change is referred to as “professional development.” However, in the different disciplinary literatures—teaching, nursing, flying an aircraft, doing one’s everyday business—the term is used independently of the question whether the observed changes in behavior or consciousness are cumulative or transformative (e.g., Jóhannsdóttir & Roth, 2014). Even though biological (maturation) processes are less important in adults—though they are important later in life when certain physical and physiological capacities decline—there are phenomena that correspond to qualitative changeovers (e.g. in consciousness) and subsequent cumulative changes that substantially differ from those that had occurred prior to the transformation. Take the following story of a teacher named Leandro that I was told by a Brazilian doctoral student of mine.

Leandro had begun teaching in a private school while being enrolled in a teacher education program. The purpose of the school was to prepare students for the compulsory college entrance examinations. He designed his lessons as self-contained units, with little connections between consecutive units. Over his years of teaching, which later continued in the public school system, he incrementally
improved his presentation style by refining the materials and his ways of interacting with students. It was out of this context of teaching social studies at a secondary school that he agreed to be a participant in a research project. With another teacher from his school and the doctoral student conducting the study, he discussed issues of teaching and a variety of readings. One of these discussions became the context of a radical change in consciousness, which entailed qualitative changes in the ways Leandro was conceiving teaching, preparing curriculum and lesson plans, and in the ways in which he actually taught. His growth trajectory changed from what it was before, ultimately leading him back to university to enroll in a graduate program to do a Masters degree and later begin doctoral studies.

The discussion where the radical transformation began had a journal article as its topic. The article presented the account of the experience of a teacher, who had used a Freire-inspired problem-based approach. Under the motto “Poop on the Beach? No!,” local citizens rallied against the government project of building an outfall releasing raw sewage into the ocean just off a poor neighborhood (Saito, 1999). The teacher created the opportunity for students to participate in this popular movement, which led them to develop critical consciousness and participate in the collective action against the project.

Leandro emerged deeply disturbed from reading the article. The discussion with other members of the research group deepened his unease, which he formulated in terms of the problem that what he had been doing—though always with the well-being of his students in mind—has nothing to do with students’ interests and was not helping them to become (critical) citizens. In this and subsequent discussions, the members of the research group were thinking about different ways of teaching, leading to the development of a first set of lessons in which Leandro would be addressing students’ needs and relevance to their lives. He changed from the teacher-directed style that characterized his teaching before to a new form of teaching that fostered classroom dialogue. Rather than planning the entire curriculum at the beginning of the school year, his planning became adaptive so that the lesson content and structure would take into account the specific student needs that emerged during the lived curriculum itself. In the process, Leandro underwent a developmental process of consciousness not only pertaining to his own ways of being, but also for the social conditions that reproduce the very phenomena (student failure, unemployment) that these same conditions are supposedly designed to overcome. It was a process known as conscientização, which consists of and allows for the critical consciousness of societal (political) contradictions; and out of this process, he was able to engage students in ways to foster conscientização in them.
In this instance, there are roughly two periods of cumulative changes; but these looked very different. The two periods of cumulative professional growth were separated by a qualitative changeover, which had led to a new form of consciousness and associated changes in the ways in which Leandro thought about teaching and actually taught. Vygotsky articulates consciousness as *pereživanie* [experience] of *pereživanie*. Near the end of his life, he defined *pereživanie* in terms of a person–environment unity/identity, that is, as a person-acting-in-environment system, where the environment is understood in terms of what appears to the person in consciousness (as opposed to the objective environment studied by the natural sciences). To capture this irreducible unity/identity in one term, we may write {person | environment} with the understanding that each of the two terms is a manifestation of the same whole. Although Vygotsky is interested in the processes by means of which emerges “a qualitatively unique form, truly new from that which appears in the developmental process” (Vygotsky, 1997b: 72), he does not actually articulate what investigators have to do to provide necessary and sufficient evidence for the qualitatively new forms of behavior.

**Catastrophe theory**

Catastrophe theory is an approach that originated in the works of the French mathematician René Thom (e.g. 1981). Although it makes use of mathematical concepts and of a mathematical formalism, it is, strictly speaking, not a mathematical or scientific theory. Instead, “it is above all a method and a language. As any language, it serves to describe reality” (43, emphasis added). Whether the description is adequate or true is not guaranteed by the theory. The theory provides a way of describing the morphology of a system and the changes therein. That is, it is a tool for describing the connection between continuous changes, on the one hand, and the emergence of new forms (morphogenesis), on the other. Readers familiar with materialist dialectics will immediately recognize that catastrophe theory encapsulates one of the three dialectical laws: the law of the transition of quantity into quality and vice versa (Marx & Engels, 1975).

We may describe human growth in terms of a movement through a landscape resulting from the relation of two manifestations of a system, such as personal and environmental characteristics in the growth of a person or, alternatively, biological and cultural dimensions as they relate in the course of a child’s life (Figure 2). Some of the trajectory involves continuous change (e.g., Figure 2, a, c, & e). But there are also instances of qualitative change (Figure 2, b & d). Both points are denoted as catastrophe. The first point corresponds to the
creation of a new form of behavior (function), which becomes possible (Figure 2, b) even though right up to immediately before it (i.e., in its “vicinity”) such a creation remains unforeseen. When the system continues, the new behavior (function) is present as possibility; but it does not constitute the dominant form. At some point, minor variations in personal or environmental characteristics are such that they “precipitate” a changeover where the existing but minor behavior (function) becomes the dominant one (Figure 2, d), entailing a change in the form and content of the growth that ensues (Figure 2, e).

Figure 2. Depiction of the cusp catastrophe exemplified for a {person | environment} system. The insert follows the system’s path highlighting the genesis of a new system function (behavior) at the first catastrophe “b” and a sudden transition at the second catastrophe “d,” where the heretofore minor behavior becomes the dominant one, whereas the previously dominant one comes to subsist as a possibility in the background.

This catastrophe theoretic model for the emergence of new forms—i.e., morphogenesis—has been used to provide an account for an alternative model of evolution. In it, the phenotype of a particular organism is thought in terms of a ball rolling along the valley bottom of a complex (epigenetic) landscape (Figure 3). The system here is denoted as {genotype | (epigenetic) environment}. 
Whereas there are two stable states within the fold for the first case of a system (Figure 2, branches c and e), the second example (Figure 3) has four valleys at the very front of the depiction. We see that these valleys have formed as part of the evolution of the system (from the back to the front). The system tends to be relatively stable at the valley floor. However, variations at either pole of the {genotype | (genetic) environment} system can push it into another valley—corresponding to the qualitative change in Figure 2, d. The particular model, known as the cusp catastrophe, also is useful for classifying the kinds of empirical observations contained in the two vignettes.

![Figure 3. Trajectory of a {genotype | (genetic) environment} system in its epigenetic landscape. Variations anywhere in the system can flip it (horizontally) from one into another valley and, therefore, from one growth trajectory into another with very different phenotypic expression.](image)

In the first case, we observe a student (Aslam) who, in the course of the relation with the investigator, changes the dominant form of responding to balance beam tasks from an additive strategy to a multiplicative (ratio and proportion) strategy. Although a certain level of biological development is the condition for such a change, the behavior is a typically human one and, therefore, understandable as a qualitative change in behavioral terms. For the particular case, we do not have available historical information and, therefore, do not know the extent to which Aslam already described phenomena in terms of doubling, tripling, and so on in other situations of his life. However, it is certain that he has had experiences in mathematics that deal with the relations between numbers. We may therefore assume that he already is familiar with such (mathematical) practices but, in the early part of the clinical interview, did not employ them to deal with the balance beam task. There are two aspects that have not been addressed or theoretically captured in the Piagetian literature: (a) the change in the task that the interviewer
sets up and (b) the existence of a social relation, existing in and produced by the joint labor. That is, without requiring any biological maturation, we observe a relatively quick transition (occurring over the course of a few verbal exchanges) to the use of a new way of dealing with balance beam tasks. Over time, this new form also includes more complex problems that Aslam does not initially solve, initially falling back on the additive approach before seeking a way to expand ratio reasoning.

In the second case, Leandro, we observe a rather sudden creation of a new form of consciousness concerning teaching and the changeover to the new way of understanding his reality of teaching. This changeover then provided a way of preparing lessons in a new way, so that, over a period of incremental changes, Leandro increasingly made his planning and implementation of lessons consistent with the new form of consciousness. In this case, the time between the emergence of a new form of consciousness and its becoming the dominant form was relative brief, occurring over the course of one (six-hour) long discussion that lasted until late into the night. If the duration of that meeting were plotted against Leandro’s entire teaching experience, it would appear to have occurred instantaneously, even though it had its own temporality. As before, there were personal and environmental characteristics involved. Both the journal article and the discussion with his fellow inquirers are environmental characteristics that are associated with the emergence and amplification of dissatisfaction Leandro experienced with his then-current form of teaching. It was after a second reading of the “Poop” article, apparently occurring during that long evening, that a feeling emerged that he had received a double slap in the face, and the simultaneously articulated rejection of his earlier teaching methods.

Catastrophe theory only provides a way of classifying morphogenetic processes and events. It does not provide (social) psychologists, educators, or learning scientists with principles of method that direct researchers to search for and describe necessary and sufficient evidence for the transformation of quantity into quality. Whereas the catastrophe-theoretic description (Figure 2) makes apparent what is required—i.e., evidence for the five distinct parts in the growth trajectory of behavior—it was precisely K. Holzkamp who outlined in the Grundlegung a set of necessary and sufficient forms of evidence that would accomplish such a task.
Evidence for qualitative leaps in psycho-phylogenesis: A problem of method

In my reading, it was chapter 2 of Grundlegung der Psychologie (Holzkamp, 1983) that became a major point of interest. The chapter has the long, explicative title “The genetic base form of the psychic and its evolutionary formation; the methodical problem of providing evidence for qualitative leaps in psycho-phylogenesis.” Here, the author takes up Leont’ev’s (1981) reconstruction of the psyche from its beginning, thereby providing an account that is plausible on evolutionary and cultural-historical grounds, rather than beginning with psychological capacities that could not have given rise to thinking because they did not exist and there was no reason for them to emerge. For example, in constructivist accounts, the existence of the tools of construction tends to be taken for granted, rather than explained on evolutionary grounds. Piaget (1970) believes to have demonstrated that there are “three mathematical mother structures [that] have natural roots in the development of thinking in individuals” (p. 33). If one accepts the challenge of reconstructing the psyche in general and aspects thereof in particular, the problem of morphogenesis poses itself: how do qualitatively new forms of the psyche arise, that is, forms that are not yet contained or implied in the current makeup of the psyche? When and how did those psychological tools Piaget was wrote about emerge in the course of the history of the species, which continued into a cultural history following anthropogenesis? These qualitative changeovers include, most dramatically, the transition of Homo sapiens from a situation that might have been similar to today’s primates to one in which society and its culture became the dominant, determining aspects in the life activity of the species.

To be able to observe evolution and development, the system of interest has to be such that there is an inner contradiction, as per the second of three main laws underlying the history of nature and human society: “the law of the interpenetration of opposites” (Marx & Engels, 1975: 348). Retracing the origin of “sensibility,” Holzkamp (1983) outlines a natural history of the most elementary form of anything of psychological [psychische] nature. Sensibility is the determinant and determining function of organismic life; its emergence therefore marks the arrival of a stage where the psyche first exists in its most rudimentary form. In the course of evolution, the psyche evolves until its current human form emerges in, and is constitutive of, anthropogenesis. This concrete investigation of the necessary condition for the morphogenesis of the psyche in its most rudimentary form leads into the articulation of a methodical precept. Holzkamp here is true to the materialist dialectical precept that the laws of nature and history have to be derived from their study (Marx & Engels, 1975). This
approach is opposed to what can be frequently observed (by Vygotsky, 1997a, with respect to the law of the transformation of quantity into quality), where laws (theories) come to be imposed on a phenomenon of interest with the result that something is said to work in theory, but fails to work in practice. Whereas Engels asserts that the law of the transformation of quantity and quality “stands the test every step of the way in biology as in the history of human society” (p. 353), he does not actually provide detailed examples. Rather, he concentrates on the “exact sciences” (i.e., physics, chemistry, and mathematics), because in these fields, quantities can be observed more and measured more exactly. It would be up to Leont’ev (1981) and Holzkamp (1983) to provide a plausible description of morphogenesis in biology. Holzkamp, based on the analysis of the sequence of levels in the appearance of the psyche, thus makes a “methodical [methodische]” turn by specifying five analytic steps required to provide evidence for the transformation [Umschlag] of quantity into quality. It is an attempt to provide “a methodical concretization of the basic dialectical law of the ‘transformation of quantity into quality’ for our field of inquiry [Gegenstandsbereich]” (Holzkamp, 1983: 78). Holzkamp shows how those five steps in the changeover from quantitative to qualitative change pan out in phylogenesis. My own interest lies in human learning and development, which is why I draw on the preceding examples from personal development.

In a first step, the investigator has to provide a description of the real-historical dimensions of the level that precedes the qualitative change and that constitutes the ground upon, and material with which, the qualitative change occurs. The investigation does not have to articulate “everything” about the life of the organism (person) but only those aspects that are “dialectically ‘negated’ in the qualitative transformation [Umschlag]” (Holzkamp, 1983: 79). The precise nature of the transformation in morphogenesis therefore comes to be highlighted in the integrality of its specificity. In the epigenetic landscape, this part of the investigation concerns the trajectory of the system prior to a bifurcation point (Figure 2 & 3, a). In the two sets of case material, this step corresponds to describing forms of behavior preceding the change to a new psychological form. In the first of my two cases, the investigation starts with the clinical interview from which the materials were taken. At this stage, Aslam would have likely exhibited some forms of proportional reasoning elsewhere in his life, after first having encountered them through in family relations or in some of his classes. Without having further evidence, we most likely will have found ourselves prior to the second qualitative leap (Figure 2, c), which itself occurs during the interview. As the study unfolds, it becomes clear that, from this, a qualitatively new behavior becomes the dominant one (i.e., proportional and multiplicative reasoning), further differentiating itself with respect to task difficulty and with
type of task—e.g., “transferred” to other forms of levers, such as class II levers (wheelbarrow) and class III levers (e.g., baseball bat, shovel). In the case of Leandro, the doctoral student collecting the data has had many exchanges with him and interviewed him on many occasions, producing a detailed picture of his growth as a teacher. In all of these accounts, and even though Leandro had been familiar with the work of Paolo Freire, these relations were not standing out in his conscious awareness: the possibility of the contradiction between his teaching and what students actually learned, the contradiction between his view of learning and the curricular plans, and the possible irrelevance of what students learned in school to their everyday lives.

In a second step, the investigation has to provide evidence for the objective changes at the environmental pole of the {person | environment} system that lie at the origin of the inner contradictions that eventually lead to the genesis of a new psychological form. For this, it is important to trace two aspects of the environment. For one, the investigation has to articulate those environmental features that “threaten” or put pressure on the system that provides a particular force in the direction of the change that eventually occurs. Furthermore, the investigation has to articulate those environmental features that will be relevant to the new form. In the case of studies such as the one involving Aslam, investigators have to show when and where a new behavior (function) emerges. In the case of Leandro, the researcher is actually present when this occurs. The occasion is a particular article read and discussed by the participants. As Leandro describes afterwards, his first reading gave rise to a sense of dissatisfaction with his own teaching. That is, in the reading, the teaching of another teacher comes to be held against his own teaching. But this does not mean that the materials themselves provoked such a change of appreciation. Another participant, even though her teaching is also characterized by traditional methods, sees herself only confirmed by the “Poop” story, leading her to assert that she is already acting similarly to the teacher in the article. Leandro’s initial dissatisfaction is amplified and becomes differentiated during a second reading on the night of the discussion. It is here that he articulates the dual contradiction of having set up conditions that contribute to the failing of (some of the) students in school examinations, and of having failed students for a second time in neglecting the effect of school on students’ developmental trajectory in life as a whole (i.e., relevance of school learning to life). In terms of the above-described model, this part of the investigation pertains to changes that occur on the trajectory just prior to what will constitute a bifurcation.

In the third step, a functional change has to be documented in “the relevant dimension of the ‘organism pole’ of the developmental contradiction” (Holzkamp, 1983: 79). This functional change constitutes a first qualitative leap
of the specific form of the new function in the context of the changed environment. It makes available a qualitatively new behavioral form, which is the form that eventually becomes the dominant one. In the epigenetic landscape, this step corresponds to a point of bifurcation where a new function becomes available (Figure 3, b). The bifurcation point is interesting because it belongs to two regimes. Approaching it from one side, there is only one form of behavior (function), whereas going backward in time the point corresponds to two forms of behavior (functions). Holzkamp makes the important point that the dialectical negation occurs only in a minor or partial function that is still subordinated to the main function of the earlier level. Thus, for example, in the first case study above, Aslam already exhibits reasoning in terms of proportions, but he does manifest it in the context of the balance beam task, which in fact requires the comparison of two proportions. At this stage, the proportionality form is still subordinate to the additive form of reasoning. Other studies of mathematical reasoning in early elementary school show how new forms of reasoning first appear in the lives of children in their relations with teachers (e.g., Roth, 2016). The pertinence of this instant in time is not salient; it does become so only when the new behavior has become the dominant one. At that point, backtracking of signs leads to the point in time where there is a first sign of the behavior in the life of a particular child. This instant marks a growth point, where there is both an immediate departure from the context conditioned by the same context (e.g., McNeill, 2002). In fact, the study shows consistent with Vygotsky (1989) that what will subsequently have been an individual behavior (psychological function) first was a social relation with the teacher. In the second set of case materials outlined above, when Leandro becomes conscious of a dual contradiction, he still continues based on the teaching methods he knows, while trying out a new method at the same time. The new way of teaching is still subordinate to the old ways that have constituted the grounds for the subsequent reversal. His consciousness operates at two levels: at the time, he still plans some lessons in the old way, from his old perspective, and also plans some lessons in a new way, overcoming the contradictions within his old ways. Over time, the proportion between these two ways changes. The new ways still are not determining and determinant for the total Leandro-teaching-in-the-school system.

As a fourth step in the investigation, the researcher provides evidence for a change in the dominant, system-determining form of behavior (function). This change in dominance constitutes a second qualitative leap, whereby the heretofore-minor function becomes the major one, while simultaneously the major function is pushed into the background. That is, the function (behavior) does not disappear altogether. This point is often forgotten in descriptions of conceptual change from naïve to scientific conceptions, where it is assumed that
the new conception (discourse) is paralleled by an eradication of the old conception (discourse). This does not account for the actual observation that scientists may continue to talk about everyday phenomena, such as the sun, in ways that are consistent with an Aristotelian worldview, according to which the sun moves across the sky and around the earth (e.g., “what a beautiful sunrise). Holzkamp makes a point that is consistent with the above-described biological picture of evolution. Accordingly, new life-determining (dominant) functions are not spontaneously created in response to some contradiction arising in the niche. Instead, “new organismic functions ... always form gradually from almost unnoticeable beginnings” (Holzkamp, 1983: 80), which entails that it cannot be the determinant function. Instead, the system continues on what has been a stable path. When the qualitative leap occurs nevertheless, it is because there is a reversal of two dimensions, each of which undergoes continuous (i.e., quantitative) change. Even though the two dimensions of the {person | environment} system change continuously, the changeover in dominance occurs (almost) instantaneously. This changeover is represented in the articulation of the catastrophe theoretic approach (Figure 2, d) and in the changeover between two phenotypes of the same organism (Figure 3, d). In both sets of case materials, evidence for this step exists. A detailed, instant-to-instant microanalytic case study would exhibit that turnover. Once the dominance of the new behavior is apparent, backtracking allows specification of the precise social and material conditions that provided the ground for the reversal in dominance. In the case of Aslam, for example, the immediate events includes a physical rotation of the balance beam, so that the distance markers are no longer seen and an eventual return to the task by asking about the distance of the smaller weight given the distance of the larger one from the fulcrum. The change itself can be traced back to the give-and-take relation involving the clinical interviewer and Aslam and, thus, to what will have been the endpoint a {query | reply} sequence ending in the articulation of the ratio and multiplicative rules that then dominates in subsequent tasks. This example also shows that Vygotsky wrote quite appropriately about a zone of proximal development, where the second part really pertains to a qualitative change rather than merely an accumulation of cases within an existing form of experience (behavior) (see also below).

In step five, the investigation provides evidence for the restructuring that the system has undergone and for the new developmental direction of the system as a whole, given the dominance of a new behavior (function) over the subordinated older behavior (function). This part of the investigation, corresponding to the growth trajectory following the qualitative leap to a new dominant behavior (function) (Figure 2, e), requires articulating (a) those dimensions that no longer have a main function in the system and (b) how older
dimensions take on new functions. As described above, Aslam does use the proportional reasoning on balance beam problems, and refines the forms of reasoning with increasing task complexity. He also begins to “transfer” this form of reasoning to tasks concerning other types of simple machines. It also has to be shown how specific, structural and functional differentiations occur as the \{person | environment\} system continues on its developmental path. Some of the qualitatively new behaviors (functions) may actually be subordinated to a dominant form, that is, they become new forms of behavior without being the system-determining function. This continuing differentiation is clearly visible in the model of the epigenetic landscape, where there are multiple phenotypic expressions that evolve without ever having to become the principal, all subordinating one.

Discussion

The purpose of this paper is to present an important legacy of the *Grundlegung der Psychologie* that is not frequently, if at all, taken up: the necessary and sufficient elements of a description that shows the transition of quantity into quality (and vice versa) in psychological phenomena. The point, however, is not to foist any dialectical principles or method onto phenomena, but to identify any dialectical principle in the phenomena themselves. This echoes Engel’s advice that Vygotsky (1979a) also adopted, and which is clearly operational in the way in which Holzkamp extracted the methodical principles from the summary of the work Leont’ev (1981) had done concerning the emergence of sensibility. The present study also shows how the changeover from quantity into quality in psychology, as per the *Grundlegung*, is part of a set of general phenomena in the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities classified by means of catastrophe theory.

In the presentation of the method-related principles, I show how it maps onto the classificatory scheme. The comparison highlights that the first three steps of the method map onto the first two parts of the classification (Figure 2, a & b). The fourth step of the method concerns the evidence for a qualitative leap: a changeover of the dominance of one behavior (function) and the subordinate nature of a second behavior (function) in the life processes of the person (Figure 2, d). The fifth step in the method corresponds to the growth trajectory following the qualitative leap, which is different from the trajectory before the appearance of the new behavior (function) because the coming of the latter has led to a psychological reorganization. Holzkamp already notes that there is an intermediate step between (a) the first qualitative leap (i.e., emergence and
appearance of a new behavior or function) and (b) the second qualitative leap (i.e., change in dominance from the “negated” behavior or function). Research in very different domains and concerning very different phenomena exhibits the sometimes quite extended period during which both behaviors (functions) may be equally salient. For example, in a scientific research group, in the process of providing evidence for a particular theory that previously had led its founder to receive a Nobel Prize, the suspicion arose that the theory is inappropriate (Roth, 2014). It took nearly two years of data collection, during which the team sometimes explained data in terms of the old theory and sometimes explained data in terms of an alternate approach, before they replaced in their discussions the old, Nobel Prize winning theory with a new one in their discussions. Similarly, in the research on gestures that accompany speech, it is well known that children explain mathematical phenomena verbally in ways consistent with one concept, all the while using gestures that are consistent with another, more advanced concept (e.g., Alibali & Goldin-Meadow, 1993; Church & Goldin-Meadow, 1986). In fact, when children are followed over longer periods of time, one observes that their gestures and words initially agree in expressing a particular concept, then begin to disagree with the gestures generally exhibiting the new, more advanced concept, before words “catch up” and, together with the gestures, also express the more advanced concept.

The qualitative leap is of particular interest in the case exemplified by Leandro’s story, because it shows how critical consciousness (conscientização) may arise when it does not yet exist in the experience of a person and yet, after the fact, arises unforeseeably in its own absence. This aspect is especially relevant in the context of schooling, where teachers are enabled to set up conditions that may lead to the emergence of critical consciousness on the part of their students. The methodical precepts articulated in the Grundlegung provide us with the means for studying the precise circumstances of the when, where, and how of the phenomenon.

Actual studies referred to above show that the qualitative changeover, therefore, is not as instantaneous. The research in the gesture domain generally is of what Holzkamp (1983) calls “variable psychology,” an approach that is little suited to show the actual sequence of events in which new behaviors (psychological functions) emerge, the conditions and contradictions that lie at their origins, the growth trajectory that ensues, and the instant when the ultimate changeover occurs to the more advanced behavior (function). My own research shows, however, that microanalyses of human interaction at the sub-second level are ideally suited to document the morphogenesis of new behaviors (psychological functions) in joint labor (e.g., Roth, 2016). Such work furthermore shows that psychological development essentially occurs as
sociogenesis, rather than being reducible to biological maturation and spontaneous emergence of specifically human (cultural) behaviors.

In the description of the five-step method, Holzkamp (1983) draws on the discourse of dialectics. He notes, for example, that part of the method’s first step is the “determination of exactly that ‘position’ that is dialectically ‘negated’ during the qualitative leap” (p. 79). We note that the verb negate is enclosed by quotation marks. Actual observations of psychological growth processes show that behaviors and functions are not “negated” in any simple sense. Instead they become part of the sediment upon which the qualitatively new forms appear. For example, additive forms of reasoning continue to be available to Aslam as shown during the entire physics unit that follows the clinical interview. What has changed is the fact that in the context of particular tasks, he does no longer employ it. That is, the additive form of reasoning is alive and well. There is therefore not a simple opposition of lower and higher function. Not surprisingly, near the end of his life, Vygotsky recognized in his own previous work an inherent dualism concerning the two-tiered nature of the higher and lower functions (Zavershneva, 2010). He began reading Spinoza through a Marxian lens, a viewpoint that emphasizes the plurality of manifestations and parts of Nature. Such a lens allows us to better capture the events that happen along the growth trajectory corresponding the emergence of a first qualitative leap (first catastrophe) (Figure 2, a & b).

When we observe some psychological {person | environment} system, particular forms of behavior (practical action, intellect, affect) are documented prior to what will have been a period during which a new behavior (function) establishes itself. Afterwards, we still see the system as a whole, though it is now restructured such that person and environment characteristics in/of performance differ. At the instant of time when a new behavior (function) becomes a reality in the life of the person, a new way of being is possible and eventually becomes salient. But that new way is simply a different manifestation of life, not a negation thereof. As the image of the epigenetic landscape suggests, there is differentiation without disappearance, and under certain conditions, the trajectory is continued on a different, perhaps more viable, useful, or successful path (Figure 3). The figure better expresses a Spinozist Marxian take on morphogenesis and the relation between the different behaviors (functions) than a Hegelian approach to materialist dialectics.

In everyday use, the concepts “learning” and “development” frequently are not clearly distinguished. Thus, we may read about how “learning is all about making employees knowledgeable while development is concerned with making employees incorporate new skills into their behavior as habits” (Difference Between, 2012). In the research literature, such as that concerning the
“professional development” of teachers, incremental (quantitative) growth tends to be subsumed to the term that might suitably be employed to distinguish periods in which qualitative leaps to entirely new forms of behavior occur. Thus, “new skills” are not inherently qualitatively new, such as what occurs when a sequence of several actions comes to be habitually linked and thus becomes one action. The linking of all parts of manually changing gears of a car is the result of coordinating already existing competencies, not the emergence of a completely new competency. The method Holzkamp proposed is useful in this context, for it forces researchers to articulate the qualitatively new, when it arises, and at what point and how it becomes the dominant behavior (function). Importantly, as the catastrophe-theoretical formulation makes apparent, the new behavior (function) is unforeseen from within the system as it nears the bifurcation point. That articulation also suggests that the variations may occur anywhere in the system, because variations both in personal or environmental characteristics can precipitate the emergence of a new behavior (function). Detailed case studies of concrete situations will reveal when and how such bifurcations occur.

One important psychological concept is that of zone of proximal development, which is defined by the difference between the developmental level of an individual’s actual performance and that level observed in joint work with another person (Vygotsky, 1987). We may conceive of this concept in terms of the systemic category \{person | environment\}, where the environment has both material (physical) and social dimensions (Figure 4). The system under consideration, therefore, includes not only the person under investigation (e.g., a child in school or the psychological laboratory), but also the others with whom the person is in relation. In that relation, the other person also changes, and so do the relations of both with the environment and with the other.

![Diagram](Figure 4. The system under consideration in developmental studies; no part can be considered independent of any other part.)

Once we conceive our system in this way, it is apparent that the very presence of the adult may, but does not have to, create a situation equivalent to the fold (Figure 2). It corresponds to a variation in the environmental characteristic. In that case then, the vertical distance between the two surfaces on which the system may move corresponds to (is a literal expression of) the zone of proximal
development. The method articulated above provides us with directions for showing when and how what will have been a qualitatively new form of behavior (psychological function) first appeared, how by interacting with others or working on its own the child behaves until a qualitative leap will have been observed. That is, the method provides us with a way of conducting and documenting the sociogenesis of new psychological functions and behaviors. Vygotsky was actually cautious in articulating development in a retrospective manner, stating, in following Marx, that “any higher psychological function … was social; before becoming a function, it was the social relation between two people” (Vygotsky, 1989: 56). That is, not every relation between two people leads to a new function, but every new function can be traced back to the relation between people.

The Grundlegung therefore provides us with the precepts for studying developmental phenomena anthropologically by investigating situations in which those under study (children, students, adults) engage in joint labor with others. In backtracking efforts for the purpose of identifying a growth point—corresponding to the first catastrophe (Figure 2, b) or the first qualitative leap—it may be useful and fruitful to follow an approach in gesture studies where the notion of catchment has currency (McNeill, 2002). A catchment is defined as a recurrent feature in two or more not necessarily consecutive gestures; it therefore is what has been named a tracer (Newman, Griffin, & Cole, 1989), a feature in a psychological phenomenon that marks its reoccurrence across situations and context. Because gestures in particular may express something different from words, we may backtrack the two forms of expression to the point where psychologically divergent forms first appear. We may then study more closely the conditions that will have constituted the coincidence of two developmental periods, the end of one and beginning of another. The catchment (tracer) approach fills in an area in developmental studies that the Grundlegung did not explicitly address.

Taking the approach described here will reveal in many, and, if Vygotsky is right, in all cases of backtracking what appear to be spontaneous forms of development are actually social phenomena, forms of sociogenesis. It then will no longer be mysterious why a 20-year-old African American college student is reading very much like a three-year-old child—as this appeared in story about Desmond Cathey published in The Chronicle of Higher Education (Wolverton, n.d). In the story, Desmond, though in college, was tracking letters with a finger tracking below them, putting together words one sound at a time. In another story found online, a three-year old apparently reading on her own with a few corrections and little assistance by a parent (Roth & Jornet, 2017). The article about Desmond Cathey reveals that he grew up in poverty to parents living on
social assistance. If we were able to turn the clock back to see the boy, then the social relations would have been different from those of the three-year-old girl that was already reading. In this manner, for example, the ways of doing mathematics often observed among girls in schools could be traced back to the kinds of relations working-class have at home with their mothers, relating to the daily chores typically accomplished in working class families by women rather than by men (Walkerdine, 1988).

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References


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Linking British Cultural Studies and German Critical Psychology in qualitative research

Wiebke Scharathow

Abstract
Theoretical conceptions and methodical approaches developed by British Cultural Studies and German Critical Psychology are, above all, interested in the relations between social conditions and subjects. Both pay special attention to (societal and discursive) contexts and meanings of social phenomena. Both regard power as an important aspect, that influences social relations and the conditions in which subjects assume social positions, assign meaning, and act. Furthermore, in both approaches the aspiration to critically intervene is emphasized. But even though these and other similarities exist, there are also a number of differences – for example in the understanding of what ‘power’ or ‘intervention’ actually is – as British Cultural Studies and Critical Psychology refer to distinct theory traditions. In this article, I argue that, despite these differences, both approaches can be fruitfully linked for a wider analytical perspective in qualitative research, which draws attention especially to power relations, societal imbalances, and the actions of subjects in restrictive contexts.

Keywords
Critical Psychology, British Cultural Studies, qualitative research, social inequality

1. Introduction

Researchers who aim to conduct critical research within the subject area of difference, power, and social inequalities face diverse challenges. They require theoretical and methodological approaches that allow them, for example, to reflect on power relations within the research process itself and on their own potential reproduction thereof over the course of their actions. Moreover, the
approaches should facilitate research procedures that organize knowledge production in a way that allows results to be used to critically address and intervene in societal imbalances.

Researchers seeking to address social inequalities and institutionalized power relations and to determine how the subject’s agency is influenced by these conditions require approaches that allow them not just to analyze and describe social contexts, but also to focus on the involved subjects as agents. This is important in order to emphasize that power relations and social imbalances are not naturally given and determining factors, but socially constructed. And that subjects are never just ‘victims’ of these conditions – nor privileged by them –, but are always endowed with agency and an active part of the production of the conditions under which they live. Furthermore, it is the subjects’ experiences and their ways of acting that point to the state of the social contexts, power relations, and social imbalances in which they live and assign meaning. After all, these perspectives are important for scrutinizing researchers’ own constructions with regard to reproducing power-related effects. That is why research in the subject area of difference and inequalities requires theoretical and methodological approaches that are able to reconstruct relations between subjects and social contexts or societal conditions without losing sight of the involved subject.

In this paper, I argue that useful approaches, in extension of general principals of qualitative social research, can be found in the premises of British Cultural Studies, and particularly in the concept of articulation as introduced by Stuart Hall (1986), and in the research perspective of German Critical Psychology as developed by Klaus Holzkamp (1983). Both concepts are characterized by different theoretical and methodological approaches and offer insightful complementary perspectives for researchers concerned with power, difference, inequality, or discrimination.

I will elaborate on this point by introducing the distinct perspectives of the two concepts with regard to four aspects that are, in my view, crucial for any research endeavor that aims to take power asymmetries into account. Both approaches allow, albeit in different ways, for

- interrelating subjects, experiences/interpretations, social contexts, and societal relations.
- analyzing social contexts in a subject-oriented way as frameworks that extend or limit the subject’s possibilities of experience, interpretation, and action, while paying special attention to the subject’s agency.
- conducting research with the aspiration to critically address and intervene in social relations of inequality.
taking into account the dilemma that research on social differences, power, and inequality is itself embedded and involved in many ways with (certain) relations of difference, power, and inequalities. After a discussion of both approaches, I will point out some implications for qualitative research in the field of social inequalities.

2. Cultural Studies and Critical Psychology

The analysis of the relationship between individual and society is of central concern to Cultural Studies as well as Critical Psychology. Both approaches theorize these connections as mediated through powerful and dynamic social constructions of meaning in which experiences are made, interpreted, and communicated. Thus, experiences, interpretations, and actions of individuals are always viewed as intertwined with social power relations and specific social contexts. In this respect, both theoretical concepts assume that everyday actions and interpretations always point beyond the subject to configurations of social power relations. According to both approaches, subjects are constructed neither as determined by the conditions nor as autonomous, but instead always able to act: respectively within certain ‘possibility spaces’ (Möglichkeitsräume) (Holzkamp, 1983, pp. 367 for Critical Psychology), or within power-structured contexts (Grossberg, 1997 for Cultural Studies). Thus Cultural Studies and Critical Psychology view individuals as principally able to actively interpret, deal with, and relate to the conditions and representations that manifest in their everyday lives and therefore as – at least potentially – able to act upon and alter contexts and shift social meanings.

2.1 The mediation of individual and society: Representations and social meanings

Both Cultural Studies and Critical Psychology aim to reconstruct and understand the social contexts, power relations and social conditions in which social phenomena, that is to say, experiences, interpretations, and actions of individuals are embedded and by which they are influenced (Grossberg, 1997, pp. 257-262 for Cultural Studies; Markard, 2000, p. 18 for Critical Psychology). In order to analyze the relationship between social conditions, contexts, and individuals, Cultural Studies and Critical Psychology focus on social meanings and social knowledge, which Holzkamp conceptualizes as the sphere of mediation between subject and societal conditions, whereas Hall conceives them as a discursively mediated expression of society.
Analyses in Cultural Studies turn towards the relationships between discourses, which are understood as always imbued with power (relations), and social practices, as social meanings are produced within these relationships. These meanings are of particular interest because everyday cultural practices, interpretations, and actions of individuals are, in turn, based on these meanings produced within said power structures. Cultural Studies aim to analyze these social practices in relation to power (Engelmann, 1999, pp. 18).

To conceptualize the relationship between social meanings, power, subject and society Hall initially draws on the linguistic semiotic approach of representations analysis as suggested by Ferdinand de Saussure. Sassure’s approach focuses on the production of meaning through language (Hall, 1997b). Following Sassure, Hall describes the production of meanings as the interaction of two processes, or of two systems of representations (ibid., p. 16ff): firstly, concepts in the sense of “the system by which all sorts of objects, people and events are correlated with a set of [...] mental representations” (ibid., p. 17) and, secondly, language understood as words, sounds, or signs.

The first enables us to give meaning to the world by constructing a set of correspondences or a chain of equivalences between things – people, objects, events, abstract ideas, etc. – and our system of concepts, our conceptual maps. The second depends on constructing a set of correspondences between our conceptual map and a set of signs, arranged or organized into various languages which stand for or represent those concepts. The relation between ‘things’, concepts and signs lies at the heart of the production of meaning in language. The process which links these three elements together is what we call ‘representation’. (ibid., p. 19)

Both, signifier and signified are “the result of a system of social conventions specific to each society and to specific historical moments” (ibid., p. 32) and therefore meanings “can never be finally fixed but are always subject to change [...]. There is thus no single, unchanging, universal ‘true meaning’” (ibid.).

Hall merges this concept with reflections in the works of Michel Foucault on the relevance of power in the process of the production of meanings. Hall focuses on socio-historically situated processes of knowledge production in discourses and their involvement with power relations, in which discourse refers not only to language, but also to non-linguistic social practices. This discursive approach to representations as the production of social knowledge in particular contexts is interested, firstly, in the way in which knowledge production is connected to power and, secondly, in the effects and consequences of representation: “It examines not only how language and representation produce meaning, but how the knowledge a particular discourse produces connects with
power, regulates conduct, makes up or constructs identities and subjectivities, and defines the way certain things are represented, thought about, practiced and studied” (ibid., 1997a, p. 6). In the discursive approach the specific regime of representation in a particular historical context and its specific form in a particular time and place are of interest (ibid.). Discourse, Foucault argues, “defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. It governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others” (ibid., 1997b, p. 44). Discursive formations produce social regulation and manifest efficaciously as dominant ways of conceiving social phenomena, in particular forms of knowledge in texts, codes of conduct and institutionalized spaces.

To explain which representations, which social knowledge becomes an accepted part of a discourse and manifests powerfully in constructions of social reality at what point and under which circumstances, Hall theorizes knowledge and power, in reference to Foucault, as directly implying one another, as power-knowledge (Foucault, 1977, p. 27). Thus, the productivity of powerful and valid knowledge is not the result of an ‘objective truth’, but emerges from relations of power and knowledge, from strategies and techniques that take effect in particular situations, historical contexts and institutional regimes (ibid., pp. 26-27, ibid., 1980). “The important thing here”, argues Foucault (1980, p. 131), is that truth isn’t outside power, or lacking in power: [...] truth isn’t the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.

‘Truth’ as a system of rules and ordering practices, by which assertions are produced, regulated and disseminated, is contested (ibid., 133). Knowledge and power connect in discourse. According to Foucault, power is based on knowledge and makes use of knowledge, while power, in turn, (re-)produces knowledge: “there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (ibid. 1977, p. 27).
The importance of Foucault’s power concept for Cultural Studies can hardly be underestimated, as Marchart (2008, p. 181) states. Cultural Studies reject (as does Foucault) the conception of power as a binarity of powerful versus powerless, as clear-cut distinction between sovereign and subject. Instead, Cultural Studies emphasize an understanding of power as productive – including in a positive way. As Foucault (1980, p. 119) points out: “If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it?” This is the reason, Foucault argues, why power is forceful: because it is productive. “[I]t traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression” (ibid.). According to Foucault, there can never be just one central point or a unique source from which power arises. Instead, he argues, “power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization” (ibid., 1978, p. 92). Hence, Foucault does not view power as a possession, but describes it as de-centralised, relativistic, circulating, unstable and dynamic, contradictory, situated and contextually effective. Those dynamic force relations take effect in different strategies and techniques. They crystallize in all parts of society and everyday life and are, Foucault claims, embodied “in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies” (ibid., p. 93) as well as in the subjects. To Foucault, power is ubiquitous and systemic, but not absolute.

Hence, Foucault argues, studying the subject is not possible without taking power into account, because “while the human subject is placed in relations of production and of signification, he is equally placed in power relations which are very complex” (1982, 778). Correspondingly, subjects have to be understood as involved with power and discourse in different – perhaps even contradictory – ways: as affirmative and resistant, as participating in power and opposing it. With respect to Foucault, Hall concentrates on concrete and local, but nevertheless abstract, power relations and seeks to reveal how they influence the production of particular ‘truths’ in discourses. Moreover, Hall aims to highlight the subject as an active, experiencing and acting part of these relations, namely in the form of his concept of articulation (see below).

In Critical Psychology as developed, among others, by Klaus Holzkamp, social meanings play an equally decisive role. It is assumed that society in its entirety is not directly accessible to the subjects living within this society, but that societal conditions are only partially represented to individuals through meanings, or societal meaning structures. Thus, in Critical Psychology, social meanings have the function of connecting and mediating between societal
context and individuals. However, even if these conditions are seen as very important for individuals and their actions, they are not regarded as determining. Holzkamp (1997, p. 261) states that the world does not simply reveal itself to people as conditions that entail certain actions. Instead, these conditions are represented in specific meanings and these specific meanings represent possibilities and restrictions for an individual’s actions. Thus, according to Critical Psychology, our relationship to the world is characterized by socially mediated ‘possibility relationships’ (Möglicheitsbeziehungen). Individuals are always able to act and relate to a set of possibilities that reflect societal conditions mediated through particular meanings.

Societal conditions become individual premises for actions – not their causes – on the basis of which individuals may claim their action in a particular situation to be ‘reasonable’, ‘appropriate’, or ‘in one’s own interest’ (Holzkamp, 1997, p. 261). Or, in other words, social conditions become individually meaningful as opportunities to act or as constraints on those opportunities, emphasizing the embeddedness of particular situations of everyday life in societal structures and structures of dominance and power. Correspondingly, Critical Psychologists claim that neither situations nor individuals’ experiences and actions can be understood without studying social structures as the framework of particular experiences and actions (Markard, 2010, p. 170). At the same time, individuals are viewed as principally able to consciously relate to the socially created possibilities in question, yet their actions, interpretations, and opinions are rooted, just like their premises, in the circumstances, not arbitrariness.

Studies of Critical Psychology, then, always take the complex relationship between determination and subjectivity/freedom of conduct of everyday life into account (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 345). One key concern in Critical Psychology’s analyses is the investigation of the mediation between societal structure and individual or, more precisely, the examination of the societal mediatedness of individual actions (Markard, 2000, p. 14). Thus, Critical Psychology seeks to comprehend the socio-structural mediation of individuals’ action possibilities in immediate situations.

Against this backdrop, the subject with its capacity to act represents the starting point of investigation in Critical Psychology. Critical Psychology aims to accomplish a psychology from the standpoint of the subject and therefore claims its approach to be a subject-scientific theory. In analyses of Critical Psychology, researchers ask about the subjective grounds for action. They are interested in how the individual meaningfully interprets and relates to social meanings in particular situations. Seeing as actions are grounded subjectively in meaning that reflects the individual’s possibility relationship, social meanings can be analyzed
with regard to their particular mediating function and their relation to the societal conditions to which they point. This way, certain hints can be reconstructed that provide information about a subjective and context-specific action scope with regard to a particular problem. In doing so, the individual’s concrete life circumstances and are viewed as part of societal meaning structures that become premises of the individual’s diverse and contradictory reasons to act. Josef Held (1994, pp. 112-113) argues that it cannot be assumed that all reasons for action indicated by individuals are solely individually constructed, but that conventional reasoning patterns and options for acting, as they are offered in public discourse, are part of the construction process as well. Therefore, Held stresses that it is important also to reflect on the social context in which the topic in question is situated.

Conducting science from the ‘standpoint of the subject’ not only involves a specific analytical perspective, but also implies “a particular form of discourse” (Holzkamp, 1997, p. 261). Subjects do not refer to their own actions as ‘condition-event-relationship’, but rather describe their actions as reasonable and well-founded based on their subjectively relevant premises for action. Therefore, Holzkamp considers ‘reason discourse’ – as opposed to ‘conditioning discourse’ as in traditional variable psychology – to be crucial. The starting point for the reconstruction of the special relationship between premises and subjective grounds for action are the reasons for action, but also those for opinions, appraisals, views, or attitudes on social phenomena as held by the subject. Subjective reasons for action therefore are considered to be a further “category of mediation” (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 348) “between overall societal requirements and the subject’s conduct of life” (ibid., 2013/1988, p. 42). The subjective reasons point to “societal conditions/meanings that are objectively given”, but “only become decisive for my actions to the degree that they become premises for the reasons of my actions” (ibid., p. 47). The particularity of reasons for action can only be grasped from the standpoint of the subject, as reasons are always ‘first-person’. But even if Critical Psychology as a science from the standpoint of the subject chooses the subject and its reasons for action as starting point, it must be emphasized that it is not the individuals and their actions and experiences Critical Psychology is primarily interested in. Subject-scientific studies are about the world as it is perceived by acting, thinking, and experiencing subjects (Markard, 2000, p.18). Critical Psychology pays special attention to the relationship between individual and society and to the societal mediation of conditions of action as they are perceived by subjects: as restrictive, as enabling or contradictory. That is why, as Markard (ibid.) stresses, subject-scientific statements are neither statements about people nor statements which aim to classify people, but statements about experienced possibilities for and/or
restrictions on action that may be generalized. “[T]he object of subject science research is the mode of subjective experiences of objective societal possibilities of and hindrances to act” (Holzkamp, 2013/1988, p. 44).

2.2 Subjects with agency: Subject positions and possibility spaces

In both cultural studies and Critical Psychology, individuals are conceptualized as endowed with agency, albeit within certain limits and not entirely autonomous, generally capable of dealing with social meanings and actively relating to social contexts and conditions.

The complex conjuncture of conditions that structures experiences, interpretations and actions which Cultural Studies seek to reconstruct in terms of its possibilities and limitations for the subject, consists of particular contextual and power-charged discursive formations and practices of social relevance.

Hall’s reflections on the relations between the individual and the social contexts, respectively, are subsumed in his concept of articulation. Referring to the theories developed by Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, Hall considers discourses to be the expression of the social and of society, which consists of diverse articulations. Hall defines articulations as forms of connection between different elements of social reality, such as meanings, experiences, emotions, interests, and always power, too, which become relevant only in a particular context and only temporarily. Articulation, Hall (1986, p. 53) explains,

is the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time. You have to ask, under what circumstances can a connection be forged or made? The so-called ‘unity’ of a discourse is really the articulation of different, distinct elements which can be rearticulated in different ways because they have no necessary ‘belongingness’. The ‘unity’ which matters is a linkage between the articulated discourse and the social forces with which it can, under certain historical conditions, but need not necessarily, be connected.

Thus, an articulation is dynamic and flexible and not eternal. It is a connection or link that

requires particular conditions of existence to appear at all, which has to be positively sustained by specific processes, which […] has to be constantly renewed, which can under some circumstances disappear or be overturned, leading to the old linkages being dissolved and new
connections – re-articulations – being forged (Hall, 1985, pp.113-114, footnote 2).

Hall’s analytical focus is on the power-charged articulations between discourse and subject: on the connections between social meanings offered by discourse and individuals who relate to those meanings in particular ways. According to Hall, subjects are always an active part of articulations. Following Foucault, he posits that discourse creates and provides subject positions into which subjects are ‘interpellated’. Yet, Hall criticizes Foucault’s theory for the fact that “[d]iscursive subject positions become a priori categories which individuals seem to occupy in an unproblematic fashion” (Hall, 1996a, 10) and that “[t]here is certainly no single switch to ‘agency’, to intention and volition” (ibid., 13). Hall claims that, in order to occupy a subject position, the active moment of identification by the subject itself is always needed. To him, the “result of a successful articulation or ‘chaining’ of the subject into the flow of the discourse” (ibid., 6) are identities. According to Hall, these positions constructed in discourse ought to be seen as complex and contradictory and the process of identification with these positions as not always deliberate or freely chosen. Identities are thus complex and diverse processes of articulation between individuals and discourse. Hall (1996a, pp. 5-6) describes identity as a point of *suture* between on the one hand, the discourses and practices which attempt to ’interpellate’, speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be ’spoken’. Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us.

Moreover, Hall stresses that subjects identify with diverse subject positions in different contexts and also produce and perform these positions in different ways. He clearly rejects ideas that see the hailing of the subject by discourse as equivalent to becoming and being a subject, for these ideas deny the subject’s opportunities to take part in the appropriation of subject positions assigned by discursive practices. Using the concept of articulation, the analytical perspective can be directed towards the mechanisms that constitute particular possibilities to occupy subject positions and cause subjects to identify with specific subject positions, which reflect discursive formations and what those positions mean to them. The focus is on how subjects occupy these positions, how they
fashion, stylize, produce and ‘perform’ these positions, and why they never do so completely, for once and all time, and some never do, or are in a constant, agnostic process of struggling with, resisting, negotiating and accommodating the normative or regulative rules with which they confront and regulate themselves (ibid., p. 14).

The question arises how articulations, rearticulations, disarticulations, and thus social meaning are (re-)produced and shifted. Given that it is the individual who accomplishes articulations and who itself is the site of ongoing struggles about articulation, Hall argues that the emergence of articulations can only be reconstructed if the relation between subjects and their agency is considered (Winter, 2009, p. 205). In the course of reflecting upon these connections, different relations of power that frame the subject’s agency in a particular context must be taken into account, seeing as the subject’s possibilities to act cannot be concluded simply from his or her position in the system of social differences. Agency always has to be specifically contextualized, since there is no such thing as a general theory of agency. “[A]gency can only be described in its contextual enactments. Agency is never transcendent; it always exists in the differential and competing relations among the historical forces at play” (Grossman, 1992, p. 123).

An understanding of individuals as described above is crucial to research in Critical Psychology as well. Individuals have to be understood as subjects endowed with agency whose actions are mediated by social meanings and grounded in societal conditions that are not determining, but offer possibilities for (and limitations to) action. Subjects can always “consciously orient themselves towards the situations as a ‘possibility’, that is, they always have the alternative of acting otherwise or not at all” (Holzkamp, 1992, p. 198). They are capable of relating in a subjectively meaningful way to the conditions as presented to them in a particular situation. The scope of action possibilities is relative to the individual’s position in society. Holzkamp (1983, pp. 367) theorizes the subject’s possibilities to act and relate to his or her life conditions in the concept of the ‘subjective possibility space’.

According to Holzkamp (1983, p. 368), the extent of the subject’s scope of action, complete with its possibilities and limitations, is shaped by the formation of meanings, representing societal structures as perceived by the subject in a concrete life situation and social position. Hence, spaces of possibilities are always specific and individual even if determined by societal meaning structures and can only be recognized from the particular standpoint of the subject in a given situation. This first-person perspective is always “personal and societal at once, because structures of social meaning […] flow into the premises for each person’s subjective reasons for action” (Motzkau/Schraube, 2015, p. 282).
According to Holzkamp (1983, pp. 352), the subject’s agency is characterized by the ‘double possibility’ of action, either to pursue agency within the confines of the socially given or permitted possibilities (restrictive agency) or to try to transcend those limits (together with others) and thereby extend agency (generalized agency) (ibid.; ibid., pp. 379; Markard, 2010, p. 169). Markard (2010, p. 169) argues that this ‘double possibility’ between objective and subjective determination also involves a ‘double problem’, namely that of arranging oneself with the given restrictive conditions and thus sacrificing opportunities in life or risking conflicts in an attempt to extend possibilities in life. I do not want to elaborate further on these categories of agency (see for example Holzkamp, 1983, 1990a), but instead to highlight the point of the concept I consider crucial: according to Critical Psychology, individuals are not only subjected to the conditions under which they live and limited in their actions by those structures and conditions. Instead, Critical Psychology argues that there is, at least potentially, always the possibility to influence and change those restrictive conditions that impede one’s agency and life quality. Hence, the two-sided interrelationship that constitutes individuals as producers of life conditions, in which they are also subjects, is crucial to Critical Psychology. Agency is the basic category for explaining and analyzing these complex relationships. To Holzkamp, the specificity of human beings originates in human agency and the basic possibility to extend control over conditions of life.

2.3. Intervention and Transition: Rearticulations and Extending the Disposal over Conditions

Both Cultural Studies and Critical Psychology are not just interested in comprehending and explaining certain phenomena but aim to offer a perspective for change as well. Cultural Studies seek rearticulations and the shifting of meanings to change contexts through scientific study, whereas Critical Psychology aims to develop action opportunities which help expand the subjective space of possibilities through intervention in restrictive social conditions.

Cultural Studies is often described as a ‘political project of theory’ (Hall, 2000a; Hall, 2000b, pp. 36; Grossberg, 1997, 264). Projects of Cultural Studies are always political and seek not just to understand the structures of power, but also the possibilities of struggles, resistance, and change (Grossberg, 1997, p. 253). Lawrence Grossberg characterizes cultural studies as “a certain kind of intellectual practice”, “a certain way of embodying the belief that what we do can actually matter”, “a way of politicking theory and theorizing politics” (ibid.). “[C]ultural studies matters”, Grossberg claims, “because it is about how to keep
political work alive in an age of shrinking possibilities” (ibid., 1997, p. 252). Cultural Studies pursue critical engagement with and active participation in the ‘struggle for representation’ (Hall, 2004a, p. 165). The “will to knowledge” is crucial here: Grossberg states that cultural studies is committed to producing scientific knowledge about complexities “to gain a better understanding of the relations of power […] in a particular context” (Grossberg, 1997, p. 253). A “knowledge that both helps people understand that the world is changeable and that offers some direction for how to change it” (ibid., p. 264). “For Cultural Studies, there is always something at stake” (ibid., 1992, p. 18). Cultural Studies is about questioning common understandings and beliefs and shifting socially constructed representations, since such representations are relevant factors in how people shape their world. They are the contexts that frame individuals’ actions.

In the pursuit of these objectives, radical contextualism represents the theoretical and methodological point of reference within Cultural Studies (ibid., 1997, pp. 253-262). Radical contextualism proceeds from the basic assumption that social phenomena are always dynamically articulated in various ways. Contexts are understood as the particular intertwined formations of forces at a given point in time, in which concrete social practices and phenomena are embedded and unfold their effects (Marchart, 2008, p. 39). That is why the context of social phenomena “is not merely background but the very conditions of possibility of something […]. It is precisely what one is trying to analyze and it is the most difficult thing to construct” (ibid., p. 252). Contexts are not simply given, but have to be (re-)constructed.

As the context of a particular research project is not known beforehand, “it has to be defined by the project, by the political question that is at stake” (ibid., p. 255). Scholars use particular theoretical perspectives and questions as resources that not only help (re-)construct the context, but also allow – and this is a key objective of Cultural Studies – to contribute to the transformation of contexts (Winter, 1999, p. 182): on the one hand, as mentioned above, by producing a body of knowledge that helps to understand social practices and phenomena as well as to identify possibilities of action and resistance in formations of power. On the other hand, Cultural Studies takes part in the struggle for representation (Hall 2004a, 165). This entails, for example, investigating and questioning commonly accepted patterns of interpretation and articulation with regard to power relations and their functions. One example could be to consider ideologies of inequality from the perspective of those who are restricted by the effects of these inequalities in their everyday life and to investigate meanings and articulations from their point of view. This way, the distinct conjunctures of the forces at play in society and social relations can be
analyzed and described from a specific perspective. At the same time connections can be drawn that challenge popular social meanings and interpretation patterns, shift them, and effectively rearticulate meanings:

If a context can be understood as the relationships that have been made by the operation of power, in the interests of certain positions of power, the struggle to change the context involves the struggle to understand those relations, to locate those relations that can be disarticulated and to then struggle to rearticulate them. (Grossberg, 1997, p. 261)

Following this, from the viewpoint of Cultural Studies, knowledge production by means of research which seeks to “construct the relations between discourse, everyday life and the machineries of power” (Winter 1999, p. 26) is understood as interventionist.

A similarly interventionist aspect of research conducted in the framework of Critical Psychology can be found in the research process itself, which aims to offer the subjects who are part of the process the possibility to discover and reflect upon their own social positionings and subjective possibility spaces, discern restrictive conditions, and – together with others – try to influence and change these conditions with the aim of extending agency (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 31; 1983, p. 354, p. 545). Hence, research in Critical Psychology claims to be not merely about but for people.

This objective is deduced from the subject-scientific paradigm introduced above, which requires taking the standpoint of the subject as the starting point for all research and conducting inquiries into reason discourse. Because “reasons for action are always ‘first-person’ and thus ‘my’ reasons” (Holzkamp, 1990b, p. 3), research questions must not be questions about people, but instead research as a whole has to focus on the questions expressed by the subjects concerned. Hence, as Ute Osterkamp puts it, research from the standpoint of the subject “is not about making people a problem but to take up the problems of people” (ibid., p.4).

Against this background, approaches and methods are required that help participating subjects to clarify and alter their own experiences and life practices. Critical Psychology research aims to support all research participants in defining their own standpoint and involvement in the interplay between objective and subjective determination and to contribute to the realization of their subjective possibility spaces (Markard, 2010, p. 171; Holzkamp, 1983, p. 354, p. 545; ibid., 1985, p. 31) by developing theories that facilitate a depiction of one’s “own interests, motivations, reasons, and consequences of action in important or problematic life situations” (Markard, 2000, 15). Research that aims to be ‘for’ people – in the sense that researchers and the subjects ‘to be researched’
investigate the restrictions of their subjective possibility spaces and search for possibilities to extend their agency – requires a research design that considers all subjects involved as active participants seeking clarification and insight. Therefore, research has to offer spaces of collaborative investigations where processes of – even controversial and contradictory – examination and reflection can take place to facilitate the self-understanding of one’s own conscious and unconscious involvement (‘Selbstverständigung’). According to subject-scientific theory and its premises, subjects can never be the object of research, because reasons are always ‘first-person’ and therefore only accessible from the standpoint of the subject. Consequently, those who are ‘to be researched’ are conceptualized as co-researchers in Critical Psychology.¹

2.4 Reflexivity: Radical contextualism and intersubjectivity

Cultural Studies as well as Critical Psychology regard researchers and ‘researched’ as subjects with agency who influence the research process. Both approaches stress the need for reflection in this regard.

The concept of radical contextualism in Cultural Studies has a more general impact on the notion of reflection in research processes. The demand for radical contextualism (Grossberg 1997, pp. 252-268) and the claim to analyze the particular connection of knowledge and power in specific relations at a certain time and place calls for a reflective research practice. Research conducted along the lines of Cultural Studies is characterized by a practice of constant reflection on the contexts in which knowledge is produced. The practice of Cultural Studies is in this sense self-reflective: “the analyst is also a participant in the very practices, formations, and contexts he or she is analyzing” (ibid., p. 267). According to Grossberg, recognizing the researcher’s involvement implies reflecting “on one’s own relation to the various trajectories and dimensions, places and spaces, of the context one is exploring and mapping: theoretical, political, and institutional” (ibid., p. 268). Reflexivity in Cultural Studies is thus “not so much a question of identity, or of a politics of location”, “but a matter of a form of discursive practice and an analysis of institutional conditions” (ibid.). Consequently, the concept of radical contextualism is at the same time a concept of reflexivity. It includes the researcher as well as the research process as aspects of the context of knowledge production that need to be scrutinized and reflected upon with respect to power relations and corresponding effects.

¹ The term ‘co-researcher’ tries to counteract the objectification of individuals in research processes (Holzkamp, 1983, 540-545) and to highlight the participatory approach of research. For ambivalences of this term and other terms for those subjects who are to be researched in qualitative research see: Scharathow, 2014, pp. 64-65.
The need for systematic reflexivity in Critical Psychology stems primarily from its research aspiration to simultaneously strive for problem-centered clarification and to carry out research from the standpoint the subject – which for the researcher ultimately entails conducting research from the standpoint of another subject. First of all, the question arises how it is even possible to carry out research on subjective reasons for action from a subject-standpoint that is not one’s own, if we accept that reasons for action are always first-person and can therefore, in the sense of a premise-reason-connection and subjective function, only be described and comprehended from the subject’s standpoint (Holzkamp, 1997, p. 261; ebd. 1990b; Markard, 2000, p. 15)? Are specific contexts of meaning, subjective relevances and interpretations accessible and comprehensible from the outside at all?

Holzkamp (1997, p. 261) assumes that only the subject can have reasons for his or her actions, which can never be fully grasped by anyone else. Yet, according to him, it is possible to take up another subject’s standpoint, or at least to try to do so. Holzkamp substantiates this possibility by reference to the concept of intersubjectivity, i.e. the intersubjective context of meaning and reasons. He argues (1991, p.72) that intersubjectivity arises because our daily world consists of a generally accessible social nexus of meanings in the sense of generalized action possibilities. When other people realize such action possibilities, their actions and subjective situations also become meaningful for me, that is, understood as grounded.

Even if the particular premises of someone’s action are not known, they nevertheless remain comprehensible in principle. Hence, because of the objective societal life conditions, individual actions and experiences are generally understandable and accessible to anyone living under the same conditions. Thus, individual experiences and actions are merely one variant of experiencing and acting in society. That is why, on a more abstract level, experiences and actions point to societal conditions that affect the possibility spaces of others as well. Consequently, intersubjectivity refers to “the mediating processes […] through which my situation becomes […] accessible as an aspect of my socially meaningful actions” (ibid., 73). In Critical Psychology social relations at the human level are intersubjective relations, that is, relations in which different subjective ‘centers of intentionality’ are related to one another. Thus at any given moment, in that I perceive the other person from my standpoint, I perceive at the same time that he or she perceives me from his or her standpoint as someone who is perceiving him or her, and in this sense our perspectives cross over into each other. (ibid.)
Subjectivity is therefore always intersubjectivity at the same time. Against this backdrop, it becomes obvious that researchers, as ‘co-researchers’ in the research process, are also part of an intersubjective relation and communicate as subjects who feel, think, and act within certain social conditions (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 544). However, their respective subjectivities are nevertheless an inevitable part of the interaction. Holzkamp states that it is possible to adopt another subject’s standpoint, but not without involving one’s own subjectivity. Consequently,

as a researcher, one does not relate one's theories and procedures merely to others, keeping oneself out of it, but rather sees oneself as a subject fully involved in them. […] Not only the subjectivity of the other, but also the overlapping subjectivity of the researcher, will belong to the empirical that it is psychology's job to research. (ibid., 1992, pp. 76-77)

Reflexivity is necessary with regard to social positions and perspectives, simultaneously as an object of research and instrument of knowledge production.

3. Discussion

British Cultural Studies, particularly the concept of articulation as introduced by Hall, and perspectives of German Critical Psychology show similarities in their objectives. Still, they differ in their theoretical conceptualization of the relationship between subject, power, and society. Consequently, I elaborate on two major differences in the two theorizations because they have particular relevance for research practices.

Power, or power- or force-relations play a decisive role in both Critical Psychology and Cultural Studies. Yet, there are two distinct underlying notions of power. In Critical Psychology, power is mainly understood as inherent in societal conditions that can be objectified. Power is therefore conceptualized as domination. In this concept, social conditions that restrict or extend possibility spaces seem to be opposed to individuals as subjects with agency, even though the relation is mediated through the level of meaning. Cultural Studies, on the other hand, conceptualize power, with reference to Foucault, as dynamic and flexible force-relations, as formations of power-knowledge that manifest differently in distinct contexts in the form of (embattled) meanings, articulations, and subjects. Power-knowledge effectively pervades social relations at every level in dynamic, and often contradictory, ways. In cultural studies, social relations are understood as interactions that are traversed by power in many ways
and effectively constitute meaning. They find expression in discourses as well as, mediated by discourse, in concrete social practices.

From a social-scientific perspective, as well as from a research-theoretical point of view the concept of power as represented in cultural studies allows for analyzing the power dimension of social reality in greater detail than the Critical Psychology’s power concept does. While the latter tends to paint a reduced picture of reality, therefore also providing reduced analytical insight, the concept of power in Cultural Studies – always articulated with social practices, relations, and subjects as well as an analytical focus on relations and interactions – additionally allows researchers to take into account those power relations that are in danger of being overlooked by the approach of Critical Psychology. For example, the restrictions suggested by subjective reasons for actions do not predominantly point to a generalizable societal level, but to social relations primarily in the immediate social vicinity as well. However they do not need to be of prime relevance in each situation. Although Critical Psychology’s category of immediate life circumstances (Lebenslage), which describes the situation of the individual, “somehow includes ‘the social’”, as Josef Held (1994, p. 45) states, these aspects of social life are awarded little importance and are “not regarded separately” (ibid.). However, it is precisely the embeddedness of individuals and their interactions in social contexts that are decisive when it comes to the investigation of agency in relations characterized by power and inequalities. For it is ‘the social’ that mediates between subject and society as Held (ibid., pp. 43) assumes as well. In Cultural Studies, the social is the field where social meanings and articulations are constructed and negotiated – always embedded in power relations and discursive formations. Correspondingly social relations in the sense of relations with and within the social vicinity, in which individuals and their social practices are embedded, are highly relevant and have to be taken into account.

One advantage, then, is that Critical Psychology focuses on agency, where Cultural Studies concentrates on social constructions and articulations. Cultural Studies not only emphasize the necessity to systematically adopt a power-analytical perspective in the analysis of the construction of articulations and to take the dynamics and the non-closure of articulations into account, they also stress the crucial role agency plays in the constitution and shifting of articulations as well as in processes of de-articulation. But even though this is the case, Cultural Studies are rather vague with regard to the analysis of the nexus between subjects equipped with agency and the production of articulations and re-articulations. Friedrich Krotz (2008, p. 132) criticizes that Cultural Studies only insufficiently take into account the creativity and individuality of human agency which, for example, is connected in particular ways to the subject’s biography.
According to Brigitte Hipfl and Matthias Marschik (2009, p. 316) the “subjective factor”, the subjective experiences, “have largely vanished” from current Cultural Studies.

Precisely this ‘subjective factor’, the subjective meanings and experiences, and individual agency, takes centre stage in Critical Psychology research. With its concept of ‘subjective possibility spaces’ and ‘condition-meaning-reasoning’-analyses in reason discourse, Critical Psychology offers analytical instruments that enable the investigation of concrete experiences and particular problems in their social mediatedness, without the subject – complete with his or her agency and embeddedness in multiple social contexts – disappearing from view.

The different focal points and areas of attention in Cultural Studies and Critical Psychology, respectively, also entail distinct approaches to research design and analytical perspectives on empirical data. Yet, this is where I see the potential for qualitative research: The combination of both theoretical and methodological perspectives and selected aspects thereof offers a broader and therefore more differentiated analytical perspective for conceptualizing and conducting research projects.²

In the following section, I illustrate, based on some selected aspects, what the combination of British Cultural Studies and German Critical Psychology may imply for qualitative research projects aiming to reconstruct the conditions of action in relation to an individual’s agency in the subject area of power and inequality.

4. Implications for research work

With regard to the methodical procedure, the presented premises in Cultural Studies and Critical Psychology suggest a choice of instruments that encourage the subjects who are ‘to be researched’ or, indeed, the ‘co-researchers’, to elaborate on their perspectives on their lifeworlds, their conduct of everyday life, and their day-to-day problems in such a way that particularly their assigned meanings, knowledge, explanations, and interpretations find expression, for example in descriptions of situations, reasons for action, and argumentation. These interpretations, meanings, and reasons indicated by the subjects who take part in a research project can then be analyzed (possibly, but not necessarily, together with the ‘co-researchers’): on the one hand, with regard to articulations with power, discourse and social relations and, on the other hand, with an eye to subjective meanings and their reference to social and societal conditions as premises for actions, perspectives, and interpretations. Moreover, according to

² See Scharathow 2014 for an example.
radical contextualism, different research projects ought to be accompanied by the combination of different theories and methods or even the development of new ones (‘bricolage’ in Cultural Studies) with regard to pragmatic and strategic/political principles (Winter, 2005, p. 205). Furthermore, according to a subject-scientific approach, methods should be used that facilitate a good intersubjective relationship between researcher and ‘co-researcher’ in order to devise research from the standpoint of the subject. Such research designs support processes of self-understanding of one’s own conscious and unconscious involvement and the collaborative investigation of possibility spaces. With regard to the relations of power and difference that frame research projects, it is necessary to select or develop procedures that allow taking the ‘co-researchers’, i.e. those whose perspectives are being researched, into account as subjects who are ambiguous, variedly positioned in social relations, and have agency – and to treat and present them as such.

Essentially, both the researchers and the individuals whose self-positioning is researched are subjects of research, whose theories, interpretations, feelings and actions have an impact on the research process. Equally categorically – following especially the theorizations of Cultural Studies – there can never be such thing as a hierarchy-free relation between the involved parties in the research process. As a result, the different, intertwined places and positionings in a social formation of context-specific (power-) relations as well as the action possibilities and subjective perspectives that are influenced by them and manifest in the interactive process of interpreting, negotiating and constructing meaning ought to be reflexively included in the process of knowledge production: as an instrument of cognition, not as an aspect, that needs to be eliminated.

Reflexivity – understood as systematic contextualization and constant practice of reflecting on and questioning the different dimensions of the place at which and from which research is conducted with regard to possible influences – is an indispensable part of research and knowledge production. ‘Places’ are to be understood as individually occupied and performed subject positions in a social order, specific articulations between subject and discourse. Thus, objective access to social reality cleared from any subjectivity is not possible and, consequently, neither is ‘understanding’ in this sense. I try to see and understand the world from another subject’s position, I can, at best, achieve an approximation. Correspondingly, research cannot be about adopting the very same perspective or ‘occupying’ the position of another subject, but should always be about its reconstruction or, to put it in terms of Cultural Studies, the (co-)construction of subject positionings.

With regard to knowledge production in research, it is therefore crucial to constantly keep asking questions about the power dimensions of social relations
and conditions to which subjects refer in their interpretations and positionings and in the framework of which interactions, experiences, actions, reasons, etc. take place. This is followed by the question which aspects of a particular context become premises for action and make a specific action possible in the first place. These questions are highly relevant for the (re-)construction of the context(s) of a research project and for interpretative work with empirical data. Following these assumptions, data interpretation and social science explanations are always constructions themselves, influenced by the subjectivity and the context knowledge of the researcher(s). All theorizations and interpretations in social research are, “however carefully tested and supported, in the end ‘authored’” (Hall, 1996b, p. 14).

As a consequence, neither research nor researcher can be ‘objective’ or ‘neutral’. Moreover, studies in the subject area of power, difference and inequality, studies along with the corresponding findings, can never not be political. They always represent a statement in political discourses – with all ensuing effects. In this respect, I consider not only reflexivity to be vital, but also find myself in agreement with the spirit by the claim to critically intervene in social inequalities through research, as put forth by both research approaches. The latter may imply providing knowledge that is conducive to a better understanding of the relations of power at play and develop corresponding resistance strategies and actions. It also involves critically questioning representations and articulations that are widely accepted as ‘truths’ and investigating them with regard to their constructionist character and embeddedness in power relations. That way, research and scientific knowledge production can intervene in the constant struggle over meaning and representation through re-articulations. Re-articulations, in turn, alter contexts and conditions that, for example, make discriminatory meaning production and exclusionary practices possible. Moreover, interventionist research could imply research processes that offer opportunities for reflection, self-understanding and clarifications with regard to one’s own subject position and actions within societal and social relations. At best, this can be conducive to revealing how one’s own actions are complicit in circumstances that influence action conditions in negative (or positive) ways and to thinking about how these conditions can be changed or what opportunities there may be to expand the scope of (recalcitrant) action. Of course, in the face of problems that require collective efforts at a structural level, the latter can only be accomplished in full awareness of the limitations to individual agency (Huck, 2006, p. 126, as cited in Markard, 2010, p. 176). That said, on the level of individual action, it may imply becoming aware of the societal/social dimension of one’s ‘own’ problems during the research process and realizing that these problems are neither a matter of
individual responsibility alone nor solvable at an individual level. One possible consequence could be to search for ways of acting that question social meanings and social orders and disturb the latter in their ostensible normality and acceptance.

5. Conclusion

Qualitative social research aiming to be critical (of society) and to contribute to the struggle against social inequalities and power imbalances has to question the acceptance and supposed self-evidence of mainstream categories and constructions of social meaning/representations. This implies analyzing social categories and constructions with regard to power relations and underscoring their contingency as well as carefully examining their distinct functions and meanings for different actors and for the social order of society. Moreover, it is relevant to emphasize the complex and often contradictory connections and interdependencies between subjective experience and action and social circumstances and to highlight both the conditions that make this experience and this action possible in the first place and the conditions that lead to unequal action possibilities. If science wishes to contribute to breaking down restrictive structures and obstructive conditions, those ‘possibility-conditions’ that entail unequal chances of participation and action must be revealed and criticized. This, however, has to be achieved without losing sight of the subjects – as endowed with agency, participating in the construction of social meanings and conditions, and as actors who are potentially able to resist, act unruly, and question and shift articulations. For that purpose, theorizations and methodical approaches as introduced by German Critical Psychology and British Cultural Studies can be extremely useful.

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Does experience make us wise?
Subjectscientific considerations on the relation between subjective experience and scientific generalization¹

Morus Markard

Abstract
As a contrast to dogmatic assertions, “experience” has been used with an (ideology-)critical motive since the advent of modern science. But the reference to experience can also serve to discourage criticism of practice. This paper explores this problem with respect to the relation between concepts and experience and the relation between immediate and socially mediated aspects of experience. Finally, methodological aspects of a subject scientific concept of experience are discussed, with which the official discourse in nomothetic psychology is undermined and the connection of suffering and therapy to life conditions is inevitable.

Keywords
experience, critical psychology, subject science, practice research, methodology, therapy

1. Introduction

Common knowledge tells us that experience makes us wise.\(^2\) A closer look reveals, however, that experience can also make us obtuse, stupefaction and speechlessness. To which extent one can become wise from experience depends on which experience is broken down how—and what we mean by “wise.” Does “wise” refer to developing the ability to smartly get ahead through a pliable opportunism, acquiring such a smoothness that one no longer rubs anyone the wrong way? Or to humanly inspired, artful or even subversive tactics in the jungle of the institutional administration of people? Or to the analysis of the relationship between professional and political aspects of psychological work, such as in stating reasons for extending the leave to remain for “traumatized” refugee women from Bosnia (cf. Rafailovic 2006)?

Obviously, both aspects—what we take as “wise” and how one breaks down which experiences—are connected. On the linguistic level, it is already notable that the everyday expression “to make an experience” does not at all cast the subject of the experience as passive. The aspect of activity can even be found on the etymology of the German word *Erfahrung*: *ervarn* means “roaming through,” “travelling through.”

This is not to dispute that I can also make the experience of being befallen, in the sense of a total surrender to nature, to a societal situation or to others; but this type of experience would have to be analyzed as an extreme version in a dimension of active experiencing with attending specific emotional qualities.

Foundational science, applied science, scientifically legitimized practice and everyday life all refer to experience, usually from a critical perspective—in contrast to theoretical claims, dogmatic assertions, etc.—such that experience potentially tends to transport that ideology-critical motive that has been attached to it in opposition to scholasticism since the 13th century, as Pongratz (1984: 53) highlights.

While this is true, the matter is unfortunately not all that simple. Experiences, too, are highly contested: Whether the results or consequences of research in the natural sciences are at issue, where all sides argue on the basis of “experience,” whether it is about the social science debate over how to properly understand empirical (i.e. based upon experience) science, or whether—as suggested above—experiences from professional practice or everyday life are concerned: at least today, it would be naïve to assume that a recourse to experience inherently pursues an ideology-critical motive. This, too, we learn from everyday life: “Experience against experience,” that is, a reference to “experience” alone cannot settle a dispute.

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\(^2\) The German phrase goes, “*Aus Erfahrung wird man klug.*”
This leads me back to my starting point: How do we break down which experiences, and how should we understand the wisdom that can result from them?

I can only address the related problems in an exemplary manner, and I will do so in five areas: the relation between concepts and experience; the relation between immediacy and mediatedness or communicability of experience; the resulting consequences for the relation between critical and affirmative practice; the methodological implications of a subject-scientific concept of experience; and the consequences for thinking about therapy.

2. On the relation between concepts and experience

The question is: What can be decided scientifically with reference to experience? One would think that, in the case of empirical studies, empirical data and results are decisive for the content and validity of concepts. Take an example from—experiential—psychology: the relation between intermittent reinforcement and resistance to extinction. As is know, this means that, if a certain behavior is not rewarded (“amplified”) every time, but only intermittently, it will take longer for the behavior to stop after a stable absence of rewards. To use an illustrative example: A fisherman who catches a fish with every throw of his fishing-rod is rewarded every time, one who only makes a catch every now and then is rewarded “intermittently.” We can easily imagine that if no fish are biting, the first will quit more quickly than the second (who, as we can easily understand, will remain hopeful for longer). What we can settle by experiment is whether this theoretically claimed relation exists or not. What cannot be tested is the relevance of the theory’s concepts for human life: “stimulus,” “reaction,” “reinforcement”: There is no driving school where you will learn the meaning of break lights following the logic of these concepts, that is, through trial and error. This would mean that learners would only slowly, after a series of rear-end collisions, realize that flaring break lights signal that the preceding vehicle is slowing down. Driving schools do not treat break lights as “stimuli” but as societal meanings that can be imparted through language.

Put more generally: The world, objective meanings, “stimuli” must be understood as meanings to which the individual can and must relate; meanings that therefore do not directly determine human action, but that must be seen as opportunities to act. For the individual, opportunities to act become subjective “premises for action” if she has to develop intentions for action from subjective needs for solutions in given problematic life situations. Premises, therefore, are
aspects of constellations of meanings that the individual has accentuated. Actions are based on premises.

To use a simple example, an overhead luggage rack in a train compartment is a condition for getting the suitcase off my feet; it becomes a relevant premise for me if I actually want to get the luggage off my feet. Intention for action: haul the suitcase overhead. Action: I haul the suitcase overhead. A less obvious, but equally possible accentuation of premises of the condition “luggage rack” could be to use it for pull-ups, or to hang up laundry that didn’t dry before the trip. What is crucial is that the luggage rack does not simply have an effect on the individual, but that the individual makes the luggage rack her premise and thereby establishes a context of sense or meaning. And in that sense, theoretical claims about actions have to be claims on premise-reason relations.

To guard against a frequent misunderstanding, I should highlight that “reasoned” here does not mean “rational” or “conscious,” as the litmus paper example can demonstrate. Litmus paper does not consciously turn red or blue, and also not unconsciously, but under certain conditions, it changes color conditionally. This means that the unconscious only makes sense in the reason discourse. For the fishermen example above, this means: the lake or the conditions are a matter entirely inscrutable and intransparent to him, such that he is—consciously or not—reduced to trying out, under an extreme reduction of premises (I will come back to this).

Another aspect on the relevance of concepts: I can empirically establish that the marble David by Michelangelo in Florence is more voluminous and heavy and less conductive than the bronze thinker by Rodin in Paris. To a shipping company, these may be quite relevant aspects—but not for what we commonly associate with an artwork.

This means: With empirical methods alone, as sophisticated an organization of experience as they may be, we cannot establish the relevance of dimensions or concepts. This is the reason why—certainly for critical science—the level of clarifying and criticizing concepts cannot be dealt with empirically. This marks the limits of an experience-based, that is, empirical science and the necessity of adapting empirical methods to the categorial dimensions of the subject matter. Driving instructors clearly know this.

Moreover, the problem with experimental-statistical socio-scientific and psychological approaches is that, in its full sense, the concept of experience only applies to the researchers, while the experience of those researched is methodically regulated or even—to quote Adorno—“annulled” (1972: 69; my translation, M.M.); or, to use a line from Marx: reducing the “evidence of the senses … to the sensuality of geometry” (1953: 330; my translation, M.M.).
3. On the relationship between immediacy and mediatedness or communicability of experience

In the same way that, in an experiment, empirical events have to be broken down conceptually as to their origin, experiences are also being made in the light of conceptions elsewhere. But aren’t immediacy and personal authenticity the central moments of self- and world experience? It is, after all, me who makes these experiences, and there is no-one that can make them for me; this includes spatial and temporal situatedness and the perspectivity—bodily—grounded therein. The individual experience of love, sexuality, fatherhood, toothache, musical enjoyment, physical exhaustion cannot be substituted by the reports of others. I can have to more or less passively surrender to an experience (toothache, noise, elevator music) or intentionally turn towards it (music), I can seek out experiences, try to find opportunities for them, or seek to avoid them. Learning an instrument illustrates irreplaceable individual experiences that further implicate a high share of one’s own practical involvement: I can look at any number of guitarists and read any number of textbooks about playing a guitar, it will not make me a guitar player. Sensual experience and action are not separate as such, they are related to one another in a way that has to be determined case-by-case.

Despite the sensual immediacy of experience as it is given to me—and, at first, only to me—experiences of ego tend to involve imagining alter, or its possibility: We can not only share and relate experiences in the way that common phrases indicate: A problem shared is a problem halved, a pleasure shared is double pleasure—we can also learn from the experiences of others, which is a basis of generalization.

But what does it mean to learn from the experiences of others, to share problems and pleasures? What in the experiences is it that can be shared or related, when we take into account the sensual immediacy of experience, take it seriously and do not try to suspend it? The core problem seems to be whether immediacy can be mediated.

The solution seems to me to lie in the fact that experiences are made through, and can be broken down through, the medium of societal forms of thought (and therefore societal meanings): The immediate and authentic character of experiences does not mean solipsistic encapsulation, but lies in my individual realization of (societal) meanings, as they become premises for me individually. If I experience or observe myself as endowed with or suffering from certain characteristics, I experience or observe myself, firstly, in the general figure of thought of “personal characteristics” and, secondly, in the societal perception of the characteristic’s psychological content (such as “polite,”
“competent” or “daft”). That individual experiences are made in the medium of societal forms of thought is also connected to the everyday experience of doubled pleasure and halved problems. Of course, this does not resolve the problems of breaking down experience; they are only formulated in a way that makes the function of the concept of and reference to experience comprehensible.

In my view, this also includes the differentiation of sociality and sociability, or between perceptible and non-perceptible aspects of what can be experienced (Holzkamp 1984). Society is a real system mediating the life support of the individual; but as such, society as a system is not a perceptible, immediate element of experience. Through different and (in the narrower sense) institutional subsystems, societal conditions structure the activities, ways of thinking and experiences of the members of society. This structuredness itself, however, is not perceptible but can only be determined by reconstruction. What needs to be reconstructed (in each case) is the mediated relation between the immediate life world or situation and the societal system that encompasses and structures it. Crucial to our enquiry, the immediate social relations that, in their life-worldly immediacy, appear to be quite perceptible are also structured - non-perceptibly - by the societal system and its institutional subsystems. “Perceptible” social relations are not fully captured by their perceptibility. How we experience men, women, children has biographical, situational and societal dimensions.

The non-perceptibility of societal structures does not at all mean that they cannot be experienced, but only that if we do not analyse experiences in relation to those moments, the analysis will be incomplete, skewed. However, we have to take into account that there are different, competing theoretical reconstructions and reflections of what society is, and what kind of society we live in. As a result, the break-down of experiences will be controversial. Whether you look at society as a social market economy, a risk society, the ambiance of postmodern flâneurs, or as vulgar capitalist barbarianism is a matter of controversy, but it is essential for breaking down experience (e.g., of unemployment or truancy), and in some cases also practically relevant.

The relevance of non-perceptible societal structures brings further complications with it: If we assume that subjective suffering relates to societal conditions, there are limits to psychology to the extent that it cannot or will not intervene at that level: Framing the situation of a single mother with five children in a two-bedroom apartment with running water from every wall as a problem of a woman lacking frustration tolerance would be a platitudinous psychologizing solution for a structural problem.
4. Consequences for the relationship between critical and affirmative practice

In order to introduce this, I have to come back once more to the (psychological) experiment, under the following aspect: In the experiment, the theory is devised *beforehand* and then operationalized, such that the empirical data can be generated and interpreted in that theoretical-practical framework. Conceptually, this methodic arrangement thus determines the conditions and the theory for the generation and interpretation of the participants’ empirical data, organized on that basis (and, with that, the possibilities of experience regimented in that manner). Outside of such a methodic arrangement, that is, in any (research) practice that cannot or will not enforce such a regimen, the theoretical considerations cannot be deduced from a setup designed by the investigator, but they have to start from the problem of a subject. However, this action problem does not prima vista reveal the experiences enclosed in it, or the theories or forms of thought in light of which they were made. The task is, rather, to first reconstruct these and to discuss them.

In that regard, two problematic moments of referencing experience have stood out to me, especially in the analysis of psychological practice: that this reference to experience cannot be the—decisive—*end* of an argument, but only its *part* or beginning, and that under certain circumstances the appeal to experience can become immunizing to criticism and therefore affirmative.

Thus, in one of our projects (cf. Fahl & Markard 1993), a psychological caregiver of single young mothers living in a home for such women reported her “experience” that these young women projected onto her their problems with authority, which they had had with teachers and other authority figures. Upon inquiry, it turned out that one trigger of these “problems with authority” was that the women resisted the fact they did not receive their entire monthly allowance at the beginning of the month, but paid out in installments—a measure that the director and the psychologist justified with the tendency of the young women to “throw out” their money at the beginning of the month for activities considered superfluous, such as taking a taxi, and then to go empty-handed for the rest of the month.

What, then, can be said about this report of experience under the aspect of interest to us? What is referred to by the term “problems with authority” is not an empirical, observable subject matter that can be experienced immediately, but a *concept* with which the actual empirical subject matter—that is, the dispute over the payment of the allowance—is interpreted theoretically. Or, from another perspective: the concept “problems with authority” had become “second nature” to the psychologist to such an extent that she no longer separated the relevant
experience (of conflict) from the concept of a “problem with authority” in which she made that experience—a conflation that, in addition, had the pleasant side effect that the psychologist could set aside the question of whether she herself was acting in an authoritarian way, that is, whether the young women were right to oppose her. By structuring it as experience, she was able to transform this substantive conflict into a merely psychological problem, that is, it was transported into the terrain of the psychologist in a way in which the women had their potentially justified opposition psychologically wrested from them.

This experience, as we can see, could only be discussed and criticized because it was analyzed in relation to the form of thought enclosed in it, which requires keeping description and interpretation as analytically separate from one another as possible. It is therefore necessary to dissect the (in a wider sense) theoretical ideas underlying the experiences and related actions.

In that respect, we can also note that the talk of the theory-practice relation, in which experience is supposed to play a crucial role, has to be differentiated under one aspect. What appears as theory-practice difference is (also) a relation between different, even opposing, irreconcilable competing theories, that is, a theory-theory relation (cf. Holzkamp 1988:45). Since, given the anticipatory character of action, there can be no practice without “theory,” there is really never a direct opposition of theory and practice, but always of theories with their individual practice references. For this reason, too, practice and arguments referring to practice (experiences) have to be interrogated as to their theoretical structuredness. The theory-practice relation is not one between psychological foundational science and the practical-professional occupation of psychologists, but pervades both areas.

5. Methodological implications of a subject-science-based concept of experience

Pretty much everything that I have said so far about experience and practice in the subject-world relation as a premises-reasons relation is incompatible with psychological mainstream research, inasmuch as that research reduces the specific relationship of an individual to the world—which, as I said, must be conceptualized as a premises-reasons relationship—to a condition-event relationship in a deterministic fashion, thereby also missing the specific character of therapeutic experience, which cannot be reduced to effect variables.

However, with Klaus Holzkamp (1986) we can show that claims framed nomothetically as condition-event relationships actually contain premises-reasons relationships, in short: hidden reasons patterns. It can be quite fun to go
through traditional theories under this aspect. This implication is revealed not only, but most obviously, by inserting into the “if-then” component of a hypothesis a “subjectively functional” or a “sensibly”—in that subjective sense, not as measured against external criteria of rationality: “If an action is rewarded, it will understandably/sensibly be repeated.” Assuming that an “if-then” is mediated in this way by subjective meaning, we can no longer speak of a contingent relationship between the “if” and the “then” component. Not even if, to stick with the example, the rewarded action is not repeated, say, because the reward is seen as inappropriate, e.g., because a rewarded student does not want to be seen as teacher’s pet (Brandstätter 1984: 154). Because this, too, is a relevant context—just like the only apparently contingent relationship between intermittent reinforcement and resistance to extinction (see above), which could be clarified by an extreme reduction of premises from a reason-theoretical standpoint.

A contingent relationship, by contrast, would be: if you cuddle a bird-flu infected budgie, you catch the bird flu; you catch it or you don’t, but you don’t sensibly or reasonably catch it. On the other hand: If you don’t want to catch the bird flu, you reasonably abstain from cuddling (unknown) budgies, if you are looking for a risk kick, you don’t.

If claims officially framed as condition-event relations can be shown to contain premises-reasons relations—and this is the key point— the official discourse of nomothetically dominated psychology is undermined.

In my view, this has two methodological consequences that are essential for the method dispute in psychology / therapy:

First, the empirical examination of nomothetically meant theories that can be reformulated as premises-reasons relations is a misunderstanding, is pseudo-empirical (Brandstätter 1982, 1984; Holzkamp 1986). That it is reasonable for some people to cuddle with budgies cannot be refuted by the fact that others do not find it reasonable—the different actions are examples of different premises-reasons relations. As said before, premises-reasons relations are contexts of senso or meaning created by the subject, they are the expression of subjectively good reasons under defined circumstances. In so far, the relationship between premises for action and life interests or intentions for action has to be understood as implicative, and therefore as neither in need of nor amenable to an empirical examination. If someone else generates a different intention for action under the same circumstances (cuddle budgies or not, use luggage racks in different ways), these different if-then relationships are not in theoretical competition, but they represent different ideas of subjective reasonableness, different accentuations of premises. In Holzkamp’s words (1986: 31): “It does not depend on ‘empirical’ conditions to what extent the ‘theoretical’ proposition is ‘proven,’ but it depends
on the ‘justification theory’ as implicative structure which types of ‘empirical’
conditions are suitable as ‘cases of application’.”

Secondly—and maybe even more importantly—this shows that assumptions
on reasons for action cannot be shirked off into a hermeneutical exclave of
psychology, but that essential conceptions and theories also mark the
psychological mainstream, whose official discourse would thereby turn out to be
theoretically and methodologically erroneous.

In opposition to the nomothetic understanding, psychological theories must
be conceptualized as theories for the self-reflection of humans, and those have to
be thought of and treated as co-researchers as much as possible; that is, their
experiences have to be brought to bear in the full sense. Case-related as
premises-reasons relations are, they do not contain statements on the incidence or
prevalence of the phenomena treated by them. Subjects exist in the plural, but not
in the average (cf. Markard 2000). Individual cases can be put in a relation to one
another, but cannot “set off” against one another. It is the individual
specifications that are of interest, not the leveling of an average. The individual,
subjective cases are not deviations, the idea of deviation itself deviates from the
idea of subjectivity. Possibilities for generalization therefore do not rest in key
tendencies, but in the identification of societally mediated and societally
intervening possibilities for action.

6. Consequences for thinking about therapy

This mediation by meaning is what sets apart therapy from the bird flu. And the
world relationship in that mediation by meaning (“premises”) is what makes it
necessary to relate psychological suffering to the living conditions of the subjects
(cf. Markard 2005). This raises at least two problems, which I will at least point
to in conclusion:

1. If suffering, problems, disorders of subjects have to be understood from
their living conditions, psychologists meet the limits of their work to the extent
that these living conditions are beyond their range of intervention, or if and to the
extent that their client don’t expect or even actively prevent such an intervention.
Nonetheless, psychologists are expected to alleviate problems while skipping
over (the changeability of) problematic living conditions. The subjects
themselves may also approach psychologists in the hope of delegating their own
problems to experts. This harmonizes with an expectation of competence that is
detached from societal relations, abstract and in the end unrealizable (Fahl &
Markard 1993). Against this background, it is open and sometimes controversial
what exactly is a psychological problem, a psychological disorder. Put
differently: We can certainly critically discuss when and by whom a subject matter experienced as problematic is defined as a psychological—and not a societal or institutional—problem. To use the example again, when does a single mother with five children in a wet two-bedroom apartment become the psychological problem of that mother’s lacking frustration tolerance?

Under the conditions mentioned, qualifying a behavior as “irrational” means that I was unable to clarify the premises of the subject, or stopped trying: What appears as irrational is my own lack of understanding. An example:

A woman buys a closet from IKEA that she puts together successfully in her bedroom. However, the closet only stays in place until the tramway rumbles past. Putting it up again does not survive the rumbling past of the tramway either. A friendly IKEA employee agrees to come and put it together himself. When he is done, it is agreed that he waits for the next tramway inside the closet with a flashlight, so that he can observe the potential breakdown of the closet from the inside. What happens while the woman gets the friendly IKEA guy a beer is what always happens in this kind of story: The woman’s husband unexpectedly returns. He finds the new closet in the bedrooms and opens it: “What are you doing here,” he asks the stranger in the closed, stunned.—“I am waiting for the tramway.”

The stranger’s answer—“I am waiting for the tramway—is irrational only for someone who hasn’t broken down the stranger’s premises, or who either cannot or does not want to do that.

2. Does this way of thinking also do justice to insanity? Erich Wulff (1997) discusses the problem of the world-subject relationship with reference to—schizophrenic—insanity as follows: In those affected, the most complex structures of meaning are indeed cognitively realized and realizable, but—sometimes limited to certain areas of experience—these meanings have lost their “validity,” their “subjectively binding force” (159–60). Matters of course have lost their intelligibility. A rose is a rose is a rose—the fundamental recognition of being that lies in that quote by Gertrude Stein, the recognition of society, history and subject, Wulff argues, is no longer present with insanity. In this view, the “‘premise character’” of the world, that is, what the rose means to us, is itself based on an actual act of recognition, renewed again and again, such as that a rose is a rose—an act of recognition that is suspended in insanity.

The question is now whether insanity as a fundamental suspension of the premise character of the world is itself amenable to justification. Put differently: the question is whether the fact that the matter of course is the unintelligible can itself still be understood or has to remain un-understood. Wulff leaves this question open. What seems to be essential to me: If insanity is the fundamental
non-recognition of the world, it has to be thought of as—albeit radically negative—world relation and, as such, keeps challenging us to an investigation that does not give up the question of the meaning of the world, even when the denial of the world is at issue.

It can neither be empirically proven in an unequivocal manner that every psychological disorder is related to certain conditions, nor that this is not the case. However, it is neither scientifically equally valid nor societally without consequence which research question we ask and with which perspective we pursue it. Against the background of the fundamental societal mediatedness of human existence, in my eyes, the—paradigmatic—insistence on the question of the relation of psychological suffering to the world and to society is the more scientifically fruitful and emancipatorily relevant one—because only in the pursuit of this question is the problem given over to our action not negated, namely how conditions can be established and what they have to be like such that humans do not despair.

7. References


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Part III: Refining Empirical Research
Young people’s development of agency: Explored from their perspectives on everyday school life

Pernille Juhl

Abstract
The purpose of this article is to explore young people’s development of agency in relation to their everyday school life. In the article, I present empirical examples of how young people (15-16 years old) act in relation to contradictory structural conditions in the form of the expectations and demands on youth in school. I argue that, to gain knowledge about the various meanings of such conditions in young people’s lives, it is necessary to employ concepts suitable for situated analysis of young people’s narratives about everyday school life and the conflicts they face and act in relation to. Through such analysis I illustrate how young people in school are constantly engaged in complex, collective processes of prioritising and dealing with multiple considerations and the conflicts they experience. The young people’s personal perspectives on conflicts situated in their conduct of everyday life represent a resource for developing situated knowledge about the personal meanings of structural conditions in relation to youth development.

Keywords
youth development, agency, conduct of everyday life, school, dialectics, conflicts, science from the standpoint of the subject

Introduction
In recent years, youth in Denmark has been in focus in politics as well as in research. Hence, the public approach to youth and especially the aspects of youth related to compulsory education has undergone several political reforms. The reforms place major ambitions and expectations on young people. One example
is the national goals for primary school in Denmark, enacted in 2012, emphasising the importance of enhancing and raising individual academic performance and learning outcomes, the importance of working with individual learning goals, and continuous assessments (Ministry of Education, Denmark, 2017). Additionally, political initiatives have been made in order to animate young people to move more quickly through education, to decide on career, and with it, make educational choices earlier. Concurrently, the possibility of having second thoughts on choices and for changing one’s chosen educational path has been restricted (Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education, 2017). All in all, these many different political initiatives put a strain on youth in the form of the expectation that young people be determined, capable and steady. At the same time, young people face existential dilemmas in relation to being young. For instance, they are learning to live life in a different way, experiencing huge transitions and transformations and are simultaneously expected to develop self-determination (Mørch, 1996). How should contradictions of this nature be understood?

One strand of research contends that youth wellbeing is jeopardised due to the mentioned societal demands and restrictions on youth, consequently leading to severe personal struggle and suffering (Center for Youth Research, 2010). For instance, research shows that an increasing amount of young people – mainly girls – is struggling with mental health issues, such as stress and eating disorders (Waaddegaard, 2002, Ottosen et al., 2014), self-harming, anxiety (Møhl, 2006) and other health matters (Nielsen, Sørensen & Osmec, 2010). Another strand of research shows that the quite contradictory expectations young people face lead to increasing individualisation (Katznelson, 2006) and exclusion in primary school (Henze-Pedersen, Dyssegaard, Egelund & Nielsen 2016).

This article focuses on common dilemmas in relation to being young in the effort to explore everyday school life and the common dilemmas associated with it from a group of young people’s perspectives. The aim is to learn about what activities and common dilemmas and conflicts the young people are engaged in and how they act in order to deal with the contradictions in everyday life. The empirical material derives from a study anchored in a compound practice research project. The aim of the overall research project was to create knowledge about conflicts in and about public schools in Denmark analysed from a variety of perspectives on inclusion and learning possibilities (Højholt & Kousholt, 2018). Using an exploratory design, I investigated what everyday school life was like for young people in a Copenhagen school class.\(^1\) Some of the central questions addressed were: What matters to young people in ninth grade? What

\(^1\) This study is part of one of four sub-projects. For more details about the compound practice research project, see Højholt and Kousholt (2018).
conflicts do young people face and how do they act in various ways in relation to conflicts? The empirical data consisted of written notes from participatory observations during school days from 8 am to 4 pm conducted from the beginning of the school year (August 2015) to the final exams (May 2016). Additional empirical data included transcripts of 14 interviews with the ninth graders.²

**Conceptualising youth**

Erikson (1968/1992), who studies how to conceptualise youth and developmental issues in youth from a psychodynamic perspective, developed a stage theory for understanding the development of identity. In Erikson’s theory, development is dependent on whether the person successfully handles an existential crisis in each stage. Every existential crisis leads to dualistic outcomes, such as trust/mistrust and confidence/disgrace. In the fifth stage, which encompasses adolescence, the possible developmental outcome is identity versus role confusion. Erikson emphasises that to prevent this stage from leading to a deviant outcome, no adult demands should be put on young people, thereby emphasizing the developmental significance of a moratorium. Erikson perceives the maturing body as the developmental drive, his theory opening up the discussion of development as exceeding the first three years of life. Erikson’s theory also stresses the developmental importance of social relationships, with emphasis put on peer relationships and relations to society as important for youth development, for instance when role confusion is the result of not perceiving oneself as a contributing member of society. Thus, society is seen as superimposed from the outside, affecting individual development in universal ways, hence posing challenges to young people’s agency and thus situated ways of dealing with the conflicts they face.

Mørch (1996), who also works conceptually with youth development from within a framework of social psychology, argues that young people’s developmental task is to acquire *qualified self-determination*, which, according to Mørch (1996), is multifaceted and contradictory. The tasks for young people range from developing: 1) towards adapting to society by becoming active members of a democracy, which involves cultivating certain skills and knowledge in order to manage, e.g. a job and family; and 2) having disposal over one’s life conditions by seeking influence and developing self-determination; for instance, by helping to organise the activities they participate in. Mørch (1996) maintains that school is an important context for supporting young people in the

² There were 18 pupils (15-16 years old).
described developmental tasks, arguing that schools must prepare the young people for their future lives by educating them and working: “… to qualify them and equip them with the skills required for an adult work life” (p. 166, my translation). While Mørch’s (1996) concepts contribute with important insights into what societal tasks the young people face, I wish to highlight the various personal ways of dealing with concrete structural conditions in their everyday life; thus, exploring how structural conditions are always embedded in the situated conduct of everyday life. This approach calls for an exploration of structural conditions from the young people’s subjective perspectives. In order to access such perspectives, I will build on and refine concepts for understanding young people’s development of agency in an attempt to understand how they act in relation to struggles and contradictions.

**Theoretical framework**

In an effort to overcome the mentioned dualisms between the individual and social, I take my analytical starting point in “psychology from the standpoint of the subject” (Holzkamp, 2013), which is anchored in cultural-historical research traditions emphasising the dialectical relationship between the individual and the social (e.g. Rogoff, 2003; Hedegaard & Chaiklin, 2005; Hviid, 2012). This analytical approach implies conceptualising the individuals in the school as participants in social practices, and the school as a historically and socially developed practice that comprises conditions for participation. The analysis addresses how these young people develop agency, and in this regard, how schooling as a socially and historically developed practice comprises an important everyday life context for youth development. The concept of agency is defined by Holzkamp (2013) as “the human capacity to gain, in cooperation with others, control over each individual’s own life conditions” (p. 20). Hence, agency addresses the interrelationship between the individual and society.

One concept within the tradition of psychology from the standpoint of the subject that is fruitful for analysing the internal relations between personal meanings and structural conditions is the concept of the conduct of everyday life (Holzkamp, 2013; Dreier, 2016). Dreier (2011) states how the conduct of everyday life “involves persons coordinating their various obligations, relations, and activities with their various co-participants in various social contexts across the day” (p. 13). Further, Holzkamp (2013) states that the conduct of everyday life is “not an additional concept, superimposed from the outside, but the elementary form of human existence: there is no human being who is not situated within a scene of everyday life conduct” (p. 314).
The concept of the conduct of everyday life is fruitful for shedding light on the efforts people make in their endeavours to integrate and coordinate what are often quite diverse, conflicting and sometimes contradictory aspects of their shared and compound everyday life. For instance, young people participate in both social relations and activities during the school day, while simultaneously participating in academic activities. These goings-on often happen at the same time at school and involve multiple actions to integrate them, like when Miriam explained that she is on Facebook’s Messenger while she does her math assignment because, as she says, math will still be there tomorrow. However, the math teacher stressed that Miriam needed to work harder in order to achieve better results on the next test. Miriam does not want to risk missing out on virtual conversations about a party she and her friends went to if she puts her phone down to focus solely on the math assignment. This example shows how young people work hard to prioritise and coordinate contradictory activities and aspects of being young. Insights into the ways in which Miriam prioritises can illuminate how different aspects of her life can be hard for her to coordinate and integrate, and how she is dealing with these different, and somewhat contradictory aspects of her everyday life.

The next section will provide more insights into some of the major contradictions related to being young in primary school in Denmark that were mentioned earlier in the introduction.

Societal context for school and youth in Denmark

This section provides insight into a few societal landmarks that currently shape primary schools in Denmark and Europe. To be able to understand what is at stake in the Danish school, it is also necessary to look abroad at transnational policies.

OECD countries regard education as closely connected to financial goals because a highly educated workforce is regarded as a prerequisite for economic growth (Klitmøller & Sommer, 2015). As a result, during the 1990s, they began conducting transnational comparisons of pupils’ academic level. The results from initial research on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA,

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3 For instance, digital social media devices were present at all times when I participated in school classes, allowing the pupils to stay connected to social communities and activities with, e.g. previous classmates and boyfriends. One could of course discuss the implications for the young people’s learning processes, but that is beyond the scope of this article. See, e.g. Schraube (in press), who examines digital technology and its implications for engagement in learning processes.
2009) indicated that the performance level of Danish school children was lower than that of other OECD countries. These results served as the basis for instigating legislative changes in Danish schools. Subsequently, Danish politicians emphasised that academic performance should be improved, leading to an increased focus on the individual assessment of performance (Kelly, Andreasen, Kousholt, McNess & Ydersen, 2017), as mentioned in the introduction. In the wake of this, much more detailed target management in teaching has become part of the everyday school life, leading to standardisation, individual categorisation and increased differentiation.4

During the 1990s the dominant discourse in Danish education policy was to ensure education for all (Katznelson, 2014). In 1994, Denmark joined the UNESCO Salamanca Statement on access and quality in the educational system, implying that inclusion was part of the school’s core tasks, as well as enhancing the wellbeing of pupils in school (Røn Larsen, 2012).

Another political target in Denmark is that 95% of each cohort receives some kind of youth education, with more than half of them continuing with further education. The aim is not to just randomly educate people, but to give them the skills that lead straight to a job after graduation. These political aims have been followed up by research projects focusing on the effects of career guidance and retention strategies (Katznelson, Lundby & Hansen, 2016), and on how young people can be motivated to educate themselves beyond compulsory education (Grubb & Lazerson, 2006; Savelsberg, 2010). As a result, concepts such as career learning and guidance have become part of the school curriculum and hence also a part of the tasks young people regularly reflect on (Thomsen, 2015). Simultaneously, grade point averages required to be accepted into high school and other youth education programmes have gone up. In that way, individual assessment directly affects the future opportunities of young people in terms of education, leading to increased differentiation of students in primary school (Andresen & Hjörne, 2014; Langager, 2009).

Concurrently with the high expectations put on youth today, there is also a great amount of concern. A report by the Center for Youth Research (2010) shows that an increasing number of young people – mainly girls – are vulnerable and suffer from eating disorders, self-harming, anxiety and depression (Katznelson, 2014, p. 156). Other research identifies risk factors and develops interventions designed to prevent alcohol and drug abuse among youth (Ballegaard, Dieckmann & Buck, 2017). As a result, health promotion has also become an important aspect of youth policies in Denmark.

For a more detailed discussion of the meaning of assessments and standardised tests, see Pedersen, 2015 and Kousholt, 2016. This is also the case internationally (see Biesta, 2009).
The general image of young people in school created in public debates thus represents two, somewhat contradictory, sides. On the one hand, the image encompasses young people being expected to choose the right (educational) path early in life and doggedly pursue that path. On the other hand, the research and policy side of the image depicts a cohort where 20% fall through the cracks. Somewhat contradictory tasks derive from these two perspectives on youth and societal challenges for all primary school participants. For instance, research shows that school teachers experience dilemmas with coexistent and contradictory demands involving, e.g. inclusion, ensuring pupils’ wellbeing and a simultaneous effort to raise academic outcomes (Troman, Jeffrey & Raggl, 2007).  

At this point I have accounted for two important, current issues concerning youth. The first one is that the core tasks of schools are defined based on many different, conflicting intentions and perspectives, and hence result in contradictory conditions for those participating in school. The second, is how the understanding of individual success, or the lack thereof, of young people is presented either as a matter of general risk factors or as a matter of individual vulnerability. In this regard conflicts and problems in young people’s lives seem to occur in isolation from their everyday life conditions. The following analysis tries to challenge this by illustrating how the conflicts and problems young people face are reasoned within conditions situated in their everyday lives, including school.

**Being a ninth grader – changes, transitions and contradictions**

When I started the empirical work with the specific class of ninth graders in August 2015, the teacher and the students initially told me that during eighth grade, and especially ninth grade, the sense of community in the class had been affected by several changes. One important change, according to the young people, was that several classmates had dropped out and moved to other schools and that new students had joined the class. These changes meant that some of the pupils lost their best friends and that the sense of community in the class had become fragmentised. The young people problematized that these changes led to the development of smaller cliques. They further problematized that there was a lack of joint activities to unify the class and create and re-constitute social

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5 Teachers in youth education experience similar paradoxes when coexisting political demands on teachers’ work appear incompatible – for example, retention strategies and improved academic outcomes (Sachs, 2001).
relationships. One girl, Miriam, described the implications of the changed dynamics in an interview:

There has been a huge change in our class, with lots of new people starting, and also several of our old classmates changing schools. Actually, some of my really close friends … it kinda sucks … and every time a new girl or boy starts, I think I should make an effort to make them feel welcome, but it’s just (...) after a while you just don’t bother anymore. … Now I just want to hang out with the people I know well … but I guess it can’t be easy to start in our class.

The teachers told me that pupils changing schools at the end of primary school in Copenhagen is common, referring to the phenomenon as “school shopping”, and that the increasing amount of young people experiencing problems in school was one of the reasons why.

Another important change the young people told me about can be understood as related to the recent years’ increasing focus on assessments, individual performance and standardisation as leading to differentiation and problematic categorisations. The young people talked about how ninth grade felt like one long slog toward final exams. In interviews, they told me that all of their activities in and outside school were evaluated by themselves, parents and teachers in relation to the question of their being ready for high school after final exams; for instance, how the young people prioritised time spent on schoolwork compared to other activities, such as leisure time activities or hanging out with friends. Besides grades, the students’ effort and how they approached their schoolwork were also being assessed (Krøjer & Helms, 2011). On the one hand, young people are expected to be determined, skilled and to steadily develop in a certain direction that prepares them to continue after primary school with a youth education programme. On the other hand, young people are also expected to develop self-determination and become more independent and capable of making the right choices.

When I participated in their class the young people mentioned the contradictory societal conditions that were evident in everyday school life in the form of regular visits from the local vocational guidance counsellor, tests, individual monitoring of one’s performance, mock exams and other assessments but also surveys conducted by the school on pupils’ individual wellbeing, followed up by individual sessions outside of class with a teacher designed to enhance the self-esteem and self-confidence of pupils identified as failing to thrive. Anxiety and edginess about living up to the many and somewhat contradictory expectations were widespread, especially among the girls in the class, who explained that she works constantly to meet academic requirements and keep up with ever-changing social constellations in the class. Groups and friendships from eighth grade altered in ninth grade, requiring new ways of
participating and staying informed about what was going on socially in and outside school. There was a lot to keep track of. During interviews several students mentioned how the changes seemed even more problematic due to the increasing focus on academic performance. Prior to the changes they used to help each other but know who to ask in the current situation was difficult and the students were leery about exposing themselves as having difficulties with math. This example illustrates how the social community serves as the context for academic content, including tests and other forms of assessment and group projects. In this way, the lack of familiarity with classmates also influenced the young people’s learning opportunities and options for inclusion.

Miriam’s narrative about the changes in the social dynamics shows that the new circumstances had not been easy for her. Newcomers also talked about how difficult it was to become a part of the class community. Even though the changes had different personal significance for the various students, Miriam’s narrative was illustrative of a common problem since all of the students experienced the changes as challenging in different ways. According to one girl, Maria, who recently joined the class after moving from another side of the country, starting in the class was really hard and her new situation was deeply strenuous since it involved a change in her self-understanding in relation to being a participant in social communities. At her old school, she had many friends and was always hanging out with someone. It was a huge change for her to deal with herself as someone who was outside the group of girls and was only granted permission to remain as an exception. “No one talked to me and I just sat looking down at my phone, listening to what they talked about while staying in touch [via Facebook’s Messenger] with my friends from the town I used to live in,” she explained. Even though no one ever said that she was not allowed to hang out with them, she said, “I still feel like an outsider”. Maria and Miriam’s narratives illustrate, from two different positions, how the social community was pivotal for new as well as old students.

In the ninth grade, the school does not prioritise supporting the sense of community in the classroom as opposed to the beginning of primary school. Instead young people are considered old enough to independently deal with social interaction and the organisation of social activities. A study of pupils’ perspectives on inclusion in Danish schools revealed that it is common for schools to reduce the time spent on social activities in favour of enhancing the academic level as the pupils become older (Henze-Pedersen, Dyssegaard, Egelund & Nielsen, 2016). The study problematized this, considering the coexisting demands on ensuring inclusion. The point is to illustrate how the social community is of great importance to young people and that continuous changes in a class community have both social and personal consequences, since
being a ninth grader means being involved in ending something together with someone familiar, while at the same time orienting oneself in relation to future new (educational) opportunities. The changes of the social dynamics, and lack of cohesiveness during this specific time of life, result in the lack of a familiar and safe community in which to handle the transitions.

The point is not to praise stability and to problematize changes as a principle. Changes can also enhance opportunities for inclusion of individuals with other ways of contributing to the social community that can serve to co-create new opportunities for everyone, which means change can productively lead to development (Dreier, 2008). However, the changes in the ninth grade take place simultaneously with the young people being in the midst of reorientation in relation to their changing lives and in relation to contradictory expectations. In this way, the changes involved increased uncertainty and tension. In this situation, the social changes become difficult and actualise the need for supporting the social community in class.

In the next section I will also show how the young people are engaged in relation to participating in the social community in the class.

Social community – dealing with contradictions

As illustrated above, the social community in the school class is crucial to helping young people cope with the personal and academic challenges they face. They need each other to share in the process of exploring what they want and what matters to them, and to develop their personal preferences and standpoints in relation to the communities in which they participate (Dreier, 2008). They share the activities of their everyday lives with each other, rather than their parents or other adults. The young people emphasised how imperative it is to have someone in the class to hang out with who shares their interests in music, clothes and leisure time activities.

Due to the changes in the social situation, several pupils emphasised the need for activities to reconstitute and unify the class. When I asked them how this could be done, they all independently mentioned that it would require a joint activity. According to them, joint activities create shared experiences and memories, which, as one girl explained, gave them “something to look back on and laugh about together afterwards”.

When I took time to hang out with the various groups of young people in the class during breaks, I had the opportunity to learn about a group of girls who were struggling with how to deal with the fact that they, on the one hand, gathered to share their interest in dancing and listening to music and, on the
other, contribute quite differently to their shared activities. The concept of contradiction can help illuminate how participating in a community that is defined by the common conflicts and dilemmas of being young, combined with the various approaches to engaging in the common issues, can lead to conflicts in that community. When issues arose, some of the girls continued to focus on dancing and having fun together, while a few of them branched out to experiment with attending wild parties with older boys and friends. Even though the girls appeared to share engagements and be unified by the matter of how to be young and how to deal with living up to contradictory expectations, they approached the issue in highly divergent ways, leaving them torn as to how to engage in shared activities (Dreier, 2008). According to Ollman in Axel and Højholt (in press) contradiction refers to incompatible elements that are also dependent on one another. In other words, contradiction involves opposites that are mutually dependent on one another. The young people need each other in order to develop new ways of conducting their lives, but their various ways of engaging in this common endeavour can also tear them apart from one another.

In the breaks, the group of girls spent all their time together getting ready for parties by looking on the internet for the right clothes to wear, tagging each other on pictures of dresses, shoes and much more. This mainly took place during school hours (often in class). During breaks, they sat on their desks in a circle with their heads close together listening to music on one girl’s phone. They discussed where to go, where to meet and how to get around age restrictions. After a couple of months, the girls disagreed about whether to prioritise having fun together or getting to know new people (boys) at the parties. One of the girls in the group, Sarah, preferred to spend time with the girls and did not want to get very drunk or to chase after boys. At one point Sarah did not want to go to the parties anymore, though she still wanted to be in the group:

Sarah: Sometimes when the others ask if we’re going to a party, I’ll ask my mother in advance to call me on the phone and tell me that I am not allowed to go … even if I am.
I: Why?
Sarah: Because then I don’t have to say to my friends that it’s because I don’t want to go.
I: Why do you prefer that they not know that you don’t want to?
Sarah: Because then I might not be considered as one of the group.

This excerpt from the interview with Sarah (15 years old) reveals how important being part of the group was for her. Being part of the group was crucial in order to orient herself in relation to how to be young. She needed to be with her friends in order to deal with life as a youth. Sarah liked one specific group of girls and
their focus on music and clothes. Being in the group, however, meant having to do and like the same things, leaving little room for different ways of contributing to the shared activities. These differences seemed to split the girls from each other, rather than contributing to creating a diverse community. Schwartz and Højholt (in press), who conducted a similar study on young people’s everyday life in school, show that an important process for young people is learning how to include different ways of contributing to a diverse community. When participants act in various ways in relation to the community and common engagements, they in turn contribute to developing the community and expanding opportunities for action for all of the different participants.

In order to deal with this dilemma – wanting to be part of the group but not wanting to go to parties – Sarah involved her mother to absolve herself of the responsibility of saying no and of revealing why. In that way, Sarah was dealing with developing what Mørch (1996) conceptualises as self-determination by involving her mother and asking for a ‘no’.

**Youth development situated in the conduct of everyday life**

When Sarah involved and collaborated with her mother in the process of developing self-determination, she dealt with the contradictions and potential conflict in relation to participating in the community with the girls. Her way of involving her mother in the development of self-determination, challenged the understanding of youth as a matter of seeking autonomy or of being in opposition to and not needing parents and other adults. What Sarah was doing was not unambiguously seeking autonomy, as in her being able to act independently of others. In asking her mother to say no, Sarah was actively taking part in her own self-determination. By getting her mother take responsibility for saying no and for being the reason Sarah cannot go to the party, Sarah was absolved from confronting her friends about what she preferred and did not jeopardize the group of friends and its sense of community, but simultaneously avoided participating in parties she was not that comfortable with. The agreement with her mother was an important resource for Sarah, providing her with the opportunity to change her way of participating, thus developing her social self-understanding in relation to the community.

Understanding Sarah’s perspective made it possible to recognise the differences between the young people’s way of prioritising and dealing with the shared engagements. What the young people did together did not necessarily entail the same meaning for them, but their different contributions to the shared activities, and their different perspectives on what was happening, were the
feature that helped them to develop. Pedersen’s (2015; Pedersen & Bang 2016) analysis of how young people develop their subjectivity in the transition from elementary school to high school and how this transition involves encountering new standards for what young people ‘ought to be like’ in high school emphasises precisely the need for concepts capable of grasping the variety in relation to understand youth developmental processes. This is similar to the various ways that the ‘party girls’ took part in the group and that these various ways led to a potential conflict, almost tearing them apart from each other, even though they needed each other to conduct their shared everyday life.

Through Sarah and the other girls’ varied contributions they were developing social self-understanding in relation to the common activities and communities they took part in. Sarah does not need her mother’s support in the same way as when she was younger but she still needs her to be there for her in a different way. As a result, the distribution of mutuality, expectations and responsibility changes in the child-adult relationship as children grow older (Højholt, Kousholt & Juhl, 2017).

Young people involve not only their parents in their development of agency and self-determination, but also their teachers play an important role. Group work often involves problems and conflicts about how to work together and how and what joint tasks to prioritise. When the young people involved their teacher in their problems and conflicts, they wanted help to solve their problems, but they did not want the teacher to dictate a solution. The outcome was that they took more responsibility for solving their problems and they involved their teacher more as an equal partner to discuss solutions with. Similarly, the teacher also talked about episodes when he did not have an answer or could not come up with a good way to solve the conflicts, pointing out that a fruitful discussion took place involving a mutual exploration of possible solutions. Haavind (1987) see this the increasing mutuality between adults and children as part of the developmental process.

The next section further addresses how the young people actively tried to get the school and its adults engaged in dealing with their developmental processes and contradictory life conditions.

**Christmas conflict – an example of agency**

The following excerpt is from my observation notes taken one morning just before the school day was about to begin. This particular day differed from ordinary school days, since it was December first, which is when the entire school usually is involved in making Christmas decorations.
The young people gather in the classroom. Several of them have brought templates and scissors. On the other side of the hall, Christmas songs are already playing loudly from another classroom and can be heard in the hallway. The young people explain to me that an annual tradition at the school is that there is no teaching during the first two lessons on December first. Instead the whole school makes Christmas decorations, listens to Christmas songs and eats Christmas cookies. Shortly afterwards, the math teacher enters the classroom. He looks tiredly at the young people, who obviously had something else besides math planned that morning. The teacher asks the young people to find their books and put the Christmas paraphernalia aside. They protest loudly, complaining about how they had looked forward to this day for a long time. The teacher refuses to give in and explains that they soon have exams and that they are a long way from reaching the learning objectives. After a while the young people reluctantly find their books. Meanwhile, the teacher tells them that they need to get used to the fact that being a ninth grader is not a walk in the park and that they better get prepared to go to high school soon (Observation notes, Tuesday 1 December 2015, 8:10 am).

One of the girls, Amanda, who had passionately protested cancelling the Christmas activities, explained to me that this event could have created just the kind of common unifying experience they needed. Amanda and some of the other young people explained that Christmas activities were perfect because they allowed them to decide on the content themselves. And just as important, the school initiated and supported the activities. This was significant because as the young people explained, it would make it possible for them to avoid a situation in which they put themselves at stake in case the event flopped because no one wanted to join in. A key factor for them was not being left alone with the responsibility. I stated the obvious when I suggested that they essentially participated in nothing but joint activities all day long at school. For instance, they all had the same math class. The young people indulgently explained to me that being able to influence the content of an event was vital. Seen from the perspective of the teacher, the young people’s protests in the wake of cancelling the Christmas fun appeared childish. He saw making Christmas decorations as an excuse to avoid doing academic schoolwork.

This study, however, analyses the young people’s engagement in relation to doing Christmas decorations as related to the structural changes in the social dynamics of the class. Relating structural changes and personal engagement made it possible to understand the conflict and the ninth graders’ participation as a way of trying to deal with the new situation and to change it by doing something together, i.e. by trying to re-constitute and unify the class as a social practice. From the young people’s perspective, and seen in relation to the
structural changes, engagement in doing Christmas decorations did not seem to be reasoned as a movement away from something (i.e. their academic programme), but rather as an effort to co-constitute the class community as a context for academic and social activities. They needed each other and the social community in order to deal with the existential challenges related to being young and conducting their lives in new ways to help each other develop opportunities for action in a changing and contradictory life.

According to Mørch’s (1996) concept of qualified self-determination, the young people’s interest in doing Christmas decorations can be understood as an endeavour to try to influence their lives and the activities they participate in. Mørch’s approach includes societal conditions in the understanding of youth development, making the psychology more worldly (Dreier, 2011). By including the concept of conduct of everyday life it is possible to take one step further in the attempt to include the personal and the social as mutually related in the analysis. In order to expand this argument, I return to my analysis of the conflict concerning Christmas decorations.

The young people’s engagement in the activity cannot just be rejected as young people trying to avoid schoolwork and adults, or to seek autonomy. I propose that the young people were trying to take responsibility by attempting to make their everyday school life more coherent. They were eager to do this during school hours because they needed the school and its adults to be involved in problematic issues together with them and through this process, to develop self-determination, in accordance with Mørch’s (1996) conceptualisation. Inspired by the concept of the conduct of everyday life (Holzkamp, 2013), I therefore suggest co-determination as a first step towards a more adequate term for understanding the collective processes of young people trying to deal with their structural conditions, as illustrated by the Christmas decoration conflict. As a second step, I suggest linking co-determination with coordination in an attempt to emphasise how the young people did not want to be controlled by adults, but rather they seemed eager to engage with school and its adults and each other in collective processes of co-organising and coordination; that is: they wanted to share responsibility with adults and other co-participants with whom they shared their conduct of everyday life (Holzkamp, 2013). However, they could not do this alone; they needed the support of the school and its adults. For the young people, social and academic activities were part of a coherent everyday school life and could not be separated, since their social life always comprises the context for the academic agenda. Even though the political focus, as mentioned earlier, is on both enhancing academic outcomes and on concerns about young people’s wellbeing, the support of the young people’s shared social life is often given low priority in the ninth grade, where academic performance is ranked higher. The
young people were left to deal with the challenges in relation to their social lives and contradictory life conditions, outside of school hours. They were considered old enough to organise events on their own. The point I wish to make is that youth development is not exclusively a matter of detachment from adults, or seeking autonomy and trying to escape adults. Rather young people are in much need of adults who are prepared to engage with them in processes of co-determination and coordination and to engage more mutually together with co-participants in dealing with common dilemmas. As a result, young people are in need of each other as well as adults who understand how social and academic qualifications are entangled and an important aspect of conducting a shared everyday life.

Conclusions

This study applied the concept of conduct of everyday life to shed light on young people’s engagement and conflicts as anchored and reasoned in their concrete everyday lives and their shared but various ways of dealing with being young and navigating life’s complexities, contradictions as well as existential dilemmas. The analysis illustrated how the young people were striving to make often very diverse and somewhat contrasting activities work in a coherent life.

I have illustrated how the societal expectations and demands on young people are numerous and often contradictory. Politicians want them to perform better than former generations and we want them to feel better than they do, so they can move more quickly and more confidently through the educational system. In other words, there is no room for second thoughts or experimenting. In different ways, the school, researchers and politicians all want to decide for young people. This stands in contrast to both Erikson’s (1968/1992) idea of moratorium and Mørch’s (1996) idea of the contradictory developmental task that involves both developing towards society’s conditions in the sense of adapting, and at the same time aiming to develop self-determination, or as I suggest, co-determination and coordination of a complex and contradictory everyday life that involves processes of gathering as well as conflicts.

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Prejudice and discrimination in childhood: Children’s agency in intersectional structures of domination

Katrin Reimer-Gordinskaya

Abstract
Based on a project carried out in Saxony-Anhalt, Germany, the article provides a framework for intervening into power relations in kindergartens, both theoretically and practically. Drawing on notions from Childhood Studies and German Critical Psychology it reviews a range of findings, concepts and methods from Social Psychology on prejudices and discrimination in Early Childhood. In its course, research questions are derived from valuable insights, and shortcomings are pointed out in order to suggest conceptual and practical alternatives, namely, a form of subject-scientific action research.

Keywords
action research, agency, childhood, childhood studies, discrimination, prejudices.

Introduction
This article aims to develop a crucial part of a framework for researching how children gain and develop agency in intersectional structures of domination, including prejudices and discrimination. This question is explored by my research group KiWin-With Children into the World of Diversity [Mit Kindern in die Welt der Vielfalt hinaus], which is based in the East German State of Saxony-Anhalt. Over the course of three years, from 2016 until 2019, we are accompanying several groups of children in their everyday life in four local kindergartens and observe their peer interactions with respect to practices of inclusion and exclusion. The project is based on the categorical and methodological concepts of German Critical Psychology (Holzkamp 1985
[1983], Tolman/Maiers 1991, Painter et al. 2009, Reimer/Markard 2014), and
grounded in the fundamental notions of Childhood Studies (Qvortrup et al. 2009,
Corsaro 2015). We therefore presuppose that these children’s lifeworlds are
structured by intersecting forms of domination inherent in German society at
large. The empirical questions are, how they manifest, and in what ways they are
reproduced and how they can be overcome. Our focus lies on structures of
domination with respect to age, in which children are collectively subordinated to
adults, as well as to class, gender, and race, in which children are positioned
differently. These structures present children with possibilities for gaining and
developing agency – either by reproducing or by transcending domination. In
terms of German Critical Psychology, these possibilities for action represent
variants of restrictive and generalized action potency (Holzkamp 1985: 367ff).
Nevertheless, as these categories are domain-general, it is difficult to draw from
them concrete research questions without the mediation of more specific
concepts and findings on the ontogenesis of prejudices and discrimination.
Hence, we need to determine the potential contribution of pertinent approaches to
our research project, as well as limitations which we will seek to resolve.

Part One of this article describes the professional and academic fields of
practice in Germany from which our project has evolved and to which it intends
to contribute. Part Two situates KiWin in the longstanding international research
tradition pertaining to prejudices and discrimination. Part Three formulates
fundamental research questions that derive from the review of basic concepts in
Social Psychology, namely categorization, stereotyping, prejudices and
discrimination. Part Four revisits additional findings from contemporary research
and discusses the methods critically. Part Five delineates our research concept
and methodology, followed by the conclusion in Part Six.

1. Contextualizing KiWin with professional and academic fields of
   practice in Germany

In the past 15 years, elementary education has found increasing recognition as an
integral part of the education system in Germany. One indicator of this process is
the introduction of academic degrees in addition to the traditional vocational
training for teaching staff. Another indicator is the agreement, made in 2004, by
the ministries of the sixteen states of Germany, regarding a framework for
elementary education, which was followed by the issue of guidelines by all
federal states. In the national framework, as well as in the guideline of Saxony-
Anhalt, the welcoming of diversity and the urge to overcome inequalities are
prevalent themes. This created a demand among students and professionals for
concepts and pedagogical means that would contribute to the creation of environments in which children can "be different without fear" (Adorno 1997 [1951]: 116; translation KRG).

Furthermore, through a series of programs, that started in 2001 and have lasted to this day, the federal state of Germany initiated the creation and adoption of practices against right-wing extremism and various kinds of prejudices (Heitmeyer 2002-2011; Decker/Brähler 2008, Decker et al. 2010; Decker/Kiess/Brähler 2012, 2014; Zick/Klein 2014, Zick et al. 2016). The initiative, titled "Rise of the decent people" ("Aufstand der Anständigen") and announced by Chancellor Schröder on 4 October 2000, was sparked by two terrorist actions: a bomb attack directed against immigrants, among them Jews, in Düsseldorf on 27 July 2000, and an attempt to set fire to the New Synagogue of Düsseldorf on 2 October 2000. It realizes the idea that hate crimes can, in the long run, best be countered by strengthening democratic forces in civil society. In 2007, elementary education was incorporated into the state programs, following the recognition that an important form of prevention of prejudices and discrimination can be carried out in this field. A few years earlier, from 2003 onwards, the Berlin-based project Kinderwelten, founded by van Leer, had adopted Louise Derman-Spark’s anti-bias program (Derman-Sparks 1989, Derman-Sparks/Brunson-Phillips 1997), which is now widely considered a core approach against prejudices and discrimination among preschool children in Germany (Wagner 2008, 2013).

Against this backdrop, the project Ino and Kivi – Children for Diversity [Ino und Kivi – Kinder für Vielfalt], initiated in 2011 and financed by the abovementioned state programs, set out under my supervision to explore and develop pedagogical concepts suitable for the rural areas of East Germany, the social, political and educational conditions of which differ in various ways from those of an urban metropolis such as Berlin. KiWin continues to explore and account for these specificities. Nonetheless, what holds true for cities and rural areas alike is that, in my academic and professional experience, the majority of discourses and practices concerning elementary education are substantially adult-centered: parents and professionals are (seen as) the main actors, and pedagogical strategies are developed for their use. Similarly, the dominant research on the effectiveness of pedagogical methods addresses different aspects regarding the environments created for children (Beelmann et al. 2010; Jugert et al. 2016), but does not investigate how children view these surroundings, nor does it consider how these surroundings are created and transformed by the children themselves. Furthermore, from the adult-centered perspective – which professionals and parents alike tend to adopt – prejudices and discrimination displayed by children are seen as an effect (or imitation) of adults’ behavior at home or in the
kindergarten. In contrast to this logic, our current research project KiWin views children as the main actors and is interested in the children’s perspective. Hence, the project concentrates on how children bring about practices of inclusion and exclusion in their intra- and intergenerational interaction, notwithstanding the fact that they obtain at least part of their knowledge of stereotypes, prejudices etc. from adults.

While our approach aims to suggest an innovative strategy within the international field of research (as I will discuss in detail below), it also clearly fills a void in the German-speaking research arena, in which the ontogenesis of prejudices and discrimination in infancy, early and middle childhood remains a blind spot for several disciplines. This can be exemplified in the following brief summary of relevant contributions in the pertinent fields of research: Developmental Psychology does, of course, address relevant processes in these age groups, such as perception, language acquisition and cognition, yet it does not directly investigate the development of prejudices and discrimination (Oerter/Montada 2008, Lindenberger/Schneider 2012); on the other hand, prejudices are a prominent topic in Social Psychology, though not in a developmental perspective (Jonas et al. 2014). Similarly, while Socialization Theory and Research investigates prejudices and discrimination in the context of political socialization, it focuses on adolescence, but not on earlier periods in childhood (Hurrelmann et al. 2008). A partial exception can be found in the concept of Authoritarian Personality, developed by some of the founders of Critical Theory, which refers to a syndrome that is assumed to originate from certain familial constellations and corresponding experiences of young children (Adorno et al. 1995 [1950]). Nonetheless, even here childhood plays only a retrospective role, when right-wing attitudes of adolescents are interpreted as a result of certain patterns of attachment (Hopf et al. 1995). Fortunately, in Anglo-American academia, there is a longstanding research tradition on the ontogenesis of prejudices in childhood, from which we can derive important research questions and concepts.

2. Situating KiWin in the international field of academic research

In the Anglo-American academia, research on prejudices in childhood dates back to the 1930's (Allport 1954), and has since accumulated an extensive database and generated various theoretical perspectives (Quintana/McKown 2008). At present, we can distinguish five prominent approaches which apply preexisting theories to the (developmental) investigation of prejudices in childhood:

(2) Gordon Allport (1897-1967, USA) is generally regarded as the originator of a learning theory which does not have a prominent proponent at present, but rather serves as an antipode (Aboud/Doyle 1996).


(5) Finally, Kenneth B. Clark (1914-2005) and Mamie P. Clark (1917-1983) highlight the meaning of racism for children from the African-American communities in the USA (Clark, K. B./Clark, M.P. 1952; Clark, K.B. 1963). This last-mentioned perspective is highly important for the following discussion, due to its understanding of prejudices from the standpoint of the subordinated, i.e., African-American children.

2.1 A Particular or comprehensive approach?

Considering this compilation of differing theoretical approaches to the study of prejudices and discrimination, one might ask which approach KiWin should adopt. Yet, we at KiWin believe that we are not to choose, but rather to understand which detail of the common subject matter is captured by each of these perspectives. In our view, all of the core aspects addressed in these approaches play a role in the acquisition and employment of prejudices by young children: (1) the development of cognitive capacities; (2) learning activities; (3) one’s status in society (examined by means of social comparison); (4) large-scale societal conflicts; (5) and the different impact that forms of domination have on the subordinated, in contrast to those in dominant positions. Moreover, though the task of integrating these various approaches has been formulated before (Aboud 2005: 318ff), our way of tackling it leads beyond the main road of positivism.

The research conducted by KiWin is attempting to utilize the abovementioned theories not as hypotheses in the strict sense, but rather as means for guiding the collection and interpretation of data. This is based on the
conviction that the positivistic form of scientific knowledge production regarding human actions is prone to a misperception of the relation between theory and data, maintaining that the former can be falsified by the latter, whereas, in fact, data can merely exemplify such theories but not falsify them (Holzkamp 1986, 1994). In as far as this holds true, it explains the empirical evidence connected to all of these theories, as well as the reason why the positivistic model for advancing scientific knowledge by dismissing falsified theories apparently does not bear fruit in the realm of social sciences.

Instead, the approach that would advance our knowledge about the ontogenesis of prejudices is a systematic dialogue on the theoretical relation between the different facets that are investigated in each respective approach, but not within the positivistic framework (Aboud 2005: 318ff). The KiWin research group suggests that the concept of reinterpretation (Markard 2009: 299ff), developed in German Critical Psychology and based on its categorical framework (Holzkamp 1985), can contribute substantially to this task. A thorough reinterpretation of the abovementioned theories cannot, of course, be detailed here; rather, it is part of the work ahead of us. Nonetheless, in Part Three, I will offer a close reading of various traditional concepts and methods and discuss the incorporation of their insights into our approach, as well as point out their shortcomings, thus shedding light on the ways we suggest to deal with the variety of theoretical perspectives.

2.2 Identical or varying subject matters?

Another conclusion we at KiWin draw from this compilation is that, even though all of these different approaches study prejudices and discrimination, their subject matters are hardly identical. This follows from the varying historical and regional conditions in which the abovementioned classical and contemporary scientists have conducted their research. Thus, the investigated intergroup relations carry specific histories (i.e., slavery, genocide, poverty) with significantly different outcomes for both subordinated and dominant subjects. Moreover, even though the social categories at stake – race, nation, religion and ethnicity – are more or less prevalent in each case, their interrelations vary and they are (re)produced differently, both historically and at present: inequality between the respective groups may be guaranteed by law, or exist despite legal equality (USA, Australia); religion and nation can merge (Israel, Ireland), or remain relatively independent of each other (USA).

Therefore, we at KiWin cannot apply the unaltered basic concepts (prejudice, discrimination, etc.) to any given constellation we encounter. Rather, in our research we must be sensitive to historical distinctions as well as to the
specific qualities and interrelations of prevalent social categories in Germany today. Moreover, we must take into consideration the specific meaning of each constellation with respect to the subjects in the dominant and subordinated position. Keeping this in mind, we nonetheless derive many of our research questions from the basic concepts in Social Psychology (see below).

2.3 Conceptualizing the development of prejudices and discrimination from infancy to adulthood

For the KiWin research group, the most instructive idea regarding the development of prejudices and discrimination from infancy to adulthood was gained from Gordon Allport’s seminal work, *The Nature of Prejudice*, published in 1954. His book is an extensive review of the contemporary body of knowledge on this topic and it includes a part on childhood. Again, our reading differs from the positivistic reference (Dovidio et al. 2005, Aboud 2005), in that we are primarily interested in the conceptual, comprehensive approach to the ontogenesis of prejudices covering the timespan from infancy to adulthood.

We also find of importance the fact that the trajectory of prejudice is critically viewed as inherent in the US-American culture, as it had been depicted in an influential publication at the time (Myrdal 1944). This culture is characterized by contradicting forces: the humanitarian-Christian values of equality on the one hand, and structures of inequality with respect to class and race on the other (Allport 1958 [1954]: 313ff). Allport argues that (white) children who grow up in this culture do not necessarily need to develop prejudices, but if they do, their prejudices mirror and reproduce this two-faced culture, thus mastering "the peculiar double-talk appropriate to prejudice in a democracy" (295).

With regard to the prevalence of this contradictory character of society in childhood, Allport reasons that it is not only the transmission of specific content, but also a specific form of education that sets the stage for the development of prejudices or tolerance (282ff): if children experience love and feel secure, they will develop a fundamental understanding of equality and trust; on the other hand, if adults impose their will without explanation or negotiation, children will deduce the ruling of power and authority, and will gain a hierarchical understanding of society. It seems that Allport is depicting ideas from *The Authoritarian Personality*, which had been published some years before as part of the *Studies in Prejudice* (Horkheimer/Flowerman 1950), while transforming its retrospective notions into the present experience of developing children: the exercising of authoritarian forms of education in a democratic society.
Within the authoritarian educational constellation and the ensuing hierarchical understanding of society, specific prejudices, which are based on generalized social categories, are likely to be acquired. It is noteworthy that Allport (1958) describes the development of the cognitive capacity of forming generalized categories: it begins with the perception of cues related to social categories (287ff), followed by the adoption of swearwords (and thus of negative evaluations of social groups) in the process of language acquisition (289ff), pregeneralization without full cognitive understanding of their meaning (linguistic precedence, 292ff), and, lateron, the generalization of prejudices (294f). Being aware of the confinement of many contemporary research approaches to cognitive processes, due to their preferred methodology (see below), it is equally noteworthy that Allport acknowledges the fundamental difference and complicated relation between prejudices and discrimination: he states that prejudices can coexist with democratic behavior, that discrimination can occur on the basis of or independent from prejudices, and, finally, that prejudices and discrimination can concur (14ff, 47ff). He concludes that reproducing prejudices and discrimination in a democratic society can lead to inner conflicts, which may be dealt with by means of repression or rationalization on the one hand, or by (partial) compromises or integration on the other hand (309ff).

Keeping in mind that Allport’s work does not reflect systematically on the meaning of prejudices and discrimination for subjects in subordinate position, what can we at KiWin learn from his considerations with regard to the development of prejudices and discrimination in childhood? First, we need to conceptualize the existence and acquisition of prejudices and discrimination as something that is embedded in a democratic society, and hence contradictory in character. This ambivalence can be assumed to manifest in the relation between children and adults in the participating kindergartens, which is why it is important to pay attention to the interplay of inclusion and exclusion in our research. Secondly, with respect to children in dominant position, we need to consider the alternatives of conforming or non-conforming with the dominant culture. Thirdly, we need to maintain our consideration of the developmental stages regarding the children’s capacity of forming generalized social categories, instead of presupposing that they perceive them the same way we do. Finally, we must be sensitive to the difference and ambivalent relations between prejudices and discrimination, rather than deducing one from the other.
3. Deriving research questions from basic concepts in social psychology

To the extent that, notwithstanding the different historical and political constellations, all of the various approaches mentioned above do have a common subject matter, it is defined by a set of basic concepts in Social Psychology: social categories, stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination. These concepts determine the scope and structure of what becomes visible in research, and therefore are not and cannot be analyzed or tested in the research itself (Markard 1988). As with the different approaches and theories presented in the previous and following sections, in our project at KiWin we interpret these concepts through the categories of German Critical Psychology, i.e., as aspects of agency, in order to derive from them research questions. For this purpose, we refer to their fundamental meanings, without particularizing the manifold definitions and theories related to each concept (see for instance: Zick 1997, Hormel 2007).

3.1 The meaning of categories and categorization regarding social groups in childhood

The fundamental act in the formation of prejudices is social categorization. Categorization is the grouping of objects on the basis of certain criteria. This process entails the accentuating and disregarding of information; thus, categorization reduces complexity and enables perception. Furthermore, it is based on the cognitive capacity of inductive generalization and deductive subsumption. In other words, this process enables human beings to identify objects as elements of a certain class (Brown 1995: 40ff; Klauer 2008: 23ff).

Nonetheless, the categorization of material objects and of humans is of a fundamentally different quality. Objects are produced with a certain purpose and this intention is materialized in their characteristics. Therefore, the categorization of objects is based on criteria that are indeed inherent in these things. For instance, spoons are made for eating liquids, and therefore one of their sides is concave and connected to a handle; these traits indicate that an object is a spoon, and convey the central meaning of a spoon. The categorization of human beings into social groups may be said to function similarly, but it differs in a significant regard: it does not derive from inherent traits, but from social practices and societal structures. For instance, the subsumption of human beings into the social group of women can be based on physiological traits such as features of the reproductive system. However, related criteria such as chromosomes and hormones are not as homogeneous and distinctive in men or women as common sense may assume. Moreover, the better part of the meaning of "being a woman" is not assumed from these traits, but from social practices and societal structures.
such as patriarchies, which enable and disable the agency of individuals categorized as women or girls. Similarly, the meaning of "being" dark- or light-skinned evolves from and in specific social practices that are related to colonialism and racisms. The same holds true for the other social categories. Hence, in our research we focus not only on the construction of social categories by highlighting certain traits ("cues" according to Allport), but also on the meaning of "belonging" to social categories, i.e., the membership to a group on the basis of social practices and societal structures, which affect the children’s agency.

Following these distinctions, research questions that are related to social categorizing can be articulated:

1. Which social categories do children construct and reconstruct?
2. Which criteria in the sense of traits do they rely on? Which information do they accentuate or neglect?
3. To what extent do they employ inductive generalization and deductive subsumption?
4. Do they, and to what extent, distinguish between traits and practices?
5. Are they, and to what extent, aware that social categories are socially constructed and societally (re)produced?
6. Do they, and to what extent, understand themselves and others as belonging to certain social categories?
7. Which meaning do they ascribe to group-memberships?

3.2 The meaning of stereotypes and stereotyping regarding social groups in childhood

Stereotyping is another essential act in the formation of prejudices and built on categorization. The term refers to the expectation of certain additional traits to be characteristic of elements that belong to a particular category, or of certain behaviors to be displayed by members of a social category. Like categorization, this process enables agency insofar as it discharges us from the constant need for evaluation and re-evaluation (Brown 1995: 82ff, 90ff; Petersen/Six 2008: 45ff). However, stereotyping can become dysfunctional when it is rigid and inflexible (Brown 1995: 111ff). Horkheimer illustrates this ambivalence as follows: "Without the machinery of stereotypes someone could not cross the street, even less serve a customer. But he must be capable to limit the generalization, lest he goes wreck and ruin. Beyond the English Channel, cars drive in the left lane, and in these parts, customers change their taste increasingly fast. One cannot always satisfy them according to the same scheme." (1962: 87f; translation KRG)
As in the case of categorization, here again we need to reflect on differences between stereotyping of objects and human beings, as well as on different kinds of associations made in this process. For instance, to expect an object comprised of a concave part and a handle to be suitable for eating fluids realizes its objective or societal meaning, i.e., what this object has been made for in certain societies. On the other hand, the assumption that persons categorized as "woman" on the basis of their reproductive physiological characteristics will also wear their hair long and work in educational professions may be an adequate expectation where pertinent social practices and societally produced gender-division of labor are prevalent. However, the perception of correlations between traits lacks understanding of the formation of these phenomena and their relation. A deeper and more important insight with respect to developing agency would be to note that the correlations between sex, hairstyle and profession are not the result of inborn "traits" and contingent "behaviors," but rather the result of gender relations, which impact habitus and agency. The capability for such an understanding demands flexibility, but flexibility is merely a necessary, not a sufficient condition for understanding stereotypes as a result of social practices and societal structures.

Against the backdrop of these considerations, the following research questions can be derived:

1. What traits and behaviors are associated by children with (members of) which social categories?
2. Do children conceive of their environment in the sense of superficial correlations between characteristics of social groups such as traits and behavior?
3. To what extent do children generalize their expectations, and do they handle their expectations in a flexible way?
4. In what way and to what extent do children understand social practices and societal processes that underlie superficial correlations?

3.3 The meaning of evaluations of social groups (prejudices) in childhood

Prejudices are built on categorization and stereotyping, as they add a (predominantly) negative emotional evaluation of (a member of) a social group. More generally speaking, prejudices refer to evaluations of a person as a group-member, and therefore fully exist once a social group has been categorized and stereotyped in a general way. Allport’s classic definition of prejudices is referred to in Social Psychology until this day: "an avertive or hostile attitude toward a person who belongs to a group, simply because he belongs to that group, and is
therefore presumed to have the objectionable qualities ascribed to that group." (1958, 8; Petersen/Six 2008: 109)

This definition highlights the connection in prejudices between emotion and cognition (social categorizing and stereotyping), while others stress the instantaneous connection between categorization and emotion (prejudice as an affect). Both notions are relevant in our research. As mentioned above, in his description of the ontogenesis of prejudices, Allport mentions the phenomenon of linguistic precedence, in which children acquire swear words and understand their powerful, negative meaning without having acquired the general social category addressed by them and before knowing what the corresponding behavior of its members would be. And he mentions the display of prejudices based on generalized social categorization and stereotyping.

Another aspect usually mentioned when defining prejudices is that sometimes the emotional value seems to be positive, for example in the case of philosemitism or in the romantic primitivism ascribed to black people. Both examples reflect superficial impressions resulting from the different ways in which racisms – ascribing power to Jews in modern anti-Semitism, and simplicity to Blacks in the process of colonization – have developed and are reproduced. Hence, "positive" and "negative" stereotypes partially reflect ideological knowledge, while the related concept does not enable an understanding of their genesis and function in power relations such as anti-Semitism and colonization.

Against this backdrop the following research questions can be suggested:
1. With respect to which persons do children demonstrate prejudiced emotions?
2. To what extent is there a discrepancy between emotion and cognition, in the sense of linguistic precedence and pre-generalized categorization?
3. To what extent are prejudices based on generalized categories and stereotyping?
4. To what extent do children understand the power relations behind the emotionally charged categorization and stereotyping?

3.4 The meaning of discrimination of social groups in childhood

Following the general psychological distinction between cognition and emotion on the one hand, and behavior on the other, Social Psychology distinguishes between discrimination and the other aforementioned concepts. The contemporary definition (Petersen/Six 2008: 161) still relies on Allport's work, which differentiates prejudices from several forms of "acting out prejudice" (1954: 14ff) or "rejection of outgroups" (47ff): antilocution, avoidance,
discrimination, and genocide. Hence, in contrast to contemporary usage, Allport does not refer to discrimination as an umbrella term for manifestations of prejudice, but confines it to institutionalized or legalized practices of the following kind: "Discrimination comes about only when we deny to individuals or groups of people equality of treatment which they may wish" (50). Furthermore, Allport considers that prejudices are not necessarily acted out, and, after the abolition of legalized discrimination, concepts of institutionalized discrimination include the notion of making unjustified distinctions without shared prejudices (Hormel 2007: 65ff). Hence, Allport’s superordinate phrasing – acting out of prejudice – becomes somewhat paradoxical, which is why we at KiWin use the term discrimination to designate all forms of "rejection of outgroups".

The potential discrepancy between prejudices and discrimination has been noted in the mid-1930s by Richard LaPiere, leading to a critique of research that is confined to measuring "a symbolic response to a symbolic situation" (1934: 230) – i.e., attitudes – instead of investigating intergroup relations in social reality. Allport bypasses the methodological critique and states that this study demonstrates that both types of attitudes "are >true< attitudes, fitted to two different situations" (55). In German Critical Psychology (Markard 1984: 104ff) as well as at KiWin, LaPiere’s critique has borne fruit in relation to the methodological approach (see below).

Considering the difference between interpersonal and intergroup relations, I would like to call to mind that for actions to be understood as an element of discriminatory intergroup relations, it is necessary to act with respect to a person as a member of a social category. Thus, it is important to consider the extent of generalization underlying discrimination.

Against this backdrop the following research questions can be derived:

1. Do children reject outgroups?
2. Which forms of discrimination can be observed?
   a. Do children verbalize prejudices?
   b. Do children distance themselves from other children because of their membership to a certain social group?
   c. Do children exert violence against children of a certain social group, and due to this membership?
   d. Do children institutionalize discrimination (i.e., create "rules") in their interactions and intergroup relations?
3. Are these forms of discrimination based on prejudices?
4. Are these forms of discrimination based on pre-generalized or generalized categorization and stereotyping?
3.5 General conclusions from discussing basic concepts for our research

The phenomena involved in our subject matter – facets of cognition (categorization, stereotyping), emotion (prejudices) and action (discrimination) – are manifold, and any researcher used to the positivistic model will argue that it is impossible to derive and test hypotheses from such a broad range in one research project. But, as mentioned before, at KiWin we do not seek to test theories or to directly pursue every single question derived from the basic concepts in our empirical research. Rather, the concepts and questions are to increase our sensitivity for phenomena potentially prevalent in the interactions we observe in the kindergartens (see below). Inasmuch as they appear, they can do so in various combinations: categorization and discrimination, for instance, can exist without prejudices, but prejudices and discrimination do not appear without any cognitive representation of social categories and associated stereotypes, albeit, as in the case of linguistic precedence, diachronic and synchronic developments are possible.

4. Contemporary research: Relevant phenomena in childhood and the dominant methodological approach

This section reviews contemporary research that details some of the abovementioned relevant processes, such as rudimental categorization in infancy, language acquisition and identification with social categories in early childhood, and, finally, the formation of prejudices from early childhood through adolescence to adulthood. While we at KiWin gain important insights from these concepts and findings, the dominant methodological approach to the study of prejudices in Social Psychology is discussed critically.

4.1 Infancy: Beginning to reconstruct social categories

Activities which bring about capabilities that are relevant for the formation of prejudices and discrimination begin in infancy. The research conducted by Quinn et al. (2008), which investigates social perception, allows us to understand some relevant processes occurring in this period of life. It does not intend to contribute directly to our subject matter, but it does address processes that are fundamentally relevant, namely the preference for faces representing social categories such as race and gender.

The method utilized by Quinn et al. is a standard visual preference test in an experimental setting (18). It involves displaying on screen a random choice of
two face-pairings out of 12 faces to 16 Caucasian newborns and 20 Caucasian 3-
month-old infants (19f). Each face was created by computer-generating six
natural faces, all of which presented characteristics that are considered by Quinn
et al. to be representative of male or female gender and of Caucasians and Asians
(18f). We can assume that in this research, the characteristics which are meant to
represent the social categories "race" and "gender" have been stereotyped
through the computer-generating procedure, and that these are understood in
terms of a binary, or mutually excluding, construction of (facial) phenotypes.
Consistent with the implicit idea of Experimental Psychology (Holzkamp 1995
[1993]: 22), the faces are inadequately understood as stimuli and the children’s
activities with respect to these faces as reactions, while the researchers’
"reasoning" (Quinn et al. 2008: 17, 21ff) approaches an adequate understanding
of the children’s activities in terms of actions (Holzkamp 1995: 27ff). According
to the definition and operationalization, a child shows preference by a relatively
longer time of fixation, which is reliably different from chance. The child's
preference is measured by determining the fixation duration on the basis of
filming the eye-movements, and is calculated as the ratio of summed time of
fixation on face 1 (i.e., female) and summed time of fixation on faces 1 and 2
(i.e., female and male) converted into percentages (20). Following this definition
and operationalization, none of the newborns showed preference for female faces
(21), but 16 out of the 20 3-month old infants did (20), with values 48,11%
versus 57,69%. These infants had female primary care-takers. In a similar study
with infants raised by male primary care-takers, the preference was for male
faces (17, 23).

Regarding race, newborns and 3-month old infants were exposed to
Caucasian/African, Caucasian/Asian and Caucasian/Eastern-European face-
pairings; the newborns did not show preferences, while the 3-month old infants
preferred Caucasian faces in each case (17). The infants were all born to
Caucasian care-givers and predominantly exposed to Caucasians (ibid.). These
studies, as well as studies conducted in Israel with Ethiopian/Caucasian face-
pairings shown to Israeli (presumably Ethiopian) children and in the USA with
Chinese children exposed to Asian/African, Asian/Caucasian, and Asian/Middle
Eastern faces (ibid.), led to the finding that "differential exposure during the first
3 months of life to same- and other-race faces results in a consistent preference
for same-race faces" (ibid.). The authors rule out sensory maturation as a driving
force (ibid., 22), and suggest that experiences and cognitive processes can
explain the phenomena (16f., 22).

While I concur with the authors' general notion regarding experiences and
cognitive processes as driving forces of these developments, the theorization of
the data can be deepened by articulating two important dissenting opinions.
Firstly, the notion that 3-month old infants can relate to social categories on a generalized level is untenable, since this would imply that they have already acquired a cognitive representation of these categories, including a pre-lingual concept. It is more likely that infants in these situations acquire knowledge regarding phenotypical stereotypes through the comparison between the characteristics of the differently stereotyped faces presented in the experiment and those of the faces known to them from everyday experience. In other words, they are likely to be in the midst of reconstructing categories on the basis of phenotypical criteria, but certainly not of applying social categories. Secondly, and consequently, the assumption that infants relate to faces in terms of sameness and otherness of gender or race is equally unsustainable, as this would presuppose the capacity of self-identification with one of the categories at stake. This process is likely to commence much later-on in the development of children, based on language acquisition (see below). Nevertheless, inasmuch as these infants are learning to form categories based on phenotypical stereotypes, they will eventually be capable of subsuming themselves and others to them.

Furthermore, the duration of fixation is probably not an accurate indicator for the infants' preference: if they are processing information and comparing stereotyped characteristics, they may do so whether or not they fixate on certain faces longer. Finally, regardless of whether the infants express preferences for certain kinds of faces, they apparently do not express fear or rejection of any of the faces. Thus, these data would not exemplify the assumption of a very early acquisition of prejudices, i.e., an emotionally negative evaluation of "other" faces on a pre-categorical level.

Notwithstanding these critical comments, the research conducted by Quinn et al. supports our understanding that from early infancy, children are likely to compare visible (and audible) characteristics of human beings (faces, voices etc.) they perceive at their homes and in the nursery, and to begin reconstructing social categories on the basis of these cues, before they understand and produce words. But, since the participants cannot yet communicate verbally, their behavior regarding such characteristics remains as incomprehensible as their meaning for the babies, due to the impossibility of validating our interpretation in a dialogue with them.

4.2 Early childhood: Language acquisition and the identification with social categories

In the ensuing development of children’s agency, language acquisition is a milestone, both in general and with respect to the formation of and identification with social categories. A study conducted by Bar-Tal and Teichmann in Israel
offers an understanding of the recognition and acquisition of verbal labels and the identification with the designated social categories.

In the study Teichmann an Bar/Tal (2008) involved 80 Jewish Israeli children aged 2 to 6, who were asked a set of four questions regarding labels for three social groups – Jew, Israeli, and Arab – which relate to prejudices and discrimination in Israel: “1) >Have you heard the word Arab/Jew/Israeli? <; 2) >Do you know what an Arab/Jew/Israeli is?<; 3) >Can you describe or tell me something about an Arab/Jew/Israeli?<“ and 4) “>Are you a Jew/Israeli?<” (464) Conceptually, these questions correspond with different developmental levels of acquiring verbal labels for social categories: the initial is the capacity to recognize the word (question 1), followed by the acquisition of the category (question 2), which involves the (re)construction of what the category means to the child (question 3), and, finally, self-identification with social categories (question 4). Within the methodological frame of Experimental Psychology, the researchers’ questions are understood as verbal stimuli and the children’s answers as verbal reactions instead of intersubjective actions. Since this part of the review focuses on the phenomena of language acquisition and self-identification, it suffices to discuss the findings regarding the first two labels.

All of the children aged 3 to 4 (100%) had heard the word Jew and 95% the word Israeli. Of the younger children, 90% had heard the word Jew and 60% the word Israeli, with 65% identifying as Jews and 55% as Israelis, many of them "before demonstrating category acquisition" (ibid.) – a diachronic development of recognition/acquisition and self-identification with a social category. All of the older children (100%) knew both Jew and Israeli, and most identified as such (73% and 77% respectively).

Unfortunately, the children’s remarks on their understanding of the labels for social categories are not reported, nor do the authors elaborate on theirs, even though this would be most valuable for interpreting the children's "responsive behavior" as actions. For example, the supposition of citizenship as a criterion for defining the social category Israeli subsumes both Jews and Arabs, but many Arabs living in Israel will not identify themselves as Israeli; the same may hold true for Jewish immigrants, if the concept Israeli is ascribed exclusively to Sabras (Jews born in Israel). In addition, some Arabic-speaking Jews share cultural practices with Palestinians, while the practices and understanding of "being" Jewish may differ considerably between secular and orthodox Jews, and so on and so forth. Therefore, the meaning of "knowing" what the terms Jew and Israeli designate will vary widely, as will the meaning of identifying with these social categories, depending on the backgrounds of the children involved in this study.

Based on this understanding, it is of great importance that the research conducted at KiWin explicates the ambivalent facets and layers of meaning of
(labels for) social categories prevalent in the German society, while elucidating which meaning the children (re)construct with respect to (labels for) social categories that they know, use, and apply to themselves (and others). This will in turn enable us to determine the criteria children use, the kinds of stereotypes they may associate with the different categories, the variety of floating meanings and the flexibility of handling them, and, finally, the degree of generalization. For although the verbal labels are by definition general, we cannot assume that the children have already formed a general understanding of them.

4.3 The development of prejudices throughout childhood – Findings and methodology

The considerable body of cross-sectional research on prejudices that covers the entire trajectory of childhood allows for meta-analyses, which describe the development of prejudices in terms of their degree (Raabe 2010: 120f, 182), starting from the age of 2 up until the age of 18 and older (Raabe 2010, Raabe/Beelmann 2009: 115ff). These studies demonstrate an increase between the age groups 2 to 4, with a peak in the age group 5-7, a steady (but not systematic) decrease over the age-groups 8-10, 11-13 and 14-16, followed by a slight increase until the age-group 17-19. In this section, the relevance and meaning of this curvilinear trajectory is commented on, and then two of the typical methods applied in the original studies are discussed.

Relevance and meaning of the findings on the development of prejudices

In order to assess the relevance of the inverted U-shape outlining the degree of prejudices throughout childhood, the following qualifications and restrictions should be mentioned. Firstly, these data do not indicate the dissemination of prejudices in the respective age groups, but the intensity of prejudices by trend. Secondly, the evidence does not contain information regarding the degree of generalization achieved by children of different age groups, so that the average intensity in different age groups is likely to refer to different stages of generalization. Thirdly, most of the primary studies concentrate on prejudices held by members of dominant groups regarding members of subordinated groups (Raabe 2010: 74ff), and therefore the trend is valid only for the dominant groups within each age group (145f). In fact, reviews have pointed out that the trajectory differs in children belonging to subordinated groups (49f; Brown 1995: 157f). Fourthly, within this probabilistic methodology, the determination of trends such as the degree of prejudices in different age groups implies by definition a variance of empirical, individual cases. Practically speaking, the trend does not represent a necessary developmental trajectory, and empirical individual
developments differ from it. Fifthly, the trend does not hold true for all social categories: it "is valid mostly for prejudices regarding ethnicity and race", and is "not [so much valid] regarding national groups, disability, gender groups, homosexuals and old people" (189, translation KRG). Finally, the intensity of prejudices from childhood through adolescence to adulthood is, although relatively different, generally low (average between 0.15 and 0.29) (121).

If all of these restrictions hold true, which informational value does the presentation of a developmental trajectory by trend convey? It would be fair to posit that the curve does not represent the development of prejudice in childhood, but a statistical trend in developmental changes in the generally low intensity of prejudices among children of dominant groups with respect to ethnicity and race. This trend is not the norm, and differing trends are not "anomalies" (Brown 1995: 158), but each one is at least bound to the specifics of certain social categories, and is dependent on the position of the subjects in power relations.

Considering these findings, we at KiWin should have been able to expect – on average – a low level of the specified prejudices in the participating kindergartens. But, inasmuch as statistical trends and actual, individual developments (of prejudices) differ systematically, the trend deviates from the social reality in which our research is situated. Nevertheless, prejudices among the children in our project could be characterized as more or less "intense", even though we would not be able to apply measures utilized in the experimental settings. However, the focus on measuring (the intensity of) prejudices follows from the experimental-statistical methodology, while we at KiWin are more interested in the premises and reasons children may have for displaying (more or less intense) prejudices, be it in an experimental setting or in the kindergartens (see below). In order to reconstruct premises and reasons, and since the meta-trend abstracts from the experimental settings in which the data were collected, it is important to understand how prejudices and their intensity are investigated by considering typical methods utilized for measuring them (Raabe 2010: 53). Two of these are presented in the following.

Measuring prejudices: PRAM and MRA

The Preschool Racial Attitude Test (PRAM II) was developed in the USA for the research of prejudices regarding race. The negative evaluation of a social group is indicated and measured by the child's "selection of light- and dark-skinned figures in response to stories containing positive and negative adjectives (e.g., good, nice, kind; bad, naughty, mean)" (Williams et al. 1975: 494). The "figures" are intended to represent two social groups: "Euro-Americans" (E) and "Afro-Americans" (A). In the original study, the test was administered by examiners,
who were (considered as) Euro-American and African-American and distributed equally to 483 preschool children from first to fourth grade, who were also (considered as) either African-American or Euro-American.

In the test procedure, the children are to relate 24 positive or negative adjectives in a forced-choice format, i.e., associate each adjective to only one of the figures. A positive evaluation of one figure is interpreted as a negative evaluation of the other figure and vice versa. In order to obtain a measure, the value 1 (numerical relative) is allotted to each negative evaluation (empirical relative), and the relation of the positive and negative sum-scores of each figure is interpreted as a neutral (12:12), or more or less intense positive or negative attitude ("bias") towards one of the two social groups. The most indisputable critique of this classical method pertains to the forced-choice format, arguing that it confounds preference for one group (presumably the in-group) with the rejection of the other (presumably the out-group), and that both preference and rejection should be measured separately (Doyle/Aboud 1995: 210; Aboud 2003: 48).

The *Multiresponse Racial Attitude* (MRA) measure was developed in response to this critique (ibid.). It allows generating indices of positive and negative attitudes toward any social group separately, and enables the differentiation of in-group-positivism from out-group-negativism. In this procedure, children are to assign 10 positive, 10 negative, and 4 neutral adjectives, along with a short verbal input (see below), to drawings that depict heads of children "differing only in skin colour and hair texture" (50), which are produced in sets classified as "boy set and girl set" (ibid.) and administered in a same-sex logic.

While the immanent critique of forcing children to make certain choices is limited to the potential confoundation of in-group-favoritism and out-group-negativism, it applies to several other implications of both procedures. For example, the children cannot choose between assigning and not assigning adjectives to drawings, and are therefore forced to enact stereotypes with respect to drawings. They are equally forced to enact evaluative assignments implicit to the adjectives presented to them. In this respect, these measures resemble the measures for collecting data on prejudices among adults. In both cases, the items and the possible responses are designed by the researchers, and cannot be commented on or altered by the participants according to their own view. However, measures for adults allow at least for alternative "responsive behaviors" (such as degrees of agreement/disagreement with statements), but not the ones designed for children.

In addition, due to the methodological logic, the participants are not able to articulate whether or not they find it reasonable at all to enact stereotyping, or
how they interpret the figures' behavior. It is, for instance, well possible that children find it nice to paint on walls with crayons (one of the behaviors to be evaluated negatively and ascribed to one or more of the drawings), while being fully aware of the fact that adults prohibit such behavior and identify it as naughty. Thus, the participants’ negative “responsive behavior” would not express a their negative evaluation of such a behavior and of (the drawing of) a child, but rather a (forced) conformism in the generational order (Alanen 2009).

It is also noteworthy that the drawings and their verbal labels designate a single child, and not a social group, while the children’s “responsive behaviors” are interpreted as an evaluation of a social group. Hence, instead of designing methods fit for investigating the process and degree of generalization – which is, as has been argued, a fundamental and decisive question in the developmental research on prejudices in childhood – both methods do not unequivocally operationalize a social group, but a single child which is presumed to represent a group.

It seems that the experimental settings create the abovementioned "symbolic response to a symbolic situation" (LaPiere 1934: 230). Both, the PRAM and MRA situate children in artificial environments, in which they are forced to enact stereotypes and evaluations with respect to representations of individual children. The limited experimental conditions facilitate conforming behavior, while the children's reasons for their actions and the meaning they ascribe to the situation remain unknown. Moreover, these methods are not sensitive to the degree of generalization in the children’s use of social categories. For these reasons, and because the experimental setting differs vastly from the children’s environment at KiWin, there is, unfortunately, not much to learn from these experiments for our research. In contrast to this dominant methodology and as intended by LaPiere, KiWin attempts to investigate prejudices and discrimination in a specific social reality, in which concrete children and adults interact with each other, while taking into consideration the process of generalization in the display of social categories.

5. Delineating the conceptual and methodological framework for KiWin

As has been mentioned in the introduction, our research project KiWin pursues its overarching question of how young children gain and develop agency in intersecting relations of domination, based on the categorical framework of German Critical Psychology as well as on notions of Childhood Studies. Since the latter incorporates Sociology, Political Sciences, Education and Psychology, one could assume that German Critical Psychology would align easily. And yet,
the relation between the two approaches has not yet been systematically discussed. Childhood Sociology/Childhood Studies have attempted repeatedly to conceptualize agency (Alanen 2009; James/James 2008; Kelle/Hungerland 2014; Eßer et al. 2016), and these attempts have resulted in many valuable assumptions regarding the relation between agency and structure. Yet, it is our contention that German Critical Psychology offers a more systematic execution of the paradigmatic venture onto which Childhood Sociology/Childhood Studies embarked towards the end of the 20th Century: to apply to children the fundamental categories that constitute the theoretical space of Social Sciences, and to analyze what children do (agency) within historically specific forms of childhood (structure) (Prout/James 1990: 7ff).

Following this assertion, our research relies on the category "action potency" in German Critical Psychology for its study on children's development of agency within structures of domination. This category incorporates assumptions about the societal nature of human activities (Tolman/Maiers 1991, Painter et al. 2009, Reimer/Markard 2014), that result from empirical research into the evolution of humankind. The methodological status of a category means that action potency does not describe activities observable at present, but rather serves to analyze these activities, i.e., to ask questions regarding their interrelation with the social worlds and with societal structures, as well as with intentions of the actors. Five of these assumptions pertaining to the conceptualization of the relation between agency and structure will be outlined in the following. Then, the implicative methodology and methods are described. In both cases, the relevance for our research at KiWin will be pointed out.

5.1 Analyzing children’s agency in terms of action potency

The first assumption pertains to the societal mediatedness of subjectivity and the societal nature of humankind. Ever since the societal mode of development became dominant, human offspring has needed to gain action potency in different societal circumstances, so that cognition, emotion and action (as aspects of action potency) are necessarily related to and primarily embedded in the forms of practice and thought that constitute societal relations. Therefore, the steering of the development of action potency by genetically programmed maturation can be excluded based on historical-empirical grounds, and regardless of actual-empirical research such as the one carried out by Quinn et al., which was discussed above. What *is* genetically enabled, however, is the societal nature of humankind – its capacity to develop into vastly different societal conditions and to become agentic therein. This is why, from the standpoint of German Critical
Psychology, adults and children must not only be seen as actors, but as actors in society.

The second assumption specifies this relation between actors and society: human action potential is neither an effect or a function of societal conditions, nor is it entirely undetermined by them. Actions, thoughts and feelings of an individual are possible, but are not objectively necessary in character; they result from a de facto subjective choice of specific possibilities for action (premises), and the subjectively perceived interests of the individual (reasons). From this follows methodologically that research must reconstruct the standpoint of the subject, be they adults or children. Hence, the category action potential inquires why, with respect to premises and reasons, did a person utilize specific possibilities for action and not others. In our case: which premise-reason relations underlay the reproduction of stereotypes or of discriminatory behavior by children? This understanding of human activities is opposed to framing children's acquisition of prejudices and discrimination in terms of stimulus and response, as is the case in the traditional research discussed in this article. At KiWin, the traditional methodological concept of testing hypotheses in terms of stimulus and response thus needs to be substituted by reconstructing children’s activities – such as infants’ perception of facial information, children’s self-categorization, etc. – in terms of premise-reason relations, which can be exemplified, but not falsified by empirical data.

The third assumption considers action potential and its premise-reason-relations as embedded in historically concrete societal conditions and power relations. This encompasses Allport’s (and, respectively, Myrdal’s) view of the two-faceted structure of democratic societies, but holds that it is the capitalist mode of production which concurrently brings about essential contradictions in thought and practice. Following the idea that actions can serve to reproduce or to transform power relations inherent in capitalist societies, the category action potential becomes twofold. It suggests the possibilities of conforming to practices of domination (restrictive action potential) as well as attempts to overcome them (generalized action potential), and asks why, with respect to premises and reasons, people, be they adults or children, act, think and feel in one way or the other. In order to understand children’s activities in this sense, we at KiWin need to analyze the environments in which they act, with respect to existing power relations and to the position of the children therein. On this basis it is also essential to discuss with the children how they view their environments, according to which they chose certain possibilities for action or inaction (premises) based on certain intentions (reasons).

The fourth assumption details the potentially contradictory character of restrictive action potential. It is suggested that forms of restrictive action potential
are not only harmful to others, but may also be ambivalent with respect to the subject itself, if and insofar as the reproduction of power relations grants possibilities for action, but simultaneously recreates constellations that are detrimental to the subject. It is also suggested that within forms of restrictive action potency, cognition tends to be confined to reproducing the realm of social interaction while ignoring its social mediatedness. Simultaneously, emotions within the restrictive mode potentially represent an adequate evaluation of an individual’s situation, thus creating a continuous conflict with cognitions that block problematic implications of restrictive agency. These assumptions about the potentially contradictory character of restrictive action potency further the issue that was addressed by Allport, when considering that inner conflicts can result from becoming agentic in a dominant position in American Culture and how they can be dealt with. Allport may have limited his considerations to late adolescence and adulthood based on the notion that young children cannot be assumed to be fully aware of these ambivalences, but it seems that children nonetheless develop their action potency from the very beginning under contradictory conditions. Hence, at KiWin we are paying attention to related phenomena.

The fifth assumption to be mentioned here pertains to the individual’s development in childhood. The development of action potency is the process by which human beings overcome the discrepancy between objective possibilities for action and the subjective capabilities needed for realizing them. While this process is clearly not confined to childhood, it is essential for KiWin to understand how infants and children develop (Holzkamp 1985: 417ff; Markard 2009: 222ff). As mentioned, the idea of a phylogenetically programmed process can be ruled out. Rather, the driving force are a child’s activities, which lead to the experience of discrepancies between capabilities and possibilities. On a categorical level, the most general discrepancy occurs between agency in its societal mediatedness and agency, based on experiencing society as a mere surrounding. At least three processes enable children to overcome this discrepancy: beginning ontogenetically and from a subjective standpoint within seemingly quasi-natural conditions, children's activities result in realizing cooperativity and meanings within the realm of social interaction, followed by transgressing the limitations of acting within a social world and, finally, acquiring action potency within the societally mediated world. The importance of these distinctions in our actual-empirical research was pointed out when research questions were derived from the basic concepts: understanding the difference between perceivable but superficial correlations between traits, their social construction and societal mediatedness enables children not only to represent stereotypes etc., but to gain insights into the power structures from which they
emanate. This gives way to a critical stance and generalized action potence. In our research at KiWin, we are investigating these processes in more detail.

5.2 Methodology and methods: Subject-scientific action research

Finally, some fundamental assumptions at KiWin pertain to the methodology. Within the positivistic methodology, prejudices are conceptualized as constructs, which are then operationalized and measured on interval-scale-level (as in the above-mentioned PRAM and MRA). In this procedure, prejudices are interpreted in terms of reactions to stimuli. If the subject matter could be reconstructed adequately in these terms, it would make perfect sense to isolate a limited number of factors, to hypothesize their relation, and to put this hypothesis to the test under controlled conditions in a laboratory. It would be equally reasonable to distill statistical patterns by reviewing original studies or by conducting meta-analyses, and to explain these quasi-laws retroactively by one theory or by a combination of theories. But, as this outlining of empirically grounded categorical assumptions has demonstrated, the subject matter agency/action potence does not adhere to the logic of cause and effect. If the primary quality criterion for scientific research is to use methods that can grasp the object in its entire complexity, a nomothetic methodology cannot be applied.

It is for this reason that the KiWin research group chose to investigate prejudices and discrimination and, more broadly, children’s agency in intersectional power structures in the field, i.e., in the social reality in its unreduced complexity of four different kindergartens. In this setting, the field researchers adopt the role of adult playmates, as opposed to that of kindergarten teachers. They do not initiate activities, but observe them and participate in them inasmuch as the children want them to do so. Embedded in social reality, the researchers document situations in which the children activate social categories of interest, such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, and class. They also document situations in which power structures and children’s actions are prevalent. The collected data consist of descriptions of interactions that involve only children and of interactions involving children and adults (the researchers and/or kindergarten teachers). These data are analyzed with respect to the predominance of power relations, restrictive and generalized action potence, on the one hand, and of categorization, stereotyping, prejudices and discrimination, on the other.

Since German Critical Psychology is a subject-scientific variant of action research, the analyses serve practical purposes and involve children and kindergarten teachers as experts and agents of change. The concept outlining this process is comprised of four phases and is referred to as “course of development” [Entwicklungsfigur] (Markard 1985; 2009: 279ff).
In the first phase, the existence of certain power structures and the (non)conformist actions of children and adults, as they appear in the corpus, are theoretically elucidated and exemplified by selected data. The next step is to present these findings to the actors, to determine via discussion if, or to what extent, they share our view, and to reconstruct their premises and reasons for restrictive or generalized action potency. This second phase involves the validation not only of data, but also of theories, and it requires cooperation between the actors and the researchers, as well as learning processes on both sides. The former need to gain an understanding of the theories presented to them, and the latter must familiarize themselves with the viewpoints and circumstances of the children and professionals. Furthermore, this leads to the collection of additional, mostly verbal data about premises and reasons, that could not be reconstructed by means of observation.

Once actors and researchers share an analysis of power structures and of the actors’ involvement in their reproduction ("problem theories"), the third phase begins, which aims at producing suggestions as to how to overcome these constellations ("solution theories"). This process appropriates examples and theories that enable generalized action potency, which can be reconstructed from the collected data, from others’ experiences, or from preexisting theory. Again, once actors and researchers are in agreement, the fourth phase is initiated, in which the actors attempt to put solution theories into practice. This phase includes the collection of observation and verbal data, which allow for the documentation and analysis of experiences had in this process. Failures are analyzed again with respect to problems and solutions. Successes consist of a course of development that results in empirically grounded problem and solution theories. Both are instructive for other actors in similar situations. Through these subject-scientific means of action research, we at KiWin hope to produce theories pertaining to concrete constellations, which can nonetheless be generalized both theoretically and practically.

6. Conclusion

At the outset of our research project KiWin, I embarked on reviewing a broad range of the existing research on prejudices and discrimination in childhood, because I wanted to develop an understanding of our subject matter that would help to specify the broader question of how kindergarten children gain and develop agency (in terms of action potency) in intersecting power structures. The result is twofold: on the one hand, I gained research questions and many valuable insights, which enhance our sensitivity in the collection and interpretation of
data; on the other hand, I identified some limitations that are mainly due to the application of basic concepts without specifying them with respect to the historical and political constellations, as well as to the dominant methodology.

All in all, at KiWin we aim to approach the field with a comprehensive view, which pays attention to the potential prevalence of social categorization, stereotyping, prejudices and discrimination on cognitive, emotional and motivational dimensions of the children’s agency/action potential. This is supported by an awareness of the societal embeddedness of these phenomena and, thus, their historic and regional specifics. We must pay close attention to the differential meaning of these phenomena to subjects in dominant and subordinated positions, as well as to the premises and reasons of restrictive and generalized actions potential related to them. Considering the limitations of experimental and statistical methods, at KiWin we intend to adopt a methodology and utilize methods that will allow us to contain these phenomena in their actual complexity and in their developmentally different forms.

We believe that the subject-scientific approach fulfills these requirements and that it also enables us to involve the children and kindergarten teachers in a collective process of describing and analyzing the reproduction of power structures, part of which are prejudices and discrimination. In this process, we intend to develop theories and practices that may contribute to creating an environment in which it is indeed possible to be different without fear.

References


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Interdisciplinary collaboration and conflict concerning children in difficulties: Conditions, procedures and politics of everyday life in school

Maja Røn-Larsen

Abstract
This article deals with interdisciplinary collaboration and conflicts concerning children in difficulties in school. By applying a practice approach to the multifarious, conflictual everyday life of interdisciplinary work, the article discusses and problematizes the dominant trope that quality assurance is best achieved through formal guidelines, strict organisation plans and clear legislation. This article suggests that we need to develop a conceptual framework that appreciates the situated, transformative, collaborative procedures through which interventions for children in difficulties are developed in practice; processes that are often overlooked in the endeavour, driven by a “longing for order”, of producing standardized models. In the article, such transformative processes are described in terms of “corridor casework” and “politics of everyday life”.

Keywords
interdisciplinary collaboration, conflictual collaboration, children in difficulties, school, corridor casework, street-level bureaucracy, transformative activist stance, politics of everyday life.

Introduction

When it comes to supporting children in difficulties\(^1\) in school, “interdisciplinary work”, between teachers, family-counsellors, psychologists and school nurses

\(^1\) I use phrases like “children in difficulties” in the attempt to address the multifaceted contexts in which difficulties and problems develops and thereby dissociate this
etc., seems to be the current buzzword both in Denmark and in a broader international context (Edwards et al. 2010; Hansen et al. 2014). In municipalities across Denmark, strategies of such interdisciplinary interventions are often based on a rationalistic idea of quality assurance through standardized procedures in a strict administrative organisation model, with clear political ideals and bureaucratic demands based on firm, clear legislation. In many municipalities, interdisciplinary casework is supposed to follow certain “scripts”. For instance, the number and sequence of different interdisciplinary meetings is often stated in advance. The number and kind of participants at the different meetings, as well as the content of the meetings, is also identified beforehand by guidelines for the meeting and specific questionnaires.

Such standards and guidelines typically appear in local municipal handbooks or manuals, which are regularly updated due to the on-going contestation of former adjudications by the Appeals Board for Special Education (Madsen et al, 2015; Wittek-Holmberg et al, 2017). In this way, the processes are intended to follow certain, supposedly clear and transparent, standards. This is both in order to assure the quality of the interventions (due to a fundamental idea of transparency and equality in relation to bureaucratic processes) and in order to prevent complaint-cases from citizens (Lipsky, 2010, Madsen, et al. 2015, Mik-Meyer, 2017). In this article, I term such ideas the “longing” for organisational order. I problematize such longings based on participant observations and interviews with different participants in interdisciplinary processes in everyday life.

In the present study, the different contexts – from school to appeal board – seem marked by dualities between ideas of strict abstract standards and the complex, conflictual collaborative everyday life. On the one hand, the municipal and national strategies of systematic interdisciplinary work are driven by an idea/ambition of strict order and logic in the procedures of intervention. Problems appear as “something to be sorted out” by “fixing the chain of management”, as a head of the municipal office expresses it in a personal interview. On the other hand, the multifarious everyday life and interdisciplinary, collaborative work repeatedly go beyond the clear and neat organization models. In practice, much work is done that does not apply to the formal policies and administrative standards, not because the different participants “make mistakes”, but because they continuously need to take necessary “un-scripted” actions in order to get things done. They make joint decisions, manage, organize and arrange their collaborative work around common matters in relation to children’s school-life. In the article, I call such processes “corridor-casework”, a term approach from the widespread tendency to individualize problems to a question of the child’s inner dispositions.
chosen to emphasize the flexible and unpredictable ways in which problems find their solutions in social practice. In other words, the problems of the field do not appear to be solvable through the ambitions of “ordering”. Rather, it seems that many of the complex activities necessary in the interdisciplinary collaboration become invisible or even restricted by the ordering intentions. Such observations call for a theoretical and conceptual transgression of the idea of quality assurance through “a precise legislation” and a “firm, transparent model of administration” in relation to interdisciplinary interventions for children in difficult life-situations. This means that we have to reject the perception of problems or “errors” in practice as consequences of “rule-breaking”; a rejection of importance, since such perceptions are very dominant in municipal and national evaluations of interdisciplinary courses of interventions. Rather, observations from the interdisciplinary collaboration point to the everyday life of people as the central scene in which the significance of law and administration needs to be studied as part of situated collaborative procedures that are fundamentally political. The dominant idea of law and management as central “tools” or “strategies” to order and disambiguate processes around children in difficulties in school needs to be challenged. Instead, the institutional conditions must be analysed as part of the on-going interdisciplinary practice of everyday life and struggle among different participants connected through a common matter - as something, being constantly changed, negotiated and bent as part of subjects’ participation in flexible procedures and political processes of everyday life.

The theoretical perspective of this article draws on theoretical perspectives from critical psychology (e.g. Dreier, 2008a; Holzkamp, 2013) and social practice theory (Lave, 2011). These practice-approaches emphasise subjects as active agents participating in the overall development and transformation of institutional structures (Dreier, 2006, 2008b; Stetsenko, 2013). Subjects participate in situated processes of interdisciplinary collaboration in complex and contradictory institutional conditions, which they simultaneously are determined by and determining. From this perspective, the focus is turned to people’s situated activities in everyday life processes - the conflictual processes around a common matter about school and child-life and the multiple ways in which legislation and administration play in, is negotiated and interpreted as a part of collaborative practice of interdisciplinary work around children in difficulties. In this light, the article discusses how to break with terms of “order” through standardization and control – and instead sharpen the focus on collaborative processes about inclusion and children in school as processes that are neither coincidental nor predictable. It focuses on theoretical discussions of how to grasp interdisciplinary practice and its institutional conditions as constantly changing, negotiated and bent as part of flexible procedures and political processes of
everyday life, and discusses how law and administration can be conceptualised as something that is part of such interdisciplinary social practices, rather than as an exterior frameworks determining them.

**Empirical background**

The interdisciplinary project informing this article has been developed in collaboration between myself, a researcher in social psychology at Roskilde University, and Stine Jørgensen, a researcher from the faculty of law at Copenhagen University. It is part of a larger project of a research-collective concerned with various aspects and perspectives involved in conflicts about children in school. A main objective of the overall project is to investigate the relations between historical, societal conflicts about school – and the situated conflicts between different participants in the everyday life of school (Højholt & Kousholt, in prep.). Our specific project analyses the institutional conditions for interdisciplinary collaboration, such as school politics, legislation and administration (Røn-Larsen & Jørgensen, 2018).

For two years, we have conducted participant observations and interviews with different participants in the compound interdisciplinary practice concerned with inclusion and children in difficulties in school, such as psychologists, family counsellors, teachers and other participants in the municipal administration. In addition, we have analysed the legislation across different areas and sectors involved as well as different strategy documents that relate to developing the interdisciplinary work from the involved municipalities. Finally, we have studied a number of complaint cases (documents) from the Board of Appeal of Special Education from the period 2012-2016.

The analyses draw on material across these various empirical sources from different, connected contexts, because each of them tells us something about how legislation and strategies of administration are interpreted, developed and made important in different ways in the collaborative processes among the participants in practice.

**A starting point: the “paradox of inclusion” – revisited.**

An underlying problem that has motivated this research project is an ongoing curiosity about the “paradox of inclusion”, as I have termed it earlier (Røn-Larsen, 2012). This phrase highlights the apparent contradiction between general strategies of inclusion versus an ongoing and, perhaps even strengthened, tendency to isolate difficulties in school to a question of (dis-)abilities or
dispositions of individual children. I have been interested in the institutional conditions for handling, understanding and categorising children in school. One of the analytical approaches in relation to this interest was to study the gaps between children’s everyday lives on the one hand, and the way the problems of the children and the schools are described in the case files, on the other. This research revealed how social problems around children in school tend to be individualised in order to gain access to resources and develop possibilities for helping the children and the schools (Røn Larsen, 2011, 2012, 2016a). Here, legislation and administration seem to play an immensely important part as central conditions for the persistent tendency to individualise problems in school. The analyses also showed how conflicts in courses of intervention relate to contradictions in demands from different parts of legislation. For example, this was the case in a conflict concerning a boy starting in a family class, an intervention designed to develop the parental support for children’s school-life. The children are supposed to attend family class together with a parent for a period of time, to prepare for full-time inclusion in the regular class. In the specific case, the boy was referred to the family class together with his mother, a single parent. After a brief period, the boy was transferred to another special class. He was very unhappy with this decision, since he had already made new friendships in the family class and did not know anyone in the other special class. The reason for transferring the boy related to his mother’s unemployment and her obligation to participate in a job-training programme. Consequently, the mother could not attend family class together with her son, such as the rules for the family class prescribed. In this way, the specific problems in the boy’s school situation (and the professionals’ conflicts about the case) was related to the conflicting legal requirements: for activities related to reintegration of unemployed people into the job market, on the one hand, and the requirement for the parents to participate in their children’s school-life, on the other (Røn-Larsen, 2016a, 2016b). In other words, legislative and administrative procedures seem to be a part of school problems and collaboration and conflicts among different professionals and families.

The problem in such research is that it tends to end up pointing out more or less vaguely, that problems of individualisation and exclusion somehow relate to contradictions in the legislation or the strategies of administration related to the different child care and education areas. It tends to stop “at the borders” of law and administration, to treat them as external conditions, as a framework “outside” of practice that supposedly determines what is happening, and is therefore also somewhat “beyond the influence” of the different participants in practice. However, from studying practice in other family classes or even similar cases in the same class at another point in time, we learn that such conflicts can be solved
differently. Across the different research projects over time, we are experiencing how everybody, both professionals and administrative personnel, explicitly strive to follow every rule and regulation to the letter. For instance, observations from interdisciplinary meetings show that the professionals and administrative personnel often discuss “the right way” to organise the interdisciplinary procedures in relation to confidentiality. It is also commonly discussed how the procedures can be organised in ways that prevent complaint cases from involved clients (Madsen et al, 2015). At the same time, however, studies across different settings show how such procedures evolve in multiple different ways, both across different municipalities and within the separate municipality. What tends to be “the right way” in one situation, might fail in other situations – an aspect that the different participants in the interdisciplinary processes also discuss continuously. Different solutions are developed to handle similar problems depending on the specific situation, the specific relations between different participants and the specific collaborative interpretation of the legislation. In other words, understanding the meaning or significance of a specific act/law depends on a situated analysis of the complex interplay between many different participants in a specific, ever-changing institutional arrangement, in which the different participants make up conditions for each other.

**Outlining the theoretical challenge: law and administration as institutional conditions**

In many ways, this insight spurred the project that forms the basis of this article. It fuelled a growing curiosity about the importance of legislation for interdisciplinary practice, but it also gave rise to the question of how we can understand the influence of conditions such as law and administrative standards and models for the interdisciplinary work.

The theoretical and analytical challenge is to analyse the structural aspects of such processes, e.g. political, legal and administrative conditions, without either dismissing the structural aspects or assigning determining power to them. How can the significance of law and administration in interdisciplinary practice be reconsidered in terms that break with the common or even dominant tendency to think of this area in terms of strict order and control? How can collaborative processes about inclusion and children in school be comprehended as something that is neither coincidental (they are not developed in a vacuum “with no strings attached”) nor predictable (they are not the results or effects of a plan or a fixed set of principles)?
How can we understand such collaborative and conflictual processes as more than individual differences between professionals (conflicts of interests), differences in professional perspectives per se (struggles of professional power) or as consequences of dysfunctional organisations with unclear divisions of labour (faults in legislation or administration). These are all figures of understanding already well-known in the field. For instance, they are widely used as explanations in relation to “faults” in the studied appeal cases. However, such figures of understanding seem to be inadequate when trying to understand the concrete and situated collaborative and conflictual practices.

A central aspect here is that such understandings insist on addressing conflicts as problems, as either a result of egocentric counterparts or as a question of somebody breaking rules and regulations, either the scripts of the organisational plan or the law. However, in the observations of the study, conflicts are not necessarily the problem. Rather, it seems that conflicts tell us something valuable about the conditions for the collaborative work of inclusion and difficulties in school. Sometimes, conflicts turn out to be necessary generators of development, because it seems as if the actual practice develops through constant processes of conflictual problem solving (Axel, 2002, 2010).

**Corridor-casework - conflictual interdisciplinary collaboration**

The institutional arrangement around schools is characterized by struggles and conflicts. In spite of apparently common issues and goals, the specific practices around children in difficulties are continuously problematized, debated and are full of conflicts, doubts and dilemmas for all the various participants. The children, parents and various professionals (teachers, pedagogues, psychologists, social workers), school principals, municipal managers/bureaucrats and politicians) all have different perspectives and conditions for their contributions to interdisciplinary practice. They encounter different demands and follow different interests in their trajectories of participation across different settings. Nevertheless, they are interlinked in various forms of collaboration in order to make up everyday life in school work for all children (Højholt & Kousholt, in prep.).

Observations, interviews and material from the complaint cases in the present research project show how the legal complexities and the administrative procedures are not at all clear and unequivocal. Law and administration do not work as an external and clear framework of practice. Rather, they permit and invite contradictory interpretations in practice. Law and administration form central conditions for the different parties, but they do not represent strict
guidelines, and even more importantly, they are unable to do so. This is due to the democratic processes of developing and debating different legislative bills resulting in acts that express different and sometimes contradictory political purposes. But even more importantly, it is also related to the fact that legislation is constantly becoming part of an on-going social practice in which the different participants follow different engagements in order to help children in school. These are processes that are fundamentally political, because the participants are engaged in developing the school and thereby the societal conditions (Holzkamp, 2013; Stetsenko, 2013).

The multiple observations of many different professionals show a multitude of activities, which do not appear in any legislation or manual/script. This ranges from occasional meetings with colleagues or other professionals/resource-persons in the corridors, where different perspectives on what to do about a child or a class are discussed, to “behind the scenes” telephone calls to central persons in the organisation in preparing for and arranging a relevant placement for a child, or informal telephone calls or meetings with parents in order to settle conflictual situations etc. I term situations like these “corridor-casework”. Such different activities are necessary in order to develop relevant interventions and solutions in relation to the children in difficulties in school. However, such important activities are rarely documented or reported. Often, the activities even “break with” or overstep the “scripted procedures”. In practice, the problem does not seem to be that the school politics and administrative demands are not honoured properly. Rather, this immanent longing for clear, unambiguous legislation or policy tends to be an illusion that becomes part of the problem. It tends to cover up the fact that problems are always solved through messy and conflictual collaborative processes that cannot be ordered beforehand.

In these collaborative conflictual processes, legislation and administration create ambiguous conditions. They are something people have doubts and conflicts about, something that is repeatedly interpreted, negotiated and modified as part of the situated conflicts and collaboration. The observations show negotiations of interventions, where arguments related to legislation and administration are used as tools for both inclusion and exclusion, depending on the participants’ access to different resources, action possibilities and mutual interplay. In this way, legislation and administration are not definite. They are something that different parties refer to, both explicitly and implicitly, but often with different meanings. The point is that the meaning of any piece of legislation is not an autonomous entity – it constantly develops through complex transformative social practice that involves subjects in different positions. Accordingly, different interpretations by different professionals in different situations cannot be reduced to a question of who has interpreted the legal
demands correctly, and who has misunderstood them. I would suggest instead that this is how law and legislation work in an institutional arrangement. They are moveable, contradictory and negotiable in practice – as part of the collaboration and conflicts of a compound and continuously moving, multi-faceted common matter.

In relation to the institutional hierarchy between collaborative everyday-practice, municipal administration and appeal board processes (and the concepts of the meaning of legislation and administration), the processes of corridor-casework seem to be a kind of necessary “underground activity”. These situated activities fundamentally challenge the idea of “ordering” through standardization, because they consist of unpredictable, contradictory and conflictual processes.

**Lipsky’s concept of street-level-bureaucracy**

This sort of critique is not exactly new. It has been raised in many forms and from different perspectives within organisational psychology, sociology and pedagogy with terms such as formal/informal learning, tacit knowledge, unheeded knowledge etc. (Ahrenkiel et al, 2013). Such perspectives have made rich contributions to the field. Nevertheless, they often seem to uphold the figure of understanding that I criticize, namely that two practices are running in parallel: formal procedures are running constantly while unheeded and informal knowledge fills the cracks of the formal system. From my perspective, we need to go further on and fundamentally challenge the idea of a “system” existing beyond the specific and messy practice in which different subjects participate.

Similar to the perspective presented in this article, many scholars, especially within sociology and ethnography, have been occupied with the need to break with an understanding of practice as a simple, top-down reflection of law and policy and its underlying political ideas. For instance, Michael Lipsky has conducted several analyses of street-level bureaucracy, a concept that bears a resemblance to my own about corridor casework, but as we shall see, also differs from it. With the concept of street-level bureaucracy, Lipsky draws our attention to local practices and their conditions, when he emphasises how policy processes are formed in the concrete relations between street-level bureaucrats (“frontline-workers” in public service e.g. police-officers, social workers, teachers etc.) and citizens. Lipsky’s work on “street-level bureaucracy” describes situations in which citizens actually encounter law and legislation (e.g. Lipsky, 2010, 2013; Brodkin, 2013). Within this tradition, the work of different professionals forms crucial sites, because they represent situations where policies actually unfold.
Lipsky points to what he describes as “an essential paradox” in street level bureaucracy, where on the one hand, the work is “highly scripted [in order] to achieve policy objectives” and, on the other hand, “requires improvisation and responsiveness to the individual case” (Lipsky, 2010: xii). Taking this paradox as a starting point, he frames an analysis with a specific focus on the problematic role of the street-level-bureaucrats as policymakers, when forced to balance the bureaucratic requirement to treat all citizens alike, with the effort of exercising professional discretion and responsiveness to the individual case. Lipsky points out how restricted time and resources force street-level bureaucrats to routinize their practice, simplifying and reducing the information needed to make decisions, and thereby mass-producing categories of clients. In his analysis, Lipsky states that “(…) policy conflict is not only expressed as the contention of interest groups, as we have come to expect. It is also located in the struggles between individual workers and citizens who challenge or submit to client-processing” (Lipsky, 2010: xiii).

From Lipsky’s perspective, street-level bureaucracy is an expression of professionals repressing strategies that are created in order to handle restricted institutional conditions of the different welfare-institutions. His analysis sheds light on important issues of professional and interdisciplinary work, and on professionals’ specific processes of handling their conditions as central to the policy in practice. However, his analytical perspective also tends to stay within a framework where the problem about such street-level bureaucratic processes is identified as being that the professionals do not (have the possibilities to) properly follow the intentions of the law, and do not live up to the bureaucratic ideals for the legal rights of the individual. So, the ideal situation still tends to be that, if the conditions of the institutionalized practices could be arranged in such a manner, the professionals would be able to follow the (clear) legislation and the correct bureaucratic scripts. In this respect, Lipsky’s frame of reference differs from mine. The locally situated activities of negotiation and collective, flexible and conflictual action tend to be either problematized or simply overlooked in Lipsky’s perspective. In contrast to this, I am inclined to find that such processes are both unavoidable and often a central driver for the development of possibilities in the collaborative processes about school difficulties. As I will argue in the following, such processes can also be described as fundamental aspects of human social practice.
Transformative activist stance by Stetsenko

Studying interdisciplinary conflictual collaboration implies discussions about how to understand and conceptualize the subject as a participant in collective societal transformations, a discussion that has been addressed by Anna Stetsenko with her “Transformative Activist Stance” (TAS) (Stetsenko, 2013, 2008). From a Vygotskian point of view, Stetsenko is concerned with the theoretical discussions of how to understand human processes such as learning, development and cognition as fundamentally societal. As part of her argumentation, she states that such conceptual revolution is inherently part of the dialectical processes of empirical and theoretical work (Stetsenko, 2013: 8). Against this background, I have reflected on her approach in relation to the field of interdisciplinary work in school.

A main point in Stetsenko’s work is that people’s actions are always contributing to the communal processes of transgressing and transforming the societal status quo. She states that all human activity is always already part of society, and that all human actions are engaged in the collective practice of humanity. The subjects are “agents of communal history” (ibid: 9) and their activities matter as contributions to the constant communal practices of societal transformation. In the transformative activist stance, human activities are fundamentally politically anchored in historically and culturally developed visions of a better future:

“…human beings – already by virtue of being human – always act and know in ways that are meaningful and that matter within their evolving life agendas and visions for the future tied up with the social dynamics and politics of our communities.” (Stetsenko, 2013: 21)

Stetsenko’s point, that the many collaborative actions matter/make a difference in a political sense is important in order to understanding the corridor casework mentioned earlier – since it gives us a way to grasp the engagements of the different participants’ actions. They do not coincidentally meet up in the corridors, they meet up because they are trying to solve problems and to contribute to the overall transformations in the concrete (school) world for the children, the families and the professionals. In these processes, they make up conditions for each other. The different participants also meet up in the corridors because they are dependent on each other, since the difficulties of children are rarely related to one place or one situation, but extend into other arenas with other responsible participants. The children live their everyday lives across their home and school, school and afterschool centre, special class and regular class. Hence, problems and difficulties for children need to be understood in relation to
such complex trajectories of participation. This has been shown in several studies of children’s everyday lives (see, for example, Fleer & Hedegaard, 2010, Højholt & Kousholt, 2018; Røn-Larsen, 2016a; Stanek, 2013).

In addition, the different professionals are institutionally connected in a specific institutional arrangement, where their access to diverse kinds of knowledge or contexts for problem solving might be regulated by other parties. (The teacher must invite and allow the psychologist to make observations in class. The afterschool centre must apply to the school manager for an extra resource-person etc.). These aspects are collectivity and conflictuality related to the various participants’ different positions and perspectives (within a certain institutional arrangement) and are aspects that Stetsenko mentions, but does not concentrate on. In the following, I will explore these aspects by drawing on the work of Ole Dreier, Uffe Juul Jensen and Erik Axel.

Institutional arrangements and conflictual collaboration

Observations from the research project show how subjects participate from different positions with different perspectives. At the same time, however, they have interests in the common cause of improving school for children who are in different difficult situations. Different professionals participate in an on-going social practice with certain collective conditions, such as legislation and strategies of administration, conditions they simultaneously interpret, arrange and actively change, each from their different standpoints and action potential. Ole Dreier’s concept of institutional arrangements enables an understanding of how the on-going organisation of the work influences the ways in which different participants handle their tasks in relation to inclusion and children in difficulties (Dreier, 2008b). Such a perspective implies a centred approach (such as the one presented as part of the present research-project), which allows us to study not the subject and its actions isolated “as such”, but as subjective participants in compound, institutional relations between different people’s actions in different locations, with different demands and conditions. Activities in one context cannot be understood without exploring the subjects’ trajectories of participation to other locations and in relation to the things going on here (Dreier, 2008b). This is one of the reasons for the complexity in the overall research project. Such a centred approach across different contexts in the institutional arrangement, from children’s communities, to teachers’ professionalism, to school management, to legislation and policy processes in welfare work, enables an analysis of how different social practices make up conditions for each other, and how they are developed in interrelated ways. The concept of “institutional arrangement” also emphasizes how the societal institution of school cannot be
studied as a fixed organisation. Rather, it is repeatedly produced, transformed and reproduced through people’s collaborative actions - *arranged* and rearranged through different participant’s activities in their on-going social practice of collaborative work (Dreier, 2008b). In the research project, our attention is drawn to exactly the processes through which different people are *arranging and transforming together*, making decisions, navigating and managing their different tasks in ways that *matter* as a part of the multi-faceted development of school.

**The concept of procedures in a practice perspective**

One of the concepts used to grasp interdisciplinary conflictual (policy) processes is the concept of “procedures”, such as Uffe Juul Jensen and Erik Axel’s work as part of their practice-approaches in relation to areas within Health Care and Buildings Construction. They both use the concept of procedures to grasp such situated conflictual processes in practice. Contrary to the general view of health care services, Juul Jensen shows how procedures in health care practices are not expressing uniform standards or strictly scripted governance technologies. Rather, procedures in practice constantly vary in relation to an on-going exploration of the possibilities in specific situations (Juul Jensen, 1986, 1999). Erik Axel has conducted similar analyses of interdisciplinary procedures in the construction industry. He uses the concept of procedures to pinpoint the need to understand interdisciplinary collaboration as something that is neither completely standardised/settled, nor non-systematic/coincidental. Instead, it points to processes of constant arrangement among parties with engagements in a common and multi-faceted matter. Axel’s discussions of the concept of procedures specifically emphasises how our personal engagements are never fixed, but are constantly evolving as part of the exploration of and experiences with the conditions of practice. To put it in Stetsenko’s terms, one needs to emphasize how the transformative processes that the subject contributes to are never settled beforehand. They are always related to the constant collective involvement in which different participants make up conditions for each other, where your actions constitute conditions for my action possibilities and vice versa. This is why the investigation of relevant action possibilities in the interdisciplinary collaboration is always a collective process. The situated possibilities and conditions for the professional always depend on the other participants.

Such an approach challenges Lipsky’s “paradox” between the bureaucratic regulations, on the one hand, and professional discretion, on the other. In practice, professional judgement is not only related to professional expertise nor
is prior knowledge based on specific educational attainment. Rather, it expresses a professionally positioned exploration of the specific possibilities together with other participants, an exploration that also involves knowledge gained through previous experiences of such collaborative practices in specific institutional arrangements. This is why we cannot understand people’s reasons for their activities beyond social praxis, as implied by Lipsky when he relates the reasons for professional activities to the paradox between bureaucracy and professional judgement, both of which are rather abstract prior knowledge bases.

Axel’s and Juul Jensen’s conceptualisations of “procedures” are productive for the analysis of the interdisciplinary field around children in difficulties. Due to the existing vocabulary of the field, the term procedures might not be the best, since the word “procedures” is already widely used to describe exactly the fixed, standardised organisational chart, which the practice approach insists on overcoming. However, especially Axel’s persistent emphasis on collaborative processes as collective exploration and as something that cannot be determined beforehand, but rather as something constantly developed and refined for specific situated reasons in the on-going conflictual collaboration between the many different parties, presents a central theoretical contribution to the field of interdisciplinary collaboration.

In the interdisciplinary processes about inclusion and children in difficulties in school, the many different parties are struggling with the same matter: the development of school as a societal institution for the education and welfare of the children in society. However, it is a matter they experience and understand very differently because they have different positions, perspectives and tasks in relation to it. At the same time, each one of them has to coordinate their efforts with other participants’ efforts and with various other situations and demands that they encounter in their participation across different settings. These are all aspects that the idea of creating “order” once and for all tends to neglect.

**Summing up - toward concepts of procedures and everyday life politics**

The aim of the article has not been to show how laws, rules and regulations do not make any sense or have completely arbitrary meanings in practice. Rather, the aim has been to shed light on the fact that they have different, unpredictable, yet not coincidental meanings, according to the different local practices they play into – and the different political struggles they are entangled with locally. Such aspects depend on the fact that law, i.e. acts, rules and regulations, are in themselves conflictual and contradictory, since they convey different political processes and therefore reflect different interests and compromises. However, the
key point of this article is that they also play into specific conflictual social processes, where different participants – with different positions and different tasks - collaborate in interpreting the rules and regulations in order to organize good solutions in relation to common matters for children in difficulties. These interpretations are made as part of various political struggles in the collective everyday life of many parties. This is important to emphasize because such conflictual collaborative practices are often overlooked or underrated when it comes to developing strategies for the development of efforts for children in difficulties – strategies that are instead anchored in “the longing for order”.

Through the article, I have attempted to show how such longing for order tends to be elusive in relation to the specific corridor-casework needed to solve problems in everyday life, where many different professionals make great efforts to find solutions for children and schools.

If we return to Stetsenko’s transformative activist stance, and her emphasis on the many participants transforming contributions through this perspective, we come to understand that the procedures are not only responding to conditions and demands in the specific practice. They also express the different participants’ participation in what could be termed the politics of everyday life. They develop procedures to get things done in practice, but through the procedures and collaborative actions, they also contribute to the transformation of society, and through this project, the practice of school and interdisciplinary interventions around children in difficulties.

When I, as initially stressed, state that we also need to understand these processes as political, it is because a part of the collaboration is also related to understanding participants in practice as people struggling to get it right for the children, as participants who are collaboratively giving meaning to the legislation through their continuous work. As part of this on-going work in social practice, they also contribute to the on-going political struggle about the multi-faceted matter of ‘making school’. In other words, they participate in the on-going negotiation of what, and for whom, school is supposed to exist.

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Children's proximal societal conditions: Analysed through a case of an exclusion process in elementary school

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Abstract
In this article I argue for and unfold the conceptualisation of children’s proximal societal conditions. This concept is developed through research based on the German/Danish version of Critical Psychology. Various research projects studying children’s everyday life in different day care settings and in schools have made it clear that ‘the societal’ is not an abstraction – something above or outside the institutional settings or children’s everyday life. Rather, it is something that is represented through societal structures and actual persons participating within the institutional settings in ways that have meaning to children’s possibilities of participating, learning and developing.

Understanding school as (part of) children’s proximal societal conditions for development and learning means, for instance, that considerations about an inclusive agenda are no longer simply thoughts about the schools’ capacity for as many (different) pupils as possible (the school for all). With the concept of proximal societal conditions, we come to reflect on e.g. school not only as “a place to learn” but also as a societal meeting place where children participate in societal (re)production, hence developing as societal beings. Such a perspective has wider political and ethical implications on how we understand school and its many participants as a part of society. The aim is to clarify or sharpen the dialectic relation between the subject and the societal conditions.

Through an analysis of inclusion and exclusion processes in a Danish elementary school, I develop the concept of children’s proximal societal conditions in order to emphasise how such processes not only affect the potentially singled-out child, but also have meaning to all the other children. I also show how such processes are always connected to broader societal structures such as school laws, rules for allocating professional resources and working conditions for teachers and pedagogues.
Keywords
inclusion, exclusion, children’s communities, children’s perspectives, elementary school, societal conditions, participation

Introduction: Theoretical basis and the concept of proximal societal conditions

In this article, I argue for and unfold the conceptualisation of children’s proximal societal conditions, a concept developed through various research projects in which children’s everyday life in different day care settings and in schools has been studied.

The article takes its point of reference from a range of perceptions of social practice that are particularly indebted to social practice theory (Chaiklin & Lave, 1993; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1999) and to Critical Psychology or the science of the subject (Dreier, 1979, 1997a, 1997b, 2008a, 2008b; Holzkamp, 1972, 1983, 1985; Holzkamp, Maiers, & Markard, 1987; Osterkamp & Schraube, 2013; Tolman, 1991, 1994). In a Danish context, this theoretical base has been incorporated into research on childhood and has been further developed by, amongst others, (Chimirri, 2014; Højholt, 2006, 2008a, 2008b, 2012; Højholt & Kousholt, 2014; Juhl, 2015; Kousholt, 2008, 2016; Morin, 2008; Røn Larsen, 2012; Røn Larsen & Stanek, 2015; Stanek, 2013, 2014).

The theoretical basis for the article sees people as fundamentally active social beings, which means, for example, that when we wish to understand the actions of an individual child, we must understand those actions by looking at what other children and adults around that child are doing (Højholt, 1999, 2012; Stanek, 2013, 2014). The concept of proximal societal conditions is an attempt to go further with this basic assumption. The concept was developed from Critical Psychology, but the word ‘proximal’ invites associations with Vygotsky’s concept of the zone of proximal development. The point of bringing this association into play is to provide a critique of the often very individualising understanding of ZPD, in educational practice (Chaiklin, 2003). Anna Stetsenko points out that Vygotsky developed the concepts of social interaction, cultural tools and ZPD, and that these three concepts may not be separated (Stetsenko, 1999). Stetsenko believes that the unification of the three concepts in analyses of what she denotes "the Germ Cell Process" is a viable way to avoid splits in the understanding of human development processes. She points to the need to conceptualise more complex processes than can be captured by concepts such as ZPD or 'guided participation' (Rogoff, 2008).
The concept of proximal societal (developmental) conditions is intended to capture the complexity of both the dialectic between the subject and the societal, and the notion that the societal is represented through actual active persons. I try to conceptualise children's learning and development as something happening through participation in the (zone of) proximal societal conditions. The concept is connected to the theoretical starting point that human beings develop and change through social participation. In this way, the word ‘proximal’ points to something very different than some kind of inner cognitive zone of development. A similar challenge is the one Stetsenko tries to capture with the concept “collectividual” (Stetsenko, 2013).

The subject-scientific paradigm is historically set against two basic and conflicting assumptions in the research on humans (Dreier, 2008b; Holzkamp, 1985, 2013a). The first is the notion of actions as determined by society and societal structures. This notion often surfaces in various types of sociological and statistics-inspired research on causal relationships between societal conditions and their effects on human action. The second is the more classical psychological research revolving around mankind as an entity in itself, mankind without its social contexts, mankind decontextualised. In the subject-scientific understanding, the focus is instead on the dialectic between the subject and societal structures. The subject should not be perceived as determined either by some inner drive or by external societal conditions, but as someone acting for a reason. Reasons, as something spawned from the decontextualised human’s 'inner' assumptions, do not appear in the subject-scientific paradigm as anything 'in itself', but are always related to societal conditions. Societal conditions consistently gain meanings for the subject, depending on the subject’s position within them (Dreier, 1994; Holzkamp, 1989). A theoretical point that this article focuses on is that there are in particular some societal conditions that significantly stand out for or are proximal to the subject, depending on and through the particular societal structures in which the subject participates. All subjects participate in the production and reproduction of society, but the individual subject does not take part everywhere. That is why some societal conditions become more significant or proximal to the subject. Society is not just a 'remote' state body, but must also be understood as (mediated by) you and me and the intersubjectivity we partake in. 'WE' are society. Society is thus also represented for (and by) children in their intersubjective interactions with their peers and their teachers or educators in institutional arrangements, which are also fundamentally social. When we understand the social world and the subjects as dialectically connected (cf. Dreier 2008), society only exists by virtue of the socially participating subjects and their endless and varying work in reproducing and changing the social world. The subject and society are linked by human
activity. The social world or society is not something located at a particular location outside of human action. The societal should definitely not be understood as something which ‘floats above’ or is 'somewhere out there'. Society is represented in varying degrees or ways by all participants in the production and the reproduction of societal institutions and societal structures. ‘To be a school child’ is not the same everywhere.

Wherever subjects act together, different conditions - possibilities and limitations - are created, conditions in relation to which the subject must act. Based on his/her own situated interests, the subject can always decide how it will act in relation to these possibilities and limitations (Holzkamp, 1998), but other participating subjects and thus the societal conditions, the subject’s proximal societal conditions, form the conditions, possibilities and limitations of the subject’s conduct in everyday life (Chimirri, 2014; Holzkamp, 2013b; Højholt & Kousholt, 2009; Røn Larsen & Stanek, 2015). We should necessarily be careful to highlight the non-deterministic, to find the balance between not overlooking the limitations, whilst our sights are simultaneously fixed on the possibilities. By acting in relation to the conditions, the subject has the possibility of having and changing disposal over their life conditions and the ability to change someone else's conditions and thus change other people's possibilities and thereby take even further charge of their life conditions (or the opposite), which is a major point in relation to educational work with children in institutional contexts. In this way, we are determined by conditions, but at the same time participate in creating, maintaining and changing these conditions, both for ourselves and for others. On this basis, it becomes relevant to address the research question about inclusion as a societal question. The point of reference is the theory of people as social beings, but we lack knowledge about and concepts for understanding how inclusive and exclusive practice has meaning, not only for the potentially singled-out child, but for all the children’s participation in and across various institutional contexts.

Empirical data

The empirical material in this article has been collected through two different research projects in particular. The specific case analysed subsequently is based on results from my PhD project concerning the meaning of children’s communities (Stanek, 2011). Here, I followed a particular group of children from different day care settings into the same school. In Denmark, children attend day care from age 1-5. This is not mandatory, but 98% of all 3-5-year-olds participate in a day care setting (kindergarten). From the year children turn 6, they start
school, and the first mandatory class is called “kindergarten class” and functions as a reception class. The second class is called first class. The empirical material has taken its point of departure in a particular school class. Taking this school and the prospective class as my starting point, I could find those kindergartens that would potentially send children to that school. I observed the children during the last six months of their time in kindergarten. I subsequently followed the group of children for the first three months of their time in kindergarten class, in their classes, in the breaks and during the afternoons in their afterschool care, and repeated this for the first three months of first class.

The primary research method was to observe the children and to interview some of the children and all the primary professional adults around the children: the head of the kindergarten class and the class’ primary pedagogue\(^1\) in afterschool care, as well as the class teacher in first class and the head of the reception department. In addition, I took part in some of the meetings held by the professionals about the children and had access to minutes from other meetings.

The theoretical points in this article have been developed further through a research project financed by the Danish Ministry of Education\(^2\). Through qualitative research conducted in collaboration with two municipalities in Denmark and The National Inclusive Counseling Unit under The Danish Ministry of Education in 2014-2015, this project has investigated ways in which inter-professional collaboration has the possibility of supporting or underpinning an inclusive everyday practice within children’s communities (Stanek, 2014). The results of this project particularly emphasise how inter-professional collaboration can (or cannot) help children avoid ending up in stigmatised social positions in day care and school.

My point of departure for researching children’s lives in school is a curiosity to find out more about children’s perspectives (Aronsson, Hedegaard, Højholt, & Ulvik, 2012; Morin, 2008; Schraube, 2012; Stanek, 2010) on what is meaningful, interesting and eventually difficult about school life. This interest has led me to an awareness of how our societal structures play a part in supporting processes of inclusion and, not least, exclusion in and across institutional arrangements (see also Gilliam, 2014, 2015). We have to understand that a very large proportion of children’s activities revolve around their attempts to establish, secure and develop access to the communities they are (potentially)

\(^1\) In Denmark, afterschool teachers are referred to and educated as pedagogues. Pedagogues are employed in day care settings, in kindergarten class and in afterschool care. Teachers are employed in school together with pedagogues.

\(^2\) I was head of a research project conducted in collaboration with PhD, assistant professor Pernille Juhl, Roskilde University, Denmark; PhD, assistant professor Mette Elmose Andersen, University of Southern Denmark; and research assistant Solmai Mikladal, University of Southern Denmark.
part of and to support the community’s dynamics. When children become disruptive and lose concentration at school, the reason often lies in difficulties with their communities (Højholt, 2012; Højholt & Kousholt, 2014; McDermott, 1993; Morin, 2008; Røn Larsen, 2016; Stanek, 2013). Understanding the difficulties or challenges that play out in children’s communities is therefore crucial for the professional’s possibilities of working with their academic agenda for the children. Furthermore, we need to understand children’s actions and the development of children’s communities in relation to the adult’s actions, just as the adult’s actions must be understood in relation to both children’s and other adults’ actions as well as in relation to laws, rules and political demands.

Understanding school as (part of) children’s proximal societal conditions for development and learning means, for example, that considerations about an inclusive agenda are no longer simply thoughts about the school having space for as many pupils as possible (schools for all) (Bricker, 1995; Tetler, 2000). Such thoughts must be supplemented by reflections about which ‘version’ of the societal we wish to present our children with, and which ‘version’ of the societal we wish to set up as the condition for children’s participation and development. By this I refer back to my previous point about the societal acted out somewhat differently in different settings.

In the following section, observations and analyses of children’s everyday life in specific institutional conditions in which ‘an excluded child comes about’ will be used to take a closer look at how the limits of the inclusive elementary school acquire meaning for children’s communities. Communities that develop and become part of children’s proximal societal conditions.

**The case: A child comes and goes**

In the kindergarten class I observed as described above, a boy I will call Ismael starts. The professionals are already talking about Ismael before they have properly met him. Ismael has older siblings who are or have previously been at the school, so several of the professionals who are to look after Ismael and teach him at school are already, directly or indirectly, familiar with Ismael’s family. There have been a number of conflicts between the school and Ismael’s parents and older siblings, and the older siblings have on several occasions been excluded from school. From his first day at school, a special focus has been directed at Ismael, both in kindergarten class and in the afterschool centre. The professionals show low expectations for Ismael’s participation at school. Special procedures are swiftly put in place to ensure that there is always an adult in physical proximity to him, and he is perceived as being very disruptive. On their
first day at school, children are normally fairly quiet and restrained, but not Ismael. The following observation is taken from his first day in kindergarten class:

The children are to sing a song. While they are singing, Ismael shoves some of the other children. When Tobias is pushed, he gets angry and pushes back. The adults interrupt the song and separate the boys. Later that day, all the children are sitting concentrating on listening to a story. Except Ismael. He starts poking the other children, pulling their hair, laying his head in the lap of those sitting close to him. Hassan appears to think that what Ismael is doing is funny – so funny that he starts laughing. This seems to encourage Ismael. He continues but disturbs the other children, who want to hear the story, and the adults have to stop the story and move Ismael away.

Looking at my observations about Ismael, I notice a preponderance of observations of various forms of ‘clashes’ between Ismael and other children or some of the adults. During the first few days in the kindergarten class, the professionals try to be patient with Ismael and to resolve or avoid conflicts by sitting near him. However, this quickly develops into a way of coping with Ismael where he is positioned away from the other children. As an example, the professionals place him on a chair a little distance from the others when the class is assembled – or they send him outside ‘to play a bit’ when he becomes too restless in class. The clashes between Ismael and the kindergarten teacher evolve rapidly during these first few days in the kindergarten class. Ismael’s behaviour and restlessness, and difficulties with getting him to cease being so restless and disruptive, upset the kindergarten class teacher. On a number of occasions, the kindergarten teacher almost carries Ismael out of the classroom and all the way down to the office. On the third day, the kindergarten class teacher initiates a discussion with the head of the school to negotiate having Ismael moved out of her class.

I should add to the story about Ismael that he had been out of the country for 18 months prior to starting school. His parents are not Danish-speakers, and his own Danish is not well developed. When he starts school, the teachers are in some doubt as to whether Ismael understands or speaks Danish at all, and they do not hear him say much. This doubt about his language ability comes to play its part in the negotiations about which form of schooling he should be offered. During a break on the third day at school, the kindergarten class teacher comes back from a meeting with the principal with the message to the kindergarten class assistant teacher that they only need to “stick it out” for one month. From the middle of the second school month, Ismael will be moved over to the school’s
language class. It is decided that Ismael is the only pupil at the school who will attend language class full-time, while the other bilingual children only go there for short language courses. When Ismael starts in the language class, new negotiations about Ismael’s placement come into play. The professionals in the language class disagree with his full-time placement here. The principal makes the decision that Ismael has to be placed in the language class (in the first instance). Negotiations regarding Ismael’s possibilities for participation continue on many levels. The principal works on having Ismael transferred to a completely different school. The language class supports this, using the argument that Ismael’s problems are primarily social in nature and not about language. The mainstream class keeps insisting that he does not belong there either. The only people not involved in the battle of having Ismael removed are the staff at the afterschool centre, but they note that they could use extra resources to look after him in the afternoons. These negotiations continue throughout Ismael’s time in kindergarten class (See similar analyses of how professionals work together around children in difficulties in Højholt, 2006; Morin, 2008; Røn Larsen, 2012).

At the beginning of the school year in first class, a third option is arranged for Ismael. The school appoints a support teacher to look after Ismael and his classes for two hours a day from 10-12, after which he will continue his school day in the afterschool centre without extra support. Ismael is not supposed to come to school before 10 am, but he still arrives together with all the other children at 8 every morning. During the first few days, the class teacher takes Ismael down to the school office, but he cannot be there either, so Ismael is placed in a small room in the corner of the classroom. The room is meant to be a workstation for smaller groups of children whenever suitable. Ismael sits alone in this small room until the support teacher comes and fetches him.

My theoretical point in the following analysis is related to the notion that development and learning take place through proximal societal conditions. The concept of proximal societal conditions points towards issues regarding both the possibilities open to Ismael for societal participation and the learning amongst the other children about what they are participants in, in other words, what their proximal societal conditions are. In the example with Ismael and his class, the children are learning that the class community is a place in which certain children can be a part and at the same time cannot be a part. The children learn here that both the children’s community and the community of the class are places where you can potentially be sorted out.

Moving Ismael to the language class does settle things down in the kindergarten class and there is more peace and quiet in teaching situations. However, even when Ismael does not receive any teaching in kindergarten class, he still plays his part in the children’s shared everyday life. He forms a
continuous element in the children’s proximal societal conditions. Ismael continues going to the afterschool centre and is still a part of the class’s afterschool community. While being taught in the language group, he is together with the other bilingual children when they attend their shorter Danish courses, but he is also outside with the other children during their shared breaks. So, the children experience that there are places where all children can or have to join in. It might be said that the exclusion processes have a powerful influence on Ismael’s participation possibilities in school, but that there are nevertheless gaps and cracks in the fabric where processes of inclusion can come into play.

The analysis shows how processes of inclusion and exclusion are not solely about, nor solely have meaning for, the included/excluded individual. They also have meaning for the community to/from which the individual is included/excluded. In addition, the story about Ismael paves the way for a discussion about when inclusion takes place. Is Ismael included, for example, when he is allowed to stay at school and go to the afterschool centre?

The children’s perspective

For the other children, Ismael is one child amongst many who are starting in the kindergarten class. For them, Ismael is part of the circumstances and a part of the school class they are starting in. Ismael’s way of participating is both irritating and disruptive for many of the children. They often get irritated and angry with Ismael when he disturbs the teaching and the attempts by other children to follow the class, but Ismael is also an addition to the school day that is different, interesting and entertaining. Ismael often manages to get his classmates to laugh as a group at all the ‘naughty’ things he does during the course of the school day, and it is not unusual for some of his classmates even to encourage him to do some of the things the adults do not approve of. I regularly hear children saying during the breaks that it was fun to see how angry Ismael could make the teachers or the pedagogues. At the same time, I observe the children repeatedly trying to include Ismael in games and football. Occasionally, this goes on without problems or conflicts.

As mentioned, after Ismael is moved out of the class over to the language class, he continues to go to the afterschool centre with the rest of ‘his’ class, and in the afterschool centre he is counted as a child from this class. He continues to eat lunch with his ‘old’ classmates and the class’s main pedagogue, for example. In the language class, the professionals often allow Ismael to have his breaks at the same time as the other children from the kindergarten class. This means that Ismael continues to form part of the other children’s everyday life at school. The
only time when Ismael is not part of his regular class is in situations where the children are involved in the school’s teaching.

In the kindergarten class, I often hear the kindergarten teacher or her assistant do sums using the number of children in the class. When the school year started, there were 21 children in the class, but after Ismael is moved, they try to get the children to sum up the number of children in class to a total of 20. However, it is not easy to get the children to let go either of the number ‘21’ or of Ismael.

The school day starts with counting the children.
Kindergarten teacher: We are usually 20.
Michael: 21 with Ismael!
Kindergarten teacher: Yes, but if Ismael isn’t here, then we’re 20. If I say that one of you is missing today, is there anyone who can work out how many we are?
Christian: 19.
Kindergarten teacher: That’s right. The one who’s not here is Aida.

Perceptions of who and how many ‘we’ are in the class are different, depending on whether it is seen from the children’s or the teacher’s perspective. Confusion is only aggravated by the fact that some of the children in class are also attending language class for some of their classes but are still supposed to be counted amongst those who belong to the ‘we’ of the regular class. Similarly, it seems confusing to Ismael that in some contexts he is not allowed to join in with the other children in the class, and in others, such as breaks and in the afterschool centre, he still belongs to the ‘we’.

In previous work, I have addressed (Stanek, 2013) issues concerning the relation between children’s participation possibilities within children’s communities and the ways in which they take part in the school agenda. Here, too, I have made analytical points about the meaning of institutional structures and the professional’s ways of thinking about children’s possibilities for participation with one another. With this as a starting point, it is not difficult to understand that Ismael’s possibilities for participation in children’s communities in the afterschool centre and break-times do not become less conflictual after he has been moved out of the class. Ismael is continuously struggling with the issue of being ‘one of us’ amongst what are now his former classmates. He alternates between doing more and more things he is not allowed to, which I interpret as an attempt to be recognised by the other children, and becoming angry and frustrated over their rejections, and thereby becoming involved in more and more fights. The task of working in an inclusive way in the afterschool centre becomes more difficult, in line with the increasing practice of exclusion from teaching.
If we look at starting school from Ismael’s first-person perspective (Osterkamp & Schraube, 2013; Schraube, 2012), we are looking at starting school from a child who has been out of the country and not registered at his kindergarten for 18 months, which means he has been away from former friends for a relatively long time. We are looking at starting school from a child whose family has a history that means that the professionals who are to welcome him to school have particular expectations of him and his participation in school even before meeting him as a person. When he starts school, he meets children he once went to kindergarten with, whose parents have said that their children should not play with him, due to their acquaintance with his family. In addition, he meets a wide range of children whom he does not know. Many of the children he does not know are already fed up with his attempts to make contact on the very first day.

When I observe Ismael’s actions in school and the afterschool centre, I see a boy who persistently attempts to make contact with the other children and who really wants to join in, but I also see a boy who seems to draw on experiences with making contact through teasing, challenging others’ boundaries, etc., and who occasionally experiences a form of success in the plaudits of other children by doing precisely those things that the other children know they should not do. In particular, the other children with whom Ismael once went to kindergarten laugh when Ismael does things he is not allowed to. It looks as though Ismael’s reasons for being disruptive are closely linked to his attempts, often inappropriately, to make contact with and become a part of the other children’s communities, and to be allowed to join in. However, his conditions for joining in are already much more difficult from the start than those of the other children and it could be said that what he needs extra support for is precisely these participation difficulties. However, the social challenges he faces are left primarily to the children to deal with themselves, and when things do not work socially, Ismael is physically removed from the other children and has to sit by himself. During the break times, Ismael’s participation with the other children alternates between being rather conflictual, occasionally ending up in fights, and being relatively harmonious, as Ismael takes part in the children’s lives in an unremarkable way:

On the football pitch, Ismael is playing football with four other boys from the class and two boys from another class. The situation is quite free of conflicts. Occasionally, the rules are debated, but they quickly reach an agreement. They have divided into two teams and are playing against each other. The boys are engrossed in the game and are having fun. When the bell rings for class, two of the boys run in straight away – the rest run in after them.
There are occasional opportunities for Ismael to participate together with the other children, but there is a strong tendency for conflicts and problems to overshadow the picture of everything that is not full of problems, and those small areas which it might make sense for the professionals to work on. Particularly in the afterschool centre, the children can be observed playing in ways that let Ismail in, in ways that seem to work for both Ismael and the other children.

However, in the school teaching and leisure areas, Ismael rarely receives support from the professionals in his attempts to join in with play, as in the following example:

A large group of boys from the class want to play football during their break. Ismael wants to join them, but Hassan doesn’t want him to. For the kindergarten teacher, there is no problem in Hassan not wanting to have him join in, so she gets hold of Ismael and says that the others don’t want him to join in and that he has to go and sit still at the playground ‘garden table’. Ismael sits there watching for the remainder of the break.

In this situation, Hassan and the other children are supported by the adult professional in their sense that it is acceptable to exclude some children from their games. As a consequence, Ismael learns that his possibilities for participation are different from those of the other children. Ismael’s possibilities for participation vary considerably, and often incline towards what might be described as participation-impossibilities. Maja Røn Larsen has analysed referral processes in relation to special education institutions. She shows how children’s professionals, in their struggle to allot resources to special needs teaching, often experience a necessity of describing individual children as ‘little monsters’ (Røn Larsen, 2012). It appears as if something similar might be at work around Ismael, and that this attempt to describe Ismael as ‘a monster’, which is intended to be grounds for moving him to another school, becomes so convincing that (several of) his professionals occasionally perceive him only as such. Moreover, it seems that this picture is transferred from the school’s teaching side to the afterschool centre, which, as has been said, has greater difficulties in attracting extra resources to deal with and support Ismael than the teaching side. Episodes like the following only serve to harden the analysis in this direction:

In the afterschool centre, Ismael comes travelling through the room on a scooter. He crashes, falls and clearly hurts his foot. A pedagogue comes to him and asks him whether it is his scooter. A girl says that it isn’t Ismael’s, and the pedagogue tells Ismael that he should stop taking the other
children’s scooters. She goes out with the scooter. Once the pedagogue has
gone, Ismael gets up from the floor and limps outside.

In the process of getting Ismael reallocated to a special school, it looks as though a picture of him develops in which he figures solely as the child who steals the other children’s scooters, while the picture of the six-year-old boy who has crashed and hurt his foot fades into the background or even fades away.

**When the problems overshadow**

It looks as if the primary focus on Ismael’s disruptions casts a shadow over those minor incidents when Ismael does in fact attempt to participate in the school’s agenda.

In the class, the day’s teaching starts with the kindergarten teacher decorating the blackboard with two artificial sunflowers. While the assistant talks to the children about why the flowers are being put up and what a sunflower is, Ismael gets up and goes and fetches a large (beautiful) artificial rose that stood in the same place as the sunflowers before the kindergarten teacher put them up on the blackboard. He says, “This is beautiful!” with a broad smile on his lips. Almost all the children laugh. The kindergarten teacher gets angry and takes the rose away from Ismael and puts him in his place. The assistant continues with her teaching.

In the above example from the kindergarten class before Ismael is moved to the language class, we can choose to see Ismael as a child who is trying to obstruct the class. He fetches the wrong flower (roses and not sunflowers). He gets up when he is supposed to remain seated. He attracts the other children’s attention and gets them to laugh at him when they are supposed to be quiet and listen to the kindergarten assistant. However, we can also see Ismael as a child who demonstrates the desire to participate in the day’s class teaching and appreciates that the teaching theme is about flowers. He also says in fairly well-articulated Danish “Den er flot”, which means “This is beautiful”. The articulation is relevant to note, since the professionals are discussing whether he even understands Danish.

The following is another example from the kindergarten class where Ismael takes part in the school’s agenda without problems:

That day, the class is responsible for arranging the morning assembly, which is held every morning with the other kindergarten classes. The
kindergarten assistant asks who would like to present the songs they are to
sing. Jamila, Mikkel and Ismael want to. Ismael also presented a song
yesterday, so initially the kindergarten teacher and her assistant would
rather find someone else, but no one else volunteers (it seems to be a
slightly frightening task), and Ismael is very keen on doing it. The
kindergarten teacher lets him. Ismael presents ‘his song’ loud and clear –
exactly as he is supposed to (in contrast to Jamila and Mikkel, who both
get stage fright once they are standing in front of the other children and
don’t dare say anything).

In this example, Ismael carries out his task with no difficulty and better than most
of the other children, but these small successes are not the things that are
emphasised around Ismael. One of the reasons for these successes not being
emphasised could be that they are irrelevant to the negotiations about where
Ismael ought to be placed in the Danish school system. In this context, it seems
to be impossible to see Ismael’s successes and to ask for help at the same time.
The problem is that it is very difficult for the teachers to get help with children
who disturb the teaching. If there is a tiny sign of hope for the teachers to manage
to overcome the difficulties, they are expected to do so. This situation seems to
underpin the one-sided view of Ismael’s ways of participating in which the
problems overshadow the rest.

Over the decades, working in inclusive ways has been an issue in Danish
elementary schools, and even the name of the school, “folkeskole”, which means
“school of the people”, indicates that elementary school is a school for everyone.
This is not always the case in real life, though. It seems as if there are
contradictory forces at play in schools. While requiring the schools to work
inclusively, there is a steadily increasing political wish that schools ensure that
school children get “smarter”, “faster” (Retsinformation, 2003; Skolestartsudvalget, 2006; Undervisningsministeriet, 2006, 2014, 2017). This
last part could be analysed as a reason for Ismael’s teacher’s quick reactions to
his ways of participating in disruptive ways from the very first day at school. A
child like Ismael challenges the possibilities of the kindergarten class teachers to
achieve professional success with regard to academic achievement. The fact that
the number of children referred to some kind of special educational programme
has been increasing since the middle of the 1990s, starting just after the first
PISA results in which Danish children did not perform as the best readers in the
world, supports this analysis.

In an interview, the head of the kindergarten class and I talked about how
the kindergarten class as a whole compared to previous classes the kindergarten
class teacher has taught. She put words to the fact that removing Ismael from the
class has been good for the professional academic work with the class.
Teacher: Well, this is indeed a fine class compared to what else we have had to work with, right? This is going to be such an ordinary functioning class, no doubt about it!

*One that has also been thinned out? (With reference to Ismael having been moved out of class)*

Teacher: Well, yes yes yes yes, that has definitely not been a bad thing for getting work done (laughs). It didn’t make it harder ... no, not at all! Couldn’t you see that we would have been having special needs education in here at the same time? That was where we were, right?

When the teacher talks about an “ordinary functioning class”, she comments on the knowledge of the meaning of the social life amongst the children. To be a ‘functioning’ class, the children need to behave well with regard to both the teaching and one another. When we understand that children’s possibilities for participation in the social context are important for their possibilities for participation in the school’s agenda, and vice versa, and when as a result we try to teach and encourage children to get their social learning communities to function inclusively, then the example of Ismael reveals a paradox. It looks as though an ongoing political pressure on the school to achieve higher academic results – along with the requirements for acquiring extra resources for working with children in difficulties – presents a set of conditions for the professionals that end up seeing their professional input effecting precisely the opposite of what we ask children to do, namely, excluding children from both the teaching setting and from their social community. The aim of the requirement to work inclusively is the opposite of the above.

As mentioned above, in line with the increasing demands for better academic results (measured with PISA) over two to three decades, the number of pupils referred to special educational settings in Denmark has been increasing as well. For various reasons – economic, social and educational – it has become a goal for the Danish Ministry of Education (Ligestillingsudvalget, 2014) to decrease the number of children being referred, and instead order schools to develop ways to include more children with different difficulties within the general school arrangements. As it has been possible to spot different reasons for the wish to decrease the number of referrals, it has also been possible to spot different ways to work towards the goal of decreasing the number of referrals. One of the ways to work towards the numeric goal is to change the concepts for when to speak about special education programmes. It is decided by law (Inklusionsloven, 2012) that children only count as special education children when they are assessed as being in need of a special education programme for
nine hours a week or more. Paradoxically, my latest research points to the fact that these rules seem to make it even harder for the professionals at school to argue for support and extra resources, understood as extra hands to help with children who, for various reasons, are difficult to include in everyday practice in school.

At the same time, politicians have implemented a new school reform (Undervisningsministeriet, 2014) whereby schools are obliged to offer children more teaching in Danish, maths and gym, along with homework support. It is not the aim of this article to go into the details of this school reform.

Even though politicians may wish that school should primarily be about children developing skills in an academic sense, from the children’s perspective school is about many other things than academic achievements. For them, school is also to a large extent about living their everyday lives amongst other children, for better or for worse (Højholt, 2008b; Morin, 2008; Røn Larsen, 2011; Stanek, 2013, 2014).

When we focus on inclusion, we need to focus on the complex practice which includes more than just the ways the children are being thought (the didactic) and the present curriculum. What goes on in children’s communities has meaning for the way children participate within teaching (Stanek, 2013, 2014). Break times and afterschool centres seem to be good places to work with children’s communities and, from this viewpoint, it is problematic that exactly the time where it is possible and relevant to work with children’s communities is being shortened due to the school reform.

Through the analytical example in which we followed the exclusion process of a boy, this article shows the meaning of the tension that exists between the framework within which teachers and pedagogues operate in supporting inclusion in school and the children’s perspective of the possibilities for participation in school.

The push towards inclusion announced by politicians raises and emphasises demands on when it might be relevant to apply for extra resources or refer children to special needs education. Negotiations about the perceptions and placement of children, like those we have seen played out around Ismael, will continue to be conducted in the future. Ismael’s difficulties in participating in starting school do not disappear because the laws have changed. Results from the second research project this article is based on shows that the tighter agenda for inclusion might only lead to black-and-white pictures and descriptions of children with difficulties becoming starker in the future.

At the same time, there is a tendency for the controlling themes in the interdisciplinary cooperation between pedagogues and teachers to become the school’s teaching function and its academic learning agenda. It seems as though
the consequence will be that pedagogues in afterschool centres are caught up in the
dominant agenda of the teaching function in ways whereby the potential for
breaking with stereotypical perceptions of children is simply lacking.

As far as the children’s community that I followed for the first two years at
school goes, the story of Ismael’s impossibilities of participation concluded a
couple of months into his first year, when the head of the school managed to
move Ismael to another elementary school in the town, which also meant that he
moved to a new afterschool centre and therefore no longer formed part of the
daily lives of the other children in the class. However, Ismael was not consigned
to oblivion, for he formed part of the class’s common history. Ismael was an
element in the proximal societal conditions through which the children took part
in school, and he continued to be a feature of those proximal societal conditions
by confirming that “our class does not have room for everyone”.

The perception of school as constituting the children’s proximal societal
conditions for development takes on meaning when we come to consider the
‘inclusive school’. Such considerations lead to reflections about which version of
‘the societal’ we wish to present to children, and which version we wish to apply
as children’s conditions for participation and development. To be concrete,
through examples like Ismael’s, children in schools are confronted with a societal
model in which children are weeded out for various reasons. It is the children
who play both the conflictual games of football and others that are (more)
conflict-free – and they play together with those children who are weeded out.
During the course of this interplay, they learn that if they do not play the game in
the right manner, they, too, might be weeded out. In relation to the development
of children’s communities, children learn that, even though the aim may be to
have everyone on board and to be kind to one another, there are nevertheless
children whom it is acceptable to exclude. It is important to bear this in mind
during the entire interplay that unfolds in the attempt to acquire more resources
for working with children with difficulties, whether these resources are to be
brought into the class or whether the child is to be removed from the class. This
whole interplay in which those children who become centres of difficulty are
seen as ‘little monsters’, as Røn Larsen puts it, turns into a part of everyday life
not only for those that are singled out but also for the rest of the children. The
fact that it is difficult to acquire the necessary support and extra resources
becomes an element in the proximal societal conditions for the whole class.
Conclusions

The contribution of professional pedagogical work can scarcely resolve the paradox presented above, but professional work involves particular opportunities for confirming and for countering the processes of exclusion. To a significant extent, the difficulties around Ismael’s presence in school arise out of his attempts to gain access to the social life of children, and the way his attempts are met by children and professionals. Yet, it is also precisely in this social life of children’s communities that Ismael can regularly be observed being included. Ismael and pedagogical efforts made in relation to him need a nuanced eye for Ismael’s engagements and where he seems to be participating in ways we would like to encourage. Both teachers and pedagogues need a nuanced eye for the conditions that have to be in place if Ismael is to join in at school. In the pedagogical practice in the afterschool centre, it is possible (and part of the job) for the pedagogues to join in with the boys’ football games (or through other types of pedagogical activities) to help them find solutions that avoid situations where Ismael is asked to sit alone on the sidelines at a garden table. There is the potential here to build up knowledge of Ismael’s personal engagements that is relevant for adults who have to deal with the class and at the same time juggle an academic agenda.

This is not to be done by shielding him or isolating him from social participation, but by inviting him in to take part in relevant activities and by supporting and guiding any participation that is moving in an expedient direction. As regards interdisciplinary work at school, analyses of Ismael’s participation in a Danish elementary school point out the need to see possibilities for participation rather than the impossibilities. The support and extra resources that are devoted to the school’s teaching side (like individual lessons) could have been used differently in both the pedagogues’ and the teacher’s investigation of Ismael’s concrete difficulties in participation, and inclusive ways of supporting Ismael’s participation, both in teaching and in the afterschool centre, might develop.

A conceptual development such as children's proximal societal conditions distinctly points out that the communities within schools are of great importance for children's learning and development – both academically and as persons. By comprehending communities of practice such as children's proximal societal conditions, we place the focus on the fact that children – in addition to learning how to read, write and count – also learn about their position and possibilities for participation in society through their participation in Danish public schools. For the children, it is very much here that the dialectic between themselves as subjects and the societal structures unfolds or takes place. The point about
Communities of practice representing the children's proximal societal developmental conditions is particularly evident for children who are designated in elementary school as children with special difficulties or needs, that is to say, children who either must be helped in special ways (e.g. through relocation to special classes) or who are quite simply designated as someone who does not belong in a Danish public school. Communities of practice pose as the children's common proximal societal conditions, where those children who are not designated also participate in the societal conditions in which some children may take part, but where others may not. In many ways, parallels can be drawn between the societal conditions that children find themselves in and the conditions for participation that children develop together – one could point to a certain form of reproduction. This does not imply that children simply reproduce societal structures. Instead, the point is to show that the adults’ categorisations of children, as well as the processes of segregation that adults set in motion at school, affect children both directly and indirectly: directly in the form of e.g. specific classmates being relocated, and indirectly by the children thus learning that the ways we are together and the ways we establish communities, amongst other things, undergo segregation – there are some who can be here and some who cannot.

As I previously argued, the societal should be understood as ubiquitous and definitely not something which 'floats above' or is 'somewhere out there'. Societal structures must be seen through the participants' production and reproduction of the social institutional bodies. That is how I view the children's communities of practice as their "proximal societal conditions". What can be included in a community of practice, and what can be understood as the most proximal societal conditions must be determined in a concrete and situated way, and not in the sense that there should be sections of society which children are not a part of. The point of the concept is to demonstrate that the children's proximal societal conditions, and thus their most important scope for possibility and limitation, is the community of practice in which the children participate, e.g. in their institutional contexts. By focusing our attention on proximal societal conditions as being significant to children's learning and development, it will become evident that processes determining who may participate in Danish public schools and who cannot become an essential part of the children's learning about (participation in) Danish society.
References


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Common engagements as resources for inclusion: Children with disabilities transitioning from one age group to the next within general day care

Kurt Bendix-Olsen

Abstract
This article presents a social psychological study of three-year-old children with disabilities who are transitioning from one age level to another within inclusion day care centres in Denmark. I investigated children’s transitions as a decentred participation-problematic by drawing on material feminist disability studies, social practice theory and German-Danish critical psychology. The study included four children, all with disabilities, during the transition from one age group to another. I foregrounded one child, a girl, to illuminate the specific access barriers she faced as a new group-participant handling age level changes. I analysed this girl’s socio-material visibility and her personal engagements as a way to explore her local action possibilities and her emerging action potency across age level settings. The analysis shows that children with disabilities are at risk of becoming objectified as impaired children prior to, as well as during such age level changes, suggesting that professionals need to study how changes in institutional arrangements present personal barriers to children with disabilities and to their inclusion into the general education system. The study concludes that inclusion for transitioning children with disabilities relies on how children’s personal actions and common engagements are understood, investigated, and developed in and across contexts as part of a changing day care practice.

Keywords
children with disabilities, transitions, day care, participation, inclusion, institutional arrangements, community of practice
Introduction

The article focuses on the theoretical and practical question of how access to resources for inclusion is distributed in social practice in day care. The article investigates how the transitional process of a child with disability relates to institutional arrangements and social practice in change within general day care. The study draws on material feminist disability studies (Garland-Thomson, 1997, 2011, 2012), social practice theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and German-Danish critical psychology (Dreier, 2003a+b, 2008, 2009) to investigate the conditions a child with disabilities has as an active participant in structures of social practice. This theoretical knowledge base builds on a relational ontology that invites researchers and practitioners to conceptualize disability as a situated and practical difference tied to conflictual participation in historical social practice under change – a perspective that stands in stark opposition to the widespread and dominating impairment-related, biomedical research traditions, where the focus is on deficit within the individual’s universalized human body.

The aim of the study was to generate knowledge from practice about children’s transitions in order to understand how children with disabilities are finding their way through educational arrangements (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Dreier, 2008, 2009).

The study is part of a larger ongoing Ph.D.-project called: ‘Small Children’s Perspectives on Inclusion Practice’, funded by University College UCL, Roskilde University, and The Municipality of Odense, Denmark.

The empirical study involved four 3-year-old children with disabilities in newly established resource day care centres. In the municipality of Odense all children in day care centres are transitioning from their initial group to the next when they are 2 years and 10 months old. I followed the four children with disabilities prior to, and, during the children’s transitioning processes. In the receiving day care groups, children were from 2 years and 10 months of age and up to 5 year old. Each resource day care centre holds three placements for “children with special needs” and employs one extra full time professional in comparison to other general day care centres.

Throughout the research process, the children’s engagements in practice were in the centre of attention as a way to explore how their actions related to the socio-material possibilities in resource day care centres.

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1 In 2013, The Municipality of Odense changed its organization of day care centres from what Madsen (2005) calls “an integration model” to “an inclusion model” as a way to open up the general educational system to children that until then had been cared for in segregated day care arrangements. The resource day care centres are developed out of already existing general day care centres.
The research questions capture the conflictual relations that a child with disabilities faces as a participant in a local practice, where s/he is a newcomer:

1. How a child with disabilities is engaged in his/her age level transitions within the resource day care centre?
2. How does participation problems occur from the perspective of the transitioning child?

The article begins by addressing the way children with disabilities and their everyday life has been set apart in clinical studies of children and in biomedical understandings of disability. I argue from a social relational view on disability for the investigation of the conditions participants have, (re)produce and transform in local practice. This theoretical point of departure facilitates an exploration of how ‘disability’ takes form in practices and becomes vested with social meanings in institutional arrangements. Next, I present the various explorative research methods I used to investigate children with disabilities as active participants in a historical social practice of ‘ability – disability’. The research methods have accommodated an exploration of theory and practice in their dialectical relation, and the research-practices I have developed continuously over time in line with Lave’s understanding of “research as apprenticeship” (Lave, 2011).

The introduction to the Danish day care system that follows contextualize and problematizes the access-demands children with disabilities encounter as new participants in the general day care arrangement. I use empirical examples of one girl’s transitioning process to illustrate what it takes for small children to have access to common conditions for participation, and hence, for inclusion in day care. Implications drawn from the research suggest that by exploring participation and access-problems from the perspective of the transitioning child, professionals can identify and act to break down participation-barriers as they present themselves to children. By exploring participation and by consolidating common engagements in action, day care professionals can assist children in actively developing conditions that may afford expansive action potentials in and across institutional arrangements and other action contexts (Højholt, 2016).

**Setting the scene: The decontextualization of children with disabilities**

Institutional day care arrangements may produce vulnerability and participation difficulties for children with disabilities, especially if professionals view these children’s presence and personal engagements as problematic for sustaining existing group practices (Fisker, 2012; Bendix-Olsen, 2018). A common participatory problematic that follows from having institutional age-based
arrangements applied to diverse groups of participants is the risk of identifying “the impaired child” as the problem (McDermott, 1996; Mehan, 1996; Davis & Watson, 2001). Traditional individualizing understandings of children’s development in psychology have long been the norm (for a critique of individualizing approaches to studying children, see Gulbrandsen & Ulvik, 2015; Hedegaard, 2011; Hedegaard & Fleer, 2008, 2013; Hundeide, 2010). Individualizing understandings of child development can be said to be an a priori assumption in clinical studies of children with disabilities, and thus, also within the impairment-related tradition of special education (Oliver, 2009; Goodley, 2011, 2014). These individualizing understandings of child development often serve and preserve standard age- and needs-based institutional arrangements, so they are not typically perceived as part of the inclusion problematic (Holt 2003, 2004a+b, 2007; Garland-Thomson, 2011). This, then, blocks critical examination of institutional arrangements, understood as historical action-conditioning contexts, because they are already entrenched as commonsensical and legitimate (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lave, 2006, 2012).

In his critique of such decontextualized approaches to child research, Hundeide (2010) argues that psychological research should avoid isolating the individual child from its social world. Experimental research, he points out, often ends up diagnosing the child’s individual competence rather than situating the child’s actions within its everyday social practice and experience. Further, Hundeide argues that research methods that are not in dialogue with the participating child may lead to biological reification (Hundeide, 2010, p. 151 - 152). In his view, test-based-research-methods can contribute to a “ranking practice” that tells us more about notions of normativity within a given society than it does of a specific child’s actions, perspectives and inter-subjective production of meanings.

In concert with Hundeide’s perspective, Dreier (2008) argues for the development of psychological studies that include the subject’s everyday life as both an ontological and methodological point of departure. Dreier emphasizes the vital importance of the first-person-perspective, rather than isolated individuals, isolated psychological functions, and isolated locations, which Dreier calls ‘a third person perspective’, an un-situated view from “nowhere”. If we want to understand the social practice children face as part of their development, we need to study children as participants in and across local action-contexts (for an extended critique, see Dreier, 2008 and 2009).

In contrast to decontextualized child research, a growing number of researchers are undertaking studies from a social relational view of disability, investigating the social conditions for participation in day care (e.g., Davis & Watson, 2001; Ytterhus, 2003; Rasmussen, 2008; Fisker, 2010; Åmot &
Ytterhus, 2014; Hilleshøy, Johanson & Ohna, 2014; Wilder & Lillvist, 2017). However, we still lack extensive research knowledge about children with disabilities as active participants in and across general day care arrangements and are, therefore, missing important insights into how the (re)production of ability - disability occurs in concrete situations. More research is needed to investigate how subjects, including children, parents, and professionals, relate to or may communally succeed in transforming conditions for participation in local practices (Højholt, 2016; Mørck & Huniche, 2006).

**Empirical and analytical research practice**

My empirical work took place from 2014 - 2016 in three newly established resource day care centres, where I studied four children with disabilities as active participants in social practice. I followed two children’s everyday life during their transition from one age group to the next: Ruben, “a late developing boy” and Amina, “a girl with Down syndrome”. I observed Ruben in his group for the 0 to 2 year 10 months-olds for 21 days and for an additional 5 days when he transitioned into his new group. I observed Ruben one day a year and four months after his transition. I followed Amina for 9 days in her group for the 0 to 2 year 10 months-olds, and again for 4 days when she transitioned into a new group. Amina stayed in ‘the middle-group’ for 14 months. Thereafter she got a placement in a special day care for children with severe and lasting impairments. I interviewed two professionals after Amina had transferred to the new placement.

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2 The quotation marks indicate that such categorizations and understandings of the human body relate to a societal problematic of ‘ability – disability’ tied in situated ways to institutional arrangements and specific historical social practices. Naming children with regard to their functions and impairments is not a neutral act. It is, I argue, engaging in social struggles over practice (Holland & Lave, 2001; Lave, 2011). However, as Shakespeare (2014) argued, it will lead to “contextual essentialism” if bodily impairments would be out of the picture, and only barriers and environmental factors would be foregrounded academically. He argues for a “progressive disability politics” that engage with impairment instead of ignoring it (p. 75). While I agree, to a certain extent with Shakespeare on this point, this impairment concept (re)produces certain biomedical and ontological assumptions about the capable human as an individual outside the context of its social environment. Hence, the context and the individual (I prefer the term “subject”) cannot be understood in separation of each other, as they constitute one another in a relational dynamism.

3 Children’s names, sex, and, circumstances have been altered and/or blurred to secure anonymity for the involved children and their families.
Furthermore, I studied the two children, Thor and Dina, primarily as intervention cases during action plan meetings and through recorded interviews with professionals and one parent.

I feature Amina’s transitional process here because she was the only child not to stay in the general day care system. Amina’s transition and inclusion was (partly) “un-successful” from a pro-inclusion perspective, and in this way, her transition presents a particularly interesting contrasting possibility. Amina’s transitional process shows more clearly, how conditions for participation must be developed collectively and have roots in the children’s mutual and often conflictual engagements. I have used the knowledge I gained from studying the other children's situation as analytical ballasts.

I conducted this study in line with the tradition for critical ethnography (Lave, 2011), critical psychological practice research (Dreier, 2008; Højholt & Kousholt, 2014), and cultural historical observation practices (Hedegaard & Fleer, 2008). In short, this means over a longer timespan to develop an explorative research practice in and across local contexts with the different co-participants who live their lives there. I produced written records from ethnographic field notes, participant observations, as well as from spontaneous talks and semi-structured interviews.

My research practice takes inspiration from Lave’s conceptualization of research as the exploration of a theoretical/empirical problematic (Lave, 2011, p. 150). According to Lave, a problematic relates to the Marxist idea of praxis, i.e. “…the idea that human beings make their lives together, in a complexly structured, historically and materially changing world” (p. 161). A problematic is produced in an ongoing way by persons living under conflicting and contradictory conditions that lead to struggles and the creation of historical subjectivities in action (Holland & Lave, 2001). The social struggles emerge and manifest themselves in situated ways for subjects, as for example, when a child identified as “disabled” is transitioning from one institutional arrangement to the other. As indicated in Lave’s writing about critical ethnographic practice (2011), the research practice involves that the researcher:

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4 To identify subjects as “able” or “disable” is an example of a struggle over historic subjectivities. The historic subjectivity that I promote by using the linguistic compilation “children with disabilities” over other historic subjectivities means taking part in the problematic of “ability – disability” in institutional arrangements which nowadays is referred to as inclusion. I choose to emphasize the subject first (child with disabilities) instead of “highlighting” the impairment as for example by referring to “a physically or mentally impaired child” because I see this as the least objectifying and most dynamic way to conceptualize and refer to children and disability in a changing world. See also note 2.
looks at a specific aspect of social life in its relations made with, in, and through other objects, persons, institutional arrangements, contexts, and events. This requires establishing how specific aspects of social life are part of other human activity in a “world” that is historically construed. A problematic includes assumptions (an ontology, an epistemology, an ethics) about relations between persons and world, the nature of human being and how it is produced, in what terms we can know it and the nature of knowledge (Lave, 2011, p. 150).

In Lave’s understanding of research in, of and through changing practice, “theoretical and empirical endeavours are mutually constitutive and cannot be separated” (p. 2). In this way, she conceptualises research as ongoing apprenticeship-practices (p. 147ff).

When exploring children’s participation, I followed Dreier’s stance: “To gain a richer, more concrete and lively theoretical conception of the person, we must, paradoxically, not look directly into the person but into the world and grasp the person as a participant in that world” (Dreier, 2008, p. 40). The idea of looking from the position of the child, not on or into the person him/herself, has thus been a guiding principle. This decentred and context-sensitive take on acting subjects foregrounds participation analytically. Thus, I have looked for situations, where the children’s participation was “unproblematic” and/or became conflictual in relation to their inclusion in and across arrangements.

The following questions have served as tools for my analyses of the empirical material:
1. How do transitioning children with disabilities engage in social practice across day care arrangements? (What do they do and how are they orienting themselves?)
2. What does member-qualifying participation look like in the different contexts?
3. How do the different institutional arrangements condition the children’s transitional processes?

The Danish day care system

Denmark has an extensive public day care system. Almost all children attend day care centres on a daily basis. This means that almost all children conduct their everyday lives in and across institutional day care arrangements. Most children

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5 According to the Ministry of Children and Social Affairs (2017), 90% of 1 to 2-year-old children and 98% of children between 3 and 5 years old attend general day care.
experience their first institutional transition when they are around three years old when they move from the institutional arrangement for the youngest children, vuggestue in Danish, to the next institutional arrangement, boørnhave in Danish, for children up to nearly six years of age. Until now, this transition has not received much attention in research, whereas the transition from day care to school has been explored in detail (see Ballam et al., 2017; Hedegaard & Fleer, 2013; Stanek, 2011; Broström, 2005; Højholt, 2001). Transitions within general day care, especially for children with disabilities is an overlooked research area.

Since 2007 “children in need of special measures” have had the right to inclusion in the general day care system in Denmark (see Dagtilbudsloven, §1, section 3, www.retsinformation.dk). However, this does not mean that all children with disabilities are, in reality, included in the general day care system. Children with “significant or lasting impairment of physical or mental functioning, where the need for support and treatment requires a special placement” are placed in a different “specialized system” (See National Instruction on Day Care: Vejledning om dagtilbud mv. VEJ nr 9109 af 27/02/2015, section 102, www.retsinformation.dk). When a placement in “the specialized system” is in question an expert professional makes an assessment of the specific child in relation to his/her needs for special support, treatment and training. In this parallel system, special groups or day care centres are set up as autonomous units in respect to pedagogy, administration and economy with the official aim of children’s inclusion back into the general education system, if possible and with time. This arrangement continues the dual track system, which might be indicating that children’s individual “needs” and bodily “functions” serve as

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6 The transition from home to day care is of course the first institutional transition, if we view the family as an institution in the sociological sense of the word.

7 As day care or preschool provision may or may not be private and/or part of national welfare models, day care arrangements vary a great deal in distribution, organization, costs, educational philosophies and traditions across nation states. This may provide a partial answer as to why the literature lacks a sufficient body of international research on general day care transitions. Additionally, over the years, the formal school has attracted more political attention and more research funding because the school is considered the most important public institution for children’s learning (Lave, 2012).

8 Inclusion in day care centres in Denmark has different historical roots. Since 1919, the public day care centres have been part of the state’s social policy and have been part of the state’s preventive measures in relation to children at risk, mostly targeted at children and families in social difficulties (see Nielsen, 2013, p. 74f). With the ratification of the different UN conventions on all children’s universal rights, children with disabilities have stipulated rights to inclusion in the public day care system in Denmark. The UN conventions in mind here are The Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989), The Salamanca Statement (1994) and The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006).
important selection criteria\(^9\) for initial or continuing access to general day care. This may also indicate that general day care centres become provisional arrangements for children with disabilities who do not “function” well enough as measured by the institution’s existing practices. Said another way, participation in general day care centres can be seen as provisional or temporary for children whose participation cannot be accommodated within the typical day care practices.

The invention of the resource day care arrangement was an initiative that sought to bridge the historic gap between the general and the specialized system in order to provide a day care arrangement for most children. However, the existence of the dual track system still seems to call forward a selection procedure of individual children and their personal needs and abilities before granting initial placement or entry to the next age level. Not a critical investigation of how access to participation is conditioned by the different understandings of ability - disability in historical institutional arrangements. Paradoxically, the resource day care arrangement can reproduce differentiation practices that work against the rights to inclusion.

**Children’s engagements in resource day care centres**

Children’s actions connect with both institutionally assumed age level standard of child “behaviour” and the local and diverse access-demands for becoming a member of the community of practice. The following field note illustrates how the presence of children with disabilities raises questions about children’s ways of taking part and how their actions may contribute to the institutional context.

“I wonder what she is investigating?!” a professional said, referring to Amina who had just transitioned to a new age level. Amina, a girl (“with Down syndrome”), was standing “by herself” on the playground in a bent over position touching her shoelaces. Now and then, Amina looked up. It looked as if she was noticing the whereabouts of the staff. The children “around her” moved about and were in motion. They formed groups that dissolved and formed again in new constellations. Sounds of activity filled the air” (Fieldnote, Bendix-Olsen, September, 2016)

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\(^9\) When the understanding of children’s personal *needs, abilities and functioning* work as a state’s selection criteria for granted rights to access in general day care, it becomes even more important to study *how practically embedded understandings* of children’s needs, abilities and disabilities are influencing the everyday lives of children with disabilities.
The situation puzzled me that day and continued to do so, well after the fieldwork had ended. It made me wonder in what respects the day care practice, as well as my presence\textsuperscript{10} in the new group, made Amina’s participation stand out (Garland-Thomson, 1997, 2011). Was the professional commenting on Amina’s engagement as that of an intentional acting subject or was she referring to Amina’s anticipated inabilities due to her “Down syndrome”? Was the question marking an interest in Amina’s perspective or was it marking the distance between the observer and the observed? My point here is not to pin down the actual intention of the professional or to pass judgements on the staff’s professionalism. I include this field note only to point out that the actions of transitioning children with disabilities may reveal day care practice as contradictory and potentially including/excluding. On one hand, day care practices can enable children’s personal development and social inclusion. On the other, day care practices can differentiate between children’s (bodily) performances and thereby contribute to institutionalized selection procedures within and across educational arrangements.

The field note and questions that arise from it invite exploration of how children with disabilities are understood as acting subjects that conduct their lives in and across contexts, and who are dependent on other co-participants in order to be included socially and materially as members of the community of practice.

Below, I will explore how Amina is finding her way in the new age level setting and try to identify the different participation-barriers she faces in the process.

Visibility and material misfits

In the field note, Amina was engaged in an activity on her own. However, she was neither out of sight nor anonymous to the professional or to me and probably not to her peers either. Material feminist Garland-Thomson (2011) describes the visibility of specific bodies, as indicative of the vulnerable position that arises from the reoccurring misfits between a materially arranged setting and the acting body. She states, that “…the way that bodies interact with the socially engineered environment and conform to social expectations determine the varying degrees of disability or able-bodied-ness, of extra-ordinariness or ordinariness” (Garland-Thomson, 1997, p. 7). For Garland Thomson the interacting body is key to exploring how ability - disability is produced and has social and personal ramifications in material action-contexts.

\textsuperscript{10} My presence as a participant observer investigating the inclusion of transitioning children with disabilities is, in itself, a practice that may produce intensified attentiveness towards Amina as a certain kind of subject.
Garland-Thomson relates vulnerability to disability in several ways. To her vulnerability is a universal, bodily-material, relational and political concept (Garland-Thomson, 2011). Vulnerability is universal as it is an inescapable part of our existence and of living our lives. Throughout our existence in time and space, we are all depending on others and are, in different situations and ways and to varying degrees, in need of care and help. However, the materiality of the world makes certain embodiments visible in exclusionary and dependent ways, which is where the concept, according to Garland-Thomson relates to politics.\textsuperscript{11} To her, disability oppression materializes in everyday life and “emanates from prejudicial attitudes that are given form in the world through architectural barriers, exclusionary institutions and the unequal distribution and access to resources” (p. 591). Garland-Thomson argues that in many situations minority embodiments are produced when the materiality of the world does not accommodate to all varying embodiment types, as could be the case in transitions of educational arrangements and local settings. As a consequence, minority embodiments stand out as misfits, i.e. deviants up against unaccommodating material arrangements. In her words: “...to misfit renders one a misfit” (p. 593). To Garland-Thomson, it is important to determine the relation between the embodied subject and the material environment as the misfitting agent, never the body itself.

Garland-Thomson (2011) draws attention to important inter-connections between embodiment and materiality as an ongoing process of bodily becoming and world-making that is closely tied to everyday life in institutional arrangements. By paying attention to the material arrangement and how it co-constitutes participation Garland-Thomson shows how materially arranged disablement is situated in practice and has lived consequences for what she calls minority embodiment-types. For example, this process becomes animated during transitions with children with disabilities when they become visible objects of study, as they carry their bodies in surprising ways or carry out actions in ways that their co-participants consider “wrong” for their “age group”.

While Garland-Thomson focuses entirely on material arrangements; I have broadened her concept to include socio-material arrangements, such as

\textsuperscript{11} From a minority-embodiment-position, showing how a person’s visibility and vulnerability relates to materiality is political in two ways: (1) it is advocating for universal design and equal rights to participation for all embodiment-types in a rights based society (social justice) and (2) it may potentially have consciousness raising effects for a subject to be experiencing enduring misfit-relations. As a kind of subjugated knowledge of the “marked” subject, this knowledge may lead to oppositional consciousness and politicized identity (identity-politics, activism) (See Garland-Thomson, 2011, p. 597).
participation in playground activities and mealtime, as well as other ongoing daily produced “configurations” of socio-materialism.

When I observed mealtime during my fieldwork, I noticed that transitioning children would sometimes smear their food around, cry and not abide by the expected, socio-material conduct. In situations, such as these, they quite often were called “small” or “babies” among the other children, and especially older children would also point at them and say: “look!” Some of these children would signal a certain distance to the transitioning child’s surprising actions by moving away or by encouraging him/her to make more “extraordinariness”. In such situations, the transitioning children became very visible participants and at the same time relationally vulnerable.

This extraordinary visibility of newcomers with disabilities may indicate how failing to live up to the expected socio-material practice can lead to misfit-positionings of children with disabilities. Seeing Amina as “a misfitting child”, would position the peer-group as an already competent body of participants, i.e. as ordinary participants. An alternative way into the “participant-and-socio-material-access-problematic” would, from a material feminist disability studies perspective, be to see socio-material misfit-situations as opportunities for shared learning and practice development. Understood in this way, relational vulnerability and participation-problems can be regarded as educational springboards for the whole community of practice to engage in. When participation-difficulties are identified when they occur as misfit-situations, then they are discovered as positions and relations of limited access, and thereby efforts of practicing inclusion becomes an ongoing co-creation of socio-materially afforded everyday practices.

Borrowing from Garland-Thomson’s (2007, 2011) analytical concepts, we see the need for additional research to explore the socio-material conditioning of care and educational arrangements as they relate to small children’s inclusion (see also Holt 2003, 2004a+b, 2007, 2012 for more studies on materiality in school settings with an emphasis on inclusion).

I will now shift from Garland-Thomson’s work to the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) to further explore how transitioning children are active participants in social practice. This is a shift from analysing how power and privilege relate to materiality to focusing on membership of a community of practice in relation to accessing common learning resources. Both perspectives help identify how institutional arrangements set conditions for acting children with disabilities in situated practice.
Becoming a member of a community of practice

Transitions studied from Lave and Wenger’s (1991) theoretical contributions centre on the process of becoming a member of a community of practice and, within that process, the paramount question of how newcomers gain access to participation in the community’s practices. As Lave and Wenger illustrate in their work on situated learning, the newcomer must have access to a rich textured landscape of practices within the community of practice to be able to draw from and contribute to shared learning resources. With the term “legitimate peripheral learning”, Lave and Wenger re-conceptualize learning as a process of social and personal transformation in communities of practice. They show that “learning” cannot, in itself, be an individual and purely cognitive endeavour; it is better grasped as a practical matter involving conflictual engagements with others. Likewise, gaining access cannot be reduced to the individual’s personal choices and actions. “Depending on the organization of access, legitimate peripherality can either promote or prevent participation” (p. 103). This means that a person’s participation must be analysed in respect to the way the community of practice is “recruiting” its members and how the members participate in producing the community through their overlapping engagements. A newcomers’ limited access to shared participation is a sign of an enduring lack of overlaps of common engagements, leading over time to social marginalization. “In a community of practice, not all members’ engagements overlap or complement each other as social practice is always changing, conflictual and contradictory. This further means that there is no absolute “centre” of the community of practice as an end goal for the newcomer to reach in order to become a “full participant”. The dualism of “peripherality” and “centre” as well as the “mechanistic” interpretation of newcomers’ learning trajectories leading toward an assumed centre, Lave opposes to and criticizes in her recent work (Lave, In prep. 8). Lave describes a community of practice as an analytical concept meant to grasp participants’ mutual and ongoing learning in situated local, historical changing practice. The work by Lave & Wenger (1991), I use to critically investigate how common learning resources are produced in, and through practice and how community processes take on different organizational forms in different social contexts (For elaborations, see Lave, In prep, p. 2f). In Lave’s own critique of the 1991 book, she states that she regrets not to have emphasized more strongly, how “institutions and the forces of production give some participants power over legitimate peripheral participation indissolubly” (p. 9). This hidden access to power and learning resources is what I see is being reproduced and come into effect when ‘children with disabilities’ become extraordinarily visible, and are viewed as misfitting children in a certain socio-materially arranged action context.

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12 Lave points out that she and Wenger introduced the term “communities of practice” in “an attempt to move away from an abstract universal notion of group or social category to emphasize that people are mutually engaged in doing things together!” (Lave, In prep., p. 8)

13 In a community of practice, not all members’ engagements overlap or complement each other as social practice is always changing, conflictual and contradictory. This further means that there is no absolute “centre” of the community of practice as an end goal for the newcomer to reach in order to become a “full participant”. The dualism of “peripherality” and “centre” as well as the “mechanistic” interpretation of newcomers’ learning trajectories leading toward an assumed centre, Lave opposes to and criticizes in her recent work (Lave, In prep. 8). Lave describes a community of practice as an analytical concept meant to grasp participants’ mutual and ongoing learning in situated local, historical changing practice. The work by Lave & Wenger (1991), I use to critically investigate how common learning resources are produced in, and through practice and how community processes take on different organizational forms in different social contexts (For elaborations, see Lave, In prep, p. 2f). In Lave’s own critique of the 1991 book, she states that she regrets not to have emphasized more strongly, how “institutions and the forces of production give some participants power over legitimate peripheral participation indissolubly” (p. 9). This hidden access to power and learning resources is what I see is being reproduced and come into effect when ‘children with disabilities’ become extraordinarily visible, and are viewed as misfitting children in a certain socio-materially arranged action context.
As an example, Lave and Wenger (1991) describe how butcher-apprentices in a supermarket are only used as meatpackers; they are not involved in the wider range of butcher-practices due to the employers’ wish to minimize wage costs. The legitimate peripheral learning of the apprentice is, therefore, “frozen,” or put on hold, until the apprentice is granted with or otherwise gains access into new action possibilities/responsibilities within the community of practice. The example illustrates how the specific organization of access to community practices has social ramifications, in particular for the newcomer, but also for the community of practice in respect to holding back new learning resources and, thus, its opportunities for change and renewal.

By studying the newcomers’ access-problems as a participation-problematic over time, we discover how everyday life is both structured by the old-timers and developed through participation with newcomers as potentially included co-participants. Marginalization seems to occur if the newcomer’s actions and engagements are considered to be too unusual, become restricted or not recognized as valuable for the reproduction or renewal of the community of practice. Under such conditions for participation, the newcomer’s actions work in relative isolation and the newcomer’s personal and social development becomes stalled. From the work of Lave and Wenger, the transitional process of children with disabilities can be understood as distributed within the community of practice. How such distributed access-relations work in and across communities of practice, I will explain in more detail throughout the rest of the article.

In the next section, I follow up on how the transitioning children’s participation-problems may reflect not only organizational or community dynamisms but could be identified as societal contradictions that will need to be handled collectively in order to support the child in his/her developmental task of forming a coherent everyday life.

The development of personal action potency

In German-Scandinavian critical psychology drawing on Holzkamp’s work (for example 2005, 2017), a subject develops his/her “action potency” in relation to his/her “personal conditions” for taking part in historically developed social practices (Dreier, 2003a+b, 2008, 2009; Højholt, 2016). According to Dreier (2003a), the subject develops his/her action potency and social self-understanding “*vis a vis his or her immediate situation in the social structure*” (p. 21). Thus, it is crucial to explore the child’s different and changing conditions for acting and contributing to practice from his or her position as the participating subject. For example, as three-year-old Amina takes part in developing her
everyday life in a new age level arrangement, she is also encountering the societal contradictions that present themselves to her as personal conflicts.\textsuperscript{14} Dreier argues that a subjects’ participation is a dynamic, conflictual, and a socially constitutive process:

As a person moves from one context to another, his or her position varies, and so does that person’s possibilities, resources and degree of influence. It therefore takes different personal action potencies to participate in them, and a person participates in different ways and for different reasons in different social contexts. All this introduces complexity into every person’s life and modes of functioning. Faced with this complexity, people do not just shift mode of functioning as they move from one context into another, as some would have us believe. Rather, they must to some degree compose their everyday lives, and certainly conduct them in and across different places in a way that depends on their varying personal scope, influences and co-participants. (p. 23f)

Following Dreier, the everyday life of the transitioning child is to a certain degree actively composed by the child in a co-constructed social practice. However, in the case of children with disabilities, the development of action potency within an institutional arrangement, where the children historically have been denied access, may in many respects be a too difficult task for them to handle. The day care arrangements do not necessarily facilitate participation-access seen from the position and perspective of the children with disabilities (Bendix-Olsen, 2017, 2018). The institutional arrangement may in fact, manifest itself as disabling to the child’s development of a coherent everyday life, especially if the child’s conditions for taking part are arranged or distributed in ways that limit his or her mutual engagements in local practice (Højholt, 2016). Here the care and differentiation practices of general day care come into play in contradictory ways for children with disabilities.

Returning to my initial field observation and looking at the situation from Amina’s perspective, we see her actions as efforts to experiment with and orient herself in a new social situation. As noted earlier, Amina spent time looking at her shoes. When Amina looked up from her engagements with her shoes, she seemed to follow the movements of the staff. Here, she might have been trying to develop her conditions for taking part in the day care centre. However, neither professionals nor peers supported her emerging action potency in ways that

\textsuperscript{14} Garland-Thomson (2011) conceptualize such personal conflicts due to societal contradictions as material misfits and Lave and Wenger (1991) as an access and membership-problematic related to mutual engagements in social practice.
might have helped her become a more consolidated member of the community of
practice.

The literature suggests that professionals with appropriate experience and
knowledge can be very important co-participants in play and social encounters
for children with disabilities and their peers. They can support the development
of mutually meaningful engagements through their awareness and mediation of
the institutional demands, possible misfit-situations and community based
participation challenges. However, when I study my field notes, I cannot not find
many examples of professionals’ adroitly encouraging or facilitating common
engagements with Amina as an “able” and competent, i.e. “fit” participant. It
seems clear, that Amina would have benefitted from engaging more directly with
the other children to increase the likelihood, that she would be seen by the other
children as a contributing member of the new group. However, to support and
promote the development of children’s personal action potencies, professionals
need extensive and situated knowledge of the children’s different orientations
and experiences. (For studies pointing to this practice-informed professionalism,
see Ytterhus, 2003; Theorodou and Nind, 2010; Fisker, 2010; Bøtcher, 2012;
Cecchin, 2013; Hilleshøy et al. 2014; Hilleshøy, 2016; Janson, 2010; Luttropp &

**Common engagements as community resources for transitioning
children with disabilities**

and Dreier (2003a+b, 2008, 2009) have each contributed to the exploration of
personal and common engagements as interrelated in dynamic and complex ways
in different contexts and institutional arrangements. From this theoretical
perspective, I will illustrate how children with disabilities can be limited in
developing their action potency both before and during changes in age levels,
because of limited access to community resources.

Typically, children in this municipality change groups when they turn 2
years and 10 months old. However, since Amina is a “child with Down
syndrome”, her parents and the professionals wanted her to stay somewhat
longer in the younger group so she could “develop further” and, with time,
be better suited for the transformational processes ahead of her with the
older children.

This decision to give Amina more time before transitioning to the next
group brought unexpected troubles for the professionals. The children
Amina knew from the group moved up to the next group when they turned
2 years and 10 months old, and their spaces were immediately filled by one-year-old babies. As time went by, the staff found it increasingly difficult to handle Amina’s needs as well as those of the new babies in the group. From my observations in the group and from talking with the staff, I learned that Amina was sometimes biting the smaller children, which put increasing demands on the professionals to keep all children safe. As a solution, Amina’s caretakers (family and professionals) decided that Amina would transition into the older group. She had now turned 3 years 1 month old. (Field notes, Bendix-Olsen, September, 2016)

In this case, Amina’s caregivers made a well-intentioned decision to postpone her transition for some months because of her “special needs”. The professionals’ understandings of Amina’s “impairment” and their wish to give her more time to develop as an individual made a prolonged stay seem like a plausible and advantageous solution. Meanwhile, however, the world changed and likewise Amina’s conditions for taking part in the group also changed as the rhythm of the day increasingly revolved around the needs of the babies. What initially was intended as a protective measure gradually put a spotlight on Amina’s participation and made her increasingly visible (Garland-Thomson, 2011). The situation shows us how Amina’s conditions for sharing her engagements with others --as part of conducting an everyday life in a changing world --connects to the collective organization and responsibilities of the day care centre as a whole, including such elements as the staff-ratio and the professional’s obligations to provide incoming infants and families with a good start (Dreier, 2003b).

When Amina’s “needs” became evident, planned for and acted upon without taking into consideration her relations to her transitioning peers, she became at risk of exclusion. These problems arose because the focus was, basically, an intervention to address Amina’s impairment, not on embracing and supporting her participation rights by ensuring that she had access to the community of practice as the group’s constellation changed. Amina’s new group was located in the same day care facility –however, the professionals in the two groups did not cooperate very much on helping the children develop their everyday life across age level-arrangements. This organization of distinct groups was due to autonomous planning within each group, different daily routines and activity times primarily connected to children’s perceived needs and ages, which functioned as structuring principles.

The receiving community of practice was larger and more complex in terms of the number of children and their different engagements; for example using the signing practices that Amina knew from her earlier group was therefore much harder than anticipated for the professionals. Thus, Amina participated in the new
It is after lunch in the middle-group and the professionals are guiding the children to the playground outside. As I am heading down the tiled path in front of the 0–2 year 10 months-old’s building, I see a professional holding Amina’s hand as they go in the direction of the playground. Amina stops in front of the window to her former group setting. She slaps her hand against the window and looks in. The professional is waiting next to her with some sand-play-tools. The professional seems impatient (eager to reach her destination), and her body signals that she wants to be on the move. Amina is not moving. She sits down on the pathway. The professional says standing: "We'll find some sand for this" and points to the tools that she holds close to Amina. Amina reaches out and takes a shovel. The professional kneels down and says: "No, not into the mouth". Amina is exploring the tools with her mouth. Amina turns over and moves towards the window. The professional says: "No", followed by: "Out on the playground". Amina softens her legs when the professional grabs her. The professional tries to hold her by her hands. The professional lifts and walks Amina to the sand pit. Amina sits down alone when arrived at the sandpit. (Fieldnote, Bendix-Olsen, 2016)

The situation is interesting, as Amina seemed to be using an opportunity to reach out and connect with an already well-known context by sending greeting gestures to those inside the building. I have also seen other transitioning children and their parents do such daily rituals. The former setting is, I argue, still an important part of Amina’s everyday life, but connecting with this context is not an option any longer, even though its “materiality” is so close by. Interestingly, the professionals paid positive attention when her peers waved at the children and staff in their previous group. However, the professional in this situation seemed to view Amina’s gestures as “acts of impairment,” perhaps because she did not produce any accompanying words or narratives as the other children did, or because of her frequent incorporation of sensual and tactile engagements that differed from those of her peers.

As the professional tried to motivate Amina to go to the playground where she now “belongs”, Amina looked as if she were protesting or resisting in a bodily fashion (see Ytterhus & Åmot, 2014 for a study on diagnosed children’s resistance to educational rule enforcement). Amina’s “soft legs” seem to reveal that the professional did not see her intentions as directed and her actions as unfulfilled. Clearly, Amina and the professional had very different understandings of this situation. Over the course of the day, it seemed that Amina might experience many such disruptions of her engagements that would work
against her understanding of herself as a competent and orienting subject (Dreier, 2003a).

Interestingly, in contrast to the restricted action-possibilities that Amina often had, I observed something quite different when a professional engaged in playing “music” with her on the playground’s outdoor instruments (a big wooden xylophone and hanging metal rods), especially when the other children assembled around them and took part in the music-making. In situations such as these, Amina was happy, as indicated by her bodily gestures signalling joy. When the professional actively engaged with the children in less structured and rule-based play, s/he helped create a social oasis for Amina (see Luttrop & Granlund, 2010 and Theodorou & Nind, 2010 for studies exploring adult-supported interaction in play situations in the day care settings).

The new age level seemed to present many socio-material barriers to Amina’s inclusion, but as shown, not in every situation. The materiality also “welcomed” and engaged her. The professionals also seemed to provide opportunities that could expand Amina’s action-possibilities when they collaborated in activities where materiality and social practice invited children and adults to explore and experiment creatively together. When they did so, they were taking part in communal world-making processes where Amina was included more fully as an equal and contributing participant (Garland-Thomson, 2011). However, these situations were infrequent during my observations.

Amina stayed in the group for 14 months until it was time for the next transition into the group of the oldest children. The upcoming transition she was expected not to be able to manage as the staff ratio was even lower in comparison to the middle-group. Therefore, she was transferred in a special day care centre for children with “more severe needs.” As a professional said in an interview after Amina was moved out of the middle group: “Seen from Amina’s needs, it was better for her to be placed in the special day care”. The professional’s words illustrate that the “needs” and opportunities of transitioning children with disabilities correlate with the possibilities open to them to become fully participatory and legitimate members of an age based institutional arrangement and community of practice.

**Conclusion**

The article has presented a social psychological exploration of how the transitioning process for a child with disabilities relates to specific institutional arrangements and socio-material configurations of everyday life. When exploring children’s participation from a social relational view of disability, an
individualized focus on impairment, abilities and development can be transcended. This is helpful, when we want to investigate what it takes for all acting subjects to develop their local conditions for inclusion in general day care.

I have analysed how inclusion-barriers for children with disabilities may occur when interventions are targeting individual children’s “impairment” and “special needs” and not their participation rights as contributing members of the day care community.

The analysis suggests that the inclusion of transitioning children with disabilities depends on building up common engagements that support the child’s development of action potency in expansive and transformative ways within the activities of the receiving community of practice. The analysis further reveals that it is productive to understand social marginalization as limited access to common engagements over time.

I have used the question that initially triggered this study – “I wonder what she is investigating?” – as a starting point to explore how the access-and-inclusion-problematic unfolds for a transitioning child with “Down syndrome”. The question has potentials to be a productive, i.e. a critical inclusion-question if it leads to additional decentred investigations of children’s conditions for conducting a coherent everyday life with others. Children with disabilities become vulnerable participants if their engagements and perspectives do not inform the development of social practice in ways that accommodate more diverse action possibilities, both materially and socially. In order to transform and develop existing day care practices, professionals must experiment with their practice in dialogical and responsive ways that include all children as co-participants, and without neglecting other obligations within the institution. In this way, local attempts to develop more inclusive practices connects to wider political struggles of how to care and how to educate small children without spending unnecessary economic means. Caring for all children as vulnerable and interdependent beings in a state supported system where economic accountability and cost effectiveness is also structuring day care practice, seems to put contradictory demands on the professionals responsibilities, possibilities, and choices of when, how and whom to include. Thus, the segregated system still exists and, paradoxically, is perpetuated within the general education system, including resource day care centres. This will likely be the case as long as children’s development is understood in individualized and decontextualized terms of ability and disability – valued and measured up against an abstracted and generic understanding of the human body.
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Considering the learners’ perspectives on testing situations in literacy education from the standpoint of the subject

Barbara Nienkemper

Abstract
This article describes the core results of a qualitative study on the issue of ‘assessment from the learners’ perspective’. Before choosing any assessment method, especially in an educational context, it is important to understand what it might imply for the individual to take a certain test. Adults with skill needs in basic reading and/or writing, in particular, often describe bad experiences, anxiety, or resistance in connection with testing situations (cf. Egloff, 1997; Schladebach, 2007). The purpose of the study was to explore the coping strategies individuals employed in specific testing situations. Interviews were conducted with functionally illiterate adults. One result of the analysis was a wide-ranging definition of the concept ‘testing situations’ as expressed in the perspectives of the interviewees. In addition, seven distinct coping strategies could be identified. The findings from the study are outlined in this article, after an explanation of its methodical approach, which was based in Grounded Theory (cf. Corbin & Strauss, 2008), on the one hand, and the theoretical framework of Critical Psychology, on the other (cf. Holzkamp, 1995). Based on exemplary excerpts from the research data, the article shows how the study participants reasoned for their individual choices of specific coping strategies in specific situations. To conclude, recommendations are provided for designing and implementing assessments in literacy education.

Keywords
literacy education, assessment, testing situations, learners' perspectives
1. Considering individuals’ perspectives on the assessment of literacy skills

The current debate in the field of adult education policy is dominated by a goal of measuring educational output through the assessment of individual skills. Consequently, the use of tests and assessment practices for policy and program evaluation, as well as for research purposes, has increased recently. Especially in North America and in the United Kingdom, several longitudinal studies measured adult learners’ literacy and numeracy skills. For example, the 1970 British Cohort Study provides much longitudinal data from repeated assessments of basic skills (cf. Bynner & Parsons, 2011). Another prominent example is the Portland (Oregon) Longitudinal Study of Adult Learning (LSAL), which was designed to analyse the development of literacy across the adult life span of high school drop-outs. For this purpose, individual proficiency measures as well as literacy and numeracy practices were examined (cf. Reder, 2011). Longitudinal program studies in adult basic education, in particular, give participants repeated standardized reading tests as well as writing and numeracy assessments, generally two or even three times. (For statistical analyses of these, see, for example, Alamprese, 2011; Condelli et al., 2011; Vorhaus et al., 2011.)

Given the apparent tendency in adult basic education to use ever more tests and assessments, it has become important to consider the learners’ perspectives vis-à-vis these tests. It can be reasonably assumed that the test takers’ perspectives on assessment or tests do not automatically correspond to the educationally intended or policy-driven goals. Hence, with the learner in mind, the use of tests and assessments in adult basic education means facing a dilemma. Assessments are essential for teachers to be able to differentiate instruction based on individual learners’ needs. Furthermore, many educators assume that assessments motivate learners by making their learning progress visible. However, there is also good reason to expect that adults with basic skill needs fear or resist being tested, because they have repeatedly experienced stigmatization and sustained negative sanctions in connection with their so-called deficits (cf. Döbert-Nauert, 1985; Egloff, 1997). The learner study published by the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) in England, examined, among other topics, the attitude of learners towards the national tests and the acquisition of a national qualification. The results show that learners’ views differed depending on their situatedness

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1 England started the national Skills for Life (SfL) strategy in 2001. In this context “[n]ationally recognized multiple-choice tests were introduced to replace and simplify a plethora of existing qualifications and other ways of recognising achievement.” (Rhys Warner & Vorhaus, 2008, p. 9).
vis-à-vis their individual educational purposes and needs. Qualifications, for instance, were mainly important for learners who are looking for work or professional development. Most older learners did not see a personal benefit in taking tests; however, some learners reported that they were proud and motivated to continue their education, after they received their national certification (cf. Rhys Warner & Vorhaus, 2008, p. 28). These divergent statements highlight the tension between formative and summative assessment. Formative assessment serves to improve the individual learning process and close learning gaps. Summative assessment serves to select individuals by their skills and makes it possible to assign qualifications.

The present article emphasizes the learners’ perspective on assessment in literacy education. It focusses on the research question, “How do adults with basic skill needs handle testing situations?” Test takers were regarded as experts, who are uniquely able to answer questions about experiencing and handling test situations. Consequently, research interviews were conducted with adults who lack basic reading and/or writing skills. The purpose of this study was to explore specific strategies individuals employ to cope with testing situations in literacy education. Before the results can be described, the theoretical framework as well as the applied method of collecting and analysing the data have to be described. To be sure, the coping strategies that emerged from the study data are not exclusive to adults with basic skill needs; however, their lack of reading and/or writing skills make the challenges of test situations particularly visible.

2. Theoretical framework

As the theoretical framework to address the research question, I chose parts of Klaus Holzkamp’s approach of Critical Psychology. His theory of learning (1995) is particularly suitable to explaining the human learning process from the perspective of the individual. According to this approach, human action is understood and examined as reasonable, rather than as a reaction to a given stimulus, as it is, for instance, in behaviouristic learning theories. Holzkamp posits that reasonable considerations are part of every human action; however, this reasoning is not explicit or rational, but rather grounded in the conditions for subjective actions. By reconstructing possible individual reasons for specific actions, it seems achievable to understand the strategic intentions behind them. The precondition for reconstructing individual strategies is to assume that the person is not able to act against her/his interest without a reason (cf. Holzkamp, 1995, p. 26).
In Holzkamp’s theory of learning, individual actions are understood as a central part of the dialectic between human beings and society, in which problems and dilemmas are inevitable and necessary parts. Provided the person recognizes a problem as such, there are always different possibilities of dealing with the problem. (Problems are understood in a positive way as challenges.) If the person is able to apply adequate strategies to handle the problem, she/he will not make any progress in learning, because there is no necessity for change. As Holzkamp puts it: people can solve the problems on a test without actually learning anything, because the test is considered an action problem. In this context, it is particularly important that the person decides by herself/himself (but not without regard to the community) what makes a problem meaningful. For example, in a test situation, the content of the test is important. However, beyond this, it is possible that, from the perspective of the individual, the relationship to the tester or the management of the testing situation also become important and meaningful. The person herself/himself chooses the meaningful components of the situation and interacts with them (cf. Holzkamp, 1995, pp. 218-219). However, that does not mean that the individual is always conscious about her/his strategies and reasons. The phenomenon of unaware actions appears as a possible resistance strategy vis-à-vis the learning situation. For example, one is supposed to memorize a poem, but cannot concentrate. One reason for this could be that the person is not aware of his personal benefit to learning this poem or that she/he is not aware of the possible negative consequences of failing the assignment.

The goal of this study was to systematize those individually reasonable actions that functionally illiterate learners report to be employing strategically to cope with testing situations. Since the individual is always part of communities, these strategies are also always part of the individual’s reasons for specific actions. Other people can both support and limit the individual’s options in a testing situation. Communities can be more or less explicit with regard to a test situation. In the study, their contributions to individual strategies emerged to the extent that they were part of the reasons the participants reported on. (For example, the strategy of used support depends on contributions by others.) However, the main focus of this study was on the description of individual experiences and strategies in testing situations.
3. Methodical approach

To answer the research question, I used the qualitative data from our research project on the issue of ‘acceptance of assessment methods’. The interviews were conducted with adults who lack basic reading and/or writing skills. I conducted ten interviews myself; the analysis of the qualitative data also included eleven interviews that were conducted by a project partner with Germans who live in East Germany.

For our choice of interview partners and for my analytical approach, we followed the method of “theoretical sampling”. Here, one aims to reach theoretical saturation for all arising substantial categories by searching for maximum variation. Theoretical sampling justifies the choice of interview partners in terms of content, by first searching for concepts in the data and then sampling according to the developed theoretical concepts. By following this procedure, theoretical sampling has an iterative and cumulative effect.

“Each event sampled builds upon previous data collection and analysis, and in turn contributes to the next data collection and analysis. Moreover, sampling becomes more specific as the researcher seeks to saturate categories.” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 146)

The purpose of theoretical sampling is to reach representative results not by frequency, but by explaining concepts completely (cf. Strübing, 2008). Applied to this study, this means that not one person, but one individual description of an experienced testing situation was considered a “case” for the interpretation.

The point of departure for the sampling was the assumption that the experience of test situations is especially unpleasant for a person who lacks basic reading and/or writing skills (cf. Egloff, 1997; Schladebach, 2007). Since formative assessment is preferred to summative assessment of adult educators in literacy education (Nienkemper & Bonna, 2011), the research question was based on the assumption that adults prefer formative assessments to summative assessments. Consequently, we started the study by interviewing participants in a reading and writing course at an adult education centre. Later, I interviewed adults with basic skill needs we met at the pretest of the leo.-Level-One Study (Grotlüschen & Riekmann, 2011). Interviewees were chosen to represent

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2 The qualitative data were collected in the research project “Akzeptanzstudie im Hinblick auf eine erwachsenengerechte Diagnostik” [“A study regarding the acceptance of the kinds of assessment adequate for adults”], which is supported by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research with the support code: 01AB074204. It was carried out at the University of Hamburg under the direction of Prof. Dr. Anke Grotlüschen and assistance of Franziska Bonna and Barbara Nienkemper (2008-2011).
experiences with different testing situations, such as strictly formalized exams or assessments and tests in a learning context. The respondents were asked to give descriptions or narrations of their personal experiences with different testing situations. During the interviews, I did not give definitions of what might be a test situation of interest. Rather, I posed open-ended questions to elicit experiences with any type of test situations. We wanted to make sure that the test situation the interviewees talked about was chosen and defined by the individual. During the interview, I tried to trigger memories by asking questions about details of the situation. Through these methodical decisions, we collected a large variation of narratives about different testing situations across many areas of life.

For the interpretation, I applied the rules of Grounded Theory, as explained by Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss (cf. Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The authors relate Grounded Theory to the tradition of Pragmatism, as established mainly by John Dewey and George Herbert Mead. This understanding of Grounded Theory is suitable for a research perspective that wants to reconstruct individual logic. Grounded Theory also gives technical tips for the search for relevant codes in interviews and explains how to build categories and search for coherences between different categories. By following the instructions of Grounded Theory, one can find the specific and relevant concepts and develop integrating categories that explain the situation from the perspective of the individual. The resulting categories are understood as theoretical generalisations.

In the analysis, I aimed to explain human actions in complex and varying test situations. Potential relationships between individual reasons and strategies were validated by investigating possible propositions and counter-propositions for the qualitative data. It was not feasible to include the interviewed adults themselves in the empirical analysis, but on several occasions tentative interpretations were validated in communication with research colleagues.

4. Results

In this section, two main findings of the data analysis are outlined. First, I will delineate which kinds of situations were reported as testing situations in the interviews. This inquiry into reported situations led to a definition of testing situations that is based on the participants’ subjective perspectives. In the second part, I describe seven distinct coping strategies for testing situations that were employed by functionally illiterate adult learners.
4.1. Definition of testing situations from individual perspectives

As a result of my methodical decisions, I gathered an abundance of data that included varying narrative descriptions of testing and assessment situations. Since abstract theoretical classifications did not prove adequate, I concluded that a system for the individually logical understanding of testing situations by the participants had to be developed. The interviewees themselves made defining differentiations. For example, one situation is described as “like a test” (Mr Franke: 32), while another situation is explicitly not seen as such: “That is like normal school. It is not an examination.” (Mr André: 91). These defining comparisons became necessary in the dialogues, especially when testing situations were not clearly named as such.

Eventually, I coded the reported descriptions to develop a definition of testing situations that considers individual perspectives. As a result of the coding process, testing situations could be sorted into three categories:

1. Test situations in a learning context;
2. Psychological aptitude tests and medical diagnostics; and
3. Situations in everyday life, where literacy or numeracy skills are required.

Although the categories are not mutually exclusive, it is possible to draw some conclusions based on individual perspectives on testing situations:

a) Test situations in a learning context (summative and formative assessments): 
As expected, test situations during school time (e.g. reading texts aloud, reciting poems, taking dictations, writing final exams, etc.) were mentioned. Older interviewees also experienced test situations in a pre-vocational training year, in vocational training, or in an advanced vocational training. One person even told about coping with test situations in her college studies. Other reported test situations in a learning context are, for example: giving a concert in music school, taking the driving test, completing a citizenship test, taking internal exams for promotion in the German Armed forces, and taking a test to finish paramedics training. Some test situations specific to the context of adult basic education were also mentioned in the interviews, for example, diagnostic tests that are used in counselling for placement into the appropriate literacy course, as well as the e-assessment on www.ich-will-lernen.de which is used for blended learning offers. Even the task of reading aloud to the group was experienced as a test situation in some cases. In addition, participation in the reading and writing assessment as part of the leo. - Level One Study (Grotlüschen & Riekmann,
2011) pretest was reported as a testing situation (despite the motto “assess the assessment” that is used in this pretest).

b) Psychological aptitude tests and medical diagnostics:
Another category of testing situations could be formed around aptitude tests and medical diagnostic tests, which are used by institutions to decide about an individual’s course of education or employment. These assessments consist of cognitive or physical ability tests.

The interviewees reported about such testing situations, which they experienced during their school years, either in the context of a psychological or medical examination. Such tests were also used at the counselling centre. To give some examples, these tests included an aptitude test for school enrolment, intelligence and performance tests for assessing special education needs, diagnostics for dyslexia, and an aptitude test for the transition from school to work. Older interviewees reported on testing experiences with the psychological services that works on behalf of the German governmental employment office. In that context, they had to take, for example, psychological aptitude tests to enter the job market for the first time. Aptitude tests were also reported at the start of a practical training on the job, or for retraining or reorientation into new fields of employment. Some of the interviewees reported on their experiences with psychological aptitude tests in centres for vocational training [“Berufsbildungs- oder Berufsförderungswerk”].

c) Situations of everyday life where literacy or numeracy skills are required:
Surprisingly, some situations of everyday life were also reported as test situations. These situations are comparable to a formal test, because they involved a standardized way of data collection. Examples include an anamnesis sheet at the doctor’s office, an application form, a survey for market research, or a questionnaire that had to be completed as part of a job interview. The requirement to write an informal application was also described as a testing situation. A job interview and the first days in a new job--and even the participation in the research interview itself--were also mentioned as test situations. These types of everyday situations are likely regarded as tests because of the test takers’ low literacy or numeracy skills.

According to these categories, the participants define as a test any situation where adequate skills have to be demonstrated by the individual. The person expects that her/his individual proficiencies are being observed and/or evaluated. The required competencies may include reading and writing, but also extend to other skills. Any situation can be called a test situation, when it is defined as such
by the individual itself. To demonstrate a specific competency can be essential in an explicit exam situation as much as in everyday situations.

This opening up of the concept of a ‘test’ based on the individual’s perspective is consistent with research approaches that emphasize the relevance of everyday social practices (c.f. Barton & Hamilton 2012; Lave, 1988).

4.2. Strategies to cope with testing situations in cases of functional illiteracy

The purpose of the study was to explore various strategies adult learners employed to cope with testing situations. As a result of the analysis, seven strategies could be identified:

1. Applied Competence
2. Used Support
3. Partial Outing
4. Ambitious Openness
5. Deliberate Deception
6. Quiet Resignation
7. Resistant Refusal

These strategies describe individually logical actions in coping with different conditions in various testing situations. Consequently, not every strategy appears subjectively appropriate for every situation. The choice of strategy is always the result of a subjective process of considering one’s reasons. Following are descriptions of the seven categories:

**Applied competence**

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<th>Applied Competence</th>
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<td>People use their skills to pass the test. They prepare for it by studying, or they put their skills to the test in the assessment situation. Another version of applied competence plays out when individuals use their innate skills to control their thoughts in sometimes frightening testing situations.</td>
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The strategy of *applied competence* can be used before, during, and after a testing situation. One version manifests as preparing for the test by choosing a learning strategy. Interviewees tell about memorizing words by repeatedly reading and writing them, for example. Applying one’s own competence during a testing situation can also mean working on tasks “at your personal best”. Interviewee Mrs Christoff describes using this strategy during the intake assessment at an adult education centre:
"[..] but, I simply did the best I could and well..., if I would have refused somehow, said that I didn’t want to do it, then it won’t be evaluated. So, I did the best I could. That’s why I am here, at least I thought, to show my weaknesses, and so, well…' (Translated from interviewee Mrs Christoff: 165)

This strategy actually involves putting one’s own competencies to the test, which, in turn, leads to another strategy, namely that of ‘partial outing’ (see below). After one applies one’s competence, one’s weaknesses are revealed, not only to oneself, but also to the teacher.

Controlling own thoughts is not a stand-alone strategy, rather, it belongs to the applying of competences. It can be employed before a testing situation by engaging in distracting activities or by concentrating on positive thoughts like “come on, you will make it” (Mr Michaelis: 106) or “come on, it is easy” (Mr Heinrich: 218). Similarly, negative thoughts and emotions are compensated by imagining possibilities in case of failure (Mr Franke: 48) or by using humour (Mr Thomas: 238ff, Mrs Albrecht: 314ff). During the situation, it is necessary to concentrate on the task and take one’s time to work on it (Mr Franke: 102). For this purpose, Mr Heinrich conducts exercises of memorizing and concentrating and takes short breaks (Mr Heinrich: 95, 99, 181f). In addition, he describes consuming sugar as helpful (53). After a testing situation, it is helpful to release tension by a cry of joy (Mr Heinrich: 67) or relaxing with music (Mr Heinrich: 161).

**Used support**

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<th>Used Support</th>
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<tr>
<td>People use the support of other persons or educational institutions to increase their chances for success. This strategy can be used prior to the test situation or during the assessment by asking for help.</td>
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The strategy of using support can be combined with that of applied competences. In the interviews, participants report that family members, partners, and members of the peer group offer their support for practicing or studying together. In addition, the interviewed adults use the support of professional educators or educational institutions. Mrs Albrecht takes private lessons from her former teacher to prepare for her French exams (178). Mr Heinrich and Mr Martin receive support from the personnel at their driving school (Mr Heinrich: 45, Mr Martin: 348). Mrs Friedrich prepares for an aptitude test by repeating relevant content in school (Mrs Friedrich: 117). Mrs Ernst reports that she benefits from
informal support opportunities that an institutional learning context provides. She was enrolled in a reading and writing course and attended a course in paramedic training that required a final exam on weekends.

' [...] and I shifted my weekend class a little bit. [...] so sometimes I walked around with my book and memorized. One time someone took my book and read something out of it: 'What is it?'—Well, they were testing me.'

(Translated from interviewee Mrs Ernst: 93)

Support by others includes tentatively testing possibly relevant content, dictating of words and sentences, explaining how to drive a car, or a joint discussion about the exam topic, for example a literary text. But the support is not always limited to the testing content. Emotional support such as encouragement can also be helpful (Mrs Christoff: 18).

Aside from the option of using support from others for test preparation, it is possible to pass the test by modifying a task in a way that seems more feasible for the individual. For example, Mr Veith reports passing final exams in his apprenticeship as an oral examination. He received this option because of his writing deficits (18). Instead of passing a dictation in the usual format, another interviewee could choose a special kind of dictation, where she copied a text located on the windowsill step by step ["Laufdiktat"] (Mrs Friedrich: 174). With this strategy, the accommodation of the assessment procedure is always offered by the institution, rather than demanded by the tested person herself/himself, which is the case with the strategy ambitious openness.

The interviewees also reported that they sometimes asked for help even during the testing situation, but this strategy is not allowed or successful in every case. Interestingly, the strategy of a partial outing precedes the strategy of using support.

Partial outing

**Partial Outing**

People reveal their strengths and weaknesses prior to the assessment. Their intention is either to illustrate their own learning status or to demand support for passing the test.

According to my analysis, partial outing takes place prior to the test in dialogue with the teacher or the person who administers the test. During such a dialogue, the testee points out either her/his learning needs or her/his learning achievements. Mrs Friedrich, for example, reports that she shows her school records during the counselling session, before entering a course at the adult
Mr Heinrich describes his participation in a psychological aptitude test in the interview. The test results are used to prompt a decision about his participation in vocational retraining. Mr Heinrich does not prepare for the test. In a preliminary talk, he says that he has problems with solving some mathematical tasks.

'[…], I said to the psychologist: 'I didn’t have this kind of math at school'. 'That’s fine; we’ll take it out for you.' 'Ok.' But, then it was still part of the test. And that’s where I got stuck.' (Translated from interviewee Mr Heinrich: 256)

Although the strategy of *partial outing* seemed successful before the test, in the end, Mr Heinrich failed because the agreement was ignored.

As a variation of Mr Heinrich’s approach, *partial outing* can be employed to prepare for *ambitious openness*. Mrs Albrecht reports on a *partial outing* where she was allowed to read a paper, instead of taking a written exam in a course of her study (222).

**Ambitious openness**

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<td>People find unexpected ways of doing something. Their intention is to show that they can arrive at the same result by using other methods. They do this by consciously choosing legitimate resources. They suggest alternative assessment methods or present an unexpected and different, but nonetheless legitimate, solution.</td>
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The strategy of *ambitious openness* is an exceptional one, because it manifested itself only in one interview of the sample (Mrs Albrecht). Mrs Albrecht reported mainly about her high school certificate [“Abiturprüfung]. *Ambitious openness* can be used with a greater or lesser degree of confrontation. A non-verbal variation is, for example, to solve a task intentionally in a manner that is assumed to be unexpected by the examiner. Mrs Albrecht intentionally chooses a text interpretation as a solution in her German exam that she assumed to be opposite to the one intended by the teacher (48). Using *ambitious openness* in an oral exam situation means verbal exposure to the examiner. Mrs Albrecht had varied experiences with it. While, according to Mrs Albrecht, her math teacher is impressed by her presentation of an alternative calculation method (60), this is not automatically or always the case. The examiners in her oral exam in Physics were not convinced by her alternative solution in the first examination attempt, where she suggested calculating the movement of a missile by using differential
equation rather than an ellipse (134). During the re-examination, she pushed her solution through, according to her narration in the interview (140).

In addition to suggesting an alternative solution, it is possible to insist on a modification of the test procedure to be successful. Mrs Albrecht has to pass a written paper in one course of German studies. While she feels able to analyse a short story by Kafka, she simultaneously assumes not to be able to do it in written form. Consequently, she decided to invite her professor to an art exhibition, in which she expressed her interpretation of Kafka creatively.

'That's how I got a credit in my German Studies course. He gave it to me. He accepted it as a different form of dealing with a text. And that it is exactly the same as writing an academic paper. This was my academic paper. But, of course, it differs from professor to professor whether they accept it or not.' (Translated from interviewee Mrs Albrecht: 262)

The goal of using ambitious openness is to force a success. The testee assumes that she or he does have skills required for solving the task, but that they are different from the skills that are required to successfully participate in the testing procedure. Therefore, it is subjectively reasonable to negotiate the conditions of the testing situation. A completely contrary strategy is deliberate deception.

**Deliberate deception**

In the face of the required testing, some people opt to use a little white lie or unethical means. This strategy is used to avoid having to openly admit functional illiteracy.

The strategy of deliberate deception refers to a conscious decision to act in an unethical manner. The goal of deceptions is not to reveal one’s weaknesses. It is used because the person assumes that her/his skills are not adequate for the requirements of the tested tasks. Based on my empirical data, two kinds of deliberate deception can be differentiated. The first version is to pretend to be ill. Mr Werner escaped from a testing situation by such a white lie.

'I had to go to the German Armed Forces. There, we also had to take tests. And then, of course, there were empty sheets of paper. Well, and then I stood there, of course. __ I had to come up with something. I said: 'I am not able to, I am ill, I feel nauseous.' or something. So I didn't take the test.' (Translated from interviewee Mr Werner: 68)
Surely, simulating an illness is not an exclusive strategy of adults with basic skill needs\(^4\). However, it is notable that, in this example, Mr Werner fears writing on empty sheets of paper and subsequently being exposed as a functionally illiterate\(^5\).

The second established version of *deliberate deception* is deception by copying from the person sitting next to the test taker. This strategy provides an opportunity for success, but is not a guarantee of success. Mr Martin, for instance, tells that he copied wrong mathematical results from his neighbour (196). The self-assessed expectation of being incompetent in the face of a required task can refer either to reading and writing competence or to another competence that is important to pass the test.

**Quiet resignation**

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<td>People expect that they will fail the test and accept it without trying to avoid failure.</td>
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When an adult person resigns in the face of a testing situation, she/he typically experiences herself/himself as powerless. The expected failure seems to be certain and inevitable. Consequently, failure is to be accepted, even if negative sanctions may follow. Disadvantages of *quiet resignation* are experiencing the failure in the first place; in addition, sometimes persons are also punished for the failure. Mr Moritz, for example, tells in his interview that during his time in the National People’s Armee of the former German Democratic Republic [“Nationale Volksarmee der DDR”], the officers wanted to teach him writing. But he felt incapable to pass required writing tasks. So, he accepted the punishment.

Interviewer: Oh, was it a kind of class in political education, or what was it?
Mr Moritz: Yes, every time. Once or twice a month, or so. ___Well, there was an officer, he had, well, he read passages out of his novels and ___everybody was ordered to write it down, his novels. Well, then you didn’t do it. As punishment, you lose your permission for leave, but, it wasn’t that bad. It was alright, ___because we knew what it was about.
Interviewer: And what was it like, that they knew ___You didn’t have any problems with them because of reading and writing?
Mr Moritz: You can’t change it, anyway. ___You were locked up in the barrack, so you couldn’t defend yourself. And you couldn’t leave anyway.

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\(^4\) This is true for all seven strategies.

\(^5\) I outlined this thought in my paper for ESREA conference in Linköping, 2010.
There was no way out, except during vacation. So you just tried to make the best of it.’ (Translated from interviewee Mr Moritz: 307 ff)

It is noticeable that Mr Moritz does not speak of himself in the first person in this quote. Rather, he switches to an impersonal “you” [in the original German, the indefinite pronoun “man”]. In this way, he emphasizes his feeling of helplessness even more. Mr Moritz, in fact, refuses the required performance, but--unlike the strategy resistant refusal--he accepts the task itself through his behaviour. He simply has come to terms with the situation, which he interprets as static and unchangeable. He reveals his incompetence and quietly accepts the negative consequences.

**Resistant refusal**

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<td>Persons escape the assessment situation by means of unexcused absences or by expressing that they cannot be forced to take part.</td>
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The strategy of *resistant refusal* becomes visible in the testing situation, because the person refuses to be assessed. In contrast to the other six strategies, in the case of *resistant refusal*, the task is not being attempted. This can happen in a more or less confrontational manner. The strategy serves as a means of resisting to use one’s own competences in the testing situation. The person may miss a testing appointment unexcused. Mr Franke tells, for example, that he skipped school on examination days (42). Mr Michaelis completely terminates his participation in educational training to avoid any testing situation. Mr Martin escapes at the last minute from his written driving test.

'Mr Martin: I was, I stood in front of the test room where people were already sitting. And, all I’d had to do was just go inside the room. I stood in front of the door and people were inside already. I said to myself, don’t go inside. If you fail now, all of them will laugh at you, and all of them have passed, and you’re the only loser and […]

Interviewer: Yes, but if you would have failed, what would have been so bad about it? What did you fear?

Mr Martin: Yes, they correct the tests there. And they, the students, go outside and wait in the corridor. And then, one after another is called up and has to go inside the room. So, and then everyone else is waiting outside […] and when you come out, they ask: 'Did you pass the test or did you fail?'. And that’s the reason why I wanted to avoid the situation. Every one of them comes out, saying: 'I have passed' and you come out of the room and they ask: 'Did you pass?'. And then you say: 'No, I failed.' and
every one goes: 'He he, he he, you failed!' So I said 'no' to myself and went home.' (Translated from interviewee Mr Martin: 356 ff).

In the case of Mr Martin's written driving test, the expected social consequences of a failure provide the reasoning for his fear and, consequently, for his decision to escape the assessment situation.

A more confrontational way to refuse being assessed is to speak up (Mr Wilhelm: 142). Mrs Arnold expressed her decision to resist all requirements of the reading and writing course she attends by mandate, rather than voluntarily. She is concerned about financial sanctions by the employment office if she drops out (Mrs Arnold: 3-12). Thus, she experiences learning or testing demands always as an imposition. At 48, Mrs Arnold says she feels that she is too old to be coerced like a school child (22). In this example, it becomes obvious that--as described by Michel Foucault (1977) and Klaus Holzkamp (1995)--a test can be used as an instrument of power and punishment by institutions (like the school), which, in turn, triggers individual actions of resistance.

5. Conclusions: Considering the learners’ Perspectives on testing situations in literacy education

The analysis of the interview data showed a discrepancy between individual and professional understandings of testing situations. In this paper, I focused on the explanation of individual perspectives. From the perspective of adults with basic skill needs, a testing situation is defined as any situation, wherein a person has to demonstrate adequate skills. In addition, the person expects that her/his individual proficiencies are being observed and/or evaluated.

According to Holzkamp’s theoretical approach, these two main characteristics of testing situations are part of a framework he terms the individual’s “space of possibilities” [“Möglichkeitsraum”] (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 372). From the individual’s perspective, both situational characteristics can become more or less meaningful for a reasonable choice of strategy. However, the requirements of a testing situation are more binding than the informal and practical requirements of everyday life. Therefore, adults with basic skill needs can only make limited use of known coping strategies for everyday life. An unexcused non-participation attracts attention, is documented and interpreted as refusal. Hence, it is not possible to simply avoid a testing situation. Sometimes an absence is even followed by a punishment. Moreover, the testing tasks cannot be delegated to a familiar person and the use of technical aids that are helpful in everyday life, for example a dictionary, usually conflicts with the intentions of a
testing situation. Nevertheless, the findings show that the conditions of testing situations can trigger reasoning for an impressively great variety of strategies.

The individual’s choice of strategy always results from subjective considerations, which are also always part of certain communities. Even though individual difficulties in reading and/or writing were not relevant for reasoning the strategy in every narration, the interview data document that they became relevant in some cases. If a person with low literacy skills opts for applying their own competence to pass a test, she/he has to consider the consequences of a partial outing because at least the assessing person or institution will know the individual’s weaknesses afterwards (except in the case of self- or online-assessments). Although the strategy of deliberate deception provides the option of avoiding a failed assessment, it is accompanied with the risk of negative sanctions.

According to the research findings presented here, the conditions for conducting assessments in literacy education have to be considered carefully. Due to the methodological decision not to determine the types of tests to be considered in this study in advance, many kinds of tests were represented in the analysis. Consequently, my recommendations for learner-oriented conditions for conducting assessments in literacy education are formulated more generally. One important insight in the face of an ever-increasing use of assessments and tests in the field of adult literacy and numeracy is that adult education has to consider the learners’ perspectives on assessment. The ongoing professionalization process in German Literacy Education has always emphasized the need for formative assessments, but the use of assessment in Literacy Education had not been extensively established at the time of this study (cf. Nienkemper & Bonna, 2011). Since then, the topic has become part of the major in “literacy and basic education” (Kley & Schick-Marquart, 2009). In addition, appropriate instruments have been developed and additional training concepts for assessment in adult basic education have been established (cf. Grotlüschen et al., 2011; Jütten & Mania, 2011). Moreover, in 2013, the main player in Literacy Education, the German Adult Education Association [“Deutscher Volkshochschulverband e.V”] developed a curriculum, the introduction and use of which is currently being tested. A curriculum is a precondition for a certificate, for which learners have to pass a standardized test. Therefore, the setup of certification practices accompanies the development of summative assessment methods.

Considering the presented results, the goal of introducing certificates of learning achievements as a right, rather than an obligation, deserves support.

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6 http://grundbildung.de/projekte/rahmencurriculum-transfer/ (access on 27th October 2017)
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Beyond washback effect: A multi-disciplinary approach exploring how testing becomes part of everyday school life focused on the construction of pupils’ cleverness

Lars Holm and Kristine Bagge Kousholt

Abstract
The growth in international assessments within education, and the frequently intense attention the results garner, make it highly relevant to examine how these assessments are affecting the ways in which education is understood, defined, and practiced. In order to analyze some of the complex consequences of educational assessment, we propose a multi-disciplinary approach that combines perspectives from Latour’s actor-network theory and critical psychology – a combination chosen in order to contribute to the critique of testing in a way that goes beyond common understandings of washback effects. This multi-disciplinary approach is applied to data from longitudinal fieldwork in five schools in Denmark. We analyze how the Danish national test in literacy becomes part of the social construction of cleverness and, in this way, interrogate the traditional understanding of positive or negative washback effects. The findings reported in this article reveal some of the significance of assessment with regard to how pupils’ cleverness is negotiated and constructed in and around literacy testing, and at concomitantly demonstrate how cross-disciplinary concepts based on theories of everyday life can contribute to the field of testing research with a critical perspective.

Keywords
testing, washback, test as social practice, multi-disciplinary approach, critical psychology, ANT,
Introduction

The political desire to increase learning in primary and lower secondary education forms the basis for the development and implementation of national strategies in which more comprehensive testing plays a prominent role. In recent time, in the USA, it was the national education strategy, "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) that triggered intensified testing (Nichols & Berliner 2007); in Norway, increased testing was embedded in a 2006 government resolution regarding a so-called "Kunnskapsløft" [Knowledge Lift] (Kulbrandstad 2010); and in Denmark, national tests are part of a comprehensive program, adopted in 2005, with the title "Promoting assessment culture" (Pøhler & Sørensen 2010). In Norway and Denmark, the development of such strategies has a common background: poor placements in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) ranking list, in which literacy levels are compared among students in a number of countries (Elstad & Sivesind 2010; Holm 2014). Thus, the increased use of tests is simultaneously anchored in local, situated practice that plays a role in individuals’ everyday lives and as a contemporary social phenomenon in international comparisons and increased international competition (McNamara 2005; Nichols & Berliner 2007; Extra, Spotti & Avermaet 2009; Elstad & Sivesind 2010; Holm & Laursen 2011).

However, according to McNamara and Roever (2006), conducting research in a way that reflects the social, societal dimensions of tests and testing practices presents significant theoretical challenges:

…to investigate the social meaning of tests and their social impact takes us into relatively uncharted waters theoretically. The problem here is that we need an adequate social theory to frame the issues that we wish to investigate. (McNamara & Roever 2006, p. 253)

We accept this theoretical challenge and, on the basis of a critical review of existing research on testing, argue for a multidisciplinary, critical approach, in which testing is analyzed as a social practice. The research problem in this article is how to grasp how testing becomes part of an everyday construction of cleverness. Furthermore, we hope to move beyond the common understanding of positive/negative washback. We acknowledge the need for exploring the effects of testing on teaching, as addressed in research on washback, but believe it is equally important to more broadly interrogate the ways in which testing affects the understanding and construction of pupils’ cleverness - something which occurs both as part of test practice (formal construction of cleverness) and as part of a more complex everyday life (informal construction of cleverness). By addressing these issues theoretically and analytically, we wish to contribute to a
dynamic and context-sensitive understanding of testing as part of everyday school life.

The theoretical inspiration for this approach is, on the one hand, critical psychology's focus on how structures of cleverness are created in a dialectical interaction between the participants and the conditions of local communities, and on the other hand, actor-network theory (ANT), with its focus on the interaction between actors and objects. This combination of different theoretical perspectives allows a research approach in which analytical attention is paid to the interaction between humans and materiality in constructions of cleverness. Both theoretical perspectives share the view that materiality is created by human beings while at the same time becoming part of practice and/or designing practice in unpredictable ways. As Sørensen (2006, p. 149) states: “Design is never just about making a technology but always also about designing practices, whether intentionally or not.” Sørensen (2006) furthermore argues that the actors or participants in a practice will always also do something with the design or materiality in unpredictable ways, so one could say that materiality is never fulfilled with the design of the technology. Analyzing testing on this basis directs research attention, not to constructions of cleverness as a general phenomenon, but to structures of cleverness in relation to testing, and to the local constructions of cleverness in a community. This points to a need for a twin focus; on both structures of cleverness that have developed historically and are embedded in materiality, for instance as testing, and on the ongoing constructions and negotiations of cleverness in specific contexts, such as a classroom.

A multidisciplinary approach to testing, first requires a clarification of the scientific traditions’ complementarity and differences, of which the research questions will be central. We will then demonstrate the potential of this research approach through an analysis that focuses on the structures of cleverness that emerge in the interaction between the test, teachers, and pupils in different classrooms in Denmark. The purpose of this analysis is to challenge a dualistic understanding of washback effect as either positive or negative and point to the ambiguity and complexity of the context in which testing is situated: everyday school life.

The concept of cleverness is our attempt to translate the Danish concept ‘dygtighed’, but it is not entirely adequate. ‘Dygtighed’ is a rather imprecise concept and the meaning depends on the contextual use. It can mean skill, ability, aptitude, cleverness, or competence. However, the concepts of ‘dygtighed’ and ‘cleverness’ share a focus on the individual’s innate categories and are both often understood as something quantifiable. ‘Dygtighed’ is a frequently used empirical concept in Danish schools, and the practice of cleverness in accordance with test practice will be analyzed and discussed throughout this article. By examining the
interaction of structures of cleverness that are constructed through and around national tests, we analyze the complex meanings that assessments have for teachers and students in Danish classrooms. We begin by unfolding the theory-based arguments supporting a multidisciplinary analysis of testing before exemplifying such an approach through two concrete analyses.

**An approach to research in testing that goes beyond washback effect**

In a general ontological perspective, tests may be viewed from different paradigmatic standpoints. The first such paradigm that we will present views tests as primarily a measuring instrument which is societally helpful and can be used to generate knowledge about, and compare, academic levels among individuals, schools, and nations. The theoretical point of departure for this paradigm is theories of validity and psychometric theory, including "item-response theory" (McNamara & Roever 2006). “Validity” refers to the question of whether a test measures what it is intended to measure. Over the years, the concept of test validity has been refined and differentiated to cover different types of validity; for example, content validity, construct validity, and consequential validity (Bachman & Palmer 1996; Weir 2005; McNamara and Roever 2006). The concept of reliability is often associated with assessing validity, and indicates the precision with which tests measure. The reliability of a test is often measured by repetition; an approach that may be recognized from studies within the natural sciences where repeatability ensures that the result does not depend on subjective disturbances (bias), but that the “domain is closed” (Christensen 2002) and the measurement precise. Within this area of test research, it is stated that reliability may be difficult to attain when people’s academic skills are the object of the measurement (see Thorndike, Cunningham, Thorndike & Hagen 1991). In the context of this approach to testing, the research interest is directed towards the development and discussion of the test as an objective, precise, and fair measuring instrument (Bachman & Palmer 1996), and towards development of meta-analyses of quantitative test results, in order to provide valid comparative statements (Allerup 2015; Kreiner 2009), or to establish possible causal connections between test results and social conditions and backgrounds (Egelund & Nielsen 2012).

The second paradigm we identify directs research attention to "the influence of testing on teaching and learning" (Alderson & Wall 1993). This research interest, often referred to as “washback," has typically focused on measurable

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1 This research overview takes its point of departure in research on testing of language and literacy
educational effects of using a particular test. According to Cheng, Watanabe & Curtis (2004, p. 4), the basic assumption within the framework of this paradigm is that, “tests or examinations can and should drive teaching, and hence learning.” The test is seen as an educational technology to enhance "efficiency" and/or generate "improvement" of teaching and education and as potentially beneficial – both for individuals and for society as a whole (Pettersvold & Østrem 2012). Based on this assumption, washback is typically analyzed as either positive or negative washback (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons 1996; Alderson & Wall 1993; Cheng 1999; Watanabe 1996; Ryumon 2007). Negative washback is described as the phenomenon seen when, for example, a test is based on a narrow definition of “language skills,” and therefore has, or is expected to have, a limiting or negative effect in relation to teaching and learning outcomes (also referred to as “teaching to the test”). In contrast, positive washback describes a situation in which a test results in "good" teaching practices that have, or are expected to have, a positive effect, such as when an oral test is introduced in language subjects with the expectation that it will encourage a greater focus on spoken language in teaching and hence improve measurements of students’ oral language proficiency (Taylor 2005). It is central to the research on washback that, at its core, it is a paradigm where the test is seen as an instrument that has the potential to improve a teaching situation by creating “measurement-driven instruction” (Popham 1987). As Alderson & Wall (1993) highlight and critically discuss, it has previously been argued that washback could be linked to validity in the sense that a test could be considered valid if it promotes positive washback in teaching.

Thirdly, we identify a paradigm in which the test is considered as a power and management instrument, from a political and societal perspective. The test is seen as part of political decision-making processes and as the result of the implementation of specific global and national strategies (Spolsky 1995; Shohamy 2001, 2006; Menken 2008). This field of research typically applies sociological theory, including the work of Bourdieu, Bernstein, and Foucault (Shohamy 2001; McNamara & Roever 2006). Within this paradigm, inscribing and analyzing the test in relation to discursive struggles over social values and norms is central (Shohamy 2006). Research is first and foremost directed towards the logic and values that are embedded in the political processes surrounding testing and towards exploring the more general (intended as well as unintended) societal and educational effects of the test, including their function in relation to categorizing and constructing social identity (McNamara 2005). Thus, it is typically the effects of the test as part of broader political and societal contexts which are the focus of the research.
The three paradigms briefly outlined above represent very different theoretical approaches to test research, but, at the same time, have one common characteristic: in all three paradigms, the test is viewed as an instrument which functions in a given social structure - as a measuring instrument, as a pedagogical instrument, or as a political instrument. The three approaches each contribute important knowledge about testing, but at the same time, the common understanding of tests as instruments results in a tendency to overlook the interaction between tests and actors and therefore to overlook the space for individual interpretation and the role of norms and values in local test practices (Lissovoy 2013; Holm 2007). As with the research on washback effect, we wish to focus on how testing influences teaching. Alderson & Wall (1993) critically discuss the term washback effect, arguing that its dichotomistic and deterministic nature needs to be explored. The concept of washback presupposes that testing will more or less automatically influence teaching in either a positive or negative direction, depending on either the quality of the test or the focus of the research. In this article we wish to open up and nuance the concept of washback. To this end, we have chosen firstly to analyze a lesson intended to prepare pupils for a test in Danish literacy and secondly to examine teachers’ constructions of cleverness after their pupils have participated in a test in Danish literacy. The first analysis is conducted within a critical psychology framework and the second in an ANT framework. Both focus on the interplay between the test as materiality and the network/community of actors/participants and on the construction of cleverness in this interplay.

Inspired by Sørensen (2006), Forchhammer (2006), and Olesen & Markussen (2006), testing is understood as a technology that materializes in different ways (the computer screen, the things used for practicing test etc.) and is attributed with some kind of intention and with meaning-making constructions that are processual parts of social practice.

We will contribute to the body of research on testing and to the related theoretical discussions by examining the local interaction between tests and actors. We will now turn our attention to a further exploration of this multidisciplinary approach to testing.

**Critical psychology as a theoretical perspective for analyzing testing**

In our first analysis, we draw on the Danish/German school of critical psychology, developed with strong references to the work of Leontiev, Vygotsky and Marx, among others. Critical psychology was developed at Freie Universität in Berlin and was since the publication of Klaus Holzkamp’s “Grundlegung der
Psychologie” (Foundation of Psychology) in 1983 also known as the ‘Science of the subject’ (Nissen 2000). Critical psychology was developed as a critique of what is referred to as the “control sciences”. Among these control sciences are approaches to psychology that naturalize certain properties of human beings – for example, intelligence - and thereby reproduce social inequalities (Dreier 1979). The aim of the subject science is to develop adequate knowledge of the meaning of societal conditions explored from subjects’ first-person perspectives.

Holzkamp (2013) distinguish between conditioning discourse and reason discourse. Conditioning discourse takes its point of departure in the understanding that human beings are only subject to certain conditions and that it can be presumed that human beings act according to these conditions. On the other hand, reason discourse opens up for an understanding of human beings as acting subjects whose actions are to be understood connected to the societal and socio-material conditions of which they are part and connected to the meaning that human beings ascribe to these conditions in everyday life; hence first-person perspectives (Holzkamp 2013b; Schraube 2013).

Critical psychology is developed with the ambition of creating a psychology linked to the historical, materialist dialectics of Marxism and identifying basic categories with an analytical and methodological grounding in the subjective as part of societal practice. As part of this approach, everything is considered in its development, and the material (rather than the ideal) is understood as primary (Dreier 1979, p. 10). In continuation of this, Marx’ 1845 theses on Feuerbach (Marx 1973) as a new materialism has been an inspiration in the development of Critical psychology not least its methodology (practice research) (Nissen 2000). Marx agreed with Feuerbach on being critical towards religion. However, he considered Feuerbach’s critique to be far too abstract, not considering the religious mind as part of a specific societal formation (Marx 1973, the seventh thesis). The theses on Feuerbach directs further criticism of any abstraction, mystification, individualization and/or isolation of human beings and of their products; For instance, knowledge production and categories are to be understood as part of acting in practice (Marx 1973; Juul Jensen 1999; see for instance Højholt 2011 taking on this aspiration regarding children’s perspectives). That is to say, psychological processes are not viewed in isolation, but as psychological aspects of social practice, and as aspects of the necessity of development, of which people are a part. Critical psychology’s unique contribution (of which the theses on Feuerbach has provided a stepping stone) is to transcend the dichotomy between the individual and the social by analyzing reasons for actions as grounded in social structures and conditions (Osterkamp 2009, p. 168).
Within critical psychology, the concept of communities is a form of specification of the concept of social practice (Kousholt 2006). The concept of community contains a dialectical duality that refers to participation in something common while at the same time implying a dynamic action - it is something we constitute communally. Dorte Kousholt (2006) also clarifies that it is crucial to note that the concept of community does not connote agreement or harmony, but is, rather, a perspective that implies that human beings create conditions for each other, and that these conditions may be conflictual as human beings have different standpoints and, therefore, different perspectives on what is common (see also Axel 2011 on conflictual cooperation as anchored in praxis). Critical psychology is a subject science, which implies that considering human beings as only subject to social conditions is highly reductive, disregarding human agency (Holzkamp 2005; see also Marx 1973, the 9th, 10th and 11th theses on the need for considering human agency, the interconnection between subject and society and the aspiration for changing society through human agency). In the analysis below, the meaning-making of testing will be analyzed as part of a complex practice and from different participants’ perspectives; it will be shown how subjects also act with the technology of testing in creative ways (e.g. Kousholt 2016b). Furthermore, the concept of learning as connected to the distinction between conditioning discourse and reason discourse presented above will be discussed in the analysis.

Based on the theoretical framework of critical psychology, subjects should not be understood as isolated individuals, but as “social subjectivities,” whereby the dichotomy between the subjective and the objective is transcended (Nissen 2002, p. 70). Related to the ambition of transcending the dualism of the individual and society starting from the first-person perspective, Ute Osterkamp (2009, p. 170, with reference to Holzkamp 1983) reminds us that the contradictions of social conditions are not external to human beings, but run straight through us. As such, critical psychology is not a psychology that looks into human beings, but a standpoint that, together with the relevant participants, explores the meaning of the generalized capacities of things as possibilities to act in concrete practice. Hence, meaning is part of acting with things in the world (Holzkamp 2013b, p. 279; Forchhammer 2013).

Critical psychology as a subject science is based on first-person perspectives on historical and socio-material conditions, and on reasons to act with them, in them and on them (e.g. Schraube 2013). Socio-material conditions, such as the reproduction of the capacity of a thing or a technology\(^2\), is considered

\(^2\) In the analysis, we use the concept ‘technology’ instead of ‘thing’ as we like Forchhammer (2006) find that the former can imply materiality, strategies, and situated and transformative meaning-making processes.
as generalized possibilities to act and become a meaning constellation of the generalized capacity of the thing/technology (Holzkamp 2013b, p. 279). Holzkamp (2013b p. 279) point to Leontiev’s classic example of both the practical value and the generalized and reproduced meaning of the axe’s capacity of axing as an embodied idea objectified in the axe. This is crucial, because things are more than their properties (Olesen & Markussen 2006). However, we must not forget that possibilities to act are not freely given possibilities; power structures, obstacles, and restrictions are part of the relation between subject and material things in the world (Holzkamp 2013b, p. 280). Schraube (2013) focuses on the power of technologies to avoid the risk of perceiving them as merely a means to an end. Sometimes, technologies unintentionally become an end in themselves and it is important to be aware of the transformative power of technologies for human beings’ sociality. Material things must be understood as part of practice and as part of subjects’ creative, transformative, and/or reproductive actions with the things (e.g. Costall & Dreier 2006; Forchhammer 2006; Holzkamp 2013b). As Costall & Dreier (2006 p. 10) state, this underlines:

“[…] the need to understand things not in isolation but in relation to the human activities in which they are involved, and the different, even conflicting, meanings things can have for the people involved with them.”

It is this need that our analysis of testing from a critical psychological perspective will address. Namely, how subjects act with and around the materiality of testing and how this materiality becomes part of teaching in unpredictable ways and part of subjects’ constructions and negotiations of cleverness.

**Actor-network theory (ANT) as a theoretical perspective in analyzing testing**

Law defines ANT as ”a disparate family of material-semiotic tools, sensibilities, and methods of analysis that treat everything in the social and natural worlds as a continuously generated effect of the webs of relations within which they are located” (Law 2009, p.141). Thus, ANT is not an abstract theory that aims to explain why something happens, but instead a wide array of research approaches that, on the basis of case studies, make it possible to describe how “relations assemble or don’t” (Law 2009, p. 141). As a result, there is no clear distinction between theory and method in ANT, because the theory in itself represents a general method that must be operationalized in relation to the specific research questions that are formulated (Arnoldi 2003). Besides the central unit of analysis
– the actor-network – there is a broad variation in concepts and categories used in ANT-inspired research (Schraube 2013).

Actor-networks are dynamic entities, characterized by the fact that actors and networks constantly constitute and redefine each other, because everything may be considered both an actor and a network – it is simply a matter of perspective. As Callon puts it, an actor-network is:

“reducible to neither an actor alone nor to a network… An actor-network is simultaneously an actor whose activity is networking heterogeneous elements, and a network that is able to redefine and transform what it is made of.” (Callon 1987, p. 93)

Latour terms the interaction between human and non-human actors in the network "translation" and he defines this concept as “the work through which actors modify, displace, and translate their various and contradictory interests” (Latour 1999, p. 331). Latour’s argument for this basic assumption is that objects may play a central role as actors in a network, through the meaning people delegate them and that, additionally, objects may mediate interaction and create meaning that is connected to other places and other times, thereby exceeding “the limits of the local” (Brandt & Clinton 2002). Actors are defined by Latour as "entities that do things" (Latour 1992, p. 241).

It should be emphasized that Latour’s theorizing does not reject conceptual differences between human and non-human actors. His juxtaposition of human and non-human actors is rather an expression of a research strategy based on “the principle of general symmetry”, which, according to Latour, “simply means to not impose a priori some spurious asymmetry among human intentional action and a material world of causal relations” (2005, p. 76). Thus, the principle of general symmetry is an expression of openness in relation to analyzing the actors involved in a network’s processes of translation, without giving priority to certain actors beforehand. Reckwitz argues clearly and precisely for this theoretical standpoint:

“….objects are necessary components of many practices- just as indispensable as bodily and mental activities. Carrying out a practice very often means using particular things in a certain way…When particular things are necessary elements of certain practices, then, contrary to classical sociological arguments, subject-subject relations cannot claim any priority over subject-object relations, as far as the production and reproduction of social order(lines) is concerned.” (Reckwitz 2002, p. 252-253)
Actor-network theory seems to be particularly appropriate as an approach to research on testing because it makes it possible to direct research attention to how, through translation processes, human and non-human actors construct what might be called “calculative spaces” (Fenwick & Edwards 2010, p. 117) – spaces in which the construction of cleverness is central for the translation process - or carry out what Hamilton refers to as “ordering projects” (Hamilton 2001), in which actors seek to give something a certain hierarchical order.

Theoretical similarities and differences

The two theoretical perspectives presented above are, to a certain extent, complementary. Firstly, both are scientific traditions characterized by an open and investigative ontology and presented as critical counter-theories to prominent scientific traditions within psychology and sociology, respectively. Secondly, there is a common understanding of “connectedness” as something that is created through interaction and is locally and socially situated, although different concepts are used to describe this interrelatedness and connectedness: respectively, “network” and “community.”

ANT and critical psychology share a methodological orientation towards ethnographic research designs in which long-term fieldwork plays a key role. They likewise both view materiality as something that must not be taken for granted as a “thing”, but viewed as something created by people, and as something that “returns” and co-creates people through an interactional meaning-making practice (Nissen 2002) where people can delegate responsibility and roles to objects. This focus on that the returning of materiality is central in our analysis of the technology of testing as leading to unforeseen aspects of practice. We find that both theoretical perspectives transcend the dichotomy between subject and materiality, albeit in different ways. Whereas critical psychology insists on first-person perspectives in order to understand reasons for acting in and with certain socio-material conditions, ANT rejects such a privileging of the human, considering humans and non-humans as equally interesting in an analytical perspective. The role of testing as materiality that co-constructs cleverness will be central in our analysis.

As suggested above, there are also differences between the two theories. Indeed, they may be said to represent different standpoints in relation to anthropocentrism, and in relation to epistemology. Critical psychology has the intention of presenting conscious and explicit societal critique, as well as an emancipatory ambition through the analysis of different ways in which social inequality is (re-)produced. Critical psychology may also be characterized as a
science of the subject, with a focus on inter-subjectivity, and on generalized societal agency, studied from a first-person perspective (Holzkamp 2005), where materiality is also a part of subjects’ dialectical conditions. Therefore, critical psychology can be understood as a theory of the mutual constitution of subject and society (Kousholt & Thomsen 2013). The epistemology of ANT, meanwhile, is first and foremost directed toward the processes “in which networks combine in particular ways to produce objects, knowledge, or facts through the displacement or suppression of dissenting voices, or of those facts unfit to fit” (Clarke 2008, p. 152). The analytical and critical dimensions of ANT focus first and foremost on how processes of knowledge production are part of the creation of inequality and social distinctions, and on how knowledge production must therefore be analyzed in relation to power. Latour describes this relation between power and knowledge as follows: “What is called knowledge cannot be defined without understanding what gaining knowledge means” (Latour 1987, p. 22). ANT directs attention to the analysis of the content of differentiations. In an analysis of testing, it is important to pay attention to this dimension because an analysis of content dimension shows us which forms of knowledge are socially valued and demanded of students at a given time within different school subjects. A new test of literacy, for instance, appends certain priorities and values to an existing assessment culture and must be seen in this light.

Despite the differences between the scientific traditions of critical psychology and ANT, we do not believe it impossible to combine the analytical perspectives they offer. On the contrary, we believe that such a combination can enrich the science of testing and be an important supplement to existing research on testing.

Combining the theoretical perspectives offered by ANT and critical psychology with the intention to analyze testing directs analytical attention to how testing becomes part of teaching and how testing co-constitutes different constructions of cleverness in certain communities/networks. With these theoretical perspectives, we shift our analytical lens from either positive or negative washback effects to how testing becomes part of everyday school practices. A common criticism of tests with a long history (as highlighted by Hanson 1993) points out that the introduction of tests affects teachers’ organization of lessons, narrowing the curriculum, impeding creativity, and letting the tests determine content (“teaching to the test”). We find this criticism important as a generalized understanding, but we also see the need to challenge a deterministic understanding of tests as instruments that create specific practices. Exploring the constructions of pupils’ cleverness in the social community of the classroom and in the testing network will demonstrate the complex localization of the test in the everyday life of pupils and teachers.
We would like to emphasize that we do not see our multi-disciplinary approach to testing as a new paradigm that can or should replace other research paradigms. We acknowledge the need to ground our research and practice in theory, but at the same time find it important not to let theory turn into grand narrative considered beyond critique or to understand theories as isolated entities with no need for explorative conversations with other theoretical orientations. We believe critical research on testing must understand theory as an ever-changing framework, rather than a fixed point of reference. A multi-disciplinary research approach is aligned with this understanding of theory. Hence, this article should be understood as a step on the path to integrating theoretical perspectives analytically.

Methods and methodological considerations

The material that forms the basis for this article comes from two different research projects on the implementation of national tests in Danish schools. The first of these projects is a post-doc project that examined national testing as part of teachers’ and pupils' school lives in the years immediately following the implementation of national tests. This project focused on how national tests become part of pupils' communities and learning processes. Based on a critical psychological perspective, implying a focus on connections between conditions such as tests and the meanings participants ascribe to them, attention was primarily paid to children's participation in, and perspectives on, national tests. This was investigated by following children using anthropologically inspired participant observations during lessons, recess, and test situations, supplemented by interviews conducted both before and after participation in national tests. The pupils’ teachers were also interviewed, but the primary focus was on the meanings the children ascribed to the tests. Four socio-economically diverse schools were selected and different age groups were represented in the project (two 2nd grade classes, one 6th grade class and two 8th grade classes distributed at the four different schools).

The second project is a longitudinal study (2009-2015) focused on how the national literacy tests are embedded in existing testing practices and on how the national tests change existing testing practices regarding literacy. This research project draws on Latour’s ANT and focuses on translation processes within the network: how “poor” test results in literacy are constituted as a problem to be solved; how actors enter into the resolution of this problem; how different roles are defined in relation to each other; and the extent to which the different actors are transformed “into manageable entities” (Clarke 2008). Attention was first and
foremost focused on the teachers as actors. The study was based on anthropologically inspired participant observations of test practices, test preparations, and the use of test results in school-home conferences. Additionally, interviews were conducted with teachers throughout the longitudinal study regarding literacy and literacy testing. The material in this study was generated by three classes at three schools from grade two to four in three major Danish cities. The three schools are all located in so-called "socially deprived areas", and the percentage of pupils with ethnic minority background in the classes is between 50% and 90%.

The two research projects share an approach to research on testing inspired by ethnography and both, to different degrees, carried out longitudinal studies based on a belief that long-term classroom presence is necessary to investigate, in a nuanced way, how testing becomes part of everyday life. In order to investigate children’s perspectives, a certain amount of knowledge is required of the children’s participation in the classroom, of their positions, and of how the conditions look from their perspectives. A focus on how new tests change existing testing practices, which is central to the ANT-inspired study, likewise requires a longitudinal research design. The research focus of both studies is not the test itself, but how it becomes a part of everyday school life, and this requires a research-based understanding of the participants’ or actors’ everyday lives because we cannot know from without, or beforehand, how “new” tests become part of everyday school life.

In the following analysis, we have firstly tried to analyze the material on the basis of our theoretical standpoints in order to be able to contribute with knowledge of how testing becomes part of children's and teachers' everyday lives. Secondly, the analysis is intended to be exemplary, highlighting how the chosen theoretical perspectives may contribute to an alternative approach to research on tests. To this end, the analysis presented here is not an exhaustive analysis of the totality of material, but instead presents a number of examples illustrative of the theoretical approaches and arguments.

Analysis with a focus on communities and constructions of cleverness

From the approach of critical psychology, there is a focus on the social practice of which the tests become part and how they become meaningful/non-meaningful in this specific practice. Testing is considered to be part of conditioning structures, which at the same time have been constituted at other times and in other places. This means that the tests may also be regarded as part of a social
practice that is carried out, reproduced, and transformed in concrete action contexts (e.g. Nissen 1996).

Such a theoretical perspective adds to test research an alternative understanding of tests, test performance, test situations, and constructions of cleverness. Instead of using tests themselves as the jumping-off point for analysis, a critical psychological perspective analyzes the social practice of which the test is a part. Furthermore, practice is conceived as ambiguous, conflictual, and composed. In the following analysis, we explore how parts of the Danish national tests in literacy (concerning proverbs and sayings) become significant for classroom practice. Testing is understood as a technology that materializes in different ways and that can be reproduced and transformed in practice (see above). The question at the center of the following analysis is: How does the technology of testing become part of the community’s construction – and negotiation - of cleverness?

Before testing: How the technology of testing materializes and becomes part of school practice with respect to the construction of cleverness

The Danish national tests are computer-based, adaptive, and have a multiple-choice design. The children perform the test individually in a room with their classmates. In this way, the test is a special materiality that imposes certain possibilities for action (Holzkamp 2013b). The children are supposed to read text on the computer screen, engage in the text, and tick what they believe to be the one correct answer to the question. There are intentions with the materiality (e.g. Forchhammer 2013; Schraube 2013) and these intentions are directed towards finding the children’s level of cleverness in order to differentiate the teaching in this regard. So how does this materiality become part of school practice outside the concrete test situation? The first section below will focus on the imitation of test practice in lessons where tests are rehearsed while the second section will focus on the transformation of test practice in these same lessons.

Imitating test practice

In one of the 2nd grade classes from the empirical material, the teacher has introduced a new topic on proverbs and sayings, as this is part of the test in literacy which the children are supposed to take some weeks later. The school is located in a socioeconomically privileged area. It is a school that focuses on maintaining a high academic level. In an interview, the teacher of the 2nd grade class explained that, because of the perception of the school as high performing,
he experiences the test as a source of pressure. Prior to the national test in literacy, the teacher explained to the researcher that he was going to practice the topic of sayings before testing. He said that he doubted whether it would help the children and that it is mostly these types of question that the children would find difficult. The teacher also said that he thought that sayings were something that the children might learn at home; if the parents often used sayings at home, it would probably be a little easier. He expressed doubt as to whether it was the school's task to teach children sayings, but he would nevertheless spend time on the topic. The teacher and the researcher talked about how the meaning of some sayings seemed to change over time. The teaching about sayings was directed towards the national test in literacy as test rehearsal. Despite his doubts, the teacher chooses to work with the sayings in his teaching.

The classroom is located on 2nd floor, there are huge windows pointing at the school yard. The room is square-formed. The teachers’ desk is located in the same end of the room as the door (the front of the room, one might say). Beside the teacher’s desk there is a whiteboard that can both be connected to the internet and can be written on (while rehearsing sayings, the whiteboard is not connected to the internet but functions as an old-fashion board). The walls are richly decorated mostly with drawings and posters that have an academic or a social message (e.g. social rules). There are four seats at each of the children’s tables. They are placed in such a way that most of the children are not facing the teacher directly, but sideways. In the classroom, the teacher and the children talk about the Danish saying “to get cold feet”. The teacher says that now, the children must sit for a moment and think carefully, and try to see whether they could contribute something regarding the meaning of this phrase. Several of the children (especially the boys, which was also observed to be the case in other lessons in this class) raise their hands immediately. The teacher says that everyone must take time to think about this, as they all have to do the test soon. In this way the teacher introduces a certain relation between the test, the children and the test practice in the class room. He introduces the test as a goal for the teaching in sayings and this seems to have implications for the lesson further on.

The teacher starts by asking Mikkel, who did not raise his hand. Bo says that he has raised his hand and asks why he was not chosen. The teacher says that it is all well and good, but that he will also ask those who have not raised their hands for their thoughts. Mikkel says that he did not really have time to think about anything. The teacher asks some of the other children, who offer a number of different answers. The teacher writes these answers on the board. One of the answers is “a guilty conscience.” The teacher once again asks one of the children who do not has raised their hands. The child does not have an answer. The teacher asks what they are going to do during the test when they are confronted
with a saying. He says that it is important to try. One of the girls, Maria, begins to talk about other sayings, but does not provide an answer to the question of “cold feet”. She contributes with the saying “hand on heart”, among others. The teacher acknowledges Maria’s contribution and says that she and another girl have studied sayings, and Maria agrees (Maria receives extra language training where sayings, among other things, are taught, which she also talks about in an interview). Some of the children raise their hands, making suggestions that are already on the board. There still are some boys with their hands raised, and the teacher has now written several answers on the board. A boy says “to be nervous,” which immediately prompts two of the other boys to cry out “uh, that’s what I was going to say”. A third boy says “becoming afraid”, adding that it is almost the same. The teacher writes “afraid” on the board, just under “nervous”. The two boys who gave the impression of also wanting to say “nervous” keep their hands raised. The teacher asks them, and they say “nervous”. The teacher says that he does not want to ask any more children. He starts to cross out the answers on the board that are not correct. Some say “boo” (when their answers got crossed out), others say “YES” (when their answers were still present). Finally, only “nervous” and “afraid” are left on the board. The teacher says that if you have to choose between them, it is probably “nervous”, crossing out “afraid”. The three boys who answered “nervous” cheer and say aloud, “that was what I said”, and “me too”.

Before the lesson on sayings, the teacher expresses some doubts regarding teaching something that he thinks should be learnt at home. At the same time, the materiality of testing, the test items on sayings and proverbs, introduces the topic to school practice, thereby becoming something the teacher has to relate to because all the children face the same test regardless of how their parents might use sayings in their everyday communication at home. In this way, the materiality of the test items on sayings becomes part of the teaching practice even though the teacher is not sure that this is a relevant task for the school to teach. Following Holzkamp (2013b p. 279-281), one might say that the generalized and reproduced meaning of testing; the idea that individual cleverness should be identified and differentiated through the use of test items such as sayings and proverbs, is part of creating conditions for possibilities to act in the classroom. These possibilities are not freely given but part of power structures and conditions (the national test are compulsory and national; all children shall take them) that the teacher does not see alternative possibilities to act than to rehearse testing. However, these power structures seem to disappear and in this way the teacher seem to have freely chosen this practice of rehearsal despite his doubts regarding this (ibid., p. 281). Furthermore, as he introduces the teaching (test rehearsal) as means to and end (testing), he is also part of
creating/reproducing certain meaning constellations about individual cleverness that is to be tested (ibid.).

In the teaching practice, the materiality of the test on the computer screen is not directly present in the classroom. From the teacher’s first-person perspective, the test offers different possibilities for action. He could, for instance, choose not to teach his students about sayings, refusing to “teach to the test”. However, these possible lines of action are not innocent or without consequences. As the teacher expresses, not practicing these test items might mean that the children would be unprepared for the upcoming literacy test. As stated, the teacher stated that he felt a degree of pressure that his pupils perform well on the test and the materiality and content of the test thus become powerfully constitutive in the classroom. In the classroom, the technology of the test does not materialize as a computer screen presenting different test items; instead, the materiality consists of a whiteboard and a pen, among a lot of other materiality in the classroom (e.g. children sitting on chairs in groups at four at one table, not all directly facing the teacher). This materiality constitutes other possibilities to act and other possibilities in the construction and negotiation of cleverness.

The next day, the teacher is once again working on sayings with the class. Again, there are a lot of boys with their hands raised and only a few girls. The teacher asks a question of a girl who has not raised her hand. She does not know the meaning of the saying “to have hair on your chest”. The teacher asks whether there is anything she can rule out and, in line with what the teacher has told the children about these items, she says that it does not mean to actually have hair on your chest; that is, it does not have anything to do with either hair or the chest. In this way, the children learn testing strategies that are useful for this test item, which involves knowing that sayings do not have a literal meaning, but are metaphors for something else. In this way, the possible correct answers to a multiple-choice test are reduced, improving the likelihood of answering correctly. The children seem to understand this strategy, whereby the number of distractors is reduced (and also, they might learn something about sayings in general). In this way, it is not certain that they have a better understanding of the concrete saying, but they will most likely be more competent to answer this type of test item correctly. After the children had taken the test, the teacher stated that the class has done well in this category.

In the classroom observations above, the teacher writes a saying on the board, and then the children try to guess or answer what it means. The lesson in sayings could be said to simultaneously both imitate and differ from a test context. The imitation of the test context may be identified through the teacher’s questioning of pupils who did not raise their hands, because he wishes to ensure that those who do not have their hands raised also reflect on the sayings. His
reason for doing this is that they will all be tested. The test makes all the pupils testable and asks all the students at the same time, regardless of whether they want to be tested or not (see for instance Kousholt & Hamre 2015 on the pupils as testable). In this way, the teacher imitates the logic of the test and, at the same time, clarifies the demands of a specific item. He uses the test to motivate the children to think about sayings, asking what they are going to do in the test situation when they are confronted with a saying, and he argues that it is important to try. However, it is not only important for the children to try in the actual test situation, but also during the lesson imitating the test context.

Another imitation of the test context is reflected in the fact that the teacher brings together pupils’ answers and then performs a kind of multiple-choice process, crossing out the wrong answers (distractors). In this way, he shows a test strategy that is reminiscent of the process of elimination. The boys’ participation in the teaching situation is also an imitation of the test context. It seems to be more important for them to demonstrate their own cleverness and the correctness of their answers than it is to contribute to the overall knowledge regarding the possible meanings of sayings (this is also evident in other observations in this class, but in particular in the work with sayings). This is seen when some of the children persist in answering “nervous”, irrespective of the fact that this answer has already been given and written on the board. In a test situation, it makes sense that all choose the same test answer if it is the correct answer because testing often operates with one correct answer (multiple choice format). However, this does not contribute to the collected learning processes of the classroom.

To understand learning we have to understand the subjects’ reasons for learning as Holzkamp (2013a) emphasizes. This follows the distinction between conditioning structures and reason structures as presented in the theoretical section above. In crucial areas this teaching cannot be seen as a learning context – at least not expansive learning. Holzkamp (2013a) makes a distinction between defensive learning and expansive learning. Expansive learning is a process that depart from one-sidedness, fixations and narrow goal-directedness (ibid., p. 125; see also Schraube & Marvakis 2016 for interesting discussion). It should be noted that the conceptual pair restrictive/expansive learning should not be used to evaluate other’s learning but as analytical categories that can help gaining knowledge on reasons for learning and not for learning which are connected to the conditions for learning. Following this, the test rehearsal could instead be viewed as an action problem that can be overcome without learning (Holzkamp 2013a). For both the teacher and the children the test rehearsal does not seem to be a meaningful practice of learning but instead as a mean to an end – a
This quotation illustrates very well some of the aspects in the observation above. Both the teacher and the children seem to deal with “extraneous learning demands” (ibid. p. 123) as an action problem; cleverness is practiced as individualized as the individual’s correct/in-correct answers to single items.

On the other hand, this is not the whole story to be told; the children do seem to gain new knowledge on sayings and how to understand sayings and many of them participate in the teaching in an engaged manner. This knowledge and this engagement could be part of new action contexts where the children could follow new learning problems. In such ways, the conceptual pair restrictive/expansive learning can also be seen as fluid, open and moving (see also Schraube & Marvakis 2016, p. 212-213 on this).

In this way, the technology of the test materializes in different ways in the classroom than in the test situation; however, some of the intentions implied by the technology seem to be reproduced by the participants and it becomes a powerful constituent in this classroom.

Following the theoretical discussion above, it can be stated that a test with a multiple-choice design does not impose multiple choices for action. It instead imposes more restricted possibilities of action as it has to do with the children’s relation to a screen and their relation to a set of questions to which they have to tick the right answer. This multiple-choice format is imitated in the classroom, where the sayings are used as examples to teach the children how to correctly answer items on sayings in the test situation. In this way, the technology of testing could seem to impose an either positive or negative washback, depending on one’s perspective, and it could seem as though testing becomes a goal in itself; learning to do the test right. At the same time, the technology of testing as part of a complex practice also offers other possibilities to act, as the next section will show.

**Beyond washback in practice**

This section focuses on how the teaching situation is not only an imitation of a test situation. This is partly because, despite the initiatives to mimic testing, a
sense of community regarding the content of the teaching is constituted in the class during teaching. In the observation above, the community and the meanings of the sayings seem to engage Maria in the lesson in ways the researcher did not observe in lessons with other content (in the following days, where the class continued to work with sayings, Maria was similarly engaged). This engagement is due to the fact that Maria is an expert in this subject, as she has worked with sayings in the school’s language center, where she receives extra instruction. While it can be regarded as a weakness to be in need of extra support in other contexts, in this case it becomes a strength for her.

In the teacher’s explanation of the meanings of sayings, he draws on his knowledge of the children’s lives outside school. He uses one of the boys, who has been winter bathing with his father, as an example. The teacher says that this requires “hair on your chest”. As already mentioned, the empirical material shows that there is a big difference between the apparent levels of engagement in the topic among the girls and boys. The substantial gendered difference in hand raising reflects a special way of being a boy pupil or a girl pupil in this class. The teacher attempted to even out the difference by asking the girls when they raised their hands, and the boys sometimes were not asked even though they raised their hands, thus also constituting a gender differentiation performed by the teacher. In this analysis, gender is not a systematic analytical category, but we can see gender differences in the material. The high level of activity in this class also becomes gendered, active participation, with the boys most visibly active. Powell, Danby, and Farrell (2006) find that girls are competent in covert activities (passing notes discretely) in the class without attracting the teacher’s attention, whereas the boys pass notes and other activities in overt ways. This also gives the boys an opportunity to form relationships with their male teacher (ibid.).

Something similar might be at stake in this material where the boys also are those who seem to have the opportunity to be active in a visible way, forming a connection with their male teacher. In the example the teacher simultaneously draws on his knowledge of one of the boys’ winter bathing, introduces a saying that responds to this knowledge in a respectful and engaged manner and ascribes a certain understanding of masculinity to this form of father-son activity. On the other hand, and due to the materiality of testing where sayings are among the test items, Maria seems to transgress this gendered participation and become more engaged than otherwise observed. The materiality of testing and the teacher’s test rehearsal offers Maria new possibilities of action in this lesson where it is possible for her to become expert on sayings. In relation to this, Schraube & Marvakis (2016) point to that some fluidity between teacher- and pupil positions can be fruitful so that these positions do not become unambiguous and frozen.
The fluidity or movement can be found in small everyday displacements for instance Maria’s new action possibilities as part of the conditions reproduced and created in the test rehearsal context (see also Kousholt 2016a for other examples as part of “expansive assessment”).

In another observation, where the class was also working with sayings, some of the students gradually seem to become so certain of what the topic is about that they experiment with the form. For example, one of the boys says that “to get cold feet” means to cut off one’s feet and put them in the freezer. And then he says that it of course does not mean this. A boy comments on another boy who does something the teacher does not appreciate, saying that he “swims against the tide”. In the latter example, the boy uses the test training to reformulate an action that the teacher did not appreciate as a positive action. To ‘swim against the tide’ has a positive meaning of taking an active and conscious stance against what is commonly accepted as the norm. One could say that he negotiates and transforms the meaning of accepted school participation using the technology of schooling in the sense of differentiation of cleverness. In the first example, the boy does exactly what the teacher tells the pupils not to – to take the sayings at face value. Instead, sayings mean something else that one needs cultural access to understand. The boy knows the two different meanings of the saying and plays with them in a humoristic manner and in this way, it seems that they (momentarily) expand their possibilities to act, developing agency, and that the test rehearsal also becomes something else. Following Willis (2002), one might say that he is doing “split epistemology” as he plays with the sayings double meaning, creating a new and creative meaning of the rehearsal of test items. As Forchhammer (2006, p. 133) suggests: “The subject is seen as a mediating authority who transforms the objective sociohistorical action conditions into subjective meaning and concrete action.” These examples illustrate that there are different ways to participate in test practice and that the children are also in possibility relations to the test, and at the same time that testing is a powerful technology to relate to (e.g. Holzkamp 2013b; Schraube 2013; Kousholt 2016a; 2016b).

In addition to this type of work with sayings, the children also work on a task where they are asked to find sayings, which is actually a task for 4th grade classes. The children work on this task in groups, helping each other both within and among the groups. However, there are also groups that refuse to help other groups because, as one boy states, his group should complete the task faster than the other groups. As they finish the task, a group of girls says that "now the exam papers only need to be submitted." As the examples show, the work on the tasks is characterized by a sense of community and helpfulness, but, at the same time, there are also test-like connotations of differentiation, speed, and individual
cleverness for some of the pupils. There seems to be a duality in the conditions of school- and test practice that the children are participating in, negotiating – trying to make sense of, reproducing and transforming test practice as part of everyday life.

During a recess, the researcher sits with the teacher in the staffroom. The teacher and the researcher talk about the lesson on sayings with a female teacher. The female teacher laughs, saying “totally teaching to the test.” The male teacher blushes and looks embarrassed. He says that he does not think that is true. This exchange shows that some of the teachers distance themselves from “teaching to the test,” and that test rehearsal is not something that they want to be seen as characteristic of their practice. The teacher gives the impression of not intending to "teach to the test,” even though the observations show that there are test-like connotations and imitations in the teaching, partly due to the fact that the content reflects the test’s content, and partly because the form occasionally imitates the test situation. As such, even though this test rehearsal seems to be a free choice of the teacher, this might not be a free choice after all. As stated above the teacher feels a form of test pressure and he wants to prepare his pupils properly for the upcoming test as he feels responsible for them having a good test experience. In this way certain possibilities to act can be difficult to even see and as Holzkamp (2013b, p. 281) states: “[…] the individuals are virtually swimming in a fictitious free space between real walls.” At the same time, there is much more going on than mere test imitation. This diversity indicates that, if the teaching could be categorized as 'washback’, then this is not an unambiguous washback practice. For instance, it is impossible to say if this washback is negative or positive as this depends on the first-person perspectives of the participants and their different positions in the community. When we follow the tests into everyday school life and see their meanings from participants' perspectives, we see that the test sets certain conditions for the participants; however, these are not to be understood as unambiguous ‘teaching to the test’, but also as potentially constitutive of new communities and new ways of becoming a child being able to teach about sayings and developing agency. In this way they can be part of new and other learning processes. At the same time, we see how teaching becomes test-like, not only preparing students for the content of the test, but imitating test practice in several ways.

The materiality of testing consists of the computer it is carried out on, of the content of the items, where sayings are but one content area, and of the multiple-choice format - to mention some. These contents are not directly present in the lessons above, but the generalized meanings of this kind of testing - which could be said to imply that there is only one correct answer as to what the sayings mean, as in the multiple-choice format, and the differentiation of pupils’
individual cleverness, - become constitutive powers in the lessons. In the lesson, the generalized meaning of testing becomes part of other materialities: the whiteboard, the teacher’s pen, the children sitting on chairs at tables etc. The materiality of testing becomes “*dynamic elements* in a continuous flow of activities” (Olesen & Markussen 2006, p. 188) and, even though one should not neglect the power of testing in the rehearsal to testing, it is worth noting that the children respond to the rehearsal on the topic of sayings in different ways. Some play with the topic in humoristic and creative ways, and it becomes possible for a girl to enter a new position as a knowing and contributing pupil.

**After testing: Analysis with a focus on practices of testing and teachers’ constructions of cleverness**

To build an empirical understanding of the meaning of the test that draws on ANT, our analytical attention in the following analysis is focused on the role and responsibility the teachers delegate to the national tests in literacy and on how "calculative spaces” are constructed and "ordering projects" carried out. From the analysis, it appears that the national tests result in an increase in calculative spaces and introduce a number of dilemmas for teachers, which shed light on conditions and opportunities for teachers’ construction of pupil cleverness. These dilemmas relate to the use and validity of different tests and test results and to the validity of formal and informal constructions of cleverness. This analysis highlights that materiality is more than just a thing in the world. As Olesen and Markussen (2006) state, there is more to a thing than its parts and properties; it transcends its parts and properties and its meanings should be found in its contexts in the intermingling between materiality and people acting with it and around it (e.g. Olesen & Markussen 2006, p. 171-173): “Material things are never ‘just material’ […]. Materiality also comprises fictional constructions” (Olesen & Markussen 2006, p. 189). In this respect, the fictitiousness should not be understood as ‘pure invention’, but as part of a construction of a social practice. The analytical question is: How do teachers delegate roles and responsibility to the national test as an actor in regard to the construction of calculative spaces and pupils’ cleverness?

**Construction of calculative spaces**

The network thinking in ANT makes it possible to follow the effect of a test - a non-human actor – in relation to the processes and dynamics in the testing network, in which the construction of cleverness is central. One effect of the
introduction of the national tests was a considerable increase in calculative spaces. When the national tests were introduced, so-called demo-tests, intended to allow students and their teachers to practice prior to the ‘real thing’, were also made accessible to schools and used frequently in the weeks before the national test, hereby constructing a number of new calculative spaces in the everyday life of the school.

The technology of a test, and its materiality, relates not only to the test and the demo-test, but also to a test result. In relation to the national Danish test in literacy, it should be noted that "the teacher must communicate the test result verbally to the pupil," and that the test result "must be printed out and handed out to the parents" (Skolestyrelsen 2010, p. 10). In this way, the test and the test result are delegated power to construct a calculative space in the pupil’s home and to inscribe the parents in the evaluative network. The teachers were also required to comment on and discuss the test result with parents at the compulsory annual school-home conference, hereby constructing other calculative spaces. In a Danish context, an increased number of persons are thus inscribed as actors in an increased number of calculative spaces in relation to the test and its results, and, therefore, test and test results become parts of people's everyday lives to a greater degree than previously, thereby co-producing reality/conditions (Hanson 1993). The national test did not only affect the construction of calculative spaces, but also became an important – but also ambiguous – actor in the construction of pupils’ cleverness.

**Competing constructions of cleverness**

In interviews with teachers, ambivalence emerges in relation to the results of the national literacy tests. In the following excerpts 1 and 2, two examples of this ambivalence are presented. In excerpt 1, the teacher responds to a question about why three different tests have been conducted in the 2nd grade class. In example 2, the teacher answers a question on the differences between informal constructions of cleverness and formal constructions of cleverness (Holm 2015).

Excerpt 1:

Anne: And the result from the national test is not an accurate picture of what she is capable of.
Interviewer: No?
Anne: And I believe that this is not possible in the test. But you can say that, when we have carried out two or three different tests - perhaps you can obtain at least a slightly broader perspective.
Interviewer: Yes.
Anne: That is how it is with the tests. They will be snapshots of the student at that exact point in time, right?

It appears in this example that two ordering projects are at work at the same time: Partly a formal construction of cleverness, which is based on the national tests and other formal test instruments, and partly an informal construction of cleverness, which is based on the teacher's perception of the individual pupil's abilities. The opposition between the formal and informal constructions of cleverness is, however, quite complex. In example 1, it appears that different test tools, in each their own way, may contribute to the construction of cleverness. The basic assumption seems to be that test results may be multiplied, and the more test tools, the broader the perspective on the individual child. At the same time, however, the teacher questions this assumption by using the word “perhaps”, and goes on to talk about the fragmented character of test knowledge by emphasizing that the test tools provide a "snapshot" of the student, and therefore appear as a construction of cleverness with only momentary validity, whereas the teacher's informal construction of cleverness is given more permanent validity and connotes a kind of “sure knowledge”. In the example above, it also seems as though the teachers trust some test results, using them in their informal construction of the pupil’s cleverness. In that respect, teachers’ informal construction of cleverness may be an assemblage of both formal constructions of cleverness and informal constructions of cleverness. The more permanent validity given to the teacher’s informal construction of pupil cleverness is clarified in the excerpt below, where two teachers answer a question about whether they were given cause to question the correctness of the national test results.

Excerpt 2:

Birgitte: So, I have to say that the results of the national test didn’t surprise me.
Anne: And, um, there is, of course, nothing that comes - there is, of course, no great surprise for you, because you know the test, and you know what the pupils can do.

The interviews with the teachers clearly show that two different "ordering projects," in the form of formal and informal constructions of cleverness, exist simultaneously. One is described as a "snapshot" anchored in the test material, and the other as broader and representing the teachers’ knowledge about the student (which may well be partly based on tests). The formulation in excerpt 2 is interesting because it appears to be a strong and indisputable indication of consensus, and a naturalization of the point of view that of course teachers know
their students' levels of academic cleverness. The use of the word "of course" indicates that all interlocutors in the interview are expected to accept the validity of the teachers' informal constructions of the pupils' cleverness. This can be interpreted both as an implicit and a more general critique of tests as representing valid knowledge – “the whole truth” - and as emphasizing the value of their professional judgement as teachers.

The basis for the informal construction of cleverness appears in the teacher interviews to be an assemblage of several factors, including assumptions about which languages and language varieties are central to the individual pupil's everyday life outside school, assessments of the individual pupil's writing, and general observations from everyday life at the school (Holm 2015). Additionally, formal test results are often part of the informal construction of cleverness, if they do not contradict the informal construction of cleverness. What clearly emerges from our material is that there are (at least) two different constructions of cleverness. These differ in terms of what is considered to be relevant knowledge about the individual child for assessing academic cleverness in literacy. It is clearly important to the teachers that they base their constructions of cleverness on their professional knowledge of the individual child. The partial absorption of the national test meanwhile demonstrates not only that the test has changed the network, but also an acceptance of the construction of cleverness in the national test, provided that the test results are in accordance with the teacher’s informal construction of cleverness. In this way, the boundary between the informal and formal constructions of cleverness is permeable, and the understanding of cleverness put forward in the national test has thereby become an important co-actor in the network.

Literacy testing in Danish primary and lower secondary schools has been a system-wide practice for decades. In the first year after the introduction of the compulsory national test, the majority of schools continued to also use the traditional test for literacy. Thus, national tests became a supplement to existing testing practices. The use of several different test formats resulted in a number of cases where a given pupil received divergent results. In the interviews, several teachers told of pupils whose scores are “at” or “over” the age-related norm in the traditional literacy tests, but in the national tests, the same pupils placed “below average”. These categories offer certain possibilities for the teachers’ interpretation of the pupils’ cleverness as something that could be understood related to an average. The inconsistency between the different test results raises the teachers’ criticisms regarding the validity and reliability of the national tests. The national tests are divided into three categories: decoding, comprehension, and language comprehension. Each of these categories is further divided into a number of item types (see above). The teachers' criticisms are directed towards
specific item types; that is, items that test sayings, and items that test students’ knowledge of individual words using visual representations. From the interviews with the teachers, it appears that the teachers' criticisms relate to ideas about the linguistic practices the pupil is part of in their everyday lives. In excerpt 3, the teachers discuss the items that test an understanding of sayings (Holm 2015).

Excerpt 3:

_Birgitte: I don't know what the idea is with these items._
_Anne: I think of it as very cultural. In fact, mono-cultural ... And one might say that it might be fair to require the pupils to understand this at some point. But I think that it is very demanding to expect this of the second grade...._

This excerpt illustrates the reasons for the teachers’ reluctance to ascribe validity to the national tests’ formal construction of cleverness. They are critical towards certain parts of the age-related literacy levels in the test, but their critique is related to the children’s age and not to the test itself. The general construction of the test, and its three categories and various item types are not criticized in this case. This demonstrates that the teachers’ criticism of the test is not an expression of a systematic and ontologically critical stance in relation to testing. They seem to accept basic assumptions about tests, with their criticism focused on concrete challenges they encounter in their everyday practice. The teachers point to a need for tests and items that are more sensitive to the everyday lives of migrant pupils with Danish as a second language during their early years of schooling, but apparently not later. The teachers’ criticisms may therefore be addressed by introducing new or different test types, and test practices can thus be reproduced.

The introduction of the national literacy test in Danish schools in 2009 may be seen as introducing a new ordering project in the testing network, and at the same time as an extension of the formal construction of pupils' level of cleverness in literacy, because the schools continued to use the various literacy testing instruments they used prior to the introduction of the national tests. The new national tests have accentuated teachers’ reflections on validity and have created dilemmas for teachers - partly in relation to varying test results, and partly owing to the interaction between formal and informal constructions of cleverness. Since the national tests in literacy have been made central in relation to the formal construction of pupils' literacy levels, both institutionally and discursively, one effect of the tests is that teachers' informal constructions of cleverness (namely, the part that is also based on everyday knowledge) have been put under strong pressure as a valid and legitimate construction of cleverness. In spite of this pressure, teachers assign most validity to the informal construction
of cleverness in cases where the two constructions of cleverness are not consistent. However, looking at the increase in calculative spaces established to practice the demo-test or to present its results, the national test appears not only to have influenced everyday school life, but also to have inscribed more actors in the testing network by making it compulsory to inform parents and pupils about test results. Thus, the national tests in literacy generally appear as a powerful and influential actor in the network that, through its materiality, creates new practices whose authority is partly accepted and partly questioned.

**Conclusion**

We can conclude that the national tests have created both new and complex calculative spaces and ordering projects. The national tests have become part of the teachers’ constructions of children’s cleverness and of the children’s constructions of cleverness: who is assigned how much cleverness by whom and why? The national tests generate teaching practices imitating test practice aiming at individualized cleverness constructions. In this way all the pupils are made testable. At the same time, pupils and teachers can act in test-like practices in creative and inclusive ways, creating new and attractive positions for some pupils.

The national tests have also created an interesting complexity in the way teachers construct and navigate between formal and informal constructions of cleverness. In addition, the analysis shows that a particular element of the national test in literacy, namely proverbs and sayings, is delegated a special role, and thus becomes a framework for the practice of teaching. The analysis has also shown that the test has become part of how teachers experience their own practice and how they distance themselves from certain definitions of this practice (a “teaching to the test” practice). The analysis shows and discusses how cleverness is at stake in different ways in the material. Even though teachers wish to transcend the narrow measure of testing and the narrowing of their teaching practice as ‘teaching to the test’, they seem, in some respects, to be caught in an individualistic and fixed understanding of cleverness, as well as reproducing test-like elements in their teaching. At the same time, this should not be interpreted unambiguously. The teachers in the material do much more than that; for instance, the teacher in the first analysis also supports the pupils and strives to create inclusive communities through his teaching. However, as Osterkamp (2009) argues, the individualistic approach is convincing. One way to understand this is through the concept of cleverness, which aligns with testing and other educational assessments. One of the tasks of the school is to ascribe students a
certain degree of cleverness, and national testing is but one possible part of this process. This might be one reason why teachers’ criticisms of the test are not an expression of an ontological approach to testing, but instead represent a more reduced critique of the possibility that a specific individual’s cleverness might have been wrongly measured. As such, cleverness is assumed to exist and be measurable, regardless of the suitability of any concrete test to accurately do so. The schools’ more general connection to measures of cleverness – including the teachers’ tasks – might be among the reasons for not challenging the individualistic view of cleverness. Testing could be said to both constitute and become part of ongoing differentiation processes and ongoing understandings of cleverness. The technology of testing becomes part of conditions for understanding cleverness in school.

In writing this article, we have experienced that an interdisciplinary research approach creates a fruitful complexity, generating discussions of the different academic concepts from various scientific traditions, such as communities/networks, actors/participants. We find that critical psychology and ANT have different scientific ontologies, but also many similarities. The similarities include (as previously outlined) the fundamental understanding that human beings create materiality, which, in turn, returns and creates conditions for human beings’ participation (Nissen 2002). In this way, materiality does something and human beings do something with materiality in different and indeterminate ways. A critical psychological view is occupied with how materiality offers different possibilities for action and with understanding this from first-person perspectives. ANT offers the opportunity to view materiality as a non-human actor interacting with human actors. The different ontologies are articulated through different concepts, which we consider it important to use. As a result, this article may sometimes give the impression of different concepts with nearly the same meaning being used in parallel. However, it makes a difference whether people’s situated actions and interactions are termed as “communities” or as “networks”. Where “community” draws on the philosophy-derived concept of praxis, and thereby relates to the understanding of humans’ constant reproduction and transformation of historically developed social conditions, the concept of “networks” focuses on multiple networks that constantly form between human and non-human actors, and on how this contributes to constructions of meaning.

On the basis of our work on this article, we believe that cross-disciplinary research projects, rather than being a scientific bricolage, have the potential to open a window for the development of theories, methods, and concepts. This article does not identify one particular social/social-psychological theory as the primary theoretical framework for understanding meanings of testing, as asked
for by McNamara & Roever (2006). We instead propose a theoretical approach based on theories of everyday life and, through the application and discussion of – in this case - critical psychology and ANT, we have suggested concepts and presented a number of analytical findings related to the meaning of testing; something which is rarely the focus of research on testing. We see this article as an example of a multi-disciplinary research approach to testing, and we believe that other multi-disciplinary research projects that draw on other theories might reveal other meanings of testing in people’s everyday lives.

References


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Decentering professional collaboration: Working with diagnosed children

Anne Morin

Abstract
On the basis of empirical findings from a collaboration of teachers, educational psychologists and psychiatrists, this article questions a centered view of siloed professions, where each part in the collaboration asks the other for resources and knowledge to take back to practice and implement. The articles present empirical analysis grounded in the historical dialectic materialistic approaches of Critical Psychology and Social Practice Theory (Holzkamp 1984, 1998; Dreier 2003, 2008; Lave, 2005). It then discusses profession-centeredness (Edwards 2009; Pecuconis 2009) and shows how it limits both professional judgement and collaboration. With its point of departure in practical collaborative work with diagnosed children, the article identifies the different professionals’ dilemmas and possibilities with regard to inclusionary educational practice.

The data analysis focuses on a specific meeting in a regional Child Psychiatry Centre and highlights how the division of labour between the professionals creates different knowledge paradigms that influence both their understanding of the problem and their proposed solutions. The article adopts Anne Edwards’s suggestion of decentering individual expertise in professional collaboration (Edwards 2009) to suggest new ways of working with structure relevance (Morin 2015) in collaborative work with diagnosed children.

Keywords
diagnosis, educational psychology consultation, intervention, professionalism, collaboration.
Introduction

In Denmark, as in most other countries in the Western world, children live their lives across different institutionalized participation and learning contexts. Many different professionals with different knowledge and tasks work together in the different participation and learning trajectories arranged for children in schools (Højholt 2011; Andenæs & Haavind 2016). Traditionally, these different developmental and learning contexts are separated and a division of labour characterizes professional work with children. In a historical perspective, throughout the last century, a process of specialization and differentiation has taken place that led to an expanded range of professionals with different competencies who work in the areas of childcare and schooling. Pedagogues, teachers, psychologists, special education teachers, and speech therapists (among other professions) work together, yet with differing approaches in terms of knowledge, competencies, and tasks (Edwards 2009). In Denmark, new legislation has led to the inclusion of more children with severe difficulties in the general educational environment (Kristensen, 2013). Currently, the traditional separation between different contexts and professions are challenged and changes are taking place in the general school arrangements. However, when difficulties occur in the lives of children, the conventional response is still to call for different kinds of professional specialists to intervene. The work on inclusion of diagnosed children in school is arranged in the form of collaborations between many different professionals, each handling different tasks with regard to referrals and interventions designed to support the child. Both divisions and connections characterize collaboration between these professionals. For instance, general education teachers are involved primarily in classroom teaching, while educational psychologists generally are based in an office. Their primary task is to assist when there is any concern for a child. However, when a child is being diagnosed, the different professionals involved collaborate across these divisions, each handling tasks that complement each other to a smaller or larger extent. The different professional contexts can be seen as both structurally divided and structurally connected in different ways. This article provides both a practical and a theoretical discussion of professional collaborations by focusing on the way in which the professionals engage in the collaboration based on their differing professional knowledge and perspectives. Two main approaches to collaboration are presented: a profession-centered approach and a decentered profession approach. The profession-centered approach is characterized by firm divisions between tasks, where each participant has a primary task and contributes only to a limited part of the solution to the problem [Problemlösung]. In this kind of collaboration, the individual professional is only responsible for
his or her own specific contribution to the solution and the collaboration is characterized by individual tasks and parallel processes (Ofstedal & Dahlberg 2009). A decentered profession approach, on the other hand, recognizes that different professionals contribute different input and perspectives. At the same time, however, a decentered profession approach aims to transcend the individual tasks and understandings, which leads to new common understandings and common solutions. New knowledge is thus developed through the collaboration between the different professionals, which leads to new insights without losing the contributions of each individual profession (Hansen 2014). The articles analyzes practical collaborative work with diagnosed children with a focus on the different contributions, knowledge and perspectives of the different professionals. Then, dilemmas and possibilities inherent in the collaboration are discussed with regard to educational practice and the work on inclusion.

Study context

The empirical point of departure is data from a case that was part of a Danish collaborative practice research project. In collaborative practice-based research, local agents develop insights and actions based on knowledge directly from their own practice. As in other kinds of action research, there is often a goal of changing and improving practice in social systems, although this does not have to be the case. Practice research in the Danish-German tradition (Mørch & Hunniche 2006), which forms the methodological basis of this case work, often begins with discussions between researchers and practitioners. While it does not have to result in an intervention or action agenda, the common goal is to bridge the traditional split between research and practice. Rather than being a fixed method, practice-based research can be seen as evolving from certain ways of organising research (Højholt 2005). For example, to understand a child with difficulties in school, we have to look at the child’s participation in the specific context of schooling and at the specific organisation of learning in which the child participates.

In the Danish-German tradition, practice research, as a dialectical theoretical understanding of how persons live and develop in the world, has had important methodological implications, which can be seen, for instance, in the development of the notion of collaboration with co-researchers. Organising research processes in close collaboration with practice constitutes an attempt to bridge the traditional gap between research and practice. The organisation of research processes to involve co-researchers makes it possible to anchor insight from the research process in practice. The research in this project was conducted
in two different schools located in a suburb of Copenhagen and in the regional Centre for Child Psychiatry. The empirical data resulted from interviews with professionals, parents and children, from observations of classrooms, meetings in the educational psychological counselling centre, and meetings in the regional child psychiatric centre. The empirical data focuses on a total of four cases, in which children involved in referral processes were followed from the initial concern about the child to the initiation of various kinds of interventions. Participants were selected according to several criteria of relevance. The selection of focus children was accomplished in cooperation with educational psychologists to identify children who were either already involved in a referral process in the Child Psychiatric Centre, or who were about to be enrolled in a referral process. Another criterion for selection was that the teachers, parents and children gave their consent and were interested in collaboration. The primary criterion for the selection of professionals was that they were professionally related to the focus children. The collaborative practice research project and the empirical fieldwork started in January 2013 and are still ongoing. The research reported on in this article was conducted at a school with 410 students ranging from preschool to 9th grade.

**Psychological test knowledge and everyday practice of teaching**

When professionals collaborate on inclusion, the decision whether students are “normal” or “special” is a practical question that occurs in schools every day (Mehan 1996). This practical task is influenced by institutional, economic and educational dimensions, where different professionals must collaborate and negotiate the best possible solution for the children involved. As mentioned above, many professionals are involved in this process, usually the child’s teacher, psychologists, psychiatrists, special needs educators, and the parents. In his work, Mehan questions which practices produce deviance or normality (Mehan 1996). In the process of defining children’s needs, certain professional positions hold more power than others and the acquisition of power is connected to a certain professional language and vocabulary (Thomas & Luxley 2001; Mehan 1996). Traditionally, in research as well as in practice, diagnostic psychological testing and the situated practice of teaching have been divided and conducted in separated research traditions and fields. The diagnostic tradition involves different kinds of individual cognitive testing that is conducted in an experimental test situation, where different symptoms are linked with each other. Eventually, certain combinations of symptoms can be labelled as a specific disease or a pattern of illness and hence provide an explanation for a child’s
difficulties. Analogies to the natural sciences, medicine, and physics influence the traditional biomedical classification system on which the diagnostic framework builds, in that it focuses on individual somatic symptoms and deficits with little or no focus on the context and everyday life of the person who is being diagnosed (Cohen 2000; Kecmanovic 2011; Benning 2015). The biomedical classification system and the diagnostic framework have been described as *categorical* because, in this framework, the understanding of the problem in question is reduced to considering individual characteristics such as personality, intelligence or family patterns (Emmanuelsen et al. 2001). The categorical framework thus has a biological orientation and an intrapsychic focus, which it typically combines with an understanding of the problem that centers on aspects of dysfunction in childhood. This is also reflected in the clinical language that dominates this framework, which is related to a research tradition concerned with developing tests that aim at compensatory intervention.

In contrast to this tradition, the situated educational approach takes as its starting point a contextual understanding that focuses on the person’s participation. In this view, the person is seen *in relation to something* because he/she is participating in and across different social practices. The interpretation of actions, development and learning is thus anchored in a specific context. As Dreier points out, the concept of participation insists that we see the subject as always already involved in social practice (1997). Subjects are “[.] not free-floating agents located nowhere in particular or above ongoing social practice in some ideational mediation with the community, the culture, or the society” (p. 104). This approach argues that analysis must conceptualize individual subjectivity through its ongoing participation in structures of social practice to be able to grasp the variety of psychological phenomena as personal aspects of the structures of social practice of which they are part (Dreier 1997). Therefore, analyzing children’s participation in school practice must reflect this variability and multiplicity in the explanations of children’s situations and everyday life.

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1 The concept of *everyday life* refers to the life that is lived every day, including all kinds of activities and all kinds of contexts of participation (Borg 2003). In relation to this project, this translates into a focus not only on what is traditionally seen as schooling and teaching proper, but also on an awareness of all the ‘stuff’ that goes on.
and in the specific problem-solving strategies employed, rather than merely locating the problem inside the child.

When trying to understand what is at stake in children’s developmental and learning trajectories, the contextual conditions in the school setting must be reflected. As Mehan puts it, “People with learning disabilities, educational handicaps, and mild retardation are most often identified in school. However, once such children leave school, many will never be identified in these ways again”. He concludes, “If children are handicapped only in school, then it is possible to say that the school itself creates or generates handicaps” (Mehan 1996, p.161). From this point of view, what is deviant will first appear in the face of a specific practice; thus, specific structures of participation and deviance and the need for special education or special resources must be seen in relation to that. In other words, certain kinds of practices, educational routines and procedures create and set the limits for what is normal and what is not. This point will be further developed later in this article.

**Person, activity, professional knowledge**

The theoretical framework of analysis in this article is anchored in a historical dialectic materialistic approach (Holzkamp 1984, 1998; Dreier 2003, 2008). In this framework, there is a theoretical endeavor to understand and conceptualize the dynamic relation between an active person and his or her participation in the social world (Højholt 2016). This dynamic relation unfolds in the concept of social practice, where knowledge is seen as developing through participation in and across different social practices. A theory of social practice that emphasizes the dynamic relation between person and world, activity, meaning, knowing and learning (Lave 2005) is part of a long tradition. A historical dialectic materialistic approach builds on a critique of a dualistic approach that reduces persons to their minds and learning to the acquisition of knowledge (ibid.). For the context of professional collaboration, the question of knowledge becomes central: due to a division of labour, persons have different possibilities of access to the knowledge that guides their professional actions. In this article, the generation of knowledge is viewed as taking place in dialectic interplay of production and reproduction, which unfolds between the person and the world. Knowledge can thus be seen as socially mediated and contextually situated and, therefore, in a flux of movement, rather than as fixed and static. The person is understood in relation to concrete contexts of social practice; the relationship between the person and the social practice is mediated through the person’s active participation in and across outside of it.
different contexts of social practice. There is an important relation between participation, action and knowledge: persons are located in social practice; they are anchored in social space and time (Dreier 2003). The subjective perspective is always from a specific location. Furthermore, locations are part of particular contexts of action that, in different and particular ways, are related to societal structures of social practice. The contexts of action are differentiated settings in social practice and may be of more or less permanence and of a more or less institutionalized character. The contexts of action are produced, reproduced or changed in an intimate interplay with the persons participating here. The contexts of action will always be characterized by specific action possibilities and limitations that lead to a certain kind of disposal with regard to the specific context of action. As mentioned above, each person participates in the context of action located in specific ways. From this location, certain positions are available. As Dreier writes: “A set of possible, more or less clearly interrelated positions may belong to an existing social context of action. To varying degrees, participants may select among them, neglect, and change them” (Dreier 2003, p. 15). The personal locations and positions also contain particular structures of relevance and meaning for the person. Specific locations and positions include specific possibilities, limitations and disposal for the person and mediate what the person experiences as relevant and meaningful. From their specific locations and positions, persons have different scopes of action possibilities, possible ways of contributions and interest at stake. The person’s perspective on what is relevant and meaningful to pursue in local action contexts is thus situated and influenced by structural conditions. In the sections that follow, this theoretical framework is linked to a discussion of profession-centeredness versus a view of decentered profession through the analysis of data from a collaboration about a diagnosed child.

**Personal locations and professional knowledge**

A theory of social practice emphasizes the dynamic relation between person, world, activity, meaning, knowing and learning. Since specific locations and positions include specific possibilities, limitations and disposal, persons have different possibilities of access to knowledge from each specific location and position. Professionals in collaborations are differently located in social practice, which also means that they inhabit different positions. For instance, they carry out different tasks vis-à-vis the children. Since they are located in different positions, different professionals also have different access to the children, which, in turn, means that their knowledge about the children will also differ.
The professionals’ perspectives, interests, tasks and knowledge of a child are mediated through their personally located participation in action contexts. Hence, their professional knowledge and view of the child, the kind of problem and possible solution or intervention may vary a great deal, since their professional judgment is made from a certain location and position with specific, often limited, access to knowledge about the child. Lave describes this situational variation as to what constitutes a problem in the procedures used in institutional practice and in the distribution of knowledge among people and settings and, consequently, in approaches to problem solving among the same people (Lave 1985). In line with this, Cole and Engeström reflect on the distributed character of knowledge that both leads to diversity and potentially functions as an opportunity for additional resources, which then make the activity system capable of combining different viewpoints and skills in the handling of complex problems (Cole & Engeström 1993). Due to the locally positioned, distributed character of professional work, there is a certain situational specificity in collaborative professional social practices, where different professionals meet and exchange their views and knowledge about both the difficulties and about possible solutions to the problem. In the following analysis of a specific case—against the backdrop this theoretical framework—I show the possibilities and challenges connected with collaborative practice.

**Professional collaboration about Thomas**

Thomas is a 5th grade student whose school life, from the start, has been full of conflicts with other children in his classes, especially other boys. Per his parents’ request and because of concerns formulated by Thomas’ teachers, Thomas is now enrolled in the regional Child Psychiatry Centre for further examination. From a teacher’s perspective, Thomas’ difficulties are being described as difficulties relating socially to classmates and as a tendency to have fits of anger. Over the past two years, the educational psychologist and the teachers have worked with Thomas on anger management, but difficulties persist.

In the regional Child Psychiatry Centre, Thomas has been to a general screening; following the screening, a meeting was scheduled during the researcher’s observation period that was supposed to lead to a recommendation about further interventions for Thomas’ school life. Present at the meeting was a psychologist from the Child Psychiatry Centre, the educational psychologist, Thomas’ two main teachers, and Thomas’ mother and father. After a longer statement about the test results, the psychologist was about to conclude the meeting with a recommendation. The following is a transcription from the
conversation that took place at the meeting. This specific part of the meeting was chosen because it exemplifies certain dilemmas between the different professional perspectives on Thomas’ case, which are, in turn, based in the different professionals’ different kinds of access to knowledge.

Psychologist: All in all, the algorithm points to difficulties on the autism spectrum.
Teacher: But it must surely be on the mild end?
Psychologist: Yes.
Psychologist: But we have tested mentalizing and in the tasks which demands abstract thinking, he is very concrete. He chooses a concrete solution and you show him a complex figure to draw ... he is not able to do that. He is very careful.
Teacher: Perhaps his art teacher told him this is the way to draw sketches.
Psychologist: Yes, but he spends 8 minutes and it is on the high end. In addition, his scores are not as good as they should be for his age. Lines are missing, he places the tip wrong.
Father: Oh my, I´m happy this is not my job (laughs).
Psychologist: (laughs) Yes, there are many parents who say the same. Finally, when he has tried out to draw the figure three times it works better but this indicates that he has decoding problems.
Teacher: I do not think he has difficulty decoding in Danish.
Father: No, he reads at a high-level language.
Mother: But he cannot see it in mathematics when working with mirror lines in math.
Father: Yes, and he also has problems in sport he walks into people.
Psychologist: Yes, it may be important in relation to how to interpret other people's motives and movements if I may say so.
Psychologist: He has also completed a questionnaire: in relation to self-esteem - he lies low, two standards beneath normal self-esteem and in relation to anxiety there is a moderate increase. The same in relation to the depression scale moderately increase. Concerning anger: he is very much above average. It is a bit like: "The world is against me."
Teacher: But the world is against him. The other children get upset with him and he gets angry and then there is a conflict.
Mother: It is because he wants to put everything into boxes and then if there is someone who will change the boxes he cannot figure it out.
Psychologist: Concerning the category norm-breaking behavior: normal so that is good.
Father: It can also mean the opposite - without norm-breaking behavior we would still be in the Stone Age.
Psychologist: Overall, we discussed it in our conference and it means that Thomas will have the diagnoses: Asperger and other mental disorders.
Psychologist: But there have been developments - this does not mean that he cannot - more that he needs help / guidance. So, the Asperger diagnosis he gets, because it is clear in the WISC test. ...
Psychologist: What we would recommend is to consider changing schools.
Teacher: Why should he change schools? He is a good guy to have in the class.
Psychologist: Due to his anger. It indicates that he is challenged beyond his abilities.

Different forms of knowledge

In this case, a professional disagreement occurs at the meeting about whether a change of school setting is right for Thomas or not. This disagreement seems to be rooted in different forms of knowledge in the inter-professional dialogue (Rasmussen 2001) and due to the professionals’ differing locations. The psychologist poses some absolutes about Thomas’ development based on what the test has shown. The teachers and parents contribute observations related to Thomas’ concrete school life, which we could call knowledge based on everyday life observations. The parents and teachers contribute by contextualizing the discussion of Thomas’ difficulties and in several aspects; their observations do not seem to support what the test has shown. For instance, when the psychologist mentions that Thomas’ “anger” is very much above average, the teacher contextualizes the isolated category of anger from her professional location and position by bringing knowledge of the class context into the discussion, stating, “But the world is against him. The other children get upset with him and he gets angry and then there is a conflict”. Our observation reveals how two forms of knowledge are in play here: the absolute and decontextualized test knowledge, on the one hand, and the everyday life knowledge based on practical observations, on the other. In other words, because the different professional locations and positions contribute different kinds of knowledge, Thomas’ difficulties and potentials are also described and understood differently depending on which of these situated and located forms of knowledge comes into play. The difference in the kinds of knowledge brought into the professional discussion has great importance for the decisions that are being made. The psychologist concludes that Thomas gets the diagnoses ‘Asperger and other mental disorders’ and recommends a change of school setting to a special school. However, the teacher is puzzled about this recommendation, asking, “Why consider changing schools? He is a good guy to have in class”.

The professional disagreement is contingent on the different ways these professionals are located in social practice, which causes their views and
judgements of Thomas’ possibilities and challenges in terms of development and learning to differ. The different views are interesting in themselves, but, at the same time, they point to a more general question about the bases on which decisions about Thomas’ further developmental and learning trajectories are made. One point of concern is not so much the disagreement *per se*, but the fact that the procedures of a psychiatric practice, e.g. the tests that are used as the main source of information about the child, depend on a cognitive and individualized paradigm. When the teachers or the parents comment on the psychologist’s conclusions with knowledge about Thomas’ everyday life, other kinds of knowledge *are* taken into consideration, but this kind of knowledge is brought into the discussion without the same scientific base and systematics. This discrepancy points to a primarily profession-centered approach in the collaboration, which means that each participant contributes knowledge from their specific position, but without there being any systematic efforts made to transcend the individual tasks and understandings in order to build shared understandings and solutions.

The psychiatric data suggest that Thomas should change schools, but the teachers do not agree. A professional disagreement is one thing, but where is the parents’ perspective? After the meeting, the parents reflected in an interview on their perspective on the meeting and the psychologist’s recommendation. Thomas’ father said,

Father: Well, I found it very strange that the professionals recommended a change of school. That was what they suggested as a solution to this. But when they suggested this, we thought but Thomas is in good hands with his teachers and that might be very difficult to find some other place. …The difference is that the teachers are looking at the whole class while the psychiatrists are looking at the single individual. This, of course, has to do with their different education cause the teachers also thinks: Thomas can make a contribution to the class.

Thomas’ father seems to experience confusion about the differing professional opinions on Thomas’ further school life that were presented by the teachers and the psychologist, respectively. He mentions the different knowledge backgrounds teachers and psychiatry have for making their recommendations. This suggests a discussion about the character of the professional collaboration and the knowledge base on which professional decisions are made. It also suggests a certain hierarchy between the different kinds of knowledge, specifically an institutional hierarchy in the division of labour between psychiatric knowledge and the teachers’ situated knowledge (Røn Larsen 2012a, 2012b). As the case shows, in the professional collaboration, the different persons have only very
little, if any, access to each other’s different knowledge, when they are deciding on Thomas’ further school trajectory. This indicates that the professionals approach the problem with a profession-centered stance, where the psychiatric view is centered on the test results and the teacher view is situated in the classroom. If different professional perspectives are not, or only sporadically, linked and discussed, meaning and relevance can become unclear. Conflicts and confusion can arise in the collaboration and, ultimately, influence the educational recommendations about continued inclusion or a change in setting to a special school.

**Conclusion**

My overall intention with this article has been to discuss, based on a dialectic theoretical framework, professional collaboration around school interventions for diagnosed children. The article questions a profession-centered approach and shows how it may restrict and limit both the collaboration and the decision-making process. In the collaboration, professionals have different scopes of action possibilities, different possible ways of contributing and different interest at stake, each from a specific location and position. A person’s perspective on what is relevant and meaningful to pursue in local action contexts is situated and influenced by different locations and points of access. Because of the locally positioned, distributed character of professional work, there is a certain situational specificity in collaborative professional social practices, where different parties meet and exchange their views and knowledge about difficulties and possible solutions to problems. As the case shows, in the concrete collaborative practice about diagnosed children, these different locations, positions and perspectives about difficulties in school may lead to disputes over what to accentuate and generalize to suggest possible solutions. This is due to the siloed aspect of each profession – the profession-centeredness -, which originates in the division of labour. Dreier argues that this profession-centeredness restricts and counteracts what he calls the necessary ‘decentering’ of professional practice (Dreier 2003). As we saw in the case of Thomas. difficulties in expanding profession-centeredness lead to a loss of meaning and relevance. This confusion was expressed both by the teachers and by Thomas’ father, who ends up being very torn with regard to the suggestion that Thomas should change schools. Edwards underscores the point that it is important that collaborating professionals have access to each other’s different motives, values and standpoints. Otherwise, the negotiations and discussions about a child’s potential, development and learning possibilities “…are likely to become formulaic rather
than responsive and fluid” (Edwards 2009, p. 38). Edwards further emphasizes the importance of focusing the work such that the resources other professionals bring can be part of the process and she advocates for a decentering of individual expertise (Edwards 2009). One possible path to decentering and expanding individual expertise might be to work more systematically with participants’ ‘structures of relevance’ (Morin 2015. The concept of structures of relevance refers to the point that, because of the locally positioned, distributed character of professional work, there is a certain situational specificity to what different professionals in collaborative professional practice experience as relevant for doing their job in a meaningful way. What is experienced as relevant is directly linked to the institutional structures of possibilities and limitations, which differ depending on each professional localization and position. Working with structures of relevance is therefore a way to bring out the different conditions for each group of professionals as part of the collaboration, thereby illuminating the differences in tasks, positions, interests, possibilities and limitations. This could be a way to gain access to the values, motives and standpoints of the other professionals in the collaboration, which then frame and contextualize the collaboration itself. In the case of Thomas, the different professionals met and exchanged information with each other only very late in the process. There could be other ways of organizing the collaboration between school and psychiatry. For instance, the meeting could be scheduled earlier in the process to discuss the data from the test results and other kinds of knowledge, such as situated everyday knowledge about the child. This way, all participants in the collaboration could make space for different professional perspectives and different kinds of knowledge about the child. Such an approach might also include a discussion of different kinds of intervention possibilities as a basis for a shared professional recommendation for intervention. From this perspective, everyday situated knowledge must be seen as an important part of working with the structures of relevance because they are experienced by different persons in the collaboration. Hopefully, such an approach will lead to a process in which all parties are recognised as equal contributors in a positioned cooperation.

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Riding the tiger: An empirical investigation of subjective courses of action in dealing with the contradictions of teaching-learning situations

Helmut Ittner

Abstract
Research on teaching-learning-processes at schools often focuses either on the student's performance or the teacher's personality, knowledge, competences, or proficiency. There is no overarching theory which links both sides of the process. The concrete studies often follow the idea that students' results can be produced or influenced by the teacher's pedagogical actions, and try to prove cause-effect-relations by a quantitative empirical investigation. In some of these research projects statistically confirmed results are found without contradictions to other surveys' outcomes. However, high degrees of variance remain, and findings of these studies merely highlight correlations so that it is not possible to prove unequivocally what is the cause and what the effect.

Keywords
subjective courses of action, contradictions, teaching-learning

Using Holzkamp’s Kritische Psychologie (1985) [Critical Psychology] and his learning-theory (1995), supplemented by findings of professionalism (Helsper, 2004), teaching-learning-situations can be modelled by a homogeneous theoretical concept as a metastable asymmetric arrangement between teachers and learners regarding the requirements of the participants' interpretations. Pedagogical action can thus be seen as grounded in conditions, meanings, and reasons in a zone of tension resulting from societal contradictions, the
institutionalization of education, and the antinomies of pedagogical relations concretely represented in a specific teaching-learning-situation.

Acting in these situations requires positioning\(^1\) by the subjects concerning the concrete requirements, conditions, and interests and about the patterns of meanings which are available to a subject with a particular social position, biography, and personal situation. This way the empirical research must discover the particular variety and subjective reinterpretation of the social patterns of meanings to understand the grounds of a specific kind of pedagogical action. This aims as well at a contribution to a subject-science model of teaching.

This article will explicate the theoretical considerations and methodological approach. It will describe some results from empirical research on the actions of teachers at vocational schools in Germany, and it will discuss what this means for the possibility for using Kritische Psychologie for concrete research and exploring theoretical views on teaching.

**Research on teachers' grounds\(^2\) for pedagogical actions**

What causes teachers to act in a certain way in (institutional) teaching-learning situations? With regard to research on teachers' professional activities, it is noticeable that this question is dealt with in a specific way. Teaching or even achievement results of students are recorded as a result of pedagogical knowledge that can be operationalized or as an effect of measurable competencies or as correlating to certain personality traits (Terhart, 2011). Most of the research based on this follows a conditionality paradigm: if there is specific knowledge, competence or personality, this leads to a kind of instruction that is considered to be best for an optimal learning outcome.

This presupposes a certainty that, given the complexity of the political, administrative and institutional circumstances and in the light of constantly changing education policy objectives, the normative guidelines and didactic concepts of the last 50 years appear more than questionable (Reich, 1977). However, this also ignores the social contradictions in an educational system committed to the best possible support of each pupil as to a selection of achievements and opportunities for social participation (Berger and Kahlert,

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1 The term ‘Positionierung’ has no direct equivalent in English. If in the following text 'positioning' is used, this refers to the possibility but also necessity for the subject to behave to different contradictory requirements and associated meanings.

2 Using the term ‘grounds for action’ (Handlungsgründe) refers to the explanation that Tolman (1994) gives: “Grounds for action derive from our assessments, both emotional and cognitive, of our environments and of the possibilities for action that they offer” (p. 110). Grounds are not necessarily conscious or rational.
2005, Gomolla and Radtke, 2009). And last but not least, the teachers in question are not accorded an independent and meaningful access to the circumstances, including their own resources (Knauer, 2006), and it is precisely the pupils who perceive the differences that are significant for teaching (Bohnsack, 2013); as a rule they do not encounter statistically average teachers.

Critical Psychology, with its understanding of the merits of the actions of societal subjects (Ebner von Eschenbach et al., 2014), offers an alternative approach in principle, but – although well founded in theory and based on the categorical provisions of human action under concrete societal circumstances – for a concrete version of the professional action of teachers a new trail must first be blazed (Haug, 2013). Although the book on learning (Holzkamp, 1995) provides a single-theoretical concretization which also provides important clues for the description of teaching-learning situations, the actions of teachers and their grounds related to situations with specific peculiarities are not substantiated in the principal works of Critical Psychology. Apart from a few exceptions (e.g., Ludwig and Schmidt-Wenzel, 2018; Schepers, 2014; Ludwig and Rihm, 2013; Häcker, 1999; and Rihm, 2006), there are hardly any attempts to make up for this and to use it as a basis for actual empirical work.

This article first presents the theoretical considerations used as a starting point for a study of the grounds for teachers' actions in vocational schools in Germany. Subsequently, the survey and evaluation procedures will be discussed. This is followed by a rather cursory review of the results of the evaluations, with a view ultimately to the question of what insights can be gathered overall for critical psychological research or a possible return of critical psychological research into teachers' actions. Even if the concrete work is linked to the context of school, it is finally also discussed which general conclusions can be drawn for research on pedagogical action.

**Theoretical frame of reference**

With his theory of learning, Holzkamp (1995) argues that initially intentional learning should be understood independently of (institutional) teaching-learning situations. Or, formulated from the point of view of the learning subject, I use an expansive learning loop to work through the breakdowns available to me of an action situation in which a problem has emerged which seems to me to be solvable with the help of an extension of my understanding of self and world (See p. 183ff.). It is about a transformation of the meanings (see Holzkamp 1985,
pp. 230ff.), which, in the versions valid for me, initially provide no satisfactory options for action. Only through a changed ensemble of meanings – according to my assumption – would there be options for dealing with the problem and my ability to act would broaden.

There are many arguments to be made for calling such transformations ‘education processes’, provided education is understood to be a cognitive and social process of making sense of self and the world (Marotzki, 1999; Ludwig, 2016).

Defensive learning situations, on the other hand, have no relation to issues with learning arising from the learning subject's life and world, but represent a problem introduced by the exercise of power. Subsequently, this compels the subject to acquire (and often also to verify the acquisition of) prescribed meanings (in a prescribed way). A refusal of this acquisition of prescribed meanings runs the risk of losing the (relative) capacity to act (Holzkamp 1995, pp. 187ff.). A classic example is the situation in school, in which the given curriculum contents are the normative measuring stick for learning requirements, irrespective of whether the learning subjects have an interest in exploring their life-world-related actions by means of these knowledge contents.

While a concept of learning has been developed which has far-reaching consequences for the understanding of teaching-learning situations, there are few implications for acting as a teaching subject. Teaching takes place with reference to meanings in the same way any action does. These meanings are understood as social possibilities for action to which the acting subject can respond. From the point of view of the acting subject, they can attempt to secure their own relative ability to act and expand it to a generalized ability to act (Holzkamp, 1985, pp. 375ff.). However, concrete action can only partially overcome the restrictions imposed by the power relationships; one's possibilities for action are narrowed as are those of others – in the case of teaching action, those of the learners. At the same time, there is always a shared perspective with others to overcome the limitations of one's options for action as well as those of others.

Teaching-learning events are highly complex. Therefore, describing an individual, expansive learning process and identifying the hindrance to the process characterized by institutionalized disciplinary power is not sufficient, since the social aspects of the learning process are neglected, as well as the

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3 In the following, reinterpreted meanings are used for clarification, but it can nevertheless be said that meanings are always interpretations and that the subject grasps meanings by modifying them and making them their own without being able to deny their sociality.

4 More precisely, it is about a change to a generalized ability to act, which goes hand in hand with an extended comprehension of the sociability of the premises of action (see Holzkamp, 1985, pp. 371f.).
ambiguity associated with every mediational issue. A course on Critical Psychology, for example, would stand in the tradition of emancipatory education and it must be possible to understand a related pedagogical act differently than merely as restrictive and as a limitation of learning opportunities (Haug, 2013). With all remaining restrictions, which cannot be eradicated even in social-critical theories, there is always the perspective of an expansion of the understanding of self and the world shared by the common general interests of the teacher and the learner.

Considering continuing education and adult education, a series of papers exists which attempt to provide a theoretical version of a model of pedagogical action based on Critical Psychology. This model is suitable for supporting expansive learning processes (Faulstich and Ludwig, 2008; an overview can be found in Faulstich, 2014). It can be used as a starting point for appropriate considerations for the school, for which there are almost no comparable efforts (Hackl, 2008; Rihm, 2011).

A prerequisite for cooperative teaching-learning processes is, therefore, an understanding of the learning interests of the learners by the teachers and the offering of alternative horizons of meaning, which are suitable to support the learners in their efforts to extend their meaning horizons (Ludwig, 2008, p 50ff.). References of learners and teachers to the objective or social side of the teaching-learning situation (which also includes the operational aspects of learning) are in each case different as a result of different life situations, positions, and biographies (which is just one reason to learn in teaching-learning situations). Nevertheless, it can also succeed in identifying similarities in these references from which the offering can be made. Teachers and students have to understand each other at least partly in terms of learning interests and possible developmental offerings; otherwise, the difference becomes insurmountable, whatever happens. The prerequisite is recognition or appreciation of concerns, intentions, and reinterpreted meanings relating to one's life world (Ludwig, 2000, pp. 213ff.; see also Honneth, 1992).

For the school, this understanding needs to be broadened to give an idea of the specific structural specificity of this institution. Here one can refer to structural, theoretical work (Oevermann, 1996; Helsper, 2004, 2008), in which there are contradictory requirements in teaching-learning situations (specifically antinomies), which are not resolved by the teachers into one pole but in each pedagogical relationship action is characterized by one pole or the other (see Helsper, 2004, pp. 61f.). However, the limitations of the current state (school as a disciplinary institution – Foucault, 1976, 2004) and future participation (by means of selection) and their mechanisms are also to be taken into account.
Thus, a constellation can be assumed in which teachers ground their actions by relying on knowledge or their competences in a manner influenced by their biographies and their conditions and positions as well as the historical-social situation (Günther and Ludwig, 2014), such that a meaningful action that is appropriate to the situational, contradictory requirements becomes possible. Of empirical interest is the way in which this happens, which societal interpretive structures are used and whether, and to what extent there are potentials for recognition, appreciation and mutual understanding in the context of grounds and meaningfulness.

Methods

Regarding the methodology, meaning-grounds analyses have been used in the research process which this article is based on (Ittner, 2017). For this purpose, adequate survey and evaluation methods were developed for the object of the study by ascertaining the level of subject-scientific methodology, and checking that it was suitable for the project. In particular, there was a lack of precise descriptions of evaluation methods for research based on Critical Psychology. At the same time, the impression emerged that certain premises for meaning-grounds analyses had to be questioned (Ittner, 2016).

In the final analysis, experimental procedures were based on research from the standpoint of the subject. The research from the standpoint of the subject reported elsewhere (e.g., Markard, 2010) suggests that this point of view can be achieved in a research process that is minimally influenced by the interests and respective standpoints of the researchers. Although the standpoint of the subjects to which research is directed must be an indispensable orientation for any subject-scientific research, it necessarily remains how far a cooperative research process may go with different standpoints. The research process will thus always be only a movement towards subjective standpoints. A generalized subject standpoint is unavailable because of the involvement of all in the contradictoriness and thus partial unavailability of social structures of meaning (Holzkamp, 1985); instead, only approximations are possible.

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5. If we speak here of meaning-grounds relationships, then their connection with the conditions interpreted as premises is also taken into consideration, but in the end, they also open up to the subject through meanings.
Investigated Cases

Case studies and reflections resulting from a research project on the use of elements of a quality management system to support student learning processes were used as empirical material (Ittner and Zurwehme, 2014). In a continuing education research setting, teachers were asked to reflect on their own actions with the help of casework (Müller, 2003) in a small group of colleagues. The results of a first evaluation of the statements by the researchers were offered in a second meeting for a deeper reflection on the cases. The transcribed records of the two meetings form the empirical material for the research described here (Ittner, 2017). From the available resources, the records were used which provided the descriptions and explanations of the teachers; moreover, only cases were evaluated in which the teachers also participated in the second meeting. Thus, a total of 11 cases could be evaluated.

The participants were teachers from five different vocational in Germany. They answered question about the classroom situation in the classes of part-time vocational schools in which the teachers experienced atmospheres of irritation, action problems, or indistinct negative vibes.

Evaluation procedures

The meaning-grounds analyses developed in the evaluation process refer to methods and principles of the documentary method (Bohnsack, 2003, 2013; Nohl, 2013) as well as situation analysis (Clarke & Keller, 2012). Because of the sociality of the reinterpreted meanings, a principle intersubjective comprehensibility can (also) be assumed that is the precondition for the reconstruction of the meaningfulness of the action of the respective subjects. At the same time, there is always a lack of understanding because of the particular biographies or the differences in the circumstances and positions of the subjects involved. Moreover, the acting subjects are only partially aware of meaning-grounds relationships; therefore reconstructions are always limited in scope (Ittner, 2016).

The primary objective of empirical reconstruction is positioning. Positioning in this context is defined as thematically delimited meaning-grounds relationships in the context of demand structures that are contradictory in themselves or that present themselves as unresolvable tensions. In contrast to situational meaning-grounds relationships, positioning is taken as situation-overlapping meaning-constitutions. It represents possibilities to meet specific (subjectively perceived) conditions of the demand structure in such a way that
one's own actions can be consistently founded. By means of the thematic mapping, positioning of different subjects can be compared.

Regardless of the difficulties in differentiating from other uses of terms (especially in the context of business models), **positioning** is used for three reasons: It expresses the intentionality of the subjects, it points towards the necessity of finding or rejecting specific societal opportunities for action, and it refers to certain societal structures of meaning (a similar definition of terms can be found in Melter, 2006, p. 287ff.).

In the process of reconstruction, it is first of all necessary to grasp the meaningfulness of the arguments cited by the respondents; this roughly corresponds to the step of formulating interpretation in the documentary method (e.g., Bohnsack, 2013, pp. 15ff). In a first comparative analysis, thematic aspects are then worked out, which show significance regarding the argumentation. The topics of the arguments are assigned to the statements, and their content is compared and evaluated with regard to validations (argumentative) grounds and explanations; this corresponds approximately to the sort of location-differentiated analysis as well as the reflective interpretation of the documentary method (see above). However, the key question is not how the statements are constructed, but rather what choice is made from a possible (and conceivable) range of appraisals, grounds, and explanations.

Still thematically related, but abstractly conceptualized, this results in a first version of the positioning. The different references to the statements and the positioning must be taken into account. While the former should refer to the survey situation and serve as explanations, justifications or evaluations of the former action in respect to a former action situation in the sociological context of the survey in the positioning, those meaning-grounds-connections can be found that came into play in the action situation itself; But this can only succeed if all positioning is situation-overlapping.

The point of view of the researcher flows into this, as for example with the question of possibilities that are conceivable beyond the range that becomes visible in the empirical material – possibly in the form of a reference to a theory – and does not leave the result of the interpretation process uninfluenced. Therefore, it is indispensable to identify the introduced theoretical models and the points of view of the researchers. In the project already mentioned above as a combination of research and further training, the researchers provided structure and theory to the participants, which appeared to be helpful in a first analysis of the case histories. In the reflection phase, the participants had the opportunity to take this up and to use it in their own ways, which seemed to them to open up their own experience.
In the further evaluation procedure, a systematization of the positioning takes place via categories, so that they can be presented as a structured spectrum. A validation of this spectrum is carried out successively by a retrospective application to the interpretations of the cases processed in the first step. The spectrum thus obtained can be understood as a concretized possibility space of meaning structures and meanings-grounds contexts, which can be attributed to the object of research – in this case, the constitutive meaning of educational action by teachers of vocational schools. Teachers of vocational schools typically refer to it as illustrated meaning structures. At the same time, the spectrum makes it possible to gain insights into the structural conditions of the subject of research - in this case, for example, concerning those power structures that are inscribed in vocational schools and discourage current and future participation of students.

In the validation by reference of the gained categories to the individual cases, the positionings in the interpretations of individual cases are exposed at the same time by recognizing for the individual case characteristic meaning-grounds relationships as thematically accentuated concretisations of the categories. The positioning that has become relevant in individual cases is different from another possible positioning. This provides a basis for deriving meaning-grounds patterns. These can be understood as a plausible sense-making background of the action and at the same time illustrates in their differentiated representation of the (comprehensible) overall structure of the positioning the peculiarities of the respective situational pattern.

**Results**

According to the methodological considerations, results occur on two levels: Firstly, on a cross-case level and secondly, a spectrum of positioning possibilities gradually emerges. As a result, there is a continual expansion, and concomitant compression to apply the already determined positioning possibilities and the resulting abstractly derived categories to the individual empirical evaluations.

In the spectrum, the situation overlapping possibilities and limitations of the focused field of action (for the study presented here: teaching at part-time vocational schools) are represented as they represent themselves for the actors.\(^6\) Thus, similarities and differences are manifested, and it is possible to formulate provisional hypotheses on sense-making features of the field as empirically detectable options.

\(^6\)This corresponds to the premises as formulated by Holzkamp, 1995, and Markard, (2014), respectively.
At the same time, the evaluations of the case descriptions on meaning-grounds patterns can be specified (on a case-by-case basis). These patterns should not be understood as descriptions of features or characteristics of acting people. On the one hand, because they are bound to concrete action situations, and on the other hand, because the subjects always have the opportunity to act substantially differently in comparable situations.

The categories of the spectrum of positioning possibilities show a wide range of aspects of the meaning composition, as they act as grounds for pedagogical actions at vocational schools. For example, there are categories such as 'Producibility of Exam Success,' 'Success restraining Characteristics of Students,' 'Social Class Community' or 'Performance Evaluation.' Particularly noteworthy, however, are categories assigned to either the upper category "power relation" or the upper category "pedagogical relationship" and play a dominant role overall across all meaning-grounds patterns. However, these categories also show that they are essential for the differences in the grounds of the patterns of individual cases.

As already mentioned, there is always the possibility of introducing a theoretical model into the underlying evaluation method if it serves to break down the obtained results further or to condense these into essential features. For the latter, the conceptual understanding of 'power of interpretation' according to Stoellger (2014) and of 'instrumental relationships' according to Holzkamp (1985) were used. In an application of these considerations to the determined results of the analysis of the positioning possibilities, two theoretical building blocks were revealed as essential dimensions of an understanding development: the bundle of characteristics called 'power of interpretation' and that of the 'instrumental pedagogical relationship'.

The power of interpretation is understood as the ability or intention to enforce structures of meaning in relation to the objective teaching-learning subject or the socio-operative teaching-learning situation as a valid interpretation relative to other possible interpretations. In the patterns analyzed, there are differences with respect to the question of which validity claim these interpretations support: starting with an absolute claim aimed at enforcing the interpretation in any case, through a variant that accepts the limited possibilities of enforcing this interpretation, to a variant that allows others (the students) situationally valid interpretations.

Instrumental pedagogical relationships involve the absence of an interest-based reference on the part of either the teacher or the learner to a teaching-learning subject. Instead, the pedagogical relationships are constituted by the unspecific aspects of an interpersonal co-existence in the consciousness that this
can always be connected with an assertion of one's interests against those of others and thus with a constant latent mutual mistrust.

The evaluated material showed three different forms of interpretive power and also three manifestations of the instrumental pedagogical relationship, of which seven variants are composed, as shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forms of the Power of Interpretation</th>
<th>Forms of the instrumental educational relationship</th>
<th>Power of interpretation as absolute</th>
<th>Acceptance of the fragility of interpretive power</th>
<th>Acceptance of the legitimacy of questioning interpretive power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structural imprint of educational relations</td>
<td>Variant 1a</td>
<td>Variant 2a</td>
<td>Variant 3a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-specific, general-human character of educational relationships</td>
<td>Variant 1b</td>
<td>Variant 2b</td>
<td>Variant 3b</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaping pedagogical relationships through instrumental relationships of the teacher to external ones</td>
<td>Variant 1c&lt;sup&gt;7&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Variants as forms of interpretive power and instrumental pedagogical relationships

<sup>7</sup> Variants 2c and 3c do not occur in the empirical material. The special constellation of variant 1c, however, also results from the combination of the power of interpretation as an absolute claim and the view of a supposed need to make the pedagogical relationships dependent on relationships with external parties. However, whether a variant 2c or 3c could become empirically recognizable must remain an open question.
If the power of interpretation is seen as an absolute requirement for one's professional ability, then in practice a constant effort is made to (re) establish the applicability of the interpretations introduced by the teacher in the face of insufficient acceptance by the students. In variant 1a, this lack of acceptance is seen as structurally (for example, by the school system or the concrete institution) conditioned in variant 1b as being due to general-human shortcomings (for example laziness). In variant 1c, the absolute claim against students also applies, but it assumes a necessary adaptation of the interpretations to the patterns of meaning of those who are outside the immediate teaching-learning relationship (such as school management, colleagues, training companies, etc.). A lack of openness accompanies all three variants to divergent interpretations by the students.

In variants 2, on the other hand, the power of interpretation is seen as fundamentally fragile, without - as in variants 3 - the students being granted a legitimate claim to the validity of their own interpretations.

Specifically, the power of interpretation refers to contentual, social or operational aspects of the teaching-learning situation. It may happen that, for example, with regard to operational aspects, the students are granted the legitimate introduction of their own meaning patterns, but at the same time they are denied access to content or social aspects.

The pedagogical relationships are in principle instrumental, as there are at best selective references to the teaching-learning subject, and a cooperative extension of the breakdown of topics is the exception. The rule, on the other hand, for both teachers and students, is distanced-pragmatic efforts to meet the requirements of action formally. For students, this tends to be associated with defensive (as opposed to expansive) learning⁸, while teachers tend to have a restrictive (as opposed to a generalized) ability to act⁹ (Handlungsfähigkeit). Concrete conclusions about possible relationships, for example between a restrictive ability to act of teachers and defensive learning, cannot, however, be derived from the empirical investigation.

In the sense-making grounds patterns, in part, just one of the variants is shown; in some cases, however, a change of the variants is also visible. That means that these patterns represent less the positionings or the meaning-grounds patterns' static properties of the teachers than the fluctuating efforts to cope with concrete dynamic action situations.

However, the patterns also reveal a structural condition of a field of action in a respective situation-specific concretization. This is characterized through contradictory requirements, a struggle to assert the validity of one's own patterns

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of meaning by the teacher against lack of acceptance on the part of the students, and by negative sensitivities and the knowledge of the non-cooperative action of others in instrumental relationships. This leads to arrangements between teachers and students, which are also asymmetric because a shift from the power of interpretation to explicit exercise of power is legitimized only for teachers. At the same time, they are metastable, because the contradictory nature of the requirements but also the arbitrariness, linked to the non-cooperative references to teaching-learning objects, are always accompanied by the fact that interests and concerns are not taken into account.

Teachers, but also students, fit into the presumed circumstances of the school and try to get along and get on well with each other. As long as the social happenings in school remain reasonably within the framework of expectations and learning, with appropriate effort, can proceed defensively with what is presented by the teachers as content, all too often students are satisfied. They do not worry that their interests and concerns in the subject matter are as little met as with offerings that encourage learning of an extended understanding of oneself and the world. This is more likely than the achievability of attainable school graduation (or training certificate) that at least partially meets one’s expectations. Teachers are too often satisfied with this, as long as it is possible to live up to the image of a well-ordered lesson, and that in performance assessments replicating the prescribed teaching material on a class scale is reasonably satisfactory. The arrangements are threatened, for example, by resistance on the part of the students to what they consider to be unreasonable social events, disappointments that give way in the absence of opportunities to participate or frustrations in the face of unsustainable defensive learning of requirements. Lack of (temporal and organizational) opportunities to turn to individual students, curriculum requirements, which are unrealistic from the point of view of teachers, and cannot be made relevant to the lives of students in their diversity and ability are all frustrating to teachers.

Thus the action of the teachers is like trying to restrain the recalcitrance of situational circumstances at least, even if taming is not possible; it is like riding a tiger.

The power of interpretation is always linked to a restrictive expression of the ability to act (Handlungsfähigkeit). The limitations of social participation and the limits of possibilities for development contained in the meanings congeal over the factual validity claim. The acting teacher harms himself and others by rejecting a questioning of social meaning structures. The fragility of acceptance (as it accumulates in about three cases to a massive denial of learning on the part of individual students or open opposition to the power of the teacher) is experienced in combination with negative sensitivities and the desire to see the
escalated situation get back into control again. Possibly, the teacher tries to discipline the disturbing student by (explicit) institutional exercise of power. To the extent that one fails to see through the social restrictions of participation involved in the meanings, the teacher ascribes himself and his individual actions to a refusal of acceptance. Discourses about the competence or knowledge of teachers in connection with a model-based producibility of desired teaching-learning situations or learning outcomes favor as societal sense-making structures this persistence in the tendency to the restrictive ability to act (Handlungsfähigkeit): If the teachers were competent and had a sufficient pedagogical, technical or methodical knowledge, they would encounter acceptance among the students for their power of interpretation. Only a reference to individual inadequacies of the pupils can then save the teacher from such a meaningful failure as a teacher.\(^\text{10}\)

As well as the somewhat restrictive ability to act (Handlungsfähigkeit) of teachers can be understood that it is just as difficult to understand a determination of a generalized ability to act. A tendency to do so can only come with common general interests of the teacher and students. In a pedagogical context, these can only relate to an extended development of teaching-learning objects and the associated meaning structures concerning the associated restrictions of participation, mystifications or reductions. Here, then, it can come to fruition, as described by Rihm (2011), with initiative and resonance. Thematically, the concrete school-based teaching-learning situation itself or a technical subject matter can become an issue, in which, for students and the teacher, evidence of other ways of social participation become apparent (as an example a debate about culturally or religiously shaped worldviews could come into question). However, any questioning can only come from the point of view of the subject, so that a joint effort to penetrate the restricted meaning structures is only possible if the teacher has at least situational and subject-related authorization of the pupils to reject the validity of the teacher's interpretations.

For the evaluated meaning-grounds patterns, an inherent plausibility was sought with regard to the suitability of the patterns of meaning for specific metastable asymmetric arrangements, i.e., the question of their functionality was raised. This also served to validate the identified patterns, whereby certain inconsistencies, such that an in-principle functionality could by no means be precluded. In addition, it was asked whether there were starting points for understanding or appreciation of students’ contributions in the patterns and whether there are potentials for a revision of the pattern. Examples of such

\(^\text{10}\) If teachers refuse an inclusive school that will do justice to each pupil, but at the same time meet the requirements for selection and opportunity allocation, then this becomes all too understandable against this background.
patterns are an "explanatory-paternalistic course-keeping" (Ittner, 2017, p. 232ff.) with the variant 1a (absolute claim on interpretation and structural characterization of the relations), a "restrictively narrow-minded balancing" (p. 227ff.) with a change between the variants 1b (absolute power of interpretation and general-human relations) and 2a (acceptance of the fragility and structural character of the relations) or a "directive-personalizing practice" (p. 199ff.) with the variant 1b (absolute claim on interpretation and the general-human character of relations).

Particularly in the case of the patterns in which variants 1 dominate (absolute claim to interpretation), but in part also when variants 2 (acceptance of fragility) predominate, there is no or only a limited potential for a revision within the survey setting. This is different from the patterns in which the variant 3 (legitimacy of a questioning) occurs; there it comes to acting out of alternative meaning-grounds contexts within the framework of the meeting reflections. The same applies to the question of potential for understanding the concerns and interests of the students. Following theoretical modeling, the understanding potential, depending on the nature of the view of the instrumental pedagogical relationship, is more likely to be structural (variant a) than human (variant b).

In part, the patterns of variants b show references to a view of the sociability of institutional restrictions. However, the example of a sample with variant 3b also makes it clear that a fundamental concession to a relativity of the validity of the teacher's interpretations by students does not necessarily have to be linked to meanings that refer to this sociability: This pattern ("opening-controlling maneuvering" - p. 213ff.) is also functional without this reference being required. This makes it clear once again that the patterns cannot be understood as descriptions of a property of the pertinent teacher: A statement whether a pattern of meaning is in principle available to the teacher that contains such a reference is not possible; it does not occur in the analyzed material.

In this way, only a few cursory results are to be presented, which can be derived from the analysed patterns. Visible are the possibilities that such an analysis brings with it; But also the restrictions become clear. This will be taken up below.\footnote{A detailed description of the range of positioning options and the established meaning-grounds patterns can be found in Ittner, 2017.}

**Discussion**

More crucial than the question of how far the interests of the researcher determine the research process is that it should be the aim of research on the
subject's point of view to generate knowledge that is not knowledge of control but developmental knowledge. Control knowledge presents facts as alleged average relationships, is based on norms or normality, and serves to change conditions from an external point of view (structural) in such a way that it leads to a desired behavior of individuals. In contrast, developmental knowledge provides an overview of possible interpretive horizons in which connections of grounds with meanings or premises are revealed. Such a knowledge can be used by a subject to question one's actions, by contrasting and broadening or deepening one's meaning-grounds relationships with the possibilities offered. A consequent change of perspectives lies exclusively in the hands of the subject and is in turn influenced by the circumstance and position of the subject and his/her biography.

In particular, research from the standpoint of the subject should focus on determining the variety of possible meaning-grounds relationships, with reference to specific action situations in a defined realm of action and their differentiation with regard to possibilities and grounds based on meanings. In the research process, therefore, it is necessary to try to move from the external point of view with an objective research interest to the standpoint of the subjects involved. This can only succeed if the research process is designed to generate developmental knowledge, since this - if appropriate - is suitable for serving the interests of the participants in the results of the research process, assuming that these results lend themselves to making possible for participants a broadening of the understanding of the Research topic. In turn, a transparency of the position of the researchers is necessary to enable the participants to classify the interpretations offered by the researchers; otherwise, there is an increased risk that the research process and research results will be subordinated to the researchers' power of interpretation.

However, a further and therefore desirable participation of the teachers on the basis of finally evaluated results could not be done in the present research, as more than two years elapsed between the data collection and conducting the evaluations. The resulting limitations must be considered when interpreting the results.

It is also necessary to question the dependency of the results on the focus on practical problems in the data collection. The research setting in the training framework was chosen, on the one hand, because it was expected that the participants would show an interest in an extended analysis of the meaningfulness of their pedagogical activities. On the other hand, there was the expectation that due to the lack of clarity and uncertainties of the teaching-learning situation, there would be indications of positioning in the form of arguments, evaluations or explanations. Both expectations proved to be realistic
in the survey process or the evaluation procedures, in so far as the participants (albeit to varying degrees) referred to the interim evaluations and used them for extended reflection of the described cases, or expressions with the hoped-for characteristics were found in the material.

It can now be argued that when one focuses on action problems, different positionings come into play rather than (from the point of view of the teacher) teaching actions occurring unproblematically. This can be countered by the fact that due to the conflicting requirements (but also the antinomies of educational action) pedagogical teaching-learning situations are basically latently problematic and the positionings that are suitable to ensure a temporarily stable handling of these constellations manifest themselves in routines in which the problems and the positionings are no longer explicit (see also van Manen, 2008). Situations in which there are problems of action on the part of the teachers would be understood as those in which existing problems would become explicit, and subsequent references to related positionings could also be made explicit.

If the term positioning is used in the method of meaning-grounds analysis as presented here, then this use of the term may seem ambiguous; however, regardless of what might be a more appropriate term, it must be clarified for subject-scientific empirical work how one deals with the situation-boundedness of meaning-grounds relationships. This becomes a problem whenever the survey situation is not parallel to the action situation, when it comes to comparisons with the goal of generalization, or if processes such as learning or education are to be understood longitudinally. For these cases, it is necessary to determine the links between meanings and the preferred grounds for action (positionings); these are, however, meaning-grounds contexts specified in terms of thematic aspects and situation overlapping relevance, and this should also be reflected conceptually.

One of the shortcomings of the approach presented here is that it does not reveal how the differences in the meaning-grounds patterns relate to the biographies or the concrete life circumstances and positions of the participants. For this purpose, supplementary thematization of biography would be necessary; whether the framework of collegial casework is suitable or whether additional biographical interviews are appropriate would have to be determined. It should, however, be borne in mind that there may be at least potentially a common interest in the institution-related case-working group with regard to overcoming the problems arising from institution-specific teaching-learning situations, and in whether partial common interests with the researchers are possible with regard to further development of situations through theoretical models or theory-based
feedback. This becomes less likely when it comes to interests that are aimed at an extended development of individual biographies or life-situations.\footnote{In this respect, potential collective interests might be more likely, for example, if caseworking were to take place in a group of fixed-term teachers, or if trainee teachers were to come together who were considering taking up permanent employment.}

Returning to the question of the appropriateness and possible yield of the empirical procedure presented here for analysis of grounds for pedagogical action, it has been shown that meaning-grounds analyses serve to generate a developmental knowledge. This may serve to enrich the processes of reflection on one's own pedagogical action with alternative horizons of meaning. However, further studies are needed in order to clarify and expand the range of positioning possibilities, and in order to strengthen the identified theoretical components of 'power of interpretation' and 'instrumental pedagogical relationship'. Further investigations would also allow for the development of an extended pool of possible meaning-grounds-patterns to offer as options. In the context of such studies, previously obtained results could then be incorporated into the research process, thus providing the participants with a much more in-depth offer with regard to the development of their own strategies for problem areas.

In principle, there is nothing to argue against the transferability of the gained theoretical components to teaching-learning situations, for example in adult education, if there are comparable constellations with regard to institutional involvement and participation (direct or indirect type, such as in arranged qualification measures). The extent to which the theoretical building blocks 'power of interpretation' and 'instrumental pedagogical relationship' would also have analytical value as viable key categories in other teaching-learning situations should be clarified through further empirical work.

It should be clear that a subject-scientific theory of teaching can by no means be deduced from the present findings. Not for nothing do we speak of theoretical building blocks. In particular, it would be necessary to review the validity of these building blocks and to identify others (such as the aspect of the dynamics of interactions between all participants in the teaching-learning situation, or the question of the relation to actions of other teachers). This would then be embedded in a framework which, with the help of reinterpretations of non-subject-scientific theories of teaching or social interaction (as exemplified in the present work with the model of the power of interpretation), can comprehensively explain teaching actions or acting as a teacher.
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Specific resistance to learning by course instructors

Claudia Schepers

Abstract
The following article highlights results from an empirical analysis that examines learning processes and resistance to learning by course instructors. The first section of the article presents the basic elements of the empirical analysis. At the same time, Holzkamp’s theory of learning will be explained. As a partial result of the empirical analysis, the second part of the article will illustrate two examples of resistance to learning and indicate plausible reasons. Finally, the article will explain why the resistance to learning is specific to course instructors.

Keywords
Learning, resistance to learning, professional development in further education, learning of course instructors

1. When course instructors learn: structure and content of the empirical analysis

This article examines selected results of a completed dissertation (see Schepers 2014). Resistance to learning by course instructors in professional development courses is investigated. What types of resistance to learning by course instructors (on professional development courses) can occur? What are the structures and aspects typical of the profession that play a role with regard to resistance to learning? These questions lie at the heart of the study. In this context, learning is understood as a vital component of the professional development of course instructors, as training is considered “a part of the strategy to foster professionalism” (Tippelt/von Hippel 2007, p. 120). The condition is that learning does actually take place in personal development courses.
Therefore, the first chapter of the study described here categorises the issue regarding research conducted on the profession. Terms such as professions, professionalisation and professionalism are briefly defined first (these are listed in detail in the first section of the study). To achieve a further rapprochement vis à vis professionalism, the profession-theory approaches taken by Schütze (1996), Oevermann (1996) and Stichweh (1996) are illustrated. Secondly, aspects such as “knowledge”, “interaction and communication between clients and professionals”, “reflection”, “client autonomy” and the “working alliance” are extracted from these approaches and categorised as relevant to defining professionalism. The aspects relevant to professionalism for course instructors as a profession are then categorised. It becomes clear that previous research on the professionalism of course instructors tended to refer to individual categories, such as for example personal concepts of education (see Kade 1989) and professional self-perception (see Hof 1999 and Schepers 2014, p. 34 cf.). The focus above all is placed on the professional self-perception of course instructors, in other words, the question of how course instructors see their professional mission (see Kade 1989; Bastian 1997; Hof 1999/2001; Fuchs 2004; Harmeier 2009). The question of assessing individual categories with regard to professionalism will be looked at again in the final section and discussed critically as it relates to individual professionalism development (see Schepers 2014, pp. 186 and 205).

In order to highlight learning as a core element of the development of professionalism, it is vital to grapple with a suitable theory of learning. The theoretical foundation is based on Klaus Holzkamp’s theory of learning from the standpoint of the subject (1995). This is where the concept of resistance to learning stems from, which is described as a “contradictory mixture of learning and refusing to learn” (Holzkamp 1995, p. 193). Subjects who resist learning do not do so due to any defensive motivation, but because obstructive effects of learning are not fully reflected on. As a result, they become stuck in a learning process and perceive this entanglement itself as obstructive. Section 2 describes how accurately the resistance to learning described here manifested itself in the underlying study.

The methodological procedure follows one of qualitative research design. A qualitative form of research design was chosen because the research is from the standpoint of the subject and (resistant) learning processes are the focus. To generate data, six qualitative interviews were linked with a process of participatory observation. The participatory observation process (see Friebertshäuser/Panagiotopoulou 2010) was carried out during paid educational leave when eight course instructors learnt about “People and their behaviour in the group”. By triangulating the data from the interviews and from the
observation, it was possible to process the very narrow research field in more depth. The data analysis is based on the grounded theory (see Strauss/Corbin 1996) and relates to three axes of analysis: resistance to learning by the course instructors, their professional self-perception and the participants’ inclinations in the course analysed. Consequently, the resistance to learning discussed in this article stems from the first analysis axis, which is shown in Figure 1 with all categories.

The following section will explain the basics of Holzkamp’s theory of learning in order to better classify and understand the selected results on the specific resistance to learning by course instructors.

2. Learning and resistance to learning

As the founder of critical psychology, Klaus Holzkamp (1995) created a theory of learning which focuses on learning from the standpoint of the subject and the subject’s reasons. Learning is considered an action for which subjective reasons exist and is therefore detached from the idea that learning is only possible when content is actually taught. In particular, Holzkamp stresses that learning allows us to broaden our options in terms of the experiences we have and the life we lead. He developed the concepts of “defensive” and “expansive learning” to create clearer definitions of why people learn (see Holzkamp 1995, p. 190 cf).

The concept of “resistance to learning” is firmly rooted in this theory of learning (see Holzkamp 1987). Holzkamp focuses on an ambivalence between learning processes with positive connotations, as well as negative experiences with learning. Learning processes as tools to broaden horizons and create subjective development are called “expansive learning” (ibid: 190). Learning that has to be carried out using disciplinary means and institutes has a compulsory nature. This is what is called “defensive learning” (ibid, p. 191). “Defensive learning” is all about “preventing an imminent loss of quality of life by the powers that be by learning” (ibid, p. 192). Learning is continued until the threat has been averted. In this type of area of conflict, the objects of, processes involved with, and access to learning can be subjected to various hierarchical interests. The reason is that initially no reflection is allowed during which the people learning could develop resistance (ibid, p. 6). As a result, the learning process is impaired and the subject area not (fully) grasped (see Holzkamp 1987, p. 6 cf.).

Typical of Holzkamp’s concept of resistance is that it is not active resistance forced by the subject that is assumed, but that resistance itself inhibits the subject and reflection on the part of the subject is obstructed initially.
What could be the reasons for resistance to learning? With regard to the freedoms of “defensive” and “expansive” learning processes, reasons and the importance of learning are what count (see Faulstich 2006, p. 22). Reasons for learning, or not learning, can also be the result of structures immanent to the system. If the subject perceives certain structures by the institutional organisation, the learning set-up or their own biographical background as obstructive, these could turn into reasons for resistance to learning (ibid, p. 19). Resistance to learning can also be associated with the subject area and its relevance, for example to people’s jobs. Subject areas are also embedded in certain structures and can therefore lead to conflicts of interest on the part of the subject (see Grotlüschen 2006, p. 77 cf.). If the subject area places demands that run contrary to the interest of the person concerned, resistance can arise (same source).

The following section will illustrate two cases of resistance to learning which are specific to course instructors in the sample group examined. On the one hand, the examples show how the course instructors were entangled in their learning process and on the other plausible reasoning structures are indicated which highlight the characteristics of resistance to learning.

2.1 Resistance to learning by course instructors: selected results

Various cases of resistance to learning were found in the underlying data (see below). Verbal examples of resistance to learning from the interviews were extracted and described, as well as examples that materialised while observing those taking part in paid educational leave. With regard to resistance that emerged in the interviews, a differentiation must be made between resistance the interviewees reported directly and resistance that was identified verbally as a consequence of being nervous in the interview situation. This second category of resistance was identified in the analysis of the interviews.

The underlying reasoning structures are always relevant to resistance to learning because they provide an explanation of the character of the resistance and possible ways of surmounting it. The following figure 1 shows the first “resistance to learning” analysis axis with all the categories stated. In addition to the cases of resistance to learning, this analysis axis also examines the underlying reasons and ways in which it appears.

The “Involvement in the learning process: defensive learning” is the main category which, as the theoretical anchor, combines Holzkamp’s “contradictory mixture of learning and refusing to learn” (Holzkamp 1995, p. 193).

The second category contains different resistance phenomena (see Schepers 2014, p. 126). The third category “Learning despite resistance” is different. It
indicates that despite resistance to learning, learning can be achieved (ibid p. 131). And finally, particular attention is paid to the category of a “potential reasoning structure” (ibid, p. 133).

The following section will focus on sub-categories belonging to the first category, namely “The link between expansively motivated learning and defensive learning conditions” and “Learning by chance” as specific resistance to learning by course instructors (see Schepers 2014, p. 120 cf. and 123 cf). These two types of resistance were defined through verbal comments in the interviews.

![Figure 1: Initial analysis axis of the empirical analysis](image)

**2.1.1 The link between expansive learning and defensive learning conditions**

The following case of resistance to learning was taken from the interview material. In this case, an interviewee describes a confrontation between her and the seminar director. In parallel with the course under paid educational leave, the interviewee developed her own seminar concept that she wanted to discuss with the seminar director. In the interview, she comments as follows:

“On the penultimate day I gave him my plan of what I would be doing the next week and he started to scribble on it. I realised that on the one hand I wanted him to look at it and hear what he said. And on the other hand, I thought it was odd that he was scribbling on it and telling me how to go about it (she laughs). I didn’t like that at all”. (IP 4)
In this example, the contradictory nature of the action taken by the person learning is clearly shown: The interviewee shows a seminar concept she has developed herself to the seminar director in order to gain feedback. The feedback involves the seminar director scribbling around in the seminar concept. This makes the interviewee feel uncomfortable. At the same time, it should be mentioned that this type of resistance to learning was not apparent in the situation itself. Merely the comment by the interviewee makes clear that in the learning processes she experiences a “contradictory mix of learning and refusal to learn” (Holzkamp 1995, p. 193): On the one hand, she wants feedback because she needs it to overcome her own personal problems with learning. On the other hand, she says that she “doesn’t like” the feedback.

Why does she feel so uneasy? A possible explanation could be the way that feedback is given here: The course instructor is not asked why the concept was drawn up in this way, but is shown that she was apparently wrong in some places. The way in which people giving seminars provide feedback to the students is definitely important. If the feedback is giving with good intentions and is worded more in the form of an offer than a sanction, people learning benefit more from it. They retain control over their actions because they can decide whether to accept or reject the feedback (see Grotlüschen 2003, p. 296). In another quote, the interviewee even says that this type of feedback does not really help her much.

“... I won’t do it like he suggests anyway. Why is he scribbling around on it and wanting me to do it like he does? After all I’ve already accepted and incorporated these things now already. (IP 4)

The interviewee obviously finds herself in a situation that isn’t adequately transparent for her. She does have the expansive learning desire to develop her own seminar concept based on new things she has learnt during the paid educational leave course. However, she feels that she needs the “success of what has been learnt” (creating the concept) verified by a control body (the director of the seminar) – a pattern of taking action based on defensive reasons (see Holzkamp 1995, p. 192). She does say that she “doesn’t want to do it like he does”, but she still turns to him and admits that she has “absorbed and integrated these things as far as possible”. Holzkamp says that the conflict between “expansive learning” and “defensive learning conditions” indicates forms of resistance to learning (see also same source p. 193).

In order to contain the above-mentioned resistance to learning in terms of its reasoning logic, further quotes from the same interviewee are used to show why the subject resisted learning. However, this is not the only reasoning structure possible, but a plausible one, which was drawn from the interview
material. Holzkamp believes that types of resistance to learning occur “when I’m not aware of the defensive character of learning, in other words the pressure to learn placed on me by external sources” (ibid). The following comment shows that interviewee was aware of the defensive learning conditions while she was learning.

“You had a few critical questions and if you hadn’t asked them I would have perhaps have done so, although I was aware that my own seminar was only a week away and the lecturer is virtually my boss. And that was not such an easy situation as if it had been someone from outside where you can ask more critical questions. So I thought, ‘Ok you want to leave a good impression here, so be prepared to accept what he’s saying.’” (IP 4)

The interviewee explains that the seminar director of the paid leave course is her own boss. Consequently, she is in an extremely defensive learning situation. She is aware of this fact, but was not able to fully predict the impact on her own learning process while the course was taking place. The presence of her boss, or learning from her own boss, automatically creates an area of conflict in which learning by the interviewee takes place. The comments show that a) certain learning processes are not given high priority, in other words, critical questions are not asked, or not initiated in the first place and b) that resistant learning processes took place.

The interview that these comments come from was conducted two weeks after the course took place. So, at the time the interview was conducted, the interviewee had already had time to reflect on what had happened. The interviewee did know before and during the course that she would have to “learn from her own boss”. However, during the process she was still unaware that the magnitude of these learning conditions would impair her own learning process, or the ability to develop her own expansive learning objectives. Therefore, in this case, there is a very specific contradictory structure of learning conditions, which the interviewee was also unable to resolve on her own.

2.1.2 Overcoming own problems with the help of a context defined by another party: incidental learning?

The following comment reveals the “contradictory mixture of learning and refusal to learn” (Holzkamp 1995, p. 193) through the language used in the interview (see Schepers 2014, p. 123 cf.). The interview that these comments are taken from was conducted during the course held as part of training leave, in other words directly after a seminar meeting. This could be one reason why personal learning processes, or the action taken in the seminar, are not reflected
on adequately. Therefore, it means that the subject does not yet know whether new skills have been obtained, or in other words whether learning has taken place, or whether the goal can be achieved through this learning loop. The following quote is taken from an interview in which the interviewee talks about what he thinks is particularly important in this course and what he would like to learn. He comments as follows:

“So the cases I illustrated here were what I call my hard-core cases, the two cases that I solved to some extent.” (IP1)

The interviewee seems to be seeking some kind of guidance: On the one hand, he was able to illustrate two cases from his day-to-day working life, which delivered the reasons for him wanting to learn. He describes them as hard-core cases and would like to tackle them in the seminar. The fact that he says he “solved them to some extent” also indicates that the problems have not yet actually been fully solved, in other words, that the subject area has not yet been fully grasped (see Holzkamp 1995, p. 218). The potential subject area is part of a social context and is determined by the subject, but only certain dimensions of it can be learnt by the subject (ibid). So, to what extent are the dimensions and the subject area themselves generated independently by the subject undergoing the learning process? The paid training leave did include practical examples from the course instructors, but the solution of the problems was provided by outside sources, in other words third parties. Therefore, the reason for learning regarding this type of problem is initially a hard-core case from the person’s own professional life. The interviewee presents the case to the seminar because he recognises a certain problem that he would like to deal with. But it is no longer up to the interviewee to exclude a (potential) subject area: the problems he has presented independently are deliberately placed in a context defined by third parties. The following comments emphasises this:

“As I said, if I can contribute a problem myself, which is also a coincidence, I’m not sure if it’s appropriate. If it’s not appropriate I wouldn’t mention it. Then I’d see if the others have a case that I can compare mine with. And then that’s sufficient. Then I’ll just listen closely.” (IP 1)

In other words, in a professional capacity the interviewee experiences his own problems that he includes in the seminar. Therefore, he experiences a discrepancy that he would like to solve. He does not initiate learning himself, but hopes that a similar case will be looked at which he believes will help to overcome his own problems. In this case the interviewee appears to be
independently and deliberately adopting his own defensive pattern of a learning process and allows the successful outcome to depend on learning conditions specified by third parties. At the same time, he accepts that it is possible that his problems cannot be solved in the seminar. This is a case of ambivalence in terms of personal determination of learning. The interviewee describes very exactly what he would like to learn and where actual problems lie. Nevertheless, he revokes some of his learning process himself and subsumes it under contexts specified by third parties. He hopes that he will (perhaps imperceptibly) be able to learn incidentally anyway in order to gain new job skills.

Even with regard to the above-mentioned resistance to learning, a possible and plausible reasoning structure is to be achieved. In the following quote the same interviewee accurately describes what he has already learnt and where he could still learn more:

“Well what we just experienced as a group is something I’d like to continue with because these sorts of phenomena occur relatively often. And the question is we’ve now clarified and have some idea about how we should go about this in Orientation Phase I. But it would be exciting to see, because there are sometimes very experienced and adventurous groups and we look at what they did and resolve to try that in Orientation Phase II, or in the mid-way phase. Or we start again at the beginning. Therefore, I think it would be exciting because I tend to think that that’s the way it is. I tend to be negative and think that it’s baby stuff that they’re doing there and I can’t be bothered to take any action now and would just like to leave them to stew in their own juice. No, the question would now be how can we do it better?” (IP 1)

Why does he not finish learning until he has overcome his problems by learning? The first two quotes show that he leaves tackling problems to chance. When the “others have a case”, he looks to see whether he can overcome his own problems himself in this way. The ambivalence of his autonomy in the learning process can also be interpreted as a quest: The fact that he has very definite ideas of what he would like to learn, but does not contribute these fully himself to the seminar, means he renounces responsibility for deciding what content is important for him as a professional person to learn. This can be logical if the search for orientation in his own professional role is not yet completed and, what’s more, from a subjective standpoint, the director of the seminar is skilled enough that learning from him is possible.

A plausible reason may lie in the learning group as a determining factor for the person’s own learning processes. If the person’s own problems are included in the course, the person who is learning can provide information on their own
professional procedures and disclose possible problems in day-to-day working lives. If people have had a negative experience in this respect, then it is clearly logical that they will be careful about revealing their own problems because it makes them vulnerable. Another quote from the person shows that this could be a plausible reason:

“You can encounter a group of lecturers or other pedagogues who don’t open up, or the others think that just one of them is an idiot who’s had problems there.” (IP1)

The interviewee initially generalises his comment and does not apparently specify any actual situation that he has experienced. Nevertheless, the language he chooses is not fully objective: “One was an idiot who had problems”. This comment or the underlying experience could be a reason for resisting learning processes in another situation. It is however important to note that everyone deals with this type of experience differently, or draws different conclusions from it. Resistance to learning can therefore be one of the consequences, but it is not an inevitable one. Further quotes from other interviewees show that a negative experience with a group of fellow learners is not an isolated case. It is understandable that it is unpleasant to open up to a group about problems. It is then also discouraging to notice that the group does not deal with ‘coming to grips’ with the problem professionally. We also have to ask whether this unprofessional way of dealing with problems has an impact on day-to-day professional lives. Is there a community of course instructors in a particular town or state? How big or small is such a community and how close-knit is it? Consequently, how confidential are problems dealt with in training courses for course instructors? In a small German state, it is likely that a community of course instructors will cross paths often and frequently encounter one another in training courses, too. A quote from another interviewee stating that “... some of them chat too much afterwards”, shows that disclosing problems to a learning group is problematic. Therefore, it could be a good idea for course instructors participating in training courses to wait and see who is taking part and how open and professional the learning atmosphere is before they talk about their problems and attempt to overcome these as part of the learning process.

3. Specific resistance to learning by course instructors

What are the reasons for the resistance to learning illustrated here? Why is this resistance to learning specific to course instructors? Figure 2 gives an overview
of all the categories of experience, which are related to specific resistance to learning by course instructors.

![Categories of experience](image)

Figure 2: Specific resistance to learning by course instructors

Specific resistance to learning is on the one hand the result of the course instructors being trapped in their professional role. On the other hand, the characteristics of this sort of resistance to learning are very strongly connected with this narrow context analysed. For example, the learning context of the paid training leave looked at here is strongly influenced by people further up the hierarchy. Section 2.1.1 showed that there was a link between the learning conditions and the structural parameters: The seminar director was the boss of at least one person. As a result, this person was confronted with defensive learning conditions, which led to a resistance to learning. An analysis of the types of resistance to learning (see Schepers 2014, p. 126 cf.) also showed that the resistance to learning encountered was often the result of interaction between the people taking part in the course and the director of the seminar. This is logical if learning in course instructor training courses is a quest for orientation regarding one’s own professional live (ibid p. 205).

The last important aspect relates to the learning group. During the empirical study, it was shown that the learning group plays an important role in learning in course instructor training courses (ibid, p. 133). If the learning group can be trusted and an open and appreciative working atmosphere is created, the subject benefits in the learning process. But if the learning group cannot be trusted, the subjects have to protect themselves and their professional position in order not to endanger their “good reputations”. Consequently, training courses can be understood as contexts in which the development of professionalism is closely
linked with the positive or negative role the seminar director and the other attendees play.

The seminar analysed included defensive learning conditions, which the course instructors were not able to remove by themselves. If subjects enter learning situations where they are automatically in a state of dependency, because they encounter their boss, subjects are merely able to “surrender” to these learning conditions and try to emerge from them in one piece. Holzkamp writes that with regard to “defensive learning”, learning is “only a necessity because I can therefore avoid having the scope I have to act taken away from me” (Holzkamp 1995, p. 192). But it is not about overcoming a learning problem that has been personally excluded, but escaping “a situation without the imminent loss of skills and quality of life” (ibid, p. 193).

Possible questions about the resistance to learning based on subjective logic by course instructors, as described here, could be as follows: As a course instructor can I refuse to take part in a training course with my own boss? Can I overcome problems from my own professional experience expansively and in an open manner during the learning process if I am unable to guess the reactions of my fellow learners beforehand?

4. References


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Conflicts in works councils as a learning opportunity: Drawing a connection between learning processes and intersubjectivity

Simone Hocke

Abstract
This empirical study is based on my dissertation and focuses on the connections between collective learning processes and intersubjectivity in works council conflicts. 47 members of works councils are interviewed in eight group discussions to analyze strategies and learning processes in conflicts.

Works councils are bodies to promote democratic processes in organizations. Their work comprises different fields of conflict, they have to deal with. Conflicts arise between employers and employees, among employees as well within the works councils. Conflicts within works councils are considered as process, which opens room for acting and learning. Individual, partial and collective strategies are practiced in this process as well as individual and cooperative/collective learning processes.

The theoretical foundations are based on subject-scientific learning theory of Klaus Holzkamp and the understanding of collective learning processes of Max Miller. Connections between restrictive/generalized agency and defensive/expansive learning are deduced by analyzing and systematizing strategies and learning processes. Possibilities and limitations of collective learning in works council conflicts are discussed. Intersubjectivity facilitates collective learning and collective learning facilitate intersubjectivity at the same time. This mutual connection is discussed in the conclusion. The implications and the relevance for further promotion of the intersubjectivity in education are drawn.

Keywords
works councils, learning processes, conflicts, collective learning
Works and staff councils are institutions with the purpose of democratising companies. As actors of the German participation system,\(^1\) they ensure that the citizen status does not end at the company door and the interests of employees are enforced. The German Works Constitution Act (BetrVG) provides the legal framework for the work of works councils.\(^2\) The works council represents the interests of employees in the company to management. In doing so, works councils are confronted with various areas of conflict, which do not only appear in relation to management or between employees, but also within the committee of the works council itself. Albeit acting and learning in conflicts is of great importance for an effective representation of interests, there is a tendency for internal conflicts to remain taboo, as these can weaken the council’s enforcement power towards management. Further, the capacity for action of works councils is also influenced by the possibilities of the conflict management within the committee. If works council bodies are restricted in their capacity to act due to missing or destructive conflict management and therefore can satisfy interest groups only in a limited manner, effective participation becomes an issue. Regarding this, conflicts within works council bodies present an unexplored area to a great extent. Against this backdrop and considering the socio-political function of works councils, I set out to investigate conflicts within works council bodies with the aim to free these from taboos and to demonstrate approaches concerning education and consulting within the scope of my dissertation (Hocke, 2012).

The problem statement and findings of this research lead to the topic of the present paper. On the basis of Critical Psychology (Holzkamp, 1985), Holzkamp’s (1995) Learning Theory as well as an extension of this towards collective learning processes (Miller, 1986), strategies of action and cooperative/collective learning processes of works councils are presented here. The focus will be on potentials and hindrances linked to these learning processes. Eight group discussions with altogether 47 works council members from different bodies and industries serve as the empirical foundation for the discussion. The evaluation of the data was based on the analytical steps of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2005). Based on the empirical findings, the relation between collective learning processes and intersubjectivity is explored in

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\(^1\) The German participation system exhibits a “dual control structure”: Two different areas of representation and conveyance of collective interests have distinguished themselves functionally. In the one – free collective bargaining – unions, and in the other – works constitution – works councils are responsible for the representation of employees (Müller-Jentsch, 1999, p. 9).

\(^2\) In the further course of the text, I exclusively examine works councils since the empirical results only relate to this kind of workforce representation.
order to formulate a number of consequences for the education and consulting practice with works councils.

1. Subject-scientific links to conflict learning of works councils

The category system of Subject Science or Critical Psychology (Holzkamp, 1985), respectively, is fruitful for the analysis of conflicts within works councils bodies, since their activities take place under given social conditions which find expression in operational conditions. Works councils act on the basis of the Works Constitution Act while the individual works council members also act from their individual situations and positions. The objective living conditions are not conveyed to the subject in a direct manner but rather through meanings and conceptual connections. Meanings represent certain possibilities for action while the available meanings and possibilities for action determine the specific space of possibility. Within this space of possibility, works councils are given the twofold opportunity of acting: on the one hand, within the given conditions by the subject accepting and moving within these (restrictive capacity for action) and on the other hand, through an extension of the conditions by the subject trying to expand the existing possibilities for action (generalised capacity for action) (Holzkamp, 1985). Based on the normative objective and tasks of a works council, the activities of a works council aim at the improvement of working conditions in the interest of the employees. For this purpose, the available conditions need to be extended in order to expand the possibilities for action and the participation of employees. At the same time there are always good reasons for acting restrictively due to the given conditions and the subjective premises.

The categories of Critical Psychology provide the following links for the exploration of conflicts within works councils: a concept of the subject which is embedded in social conditions; a socially conveyed and specific life situation and in which subjects are positioned; a factual-social world, conveyed through meanings with certain possibilities for action; a justified acting subject with, respectively, available premises, a specific subjective space of possibility for personal capacity for action, as well as the twofold opportunity of the restrictive and generalised capacity for action (Holzkamp, 1985).

Further links can be found in the learning theory of Klaus Holzkamp (1995). Thus, learning difficulties result from difficulties for action. Conflict situations present themselves as problems of action for subjects. The failure of prior routines with respect to dealing with conflicts can evoke an experience of discrepancy: The conflict cannot be managed by the available knowledge and abilities which can develop into difficulties of learning.
Learning takes place within the area of tension between defensive and expansive learning reasons. Defensive reasons for learning particularly exist if the learning demands are imposed on the subject from outside and a negative impact of the quality of life is impending in case of omission or denial of learning (Holzkamp 1995, p. 191). Expansively caused learning is understood as a degree of liberty in learning as well as learning for an enhancement of disposition. Works councils can decide on the basis of the Works Constitution Act independently if and what they learn. They can choose from an available offer of advanced training or determine the contents through in-house training courses themselves. They resolve as a body which path is selected and who goes to which seminar. At best, they learn in order to be able to master their tasks better. Therefore, their learning aims at a generalised capacity for action, which is why insofar, the objective of expansive learning is given. Simultaneously, there is a twofold opportunity considering learning: Learning can be caused defensively and repel primarily threats. Even if in practice, the learning of works councils is exposed to various restrictions, a legally protected space of training possibilities is generally provided (Ludwig, 2002, p. 11). Insofar, the subject-scientific learning theory offers a useful framework and an interpretation transparency for the understanding of learning processes within works council bodies.

2. Cooperative/collective learning processes – potentials and hindrances

Works councils are groups, which act jointly in accordance with democratic rules. As a result, this paper will specifically deal with cooperative and collective learning processes. In the following section, the aspects of subject-scientific understanding of cooperative learning processes (Holzkamp, 1995) as well as the concept of collective learning by Miller (1986) are discussed.

2.1 Cooperative learning

Holzkamp (1995, p. 509ff.) defines cooperative learning as interpersonal learning without the personalisation of the knowledge and ability. The learning subjects stand beside each other without any teaching, interpreting, assessing and knowing person between themselves and the learning topic. There exists a reciprocal relationship. In order to be able to learn cooperatively, the subjects have to make an agreement about the common learning difficulty.

“Individuals must, if they learn cooperatively, have defined their respective personal learning difficulties/learning topics (referring to their common exterior
Holzkamp assumes that common learning issues do not really exist but are only agreed upon. According to him, potentials and “divergences of personal perspectives” (ibid., p. 512) of cooperative learning result exactly from that. Different perspectives are related to each other within the cooperative dialogue while the own point of view is questioned. These contradictions must be decided within a cooperative learning process. Divergences of perspectives push the process of learning forward but only if they can be cushioned under the premise of a common learning topic. If this back reference is not possible anymore, the cooperative learning relationship is to be given up in favour of personal-autonomous learning since learning is hindered otherwise (ibid., p. 513).

Here, the narrow limits and the preconditions of cooperative learning become quite clear. It requires an open relationship, which nobody is excluded from, which challenges the commonly defined learning issue and in which no peer pressure is exerted if individuals want to leave the learning group. Further limits result from hierarchies within the groups: If a group spokesperson or a member, who is held in high esteem, evolves, then this person can informally act as a master while a shift towards participative learning takes place (Holzkamp 1995, p. 514). If, however, a jointly declared perspective establishes within the group, which is either accepted by the individual members or leads to an exclusion of members, then a hidden teaching-learning-relation has developed. The doctrinal instance is represented by those who claim the preconceived perspective for themselves and enforce it through majorities and a position of power (ibid.). Holzkamp points out that also beyond the institutional teaching-learning-relations “by no means the opportunity for unhindered expansive learning” (ibid., p. 521) is guaranteed. The unauthorised divergences of content within self-determined groups result in the formation of factions, suspicions, hidden sabotage attempts and tendencies of exclusions, and therefore to learning hindrances.

Also with respect to self-organised learning groups, Holzkamp traces hindrances of expansive learning back to instrumental learning formations, in which the interests of the rulers and the ruled are interwoven in such a manner that they partly converge, “so that the power does not have an influence from the outside but can come into its own through the concerned individuals” (Holzkamp, 1995, p. 523). The evolution of the other threatens the own capacity for action and “consequently, the violation of his interests is inevitable in my own interest” (ibid., p. 526). Holzkamp considers instrumental learning
formation as a manifestation of a restrictive capacity for action. According to him, the overcoming of the mental figure of restrictive capacity for action lies in the generalised capacity for action and following up on that, the overcoming of instrumental learning formation by intersubjective learning formation takes place. Within intersubjective learning formations, it is comprehended “that the learning expansion and deepening of the approach to the world and by this achievable enhancement of disposition/quality of life is not only in the interest of the person who has just gained it but also in the common interest” (ibid., p. 528). This requires a fundamental trust in the argumentative justifiability of own views, the possibility of discursive exchange and the revision of the own position due to differentiating perspective of others. The distinction within instrumental-intersubjective learning formations reveals the learning hindrances, which also appear in potentially cooperative learning relations.

The possibilities and restrictions of interpersonal learning relations and the conceptual interpretations of instrumental and intersubjective learning formations are instructive for the reflection of common (non-)learning of works councils concerning body-internal conflicts. Yet, Holzkamp (1995) distinguishes intentional from incidental learning (learning along), while intentional learning processes form the core of his concept of cooperative learning. Apart from that, the subject generally stays in the center of the learning process even if socially embedded. However, learning processes which concern a group as a whole and take place rather incidentally are not determinable. The concept of collective learning by Miller (1986) rather offers starting points for this.

2.2 Collective learning in and through reasoning

Miller (1986, 2006) puts “collective learning” in the center of his learning concept. He hypothesises that collective learning is essential for certain learning processes and requires knowledge of the world as well as self-knowledge. According to this, collective learning processes are a kind of social and communicative acting and take place in a form of collective reasoning. Individuals learn to reason and learn by reasoning. Arguments are results of statements of various speakers which serve as a clarification of a controversial question and are coordinated in such a way that this is generally possible (Miller, 2006, p. 16). Further, argumentations are constituted through mutual objection, agreement and accepting; this enables the elaboration of collectively valid and controversial, of consent and dissent. Three principles of cooperation form the

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3 In the further development of his theory, Miller (2006) uses the terms discursive and systematic learning. With respect to the work at hand, the terminology of collective learning is considered as the more accurate one for this topic and therefore kept.
“transcendental a priori” for the reflection process: 1. The principle of generalisation – the common knowledge about shared knowledge, hence collectively valid; 2. the principle of objectivity – the dimension of experience, in which the structural limitation of subjective knowledge horizon can be transcended; 3. the principle of truth – the essential communicative urge for the resolution of contradictions (Miller, 1986, p. 427).

Central to Miller’s learning concept is the ability to solve problems, in particular the collective resolution of interpersonal difficulties triggered by normative or moral dissent (Miller 1986, p. 247). This also includes a conception of incidental learning processes.

The success of a collective practice of argumentative reasoning does not mean that a consent about controversial questions is achieved but rather that a “subjective certainty” is affirmed or shaken, that indicators for structurally new solutions are discovered and that there is a communicative force for the advancement of the knowledge (ibid., p. 256). From a collective point of view, first, it is about achieving a “rational dissent”, i.e. to gain an understanding about what the parties disagree about. In so far, the measure for collective learning processes is if and how far a progressing agreement about differences can be achieved.

Miller divides collective learning into “learning in a collective” and “learning of a collective”. The learning of an individual within a collective comprises the social learning mechanisms of argumentative dialogue and the possibility of basic reorganisation of systems of knowledge. “The learning of a collective and therefore forms of a social change require the learning of an individual within a collective” (Miller 1986, p. 211; translated from German). According to Miller, the “learning of a collective” exceeds individual learning and is more than the mere sum of the learning processes of individuals.

Individuals and social groups change, develop fundamental beliefs and progress in their objective thinking only if their learning processes are an integrative component of a specific social process, of a discourse, triggered by a dissent and carried out by the involved with the intention of identifying and solving the dissent jointly. (Miller, 2006, p. 219)

Conflicts carried out discursively might cause collective learning processes (ibid., p. 227). At the same time these learning processes can be blocked by hidden strategic actions (ibid., p. 229). According to Miller, the primary objective within a discourse during strategic acting is not the clarification of a controversial question but of secondary individual operational objectives such as the increase of own economic or social capital. The discourse is instrumentalised for that purpose while both objectives are present within discourses. As a result,
it requires a systematically distorted and hidden strategic discourse for a blocking of learning. Concerning this, he mentions two discursive mechanisms:

1. The discontinuation of potential collectively acting premises: This can take place by focusing on consent (within social groups) or on dissent (between social groups). An intensification of consent and dissent has the consequence that an understanding about differences is not possible anymore and learning processes are blocked (ibid., p. 236ff.).

2. The undisputed validity of the discontinuation of the premises within the social group is enforced through referring to an authority: In doing so, discontinuations are legitimised. Legitimising authorities can be individual or cooperative actors as well as institutions or ideas. By appealing to a common consent or dissent legitimised by an authority, discourses could be distorted as they “at least temporarily do not allow an effective discursive resistance” (ibid., p. 238) and therefore block collective learning processes.

The escape from discursive learning blockings is only possible if they do not become apparent during the argumentation. This would occur if a reasoning about difference is impossible over a longer period of time and instead, an increasing complexity sets in. This experience can be applied to initiate a discourse about the discourse and to reflect about the mechanisms of discontinuation and legitimisation (Miller, 2006, p. 250).

Holzkamp’s concept of cooperative learning offers explanation approaches for intentional learning processes within conflicts and their limitations, among other things through instrumental learning formations. Miller’s concept of collective learning provides an understanding of incidental learning processes in social groups such as works council bodies and draws the attention to argumentations taking place during conflicts and their blockings by discontinuations. On the basis of the presented theoretical concepts, the action strategies and learning processes during works council conflicts are concretised empirically. The leading questions are:

- Which action strategies do works councils use during conflicts?
- How do cooperative/collective learning processes take shape in connection with body-internal conflicts?
- Which limitations and learning resistances become apparent?

3. Action strategies and learning during conflicts

Activities of works councils are a political element in Germany, which is executed during working hours. The works council members are elected by the employees every four years. The size of the bodies depends on the number of
employees, e.g. a body consists of seven members when there are 200 employees. If different lists compete against one another, a list election is conducted. The body constituted after the election is composed of various factions, which can be part of various unions or not have any union connection. Further, the composition of the body should mirror the variety of employees and among other things consist of different groups of employees, levels of hierarchy, sex and parts of the company. The works council elects a chairperson and his representative among its own members. The decisions of the works councils are made with a majority vote by members present. The decisions made establish the basis for action for the activities of the works council whose framework consists of a number of structural conflict potentials (Hocke, 2012). The conflict potential may develop into concrete difficulties of action at the expense of works councils and more and less into escalating conflicts.

3.1 Practices for action during conflicts

The further presentation refers to empirical results of my study considering conflicts within works councils. The works councils describe practices for action and strategies, which follow deviant objectives and assume different participants:

a) Partial strategies which are carried out by groups within the body for enforcing their interests.

b) Collective strategies aiming at cooperating and restoring the common capacity for action of the body.

c) Individual strategies of dealing with conflicts.

Partial enforcement strategies

Partial enforcement strategies are exercised by subgroups or factions within works council bodies. Linguistically, this mostly becomes apparent by the distinction between “we” and “they”, by which works council members are allocated to the own or the other group. At the same time groups pursue own interests while they can also claim to represent the general interests of the employees. Within the works council, however, the strategy serves as the enforcement of partial interests, which are not shared by the whole body. Regarding this, it is attempted to marginalise the opposite side and to prevent their participation. These strategies usually aim at a winner-loser-situation, including the enforcement of the own perspective against the others and if

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4 In the study, eight group discussions with 47 works council members of different companies were carried out.
necessary at their expense. This way, conflicts tend to escalate. Concerning this, the strategies of works councils are situated on different levels of escalation. They range from dominant behaviour to legal proceedings, e.g., procedures of exclusion or challenging an election. Majority groups partly make use of the way of majority vote in order to employ strategically relevant working committees with exclusively own members. Minorities can deny the active participation for tasks, in which they command relevant competencies or subvert the majority votes by spreading opposite views among the employees. Subgroups/factions hold back important information. Here, the level of social and political identification is not established by the body but rather the faction. The impression arises that the opposed individual sits within the own works council body and spies resulting in desks being locked. Caucuses serving as an exchange of union-related information are used to hide internal differences of opinions from the other factions and to appear as unity to the outside. At the same time majority factions can exclude minority factions from the opinion-forming process this way.

**Collective action strategies**

Collective action strategies are not directed against the others but aim at a joint collaboration and resolution within the body. Therefore, collective strategies have the purpose of not excluding the „other side“ but rather include them in tasks and the responsibilities. Further, a divided assumption of responsibility has also the consequence that minorities do not remain in the role of the rebellious audience (Sofsky & Paris, 1994) but participate actively. It is pursued to dissolve winner-loser-constellations by creating transparency, providing access to information for everyone and negotiate about working objectives together. Before making a decision, it is discussed extensively in order to reach a consent. At the same time rules for discussion are agreed upon for ensuring the culture of discussion. New works council members are given the opportunity to be noticed within the body and experienced guides to their sides. Further, their creativity and engagement are encouraged and used for the activities of the works council. Potentials of conflict can already be prevented with the help of these strategies. During conflict situations which the body cannot solve external support is made use of for the clarification and resolution. This means agreeing that a conflict

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5 While during the first three stages of Glasl’s escalation model (1999) the chance prevails that the participants are able to resolve the conflict themselves and to reach a compromise or an integration (the so-called win-win-situation), the development into the direction of “winner or loser” increases during the stages four to six. During the stages seven to nine, it is most likely that all of the participants end up as losers (Glasl, 1999, p. 216).
exists and that it is supposed to be processed jointly. In addition, some works
council bodies strengthen the social cohesion by common activities such as
Christmas parties. The collective action strategies are not as numerous and
various as partial strategies of the questioned works council members. This might
probably be traced back to the fact that the works councils were rather questioned
about conflicts in bodies than them not being available. In case of predominantly
collective strategies, conflict potentials less likely develop into conflicts.

**Individual action strategies**

Individual action strategies are strategies that the works council members
describe for themselves or for other individual members while individual actions
might indicate a collective practice. On the one hand, there are strategies which
rather aim at enforcement. This includes holding back information or the
deliberate passing on of information to specific actors to influence them and
make coalitions. This way, individual participants of the conflict develop into
groups while the conflict expands. Rumours are spread within the company and
others are “denigrated”. Losing one’s face as a result of this impacts the conflict.
Talking openly about the situation is significantly complicated due to the hidden
actions of the participants. Concerning these individual enforcement strategies,
works council members almost exclusively talk about others while presenting
themselves exclusively as victims. This leads to the conclusion that the
protection of the own group “we” makes it possible to admit that means
considered illegitimate and immoral are instrumentalised while oneself does not
reveal this publicly.

On the other hand, interpersonal processing strategies are mentioned such
as addressing conflict situations openly. However, this is an important strategy
with respect to the chairpersons while it is expected from these as well. This is
scarcely brought up as a possible strategy of works council members.

But relief strategies play a substantial role in context of subjective
descriptions. Such strategies are selected by works council members to minimize
the own mental burden during conflicts. This way, it is not interfered directly in
the conflict events while the own, modified acting has still an impact on the
course of the conflict. This ranges from mental strategies of retreat to the actual
withdrawal or even the so-called sitting out of conflicts. Moreover, there are
strategies which are supposed to strengthen resources: to ensure one’s own
support among the staff or making oneself aware of the social function of the
activities of works councils. At the same time it helps some to gain a positive
attitude towards conflicts and consider them as challenges. “Moaning” in the
private sphere can relieve emotionally while conversations resulting from that
may stimulate new perspectives. Mental and social support can present major resources during conflicts.

With regard to the conditions of activities of works councils and the presented action strategies of these, the two-fold possibility of restrictive and generalised capacity for action arises. A restrictive capacity for action is particularly obvious concerning partially action strategies as well as enforcement strategies. These intend to increase the power to the expense of other members or to challenge one’s own powerlessness. In contrast, collective strategies aim at common action. This kind of cooperation and communication makes room for intersubjective relationships within bodies. Generalised capacity for action then means to work out common interests within bodies discursively and to expand the disposal possibilities with respect to the own living conditions as employees. Regarding the embedment of the works council in the works council and social area and the tasks relating to that, the objective is to expand spaces of possibility and to improve chances of participation. One may assume that this would be achievable through a generalised capacity for action within a body. At the same it should not be overlooked that contradicting conditions and premises oppose that, which certainly increase the level of attractiveness of a restrictive capacity for action.

3.2 Missing possibilities for action

Besides the presented possibilities for action, there are also portrayed conflicts during the group discussions, which works councils cannot find any action approaches in. The experienced incapacity for action during conflict situations develops since previous solution approaches – regardless in which direction they are aimed at, if against the others or in favour of the others – failed as no possible alternatives are available.

The perceived incapacity for action might arise from political action barriers in majority or minority faction within the body. Certain possibilities for action of the minority are restricted due to the political power structures within the body. There is a discrepancy between the desire and ability of works council members. However, it is not only about a personal (in-)ability but also about a political (in-)ability, among other things due to insufficient legal regulations. On the one hand, the lack of possibilities for action comes along with burdens and emotions, such as helplessness, insecurity, frustration and powerlessness. The consequences which works council members can conclude from this may be withdrawal or giving up. On the other hand, works council members describe that they “still” do not know any solution. They assume that there is a solution
for the conflict, which they still have to figure out. Regarding this, the difficulties of action in terms of Holzkamp might turn into learning difficulties.

„The assumption of the given subjective learning difficulty implies the transition from the („intended“) »learning« as a certain attitude […], through which I consciously decide to not to continue as before (as this has not been fruitful in any way) but first try to gain direction so that I find indications where there is something to learn for me in a certain way and this way I am able to adopt the difficulty of action deliberately as a learning difficulty (or to create one for myself) (Holzkamp, 1995, p. 184).

First and foremost, conflicts present themselves as difficulties of action and are dealt with various action strategies. If possibilities for action are missing, learning difficulties might arise from conflicts.

3.3 Aspects of conflict learning

An individual or collective learning difficulty develops if learning seems to be the best alternative for action or, due to lacking other possibilities for action, seems like the only option for action to work council members. But the perception of a learning difficulty does not mean that an actual learning process is going to take place. This can be opposed by learning resistances which are based on restrictions and barriers of learning. Barriers of learning can be missing temporal resources, the family situation and professional biographical communities of origin. At the same time restrictions of learning develop from political and micro-political relations within a body. Therefore, conflict management processes might be prevented by a majority in the body as such a process might mean giving away power. Learning resistances or missing reasons for learning become evident particularly through the depictions about others by the questioned works councils, for example when employees describe their business colleagues within the works council as “education resistant” and complain about their lack of participation in the seminars. It can be assumed that these business works council members perceive the learning requirements imposed on them as an unreasonable demand. As a consequence, body-internal conflicts do not only result in difficulties of action, which might turn into learning difficulties, but also in learning resistances: „Resistances which by any means are generated only through individual dispositions but also through existing structures in the living environment, particularly of the employment and further training system (Faulstich, 2006, p. 19; translated from German).

If a works council member or a body excludes a learning difficulty, this may occur through different thematical dimensions and ways of learning. Therefore, as an example, professional further training is preferred for the
learning of legal knowledge, externally accompanied consultation processes for the improvement of collaboration within the body as well as conflict and communication seminars for the further development of the individual conflict ability. But conflict learning does not only take place intentionally but also incidentally within and from specific conflict situations. In the following, I will go into detail about to facets of conflict learning as they imply potentials for cooperative/collective learning:

a) learning in consultation processes and b) learning in negotiation processes.

Learning in consultation processes

Works council bodies partially make use of external support in order to address conflicts and process them. These consultation processes are given different designations: moderated closed meeting, team building, conflict moderation or according to a works council, “group finding whatnot”. Regardless of its designation, learning processes may take place along them – as it becomes clear during the group discussions. Guided feedback sequences, the elaboration and agreement of common communication rules, possibilities for addressing conflicts openly and their structural processing are mentioned as learning possibilities. The learning setting beyond the present activities of the works council and the liberation from the immediate need for action makes room for reflection and the joint testing of other action strategies. In a best-case scenario, a common dialogue capability and the implementation of methods of constructive conflict resolution are the learning possibilities. These may offer chances for the future conflict management and prompt further learning processes.

During consultation processes both individual and cooperative/collective learning processes arise. The learning occurs intentionally and can be captured by Holzkamp’s learning theory (1995). The body must come to an agreement and take a decision prior to the consultation process. This can be understood as a communication about difficulties of action and learning, which is followed by the specific planning of the learning activity. From the perspective of the works councils, a successful collective learning process is determined by the subsequent implementation of the results and the agreements in the daily activities of the works council. Apart from that, not only options are described for the learning in consultation processes and the transfer but also specific limitations. For example, support processes may be blocked due to the political power relations within the

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6 Here and in the following, consultation process refers to reflective forms of consultation, such as mediation, supervision, conflict-(moderation) and team building (Tietel & Kunkel, 2011).
body since the majority faction does not perceive any conflict or there is no interest in the clarification of the conflict (for further details, see Hocke, 2011).

**Learning in negotiation processes**

When works council members remain in contact during conflicts, the various views on the conflict issues emerge. In these situations, learning takes place through discussions and negotiation processes. Learning processes become apparent, which concern both the works council members as well as the body as a whole. Collective learning processes are based on argumentation processes, which are not only characterised by convincing and enforcing but by the desire for mutual listening and understanding of varying points of view. The works council expand their views on the conflictual issues and try jointly to find the best objective for all parties. A contentual and social development of the group takes place, which strengthens their common capacity for action. Learning in negotiation processes takes place through the given thought and interaction processes during the course of conflict. The action does not particularly aim at learning but rather at overcoming the issue of acting and therefore resembles incidental learning (learning along). Only a later reflection makes the parties concerned aware that something was learned during the process. Thus, Miller’s (1986) concept of “collective learning” provides an insightful explanation approach for the occurring learning processes as well as for their blockings. Learning processes can be blocked if the exchange about varying views is not possible since for example different factions are working against each other within the body (partial enforcement strategies) and a “party whip” is executed. Regarding this, the limitation of possible collectively valid arguments and positions is realised by focusing on consent within the own faction and focusing on dissent between the factions. An intensification of consent or dissent during conflicts makes a communication about different views in the whole body impossible and blocks learning processes. The presented cooperative/collective learning opportunities and their limitations, respectively, as well as their blocking within internal works council-related conflicts are interrelated to the categories of instrumental or intersubjective learning formation. This connection is outlined in the following section.
4. Collective learning processes as a characteristic of towards and away from intersubjectivity

Cooperative (Holzkamp, 1995) and collective learning (Miller, 1986) refer to interpersonal learning relations. Regarding this, individual learning is not only supported by the group – in terms of “learning in a collective” – but also means further the “learning of a collective”. These learning processes become apparent in the collective implementation of the lessons learnt in the daily practice. Therefore, collective learning is more than the sum of individual learning processes as it only reveals itself in the capacity for action of the body as a collective. The possibility of cooperative/collective learning is, as presented above, specifically located in consultation and negotiation processes.

Limitations of learning can develop from an instrumental formation of learning (see section 2.1). Instrumental formation of learning is based on the restricted capacity for action. Cooperative/collective learning is limited insofar that the works councils endanger each other by their learning processes. By the learning of one group, the others feel themselves limited and “put these in their place” due to the existing power relations. When works council members learn to represent their point of view argumentatively and find followers, they limit the possibilities of disposition on the parts of others potentially according to this way of thinking and acting. If members learn by means of conversational rules to listen to each other, others who are not supposed to be heard will be heard as well. Thus, works councils are interested in restricting and controlling the learning of others within an instrumental formation of learning. At the same time this is not separated from the structural conditions under which activities of a works council take place as well as from the conflicts within a body, which due to a subjectively good reason suggest an instrumental formation of learning.

Despite all limitation of cooperative/collective learning processes, these are possible and take place, both incidentally during argumentations within a body and encouraged by educational and consultation processes. Concerning this, the enabling of an intersubjective formation of learning is essential, i.e. the learning expansion of the space of possibility in the common interest. For this purpose, trust in the conveyance of views and interests needed to be established and also trusting them to be mutually capable of arguing. The own views needed to be scrutinised due to the other perspective, which would make the works council bodies develop further by learning. Against the background of the empirical analysis, it can be assumed that the path to intersubjective communication leads through cooperative/collective learning processes and that intersubjective communication facilitates collective learning processes.
If one assumes that during escalated body-internal conflicts relations of mutual instrumentalisation tend to dominate, the double context reveals itself here as well: Mutual instrumentalisation limits collective learning processes while missing collective learning processes intensify mutual instrumentalisation. This means that the possibility of collective learning processes is or should be, respectively, a fundamental reference point of the further education and consultation practice including works councils. As a result, it is the obligation of educational and consultation work to create a framework, in which a movement towards intersubjective learning relations is made possible. A concept of learning relations as intersubjective learning relations requires a communication of the participants, which can be supported methodically in the way presented subsequently.

4.1 Dialogue procedure for encouraging intersubjective learning relations

The application of communicative procedures oriented towards dialogue and therefore towards mutual understanding are able to encourage intersubjective learning relations. Divergences of participants’ perspectives are included while particularly the understanding of the different views facilitates collective learning processes. Further, dialogue procedures are strongly oriented towards the achievement of a common consent. This way, they offer works councils an alternative to the established majority decisions within escalated conflicts to the expense of minorities within a body. Impulses to this are provided by proven procedures within the employment policy context such as the “concept of democratic dialogue” (Gustavsen, 1994). Designing communication processes oriented by the dialogue is able to increase the reflectivity of groups and contribute to the recognition of conflict lines and power centres besides subjecting them to discussions (Modrow-Thiel, 1999, p. 207).

In my opinion the application of dialogue procedures during the processing of body-internal conflicts, on the one hand, lays the ground for understanding while it enables a movement towards intersubjective formation of learning within the present setting. On the other hand, the establishing of such a procedure in a body can also create a point of departure for intersubjective relation during the daily cooperation. At the same time it is no simple process to realise a democratic culture of dialogue. For this purpose, it is necessary to thematise the contradictions within the activities of works councils and the limitations concerning acting and learning in the area of activity of body-internal conflicts.
4.2 Addressing inconsistency in acting and learning

It has become clear that contradictions and limitations are inherent in the body-internal conflicts: This means that they may not be excluded in the educational and consultation practice but must rather be made a subject of discussion. It should be looked at the previous acting and learning during the conflict. If works councils are in the middle of an educational or consulting context, they have always been learning during and from conflicts. It is necessary to address the already learnt in retrospect and become aware of it. Particularly during escalating conflicts, the consequences from the experiences may also be distrust and speechlessness. With respect to “learning effects”, works councils mention for example that they “sit out” conflicts better or “act secretly” in the future. Since the classification of previous experiences and learning results derived from these have an impact on future actions, these experiences should be addressed during educational and consultation processes while their subjective classification should be questioned.\(^7\)

But here it is not about the normative assessment of an experience but rather about the breakdown in terms of a “premises-reasons-relation” (Markard, 2000, p. 20). Therefore, the processing of the previous conflict experience within the works council body is linked with the question which requirements justify the actions. Contradictory and opposite point of views become the subject of reflection and are referred back to diverse life situations and working contexts. Contradictions can be made visible while existing limitations of actions and learning can be made subjects of a dialogue by elaborating on the “premises-reasons-relations”. At the same time the elaboration of existing limitations of action and learning establish a foundation for the consideration of future options for action. These can be reviewed through the commonly developed understanding or be discussed with respect to the possibilities of expanding the capacity for action.

But cooperative/collective learning processes do not immediately mean a removal of “dissolution”: Existing contradictions may be addressed during educational and consultation processes, which contributes to a common understanding, but they cannot necessarily be dissolved. It is rather about encouraging intersubjective understanding and offering contextual knowledge in order to enable a constructive conflict management as well as a successful handling of conflicts within a works council.

\(^7\) Subject-scientific considerations with regard to the relation between experience and notions assume that experiences are made directly but not without conveying world knowledge by adults. “Authenticity and theoriticity of an individual experience are no opposites but rather a contradictory unity, two sides of the same coin” (Markard, 2000, p. 18; translated from German).
References


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Adaptation and resistance in adolescence: A case study of teenagers imagining adulthood

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Abstract
To ask young people about their prospects of life and ideas of their future is quite common within the field of Western youth research. For many years, the usually quantitative studies show that—at least in Germany—many adolescents seem to be rather pragmatic and very well adjusted to the expectations of mainstream society. Such results regularly lead to both relief and disappointment. Politicians are relieved, for such outcomes seem to imply neither an oncoming uprising nor the necessity for social changes. Researchers, on the other hand, are rather disappointed because the Western conceptions of youth and adolescence postulate and demand a certain resistance against and challenging of the worlds of adults through the young generation.
When we got the first results from our own, qualitative and cross-cultural, study in which we asked children and young people—especially in Ghana and Germany—to imagine their lives as adults we actually felt disappointed, too. In interviews and essays, the German participants—on whom we will focus here—expressed no worries, irritations, or dissatisfaction, and no resistance to social conditions, with the exception of some criticism of school and school learning. Particularly relevant, their essays revealed almost standardized life plans centered on choosing a career, engaging in everyday work, starting a family, building a house, enjoying leisure time, and traveling. Instead of complaining about today’s youth we took our disappointment as a source for challenging our own assumptions about youth and adolescence and for a deeper analysis of the data. In this paper, we will, first, reflect on the extent to which adaptation and resistance is particularly characteristic of adolescence and whether it involves political resistiveness. Second, we analyze those few examples in our German sample that—at least on the manifest level—resist rather than conform to social expectations and norms of a “good” future. By reconstructing the latent meanings behind this manifest resistiveness, we work out its modus operandi thereby drawing on Klaus Holzkamp’s
distinction between restrictive and generalized agency. Finally, we discuss the significance of these findings for youth research.

Keywords
adolescence (young people, youth), adaptation, resistance, images of the future, latent meanings, restrictive and generalized agency

1. Introduction

In developmental psychology and education, adolescence is constructed as the life phase in which the most fundamental biological, psychological, and social changes that an individual can experience over the course of life occur (Silbereisen & Weichold, 2012; Oerter & Dreher, 2008; Ecarius, 2009). These changes resp. transformations are viewed as the cause of various psychosocial or identity crises (e.g. Erikson, 1958). Additionally, there are more frequent violations of social taboos and norms during adolescence in comparison to other life stages (Moffit, 1993; Raithel, 2011; Greve & Montada, 2008). They are often ascribed a temporary character, since in most cases the deviant behavior diminishes when adolescence ends.

Due to their changing social status, young people are generally expected to challenge and question the existing order—and, by extension, the adults within that order—at least to a socially acceptable extent (Greve & Montada, 2008; Silbereisen & Weichold, 2012). In Germany, this topic is often accompanied by a reference to the so-called 1968 movement, which was partially student-led and in fact brought about significant changes in West German society.

In contrast to the social changes of that time, which were mainly driven by the younger generation, in recent years repeated findings in quantitative research focusing on adolescence point out that youth today espouse attitudes, values, and visions of the future that tend to be pragmatic and that they desire to adapt to existing social conditions (e.g. Shell Deutschland Holding, 2010, 2015; Sturzbecher et al., 2012)—something that researchers certainly consider unsettling. At the same time and somewhat contradictory, the results of the 17th Shell Youth Study of 2015 also show a regained interest of the younger generation in politics (Shell Deutschland Holding, 2015). How this new interest will play out, remains to be seen. Nevertheless, the data seems to indeed suggest a renewed dynamism among a younger generation that had formerly been labeled “pragmatic.”

Specific expectations of youth can also be found in Frigga Haug’s qualitative work on visions of the future of young people. In the 1980s, analyzing the essays presented in “A Day in My Life in 20 Years” written by 11-to-15-
year-olds living in Germany, she was both surprised and disappointed by the envisioned scenarios (Haug, 1991). Despite years of wide-ranging discussion on feminist ideas, most girls seemed to dream of having and caring for a traditional nuclear family, while boys imagined themselves exploring the world (almost always without mentioning a family).

Twenty years later, Frigga Haug and Ulrike Gschwandtner replicated the study (Haug & Gschwandtner, 2006) with essays from 13-to-18-year-old adolescents in Germany and Austria. Again, the authors looked for signs of the influence from feminist ideas, anti-war movements, and the fundamental social changes taking place during the economic crisis of the 1990s. But here again, they found few essays addressing social, economic, and ecological problems or engaging with the emancipatory thoughts of earlier generations (such as the so-called “generation of 1968”).

On the contrary, the essays revealed ideas of a life that is, in equal measure, individualized, adapted, and consumption-oriented, one which seemed detached from those social conditions of significance to the authors of the study. The researchers, again disappointed, concluded that these findings pointed to a need for action and gave the primary and secondary school system, an “institution that assumes responsibility for collective democratic processes” (ibid., p. 8), an essential role in overcoming the apparent split between individual and social life in children and adolescents, or, one might say, in teaching them resistive thinking. Given the multifarious criticism of school as an institution focused on teaching individuals to adapt to rather than resist existing social power relations, thereby indirectly reproducing the existing social inequalities (e.g. Bernfeld, 1973; Dreeben, 1968; Jackson, 1968; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1971; Foucault, 1975), Haug and Gschwandtner (2006) understand the emerging split in the essays between a social life with a variety of problems, such as unemployment, conflicts, and pollution of the environment, and a private life that can be individually steered, as the dominant strategy through which the young interviewees deal with their visions of the future. They view a strategy which does not relate social processes to personal life as “rather convenient equipment of humans for a neoliberal policy” (p. 15) or—so one could phrase—as an adaptation strategy. According to this understanding, resistiveness presupposes overcoming this split and turning away from individualizing social problems.
1977; Holzkamp, 1995; Menzel & Rademacher, 2012), this conclusion is remarkable. In view of such criticism, research should also address the significance of the school system as the specific context where young people produce their visions of the future (see also sections 3a and 4 in this article).

Similar results initially arose from our own cross-cultural research, in which we asked children and young people—especially in Ghana and Germany—to imagine their lives as adults. In interviews and essays, the German participants expressed no worries, irritations, or dissatisfaction, and no resistance to social conditions, with the exception of some criticism of school and school learning. Particularly relevant, their essays revealed almost standardized life plans centered on choosing a career, engaging in everyday work, starting a family, building a house, enjoying leisure time, and traveling. By contrast, the Ghanaian youth were able to clearly express their displeasure with social conditions and injustices, especially in their own country. At the same time, they showed few signs of resistance but rather expressed the subjects’ conviction that they would be able to overcome these difficulties through hard work and strong faith in God (Kleeberg-Niepage, 2017).

In this article, we begin by reflecting on the extent to which adaptation and resistance is particularly characteristic of adolescence (and not of adults or children), and whether it involves the political resistiveness Haug and Gschwandtner (2006) were hoping for. Looking at the essays in our German sample, we then analyze the few examples that—at least on the manifest level—resist rather than conform to the social expectations and norms surrounding accepted definitions of “good” adulthood or a “good” future, either within a typical narrative of the future, or in relation to the research task at hand. By reconstructing the latent meanings behind this manifest resistiveness, we work out its modus operandi and discuss its significance for youth research.

2. Youth between adaptation and resistance

2.1 Youth as a cohort

The span of life we call “youth” today, though conceptualized differently at different times, has been viewed across historical periods and cultures as the period of life when adolescents experience and navigate especially serious upheavals or crises. Traditional and modern rituals for easing young peoples’
transition from childhood to adulthood, and considerations and recommendations for the handling of adolescents in educational institutions, especially with regard to morality or to biopsychosocial models of development, are consistent with a socio-cultural response deemed necessary to these upheavals, albeit based on different theories of reference. Apparently, young people cannot become adults who both preserve society and further its development without such a response.

Until the middle of the 20th century, such a reaction—at least in the West—focused mainly on the external guidance, education and adaptation of the adolescent to socially and culturally desirable social roles. Finally, with the development tasks formulated by Havighurst (1948), the active role of human beings in this development and socialization process came into view. For adolescence, Havighurst formulated tasks such as achieving emotional independence from parents and other adults, preparing for a career and for marriage and family life, or pursuing socially responsible behaviors.

At the same time, individual and social prerequisites have been postulated for the mastering of these developmental tasks, which differ historically and culturally. At the individual level, for example, psychological models of cognitive development (Inhelder & Piaget, 1980) state the basic possibility of coping with adolescence. Reflections on Erikson’s (1958) youth moratorium refer to structures that have emerged in Western societies from the extended educational and training periods which provide time and space to young people to actively cope with adolescence. Within this moratorium, in which young people largely free of social responsibility can try out different social roles, ways of life, and courses of action, the crises and conflicts associated with the upheavals or tasks can be socially tolerated and eventually overcome.

Among adolescents, anomalies which nowadays are increasingly construed within a neuropsychological paradigm—such as mood swings, diminished impulse control, increased fears, and aggressiveness—were and are interpreted at the social level as a questioning of both the existing world and the order of the adult society. Well into the 20th century, and partly to this day, this questioning was regarded as a problematic and rather disruptive feature of adolescence and thus as a potential threat to traditions, institutions and culture in general (see also Fend, 1988). Given this presumed threat to the social order, it has been suggested that the concern for youth expressed in science and society often hides concerns about culture, society, or the survival of democracy (Reinders, 2001).

On the other hand, the conflicts that young people have with parents in particular and adults in general, also known as “Sturm und Drang,” are generally viewed positively as a sign of striving for individual autonomy (Silbereisen & Weichold, 2012). Thus, the elaborated model of identity development in

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6 fig. turmoil
adolescence developed by Marcia (1966) on the basis of Erikson’s work, in which exploration and openness to newness are prerequisites for the development of identity (in contrast, for example, to a mere takeover of identity), recognizes youthful explorative behavior beyond the family of origin as important to the development of an independent identity.

From this perspective, a creative, innovative moment seems to be inherent in youth-specific conflicts. Researchers tend to view this “creativity in conflict” not only as typical, but also as necessary for young people and the advancement of society. In this conception, something new arises from young peoples’ alteration with and resistiveness against the given and the traditional and unfolds at a higher individual and social level.

2.2 Youth as intergenerational position

Justifications for the necessity of such alterations can be found, for example, in King’s (2013) psychoanalytically and socio-psychologically influenced perspective on adolescence. She regards the youth phase not as a status passage in which young people fit into the development gaps provided by the adult generation, but as a time in which fundamental new formations of social and family relations take place. In the context of adolescent transformation processes or restructuring processes that lead to increased autonomy and agency or to a “position and attitude of psychological and social agency, an ability to care for others, and productivity” (ibid., p. 71), life visions of the adult world are challenged.

From this perspective, the particularly crisis-prone nature of adolescence is rooted in the transformation of generational relationship structures to which the young person has to connect, both in a distancing and in a bonding manner, in order to advance her or his own identity and life plans. In addition, there are simultaneities and ambivalences characteristic of the youth phase. On the one hand, young people are confronted with new demands, such as those brought on by the transformation of intergenerational relations or the simultaneity of transmission of social knowledge and its renewal. On the other hand, new spaces of opportunity for individuation processes are opened up. In modernized societies, the adolescent moratorium is such a space of opportunity that, depending on the familial opportunity structure, brings together both enabling and resistive strategies of response to social conditions (see King, 2013).

In Oevermann’s (2001) perspective of socialization theory as well, crisis-proneness, in the sense of generational alteration, is a central characteristic of the youth phase:
Youth must therefore be innovative and provocative in differentiated societies. The therein expressed degree of supposed nonconformity with the prevailing norms of adult life is socially almost mandatory. Youth has the function of being rebellious and innovative. Finding the right dose is one of the central tasks of crisis management… (p. 109)

Again, the attainment of individual autonomy is presupposed to be the central task and goal of the youth phase. In this view, adolescents can only achieve this if they succeed in finding a balance between their own intentions and the need to adapt to external, social, and occupational constraints and accept compromises. Oevermann conceptualizes this balancing process as decision crises that have to be overcome, especially during ontogenetic detachment crises, as in adolescence (Oevermann, 2004). The adolescent crisis ends when the adolescent becomes aware of the probation problem for the first time and assumes responsibility for it.

2.3 The dialectic of adaptation and resistance

Despite the diversity of the above conceptions of adolescence, researchers agree that conflicts, altercations, and transformations, on the one hand, and coping, integration, and adaptation, on the other, are central elements of this life-stage for the development and socialization of an autonomous subject. In other words, individuation in intergenerational relationships is structurally characterized by the dialectics of resistance and adaptation. Resistance is aimed at simply passing on or reproducing existing values, behaviors, and beliefs; yet new values, behaviors, and beliefs can only be produced from or on the basis of what already exists. It has to bear upon the having-become-this-and-not-that due to one’s social background and must therefore always be socially adapted to a certain extent. From a socialization theory perspective, resistance and adaptation can thus be theorized as a conceptual reformulation of the dialectical tensions between crisis and routine, transformation and reproduction, and autonomy and attachment, which can be conceived as growth and conservation from an ontogenetic perspective, and thus an anthropological constant.

Even though political resistiveness is not discarded or necessarily included to this point, existing social power relations are challenged by young people who seek to transform them. From the perspective of both ontogenetics and socialization theory, the disputes, conflicts, and upheavals discussed relate primarily to the social role and position as well as the subjective experience of

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Footnote: Holzkamp (1996) describes this dialectic on yet another level, namely the already adapted adults on the one hand, and the young people still working against it, that is, keep resisting, on the other hand.
the adolescent subject. These may contain a certain potential for a resistiveness of young people, which may even be political. Whether or not it develops into explicit expression again depends on the social conditions, specifically on the resulting possibilities and limitations.

How people in general—and not only adolescents—behave vis-a-vis these possibilities is formulated dialectically by Klaus Holzkamp (1985) in terms of restrictive and generalized agency. For him, people have a double opportunity to act under existing (social) conditions: either they get by within the realm of existing possibilities, not exceeding them and ultimately adapting (restrictive agency), or they question the existing framework, seeking to transgress it and gain control of the social possibilities of life (generalized agency). Writing from within the Marxist tradition of critical psychology (Kritische Psychologie), he assumes that the current social conditions are in need of change and that remaining in a restrictive agency would ultimately run counter to the subject’s interests.

From this perspective, the disappointment of Haug and Gschwandtner (2006) with the essays of the youth who participated in the study is intelligible. In these essays they see, above all, indications of restricted opportunities for action, of withdrawing into private life, and only little evidence of transgressing the given social framework. Why the researchers chose to interview teenagers instead of subjects from older age groups remains unclear. In our opinion, this aspect of the study raises more questions than it answers. For one thing, it obliged them to focus only on subjects’ plans or visions of their imagined future lives, and not their actual lived experience. In addition, the essays were written in a school context, which may already have prompted most students to “stay in the frame” in their visions. Finally, the analyses focused primarily on the manifest level of the essays and less on their latent content.

In the case analyses presented in this article, we therefore focus on the importance of school as an institution that influences both data collection and the data itself, as well as the difference between manifest and latent level of meaning as a structuring relationship for the case.

3. Analyses

3.1 Project layout and the function of the research question

To empirically investigate the outlined dynamics between adaptation and resistance in the juvenile phase, we contrast the reconstructions of essays from two young girls with their visions of the future. The two essays were collected
during our interdisciplinary and cross-cultural research project “Children’s and young people’s images of the future in Germany and Ghana.” They were written by two adolescents, aged 18 and 17. Both live in Germany, but come from different social milieus. The case of Tracey can be classed with an underprivileged milieu, the case of Henriette with a bourgeois milieu.

The two essays stand out from our sample in that they do not develop an optimistic projection of the future, but—at least at first glance—make particularly critical references to their own future and that of society. The essay subject is dictated by our research stimulus: “How do you imagine your life as an adult?” Although we ask children and adolescents about their visions of the future indirectly, our underlying aim is to cast light on their current world and self-references as viewed from the perspective of development and socialization theory. We are interested in how the adolescents link their biographical having-become in the here and now with thought-experimental visions of the future. To answer this question, we collect different types of material. In addition to the essays that constitute the focus of this article, we also collect drawings and photos made by children and adolescents.

When analyzing the data, we are essentially concerned with the respondents’ self-positioning. With the visual data, this self-positioning can be worked out in particular by looking at the angle chosen for any given drawing or photograph (see Kleeberg-Niepage, 2016, Maier & Rademacher, 2016). This procedure can also be figuratively applied to essay analysis. In particular, the beginning of an essay can be interpreted as a self-positioning vis-a-vis the task posed by the researchers—both formally, as a positioning in reference to the research setting, and in terms of content, as part of the substantive answer to the question of how children and young people envision their lives as adults.

So, although we ask children and adolescents about their conceptions of adulthood, we are not interested in their concrete ideas per se or the extent to which these forward-looking ideas are realistic or utopian. Rather, we use the subjects’ responses to cast light on the typological characteristics of the case, which can be reconstructed from the present self-positioning of the adolescents.8

8 The case concept is broad. It does not exhaust itself in comprehending the case only in its subjective intent, but also in explicating the underlying structures and their production mechanisms. For the subject’s actions only make sense against the background of objectifiable options for action. If teenagers currently rebel, a rebellious youth is “normal”; if adolescents are currently pragmatically adapted, a rebellious adolescent is “special.” In this way, the social environment structures the possibilities of the subject. Nevertheless, the subject is not completely bound to these conditions, but always has the opportunity to decide otherwise. In this respect, the characteristic decision-making structure of the subject is to be understood as both an idiosyncrasy of the case and an expression of coping with general structural problems in a society (dialectics of the general and the particular).
In our opinion, asking subjects to express ideas about their own future gives us access to the current, temporally and spatially bound world and self-positioning of children and adolescents. As Arnett (2000) notes, “Speculating about the future can be a useful way of assessing the present.”

After thus clarifying the research interest of our study, we focus on the essay stimulus used. As discussed above, in formulating this stimulus we were interested in what is implicitly expressed. In asking how children and teenagers envision their adult lives, our stimulus implies that the addressee is not yet mature—that is, that adulthood lies in a future towards which the addressee incessantly and continuously moves. In everyday life, this is reflected in the common question to children: What do you want to become later in life? Although the question of future being induced by our research now enters the world of the child or adolescent, it is at the same time a “natural” question that, to varying degrees, consciously or unconsciously influences the present. The main point of the case is to understand how the children and adolescents relate to the research stimulus and the future-orientedness of the subject. The fundamental openness of the future challenges the interviewee both in “real” life and in this research—be it as an opportunity to shape a possible life path or as an imposition.

As previously explained, for the stimulus “How do you imagine your life as an adult” we collect different types of materials: drawings, photographs, and essays. Basing this article on the two essays, it is necessary to determine the characteristics of this type of protocol. First of all, the artificiality of the material stands out. An essay is a text written on a specific topic rarely encountered or discussed in everyday life and, in contrast to a letter, an essay does not open an immediate dialogue with a counterpart. In the lifeworld of children and adolescents, essays are found predominantly in the school context. In school, essays typically are written for a purpose. They do not offer students an opportunity to reflect on both themselves and the world and write down their thoughts; rather, they are ultimately subjected to performance assessment through grades. Equally, through the analysis of school essays we learn something about the (strategic) (self-)positioning of adolescents in relation to the fulfillment or non-fulfillment of formal demands on this type of text set by educators’ standards of external assessment.

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9 In the psychological conception of “possible selves,” that is, of potential visions of an individual’s future self (Markus & Nurius, 1986), those visions of the future are viewed as important impulses for the motivation and the behavior of a person in the present. The view of a possible future self, desired or feared, into which experiences from the biographical past also flow, thus always has an effect on the cognition and behavior of a person in the here and now.
School writing assignments rarely include reflection essays which aim to present personal ideas, experiences, or opinions. In this respect, a research-induced tension characterizes the design of our study, which is that the formal rationality of school essays and the material rationality of the writing subjects’ personal visions of the future converge. In case-reconstructive interpretation, focusing the analysis on how the writers resolve this tension while performing the assigned tasks has proven fruitful.

Two summarized case reconstructions are presented below. As a reminder, the cases were selected according to the criterion that potentials of resistiveness were recognizable on the manifest level of the text.

3.2 Case study 1: “Tracey”

Tracey is 18 years old at the time of the inquiry and lives with her parents in a rural region of Northern Germany. She has a secondary school leaving certificate (“Hauptschulabschluss”) and is currently attending another school in preparation for a vocational training. Tracey has two older brothers who also graduated from secondary general school and have been unemployed ever since; however, they no longer live with their parents. According to the data in the data sheet, the father works as a “welding expert,” the mother as an “ambulance service worker.”

Tracey’s essay was collected as part of a university seminar. For this purpose, a blank was distributed to the respondents, with the stimulus “How do you imagine your life as an adult?” printed as a headline at the top in the middle of the sheet. There were 15 lines each on the front and back, framed by a black line. Tracey has filled the whole space from the first to the last line with her handwritten text. Only in two places does the text on the right side protrude beyond the framing into the marginal area of the page. With regard to spelling,
punctuation, and sentence structure, the text is flawed. The handwriting appears inexpert; at the same time, the effort to write carefully is noticeable.

Fig. 1 Essay Tracey, 18 years

The first line below the stimulus heading reads:

*S1: Complicated, Exhausting, scary.*

11 “Complicated, Exhausting, scary. Mainly because of the disturbing news. If I Imagined that I could possibly become like the adults who talk about not hitting Anyone and always be diplomatic and then go to war or plunder people's accounts. The economy will not be any better, the society anyway. Training is already now hard to manage in my position. That’s why I often ask myself, “Is it worth it at all?”, but I have to go through it anyway. What kind of job I will have? Not even this question I can say with certainty. My desires for a profession is always nullified by two factors. Factor 1: School performance and especially with my math weakness I'm unusable for virtually every job. Factor 2: The desire for a profession that my inclinations for craftsmanship and design, which is mercilessly destroyed by doubt. So, to return to the real question, no, it certainly will not be easy, and I am aware that I will not live in a villa. The question is cruel through and through, asking it to someone with fears about the future is... lousy! And yes, a cheeky personal opinion always belongs to a good ending.”
This sequence of words starts the essay’s continuous text. It is not a headline, although it has a heading-like character. Neither is it a complete sentence, but an enumeration with three words that awakens associations with an advertising-effective book title or an attention-attracting slogans of a help-promising call center. In this respect, it is a thematic condensation that has to be understood as supposedly preceded by an altercation process which is outlined in this listing merely with keywords. Although this sequence is not and does not want to be a headline (it is not centered either), it is a quasi-headline that anticipates what might be the result of the thematic discussion at the end of the essay, already as the opening of the text.

The anticipation happens in a mode that is, as mentioned, reminiscent of a book title in the style of an advertising slogan. For that purpose, messages are condensed and stylized so that motivation arises to prompt consumption. If something is strung together in keywords, an inner context (between the keywords and the underlying topics) is implied, but this is not further elaborated. The keyword triad is remarkable as an opening of the essay as it proceeds in the logic of culture-industrial heading or catch-line formation, although in a broader sense, it is a reflection essay in which the writer is asked to discuss her own, subjective point of view. After detailed analysis of the essay’s first sequences, we return to the contextualization of the text.

The listing of the three words at the beginning of the essay raises the question of their intrinsic connection. Ostensibly, it looks like an escalation that moves from the “Complicated” to the “Exhausting” to the “scary,” and at the same time goes hand in hand with a qualitative change from subject-relatedness to individual feelings. However, at the structural level of meaning, the analysis reveals that the escalation does not proceed in the direction of approaching the subject, but just the other way round. “Scary” is not so much an authentic expression of heightened anxiety as a result of exhausting complexity. In contrast to the speech act “I am scared of the gathering thunderstorm,” in the phrase “the gathering thunderstorm is scary” the sensibility of the subject is externalized and attributed to a specific thing: the thunderstorm.

Although only a subject can be scared, here it is a thing to which the “scary” quality is attributed. This separates the anxiety from the subject feeling the anxiety. This shift from subject to thing makes this sequence appear an inauthentic speech act of a subjectively perceived anxiety. In terms of a risky case structure hypothesis, it can already be assumed in the analysis of the first sequence of the essay that the anxiety has shifted to an object and that this is accompanied by the subject’s avoidance of self-positioning. This avoidance is most evident in the renunciation of a pronoun at the beginning of the essay. Formally, this first sequence can be understood as a direct response of the 18-
year-old pupil to the research stimulus “How do you imagine your life as an adult?”: “Complicated, Exhausting, scary.” In material terms, however, with this very answer Tracey avoids positioning herself as a subject.

So, although the question explicitly aims at taking a subjective standpoint (your life, not a life), the answer does not enclose an answering subject. As a subject, Tracey could have written, “I imagine my future life to be complicated, exhausting, and scary,” or “I imagine my future life to be complicated and exhausting, and therefore I am always scared of the future.” But she does not write that.

What does it mean that a question that is aimed at subjective expectations of the future is answered in a stylized way that does not lead to the replying subject but distracts the attention away from it?

This is, so our hypothesis, an expression of a case-specific form of resistiveness which is directed against both the formal and the content requirements of the task. For Tracey does not answer the question in the intended sense of the research stimulus. Nonetheless, she does not refuse to participate in the research, but answers—in that stylized, future-pessimistic way. At the same time, she submits herself—unintentionally—to the question that she apparently wants to criticize. To this extent, one might say, this is a case of adapted resistiveness. The elaborated structural logic reproduces itself in the following sequence:

\section*{S2: Mainly because of the disturbing news.}

In Tracey’s eyes, the news is disturbing; that is, the coverage of events that take place in spatial distance from her and about which she is informed perturbs her. The fact that it is not about tangible disturbing events, but rather about news in general, creates the image of a young woman who wants to appear as an informed listener of news, but at the same time conveys the image of a culture-industrial consumer with seemingly little expertise but a lot of cultural pessimism. What she finds worrying are not real events in her close or distant environment, but probably global events in which she does not participate but from which she merely learns from the news – presumably via a culture-industrial mediator.

These news stories about events in which Tracey is not involved are the starting point for her visions of the future and her anxieties about it. Since there seems to be no recourse to her life and her own experiences, this second sequence of words seems similarly stylized to the first one. In the subsequently cited justification for her pessimistic view of the future, she again ascribes a quality to a thing, namely to the news in its flatness, while still refusing to
position herself by using a pronoun. This mode of relating to the world seems childishly naive, as an expression of a little reflective world and self-positioning. Therefore, with the analysis of the following sequence, we want to investigate the question of what might have motivated this stylized answer mode:

*S3: If I Imagined that I could possibly become like the adults who talk about not hitting Anyone and always be diplomatic and then go to war or plunder people’s accounts. The economy will not be any better, the society anyway.*

Although Tracey now uses the pronoun “I” for the first time, the adults to whom she relates this “I” in a delimiting manner remain nebulous. In the same breath, concrete adults who are hitting and abstract adults who wage war or plunder people’s accounts become thematic. This sequence reads like a radical sweeping blow against adults who are at a tremendous distance from the teenage author. This detachment is not only evident in the content of this sequence, but also in its grammatical form: the conditional sentence “if I imagine that I could possibly become like...” lacks the sequence, i.e. the main clause, so the “then...”. Illustrated as a negative foil, the double morality of the adult world is indeed denounced, but the subsequent personal impact is not elaborated verbally.

This can be seen as a form of expression of a child’s self-view and world view, in which complex facts and contexts are simplified. In contrast to children, who normally explore the world with structural optimism, the already mentioned (cultural) pessimism is developing further. One could take this as a positioning that is simultaneously and in a contradictory way characterized by “childlike” criticism and “adult” cultural pessimism.

*S4: Training is already now hard to manage in my position.*

After having criticized abstract conditions up to now, Tracey for the first time mentions a problem that affects her personally: the search for a trainee position as an almost impossible task. It is interesting at this point that she uses the term *position* and not *situation*. Grammatically, two phrases are merging into one: in my situation or because of my position. Again, the abstractness of the criticism is striking. Neither is the development of her difficult position explained, nor are the conditions criticized that led to the unfavorable position in the training market. Instead, she problematizes the postulation that an individual who receives an unfavorable positioning as part of social status allocation still has to master it all alone. Tracey’s stance calls into evidence her internalization of social problems and the impossibility to distance oneself from these problem areas while simultaneously criticizing them.
S5: That’s why I often ask myself, “Is it worth it at all?”, but I have to go through it anyway. What kind of job I will have? Not even this question I can say with certainty.

The question Tracey poses here, “Is it worth it at all?” is basically a leading question, since she “knows” the answer already. At school, she has probably sensed that the social allocation process carried out in the course of school selections may have placed her in a loser position. In that sense, it does not really pay to make any further efforts. It is more reasonable, within one’s own limited scope of action, to come to terms with a possibly bad secondary school leaving certificate. The connotation contained in this question, “Is it worthwhile in the first place, if I now put in a lot of effort and yet have no chance to catch up with the academically successful pupils and their training opportunities?” is already answered in the negative by asking this question.

The fact that there is little scope for criticizing the conditions of failure due to the deeply rooted sense of self-responsibility for one’s own failures is basically logical. In this context, Bourdieu and Passeron (1971) refer to a “process of self-elimination” when the lack of cultural capital, due to their social background, means that competition and performance requirements can no longer be met at school, and underprivileged students leave the school system as if by itself. And this practice of dropping out seems legitimate to everyone involved. In this respect, the case points to how school socialization hampers the formation of problem awareness which would hold the system and its structure accountable; that this does not or cannot happen is all the more astonishing if someone like Tracey, in the transition from school to the vocational world, experiences for herself that she is basically without a chance and it is not worth any further effort.

Because Tracey has obviously internalized that she herself is to blame for her positioning, the criticism she voices of society remains very distant and tenuous in her argumentation. In a mood of stylized pessimism about the future, she presents a naive criticism such that the arguments appear pretentious. At this, language and socialization of her social background certainly play a significant role. The striking stylistic figures fail to appear convincing, which reinforces the impression that the criticism is unsubstantiated. With regard to the reflection of the research setting, it should be noted that the essay format implicitly presupposes a routine in handling textuality, as is to be expected in bourgeois milieus.

However, Tracey seems to be trying not only to fulfill this requirement, but to exceed it. The stylizations, in this light, can also be read as an effort to meet demands that are difficult to “manage” against the backdrop of Tracey’s social
upbringing. In the figure of stylizing the lack of opportunity and the pessimism, a certain resilience of Tracey’s vision of the future seems to be justified. Thus, she creates a stylized framework for herself, which on the one hand stabilizes her and on the other hand limits her — and from which she can voice a certain criticism and resistance to the prevailing conditions.

How resilience and resistiveness are mutually interlocked in their stylized mode becomes all the more evident if one considers that Tracey, at the time of the survey, is more or less in transition from school to the world of work and thus experiences for herself first-hand the lack of opportunities to which she refers as an acute crisis. Given these circumstances, she has every reason to despair; but that is not what she does. Against this background, Tracey’s deflection of the insight that the social system has designated her as a loser may even play an existential role. The adoption of this third-party assessment as a means of assessing her own personality prevents her from credibly criticizing the social conditions and reinforces her experience that she herself cannot change anything, and thus her habitual pessimism.

3.3 Case study 2: “Henriette”

Henriette is 17 years old at the time of the survey and lives together with her parents in a northern German city. She attends upper secondary school of a bilingual grammar school (conforming to the 11th grade). Henriette has a younger brother who attends the 9th grade of the same grammar school. The father is a graduate businessman, the mother works as a specialist in the pedagogical field.

Henriette’s essay is not handwritten, as is usually the case in our sample, but typed. We therefore assume that Henriette wrote the essay outside of school, that is, privately, and that it was collected by a student teacher who had access to the school. The essay is divided into five paragraphs of different lengths with a total of 48 lines; the text is written in a sans-serif font and fully justified. At the beginning, there is a center-justified, bold, and underlined headline. Both the typewritten and edited format as well as the relatively large size distinguish Henriette’s essay from Tracey’s. The essay format, parents’ professions, and type of school point to a social background or social milieu of origin that seems to place a higher value on education and privilege than Tracey’s.
I am just 1.5 years from graduation and one would think that in the past 6.5 years I had the opportunity to ask myself at least roughly how to go on. That is regrettably not the case. On the one hand, I find it difficult to focus on one of my interests or discover a special talent with which to base my future professional life, and, on the other hand, that though we have career information days at our school, they mainly provide information on teacher education, business administration, and other economics courses.

My rough plan so far is to leave Germany after school and to gain experience through Work-and-Travel or aid organizations in another country and expand my horizons to get an idea of the kind of knowledge not taught in school but that is much more vital than algebra. That sounds pretty much like a plan, at least partly. If one considers, however, that professional success and financial independence, which I am – perhaps utopian – hoping to achieve one day, in whatever profession and whatever is the promoted goal of this whole competition, not necessarily being friends of starting a family, so the foundation for this kind of career should be laid before the 30th birthday takes place. Assuming I finish school at 18, I come back from abroad at age 19, and my studies last about 8 years (which is well possible, if a potentially successful professional field is chosen, and possible complications implied), so I am 27 years old, and I still have about 3 more years to secure a job for me and to work on my professional advancement or, since I somehow jib at the eternal existence as part of a company, always panting for the next higher rank, to found a company myself. So far so good, but should I now take on family planning and return from maternity protection one day, no one will guarantee me that just get back this hard-earned job. Unless, of course, it would be somehow possible for me to largely hand over my lead position in my company over time, and I hope that it will continue to be on the road to success. The bottom line is that I don’t look very motivated towards my future, not because I do not...
The first line of the typed text reads:

S1: **About my future**

This sequence is centered, underlined, and placed in boldface type directly above the text, like a headline. A headline is the title above a text and the most succinct description of the work to follow, which it introduces and summarizes in a highly condensed form. The headline gives the text a formal, weighty character. The fact that Henriette adds a headline to her text can be understood as a statement about the research question, in that the futurity it implies is isolated and adulthood eradicated. In so doing, Henriette initially defies the formal research routine to overfulfill it, as it were, in the next move, by altering and interpreting the research question to fit her individual situation. Her twofold typographical marking of the headline via the use of bold, underlined letters, highlights and emphasizes—perhaps over-emphasizes—the significance of her own vision of the future.

On the content level, however, this ostensible, formally stylized meaningfulness is hardly apparent, for Henriette occupies a speaker position characterized by a monologue “about” her future and thus about herself. In such a supposedly reflective position of speech about oneself from a non-ego position, one’s own life becomes a topic that can be referred to and described as a case-specific distancing of speaking about life from (a position of) life itself. One’s own life virtually becomes a product, a cultural object which, although it originates from the practice of life, has at the same time distanced itself from the corporeal positionality of the subject. It has decoupled from the subject, so to enjoy working or working on projects, but rather because I feel I'm stuck in a kind of model where your “ranking” ends with school grades and later in the form of degrees, but which cannot measure intelligence, collegiality, motivation, ability to cooperate or strength of character. By the way, that would be a weird illusion. What I mean by that is that our chances to enter the vocational world depend on values based on the arbitrariness of teaching figures who presume to judge people they teach 180 minutes a week, and only to a degree they feel like doing (since probably tenured and nothing to worry about, anyway), who in turn were more or less arbitrarily hired for this job, and continue to have values that show how well one is fulfilling the requested tasks, but cannot explain why I have no chance of studying medicine just because of theoretically blowing the graduation exam in religion and thereby cutting the grade point average. Finally, I have to say that I have no solution to the assessment problem and, as I said, would find it much worse if, in the future, one's own strength of character would be measured by more or less corrupt or arbitrarily selected officials. But all these points ensure that I'm not exactly looking forward to making a choice.”
speak. By contrast, the thought-experimentally formable speech act represented by the headline “my future,” would have foregone that detachedness in favor of an immediate subject-relatedness. The fact that Henriette’s contentual statement about her own future appears to be distanced and disconnected from the subject is the other side of the formal, external statement about the research task. Ambivalences thus characterize the adaptation-like transformation of the research question into a question about the future.

* S2: I am just 1.5 years from graduation [the German expression “Ich befinde mich...” which is analogously translated here with “I am...” conveys a second meaning, “I am located...,” to which the following analysis refers].

The first sentence of the continuous text is instructive for a further determination of the distancing hypothesis. “I am [located]...” represents a spatial positioning, a locating act. However, “I am [located]...” is not linked to a place, but to a date specified as a decimal number. That is, a temporal positioning of the ego is made under the guise of a spatial positioning. The “location” and “time” of this (position) determination is Henriette’s graduation. The ego’s whole being seems to orient itself towards this end. Although the essay begins with the self-presentation and self-positioning of the ego, it remains a weak, unreactive ego. Conceivably, it would have been different if Henriette had said, “I will graduate in 1.5 years.” But that is not what she says. With her wording, she presents a self (or ego) that has nothing to decide and to create by itself, but is merely located at a more or less specific point within a school schedule.

With Schütze (1981), this could be described as a radical form of orientation (of life) towards the institutional time schedule, as becomes visible in the case of Henriette. School years literally seem to structure biography and consciousness; the individual’s subjectivity disappears behind school matters. In this process, it only remains to identify one’s own place on the given track, so to speak, because the time units of the sequence pattern are fixed and predetermined. In this way, “I am [located]...” becomes understandable; it presupposes a subject that in the logic of school routines seems largely effaced by its subjectiveness.

Another reading of “I am [located] ...” makes it possible to extend the previous hypothesis with respect to the modus operandi. One may say “I am in a permanent contract (of employment),” or “I am on vacation.” These speech acts emphasize that someone is in a particular state. In a state description, the processual and dynamic developments that have led to and/or characterize that state are frozen. It would be different if, for example, Henriette had said, “I am now in upper school and heading for graduation.” But she does not say that, she
is in a condition that can simply be called “school.” The condition, which manifests itself in a case-specific coping mode, consists of submitting to the school schedule up to the institutionally decided end. It reveals a conforming ego that seems to no longer assert any self-determination. In this respect, the uninvolved narrative ego, which has become clear in the sequence so far, appears to be a consistent expression of school-related de-autonomization of the subject. Based on the case characteristics worked out so far, the following analysis will be guided by questions to find out what conception of the future can be formulated with this self and world positioning, what consequential problems this entails, and how the text passages identified with resistance and criticism of school and society fit into it.

Assuming I finish school at 18, I come back from abroad at age 19, and my studies last about 8 years (which is well possible, if a potentially successful professional field is chosen, and possible complications implied), so I am 27 years old, and I still have about 3 more years to secure a job and work on my professional advancement or, since I somehow jib at the eternal existence as part of a company, always panting for the next higher rank, to found a company myself. So far so good, but should I now take on family planning and return from maternity protection one day, no one will guarantee me that I will just get back this hard-earned job. Unless, of course, it would be somehow possible for me to largely hand over my lead position in my company over time, and I hope that it will continue to be on the road to success.

Henriette formulates at this juncture, in the mode of “assumption,” evidently unquestioned statements about future stages of life (graduation, year abroad, study, professional footing, starting a family, and motherhood), following a fairly strict timetable and presenting them in a sequence to be managed and checked off. Our concern is not the concrete ideas per se, but to decipher the underlying habitual dispositions, that is, the generative structure of the case expressed in Henriette’s vision of the future and stated in this way and not any other way. It is revealing in this sequence that her actual life plan is not subjected to a hypothetical test by the introductory “assumption,” but merely its chronology. She apparently does not question whether she will graduate from school, stay abroad after graduation, go through a long study phase, and achieve motherhood at the age of thirty. The only question is whether the implementation of the specific plan will be feasible for every single calculated year.

In spite of the opening “assumption,” the time plan worked out by Henriette and outlined in her essay admits to a tested, fundamental practical viability. It is the edited essay itself that claims validity as a checked text, and accordingly also
the plan formulated in it. However, close analysis of the material level of the plan reveals a discrepancy. In addition to the orientation towards institutional and professional stages of a bourgeois “normal biography,” the plan contains stages unlikely to develop in the described way. In particular, the “company founder” episode seems naive; it is more of a utopian dream than a plan. And with that, it finally takes on the function of a placeholder in the present, a desirable but unlikely ideal, which subsequently makes the development of feasible plans potentially more difficult, and ultimately constrains Henriette’s visions of the future.

There is nothing unique in this vision, something that the ego chooses out of interest and for whose realization it works passionately. Although specific, the scheme of life looks like a template that was set up but not adjusted, thus remaining purely formal. It is distinctive of this selection mode not to decide for something, but to oppose and avoid less attractive options. In this respect, such a vision of the future indicates a present-day disposition of the subject that could be described as phlegmatic, insofar as there is always a “too little.” The interest in creating something in accordance with one’s own will is often not strong enough to overcome the necessary hurdles. Henriette, for example, opts against the arduous ascent of the corporate ladder as an employee and instead “plans” as a new graduate of an unknown field of study to become head of a company in an unspecified branch of the economy. Here, hedonistic elements mingle with an improbable plan for the future, in that it is indeterminate at crucial points and thus appears to essentially be motivated by the avoidance of professional efforts. It seems as if Henriette is trying to set forth the idea of a successful bourgeois life, though, this very idea remains oddly strange to her and appears in its material vagueness distanced and unrelated.

Henriette does not seem to be driven by joy, conviction, greed for money, or other motives, but simply submits to the “storyboard” of a bourgeois-capitalist life. She does not really want what she should eagerly wish to accomplish or to achieve. As an employee, she would have the option not to run after a career but rather to establish herself in the mediocrity of an ordinary job; but Henriette cannot verbalize and claim this for herself. Performance pressure and coerced individuation weighs upon her and she senses that she cannot really mitigate the constraints, as long as she avoids making decisions on reorganizing her life. By planning to set up, through eight years of study (!), a school-like sheltered environment which largely relieves her of pending life decisions, the time pressure following the sheltered period is already looming in the ideas of the 17-year-old. After her extended studies, she only has three years left to embark upon her scheduled career, before she has to take on family planning and then “return from maternity protection one day” (!) to the vocational world.
Although avoiding any decision relieves her of the burden of having to decide, it also puts a strain on her, because in carrying out that act of avoidance she has unintentionally decided something. In Henriette’s tightly timed schedule of fixed options, the phlegmatic indecision and material vagueness of her plans for the future unfold in a strained dynamic. In this dilemma, the intrapsychic suffering inherent to this mode of self and world positioning becomes apparent.

What do these ambivalences mean in terms of their potential for resistiveness in this type? It seems irritating at first glance that the institution which largely relieves Henriette of life decisions through a so-called “educational moratorium” is at the center of her criticism. So what kind of criticism is this—what does it consist of, and what not?

What I mean by that is that our chances to enter the vocational world depend on values based on the arbitrariness of teaching figures who presume to judge people they teach 180 minutes a week, and only to a degree they feel like doing (since probably tenured and nothing to worry about, anyway), who in turn were more or less arbitrarily hired for this job and continue to have values that show how well one is fulfilling the requested tasks, but cannot explain why I have no chance of studying medicine just because of theoretically blowing the graduation exam in religion and thereby cutting the grade point average.

In contrast to Tracey, Henriette with her phrase “our chances to enter” focuses on the plural and thus abstracts again from her own person. Besides, it is about “job opportunities” and not, as it was with Tracey, first of all just about a “training place;” for Henriette and the generalized group of people to whom she attributes herself, evidently only career advancement is worth considering.

With the perception that her chances of entering “the vocational world” depends on teachers, Henriette harshly settles scores with them in the following: these chances are dependent “on values based on the arbitrariness of teaching figures,” which in addition “presume to judge people they teach 180 minutes a week.” She thereby produces an interesting contradiction, because assessments are either arbitrary or value-bound. And values are, in terms of social regularity, just detached from the individual arbitrariness Henriette brings up here. It indicates an internal contradiction, because Henriette unconsciously shares the values that she overtly criticizes by projecting them onto the teachers and thus externalizing them. With this, the real teachers, whom she could have mentioned by name, become abstract “teaching figures.” That, in turn, is functional as a means of qualifying them as carriers of injustice to whom Henriette also belongs by social affiliation, a fact she tries to dissociate from. In this respect, criticism of school appears to be unreliable, for the denounced, arrogated assessment of
people by "teaching figures" stands in contrast to the school logic of evaluation of rendered exam performances, which Henriette fundamentally shares when she complains that she was unfairly rated and placed in this process. It is not a criticism of the allocation of life chances in schools, but only of having unfairly ended up on the losing side.

Not only does the criticism remain superficial, but so does Henriette’s own relation to her criticism, which seems to be hasty and lacking in authenticity. For in her life plan so far, neither manifest nor latent signs can prove that she suffers from having no chance to study medicine and achieve a corresponding career. If one assesses the previous findings, the criticism seems hollow and inauthentic in that it reproduces the mode of distancing and, one could say, is like a part of the stylized self-enactment logic of the case, fashioned as a put-on and mere attitude.

Like Tracey’s essay, Henriette’s writing is molded by a distinctive, stylistic element: while Tracey’s case reconstructs a logic characteristic of the culture industry (advertisement), Henriette’s case presents a speaker position that tells its own future as if it had already taken place. As in a literary work (see, e.g., Oevermann, 1997), one’s own life becomes a fictional reality (“About my future”) and thus the real open-endedness of the subject’s future life is closed off and enclosed in a technical narrative figure.

The narrative ego, i.e. the speaker position, appears to be in a positionality detached from the practice of life itself, a disintegration of form and substance. The narrative figure seems to be motivated by a serious commitment to the research question. Yet this inner, fictional reality of discussing one’s own future cannot be sustained in the work. As with Tracey’s case, this creates the impression of an inconsistent overall structure. The intended altercation with the surrounding world, written in the respective form or style, and mirroring the question about the future, turns into an affirmation of the given situation. At the same time, the indeterminacy of the future, if managed in this way, leads to a dynamic intensification of the adolescent individuation problem.

3.4 Comparative discussion

Both of the analyzed cases present a contrast to most other respondents in that they do not answer the research question with a typical narrative of an average adult life, but instead articulate criticism. This criticism—towards adults in general (Tracey) and teachers in particular (Henriette)—indeed reflects, on the manifest level, conflicts and disputes with the given situation which fit in with the previously outlined youth-typical dialectic of adaptation and resistance. On the latent level, however, as the analyses show, the alleged resistance remains
within the limits of a milieu-specific self-organization into existing scopes of action.

Although Tracey deplores her assigned, economically marginalized social position, she adapts to it. Her resistance, her fight against the research question’s imposition, acts as a defense against the idea that there is something for her to imagine or even to shape, beyond what’s waiting for her anyway. Allowing such an idea of agency and self-efficacy would reveal the integration of social space allocation into the self and pose a threat already averted—both from the performance logic of bourgeois-capitalist societies, for which Tracey is not sufficiently productive, and also from the questioning of this logic, which would make her own involvement in the maintenance of the status quo visible. Tracey’s own efforts, for example in terms of her education, are therefore not worth it; the lack of achievement potential was already certified by her graduation, bad marks and the diagnosis of “weakness in mathematics.” In addition, no immediate existential crisis will threaten her if she refrains from these efforts. Ultimately, she acts against her own interests, and that such interests—such as a “skilled trade” or “living in a villa”—do indeed exist can also be deduced from the accusatory style of the essay.

At the same time, Tracey is not just a victim of social circumstances. She acts not only within them, but also towards them. In the face of her almost nonexistent social and cultural capital and lack of visions regarding what or how it could be different, settling in the fringes of society seems to be comprehensible, indeed reasonable. In contrast, an opposition to those structures of power responsible for her socio-economic marginalization – that is, political resistiveness – would be downright unreasonable and self-destructive. The laboriously averted threat to her self-esteem would be updated, Tracey would appear as a person who cannot redeem the promise of advancement in bourgeois-capitalist societies, and her own participation in the social circumstances would be visible. Therefore, her criticism of “adults” remains abstract, on the surface, and eventually implausible (see Osterkamp, 1997).

Henriette also adjusts to a condition she calls “school.” In this condition, she just “is [located]” and waits for a pre-determined end: graduation. Until then, she negates her own scope of action and does not claim or struggle for autonomy. On the one hand, she directs her criticism against the competitive pressures of society, and on the other hand, against the fact that she is evaluated by teachers at school. She accuses these “teaching figures” of arbitrariness and listlessness and denies them the ability to evaluate her properly. Since these ratings can once again break through to her starting position in post-school competition, Henriette’s criticism closes here: the competition is rejected if one’s own good starting position is uncertain.
Which (allegedly denied) life chances specifically interest her remains unclear; her explanations follow an almost schematic bourgeois ideal model of a professional career that corresponds to the status of her social background. She does not resist it, but she doesn’t want to “pant for” it, opting rather to start right from the top of the professional hierarchy, preferably as the founder of her own company. Henriette senses, as it were, that there will be an appropriate place for her and that this place, regardless of her plans or her own efforts, is waiting for her, which is why she can safely avoid the latter. Instead, despite all her criticism of school, she mentally endorses an institutional sanctuary for eight more years, which is then called “higher education.”

Henriette’s criticism is not directed against social conditions of domination and power, either. Her general blaming of “teaching figures” does not touch on the selection function of schools in bourgeois-capitalist societies, and in her essay society’s competitive pressure on the individual is only worthy of criticism if her own good starting position is endangered. This shows Henriette’s own entanglement and involvement in the capitalist achievement-oriented society from which she will, as she already knows, eventually benefit. The articulated criticism remains external and implausible. In anticipation of this profit, a fundamental questioning of the achievement principle would be unreasonable. The price paid for this is a life plan in avoidance mode. Not only her own efforts or concrete determinations are avoided, but also the exploration of extended opportunities for action, which were, in contrast to Tracey, indeed available to Henriette due to her social and cultural capital.

4. Conclusion

The cases analyzed show that both Tracey and Henriette comply with the developmental and socialization-oriented demands on youth in such a way that, when asked about their visions of the future, they deal critically with their concrete life situations, challenge the conditions in which they find themselves, and struggle for both their own conception of identity and their ability to cope with the adolescent crisis.

In the detailed analyses presented above, we were able to work out that on the manifest level the explicit resistance to social conditions or institutions (school) ultimately remains within the milieu-specific scope of action. Albeit in different ways, both Tracey and Henriette remain in a passive-lamenting subject position. In the analyses, the presented resistance turned out to be a form of adaptation in which criticism remains within the existing system. As in the case of Tracey, the subject may give up individually, blame herself for failing, and fail
to criticize the social conditions in which she views herself as powerless, not least because avoiding such criticism prevents her from despairing altogether. Or, as in the case of Henriette, the subject may maintain her self-esteem by blaming school and the teachers for what she imagines as a perhaps curtailed life. In the end, this justifies her passivity and smothes the inconsistencies in her life plan.

In Holzkamp’s terminology, both cases are examples of restrictive agency. In Tracey’s case, this is expressed as a warding off a threat to the self, and in Henriette’s through her knowledge about the existence of a socially recognized place. In this way, both positions block the subject’s ability to make the “effort of ascent” (Silkenbeumer & Wernet, 2012) and widen their scopes of action, a stance which from the position of the respective subjects may seem “reasonable.” There is an obvious contradiction between the promise of pluralism and the multiplicity of opportunities presented by postmodern society, and the perceived narrowness of the actually existing opportunities for a life plan rated as successful. On that note, it seems reasonable to renounce efforts. For if cultural conditions are reflected in intrapsychic dispositions, as reconstructed in the cases of Tracey and Henriette, then, little or no potential can be mobilized for a change of self and world relation.

In both cases, school as the central institution in the participant’s life appears to be a place that paralyzes autonomy, in which one just “sojourns,” but which does not open up room for maneuver in the present or opportunities for the future. Even the criticism of school stays “in the frame” and does not aim to provide social living conditions, which can also be explained by the reproduction of a mode acquired in school: Holzkamp (1995) speaks of defensive, resistant learning when learning acts as defense against threats (bad grades, punishments, etc.), calling this the common case in school. With regard to the two essays analyzed, the thesis is that the school-based mode of defensive, resistant learning is actually the precursor of restrictive agency.

Last but certainly not least in this context, we should ask what we as researchers really expect from young people who—either at school or in an essay writing activity clearly associated with school—are asked to answer the question of how they imagine their lives as adults. Why should we (as Haug and Gschwandtner, 2006) be disappointed with adapted, standardized courses of life or pseudo-resistive statements, and lament poor resistance or lack of system criticism—especially since such criticism would ultimately be directed against an establishment to which the researchers themselves generally belong?

First of all, a possible form of resistance or criticism by the interviewees—in particular the refusal to participate in the research process—does not come

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10 The counter-proposal is the subject's “expansive learning” out of world interest and the effort to tackle a problem of action (see Holzkamp, 1995).
into focus at all. We only work with those data that result from a certain submission of the subject to the research requirement. In addition, a look at the possible reasons for the frequent production of standardized and adapted visions of the future under the given conditions of the survey would be worthwhile: By reproducing perceived normative concepts of life in the course of the task and distancing myself from them as a subject, I make myself unassailable, reveal no personal thoughts, and probably meet the expectations of teachers in particular or adults in general. With this approach, I again use those strategies of selective communication acquired by me during my school years, which enable me to survive school (see Holzkamp, 1993, 1995).

Furthermore, one could ask whether disappointment with young peoples’ lack of resistance does not—inaudissibly—equate adolescence-typical conflicts in the described dialectics of adaptation and resistance with political resistance in the form of system criticism. Whereas indications of (adjusted) resistiveness as part of adolescent coping with crises are to be expected in such essays, political resistance in the sense of opposition to social conditions is not necessarily to be expected—at any rate, no more or less than it is from adults, for example.

Drawing upon critical psychology (“Kritische Psychologie”), with its distinction between restrictive and generalized agency, it would therefore be more appropriate to ask why people, in general, often choose restrictive agency.

In the cases of Tracey and Henriette, we see how neo-liberal ideologies of self-responsibility and self-optimization turn into subjective premises for action (see also Rose, 1996). Particularly through school processes of socialization, subjects experience and internalize the fact that they themselves are presumably the architects of their own fortunes, and that it is their own responsibility to productively use the multitude of opportunities available to them to shape their lives. The seemingly unlimited variety of options (keyword: social plurality) which are supposed to be open to all (keyword: equal opportunities) makes it difficult to find occasions or targets for an opposition based on the prevailing social conditions. I do not have to fight for something if I could achieve it—at least theoretically. Behind this neo-liberal logic, the societal conditionality of subjective problem situations becomes invisible. Conflicts and criticism are not directed against the social conditions, but shift to the intrapsychic of the subject.

It is therefore hardly surprising that no evidence of political resistiveness is found in our empirical material. But instead of asking for schools (as Haug & Gschwandtner, 2006) to teach young people critical thinking, youth research would be exciting if it a) directed attention to those social structures, institutions, and practices that paralyze resistiveness against prevailing conditions; b) addressed how social problems are subjectified; and c) focused on the young
people’s perspective on their own role and position in society and their experience of adolescence.

References


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Forgetting influences and believing we develop our interests in a self-determined way

Anke Grotlüschen and Judith Krämer

Abstract
There is a widespread belief that we have control over what we are interested in. In this article, this assumption is subjected to an empirical analysis. The result shows that interests do appear to have been independently selected; however, the data also highlight the close link between social backgrounds and what we experience, i.e. influence by outside sources. The fact that social influences are forgotten is a genuine characteristic of the ‘habitus’ as described by Bourdieu. The data are analysed as to the role habitual characteristics play in interest development.

Keywords
Self-determination, target group research, interest development, critical psychology, habitus

1. Foreword

We start with a definition of self-determination. We then look at target group research and its concepts of interest, explore research into interest development, and contrast the discourse with Pierre Bourdieu’s habitus concept. A glance at our quantitative and qualitative data follows. Finally, similarly to Krapp (2002) and Deci and Ryan (2002), we take a discriminating approach to self-determination based on habitus theory. We cautiously link two areas of research-into interest and into target groups--that tend to be treated separately.
2. Gradual and Apparent Self-Determination

While we cannot conduct an exhaustive philosophical discussion, we begin with a brief definition of self-determination. The key element of the term is a “self,” which is to be specified in more detail, and which decides on an issue, while in a relationship (also to be specified in more detail) with the world and others. Our understanding of the term echoes the discourse of “self-determined learning.” This term is different from “self-organised learning.” The decisive criterion is the question of whether learners can decide on course content. If not, learners merely have the freedom to make organisational decisions, in other words, their choice is only about self-organisation, not about self-determination (Faulstich 1999, 2002). Faulstich does not understand that the question of how decisions on content and interest is not dichotomous for teachers, institutions, or learners, but presents as an axis on which different “degrees of self-determination” are possible (Faulstich 1999, 2002). The empirical data show the efficacy of this differentiation to reveal a dichotomy of self-determination versus determination. The relationship between self and the world is described in a plausible manner through Pierre Boudieu’s habitus concept (1987): social class has an impact on habitus and on personal decisions. However, we do not believe that the habitus cannot be changed; instead, we think it is merely inert. As a result, theoretical space is created for a subject to take action. We are presupposing subjects who have intentions and plans and acts in their overarching interest, but we do not assume that these intentions are rational or conscious (Holzkamp 1993: 27pp). We do not base these concepts solely on the theory behind research into interest; however, there are interesting connections (Krapp 2004).

The concept of self-determination, to which we refer based on Bourdieu and Holzkamp, is not to be confused with the concept of self-determination developed by Deci and Ryan, which is important for the Munich interest theory (see Grotlüschen/Krämer 2009). Deci and Ryan maintain that self-determination is a continuum that leads, with gradually increasing autonomy, from non-motivation, to four types of extrinsic motivation, to intrinsic motivation (2002: 17pp). The concept is contingent on the required differentiation of the dichotomy between self-determination and determination by others. Basic needs assumptions, which are based on requirements theory, do not, however, match the metatheoretical framework we prefer. Dewey, Holzkamp, and Bourdieu stress the reasoning structures and the intentional aspects of individuals in the interest process and the way they deal with the world, while Deci and Ryan observe how people pursue basic needs. When comparing the individual and the world, we need to consider another level: interest is a process, not merely a condition. Interests are not established gradually between self-determination and
determination by others. They have grown in a social process within a concrete historic and economic situation. Several theories suggest that something determined by others is successively internalised and becomes something that has been self-determined (e.g. Elias’s civilisation process, Foucault’s techniques of the self and Bourdieu’s habitus concept). Therefore, we assume that the choice of interests is made by a gradual self-determination process, while the individual believes and internalises them as self-determined. Outside influences are overlooked, diminished, or forgotten. However, in terms of theory, we do not want to go too far and will restrict ourselves here to Bourdieu.

3. Asymmetrical Concepts of Interest in Target Group Research

Since the beginning of target group research in adult education, motives and interests, as the driving forces for learning, have been subject to widespread debate. At one time, studies specifically asked about the educational/training interests of various groups of the population (e.g. Hermes 1926, Engelhardt 1926, Grosse 1932, Buchwald 1934). Later, the concept of interest disappeared. It has only emerged again recently – narrowed down as interest in further education and training (Barz 2004). The key terms in these studies show that, when individuals take part in further education/training, researchers label it as interest, motivation, reasons, objectives or predisposition. These terms imply localisation within the self, rather than in the world. However, the opposite end of the spectrum is more striking: if individuals do not take part in further education/training, the researchers name specific barriers, hindrances or obstacles. It is implied that in that case localisation comes from the outside, from a world which is obstructive. In our opinion, this traditional terminology is asymmetrical and therefore inadequate (see Table 1).
Table 1: Literature review re: Interests in taking part in or avoiding further education/training (up to 2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Terms explaining the appeal of a certain subject or further education/training course</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Terms explaining why a certain subject or further education/training course is rejected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Bremer</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Motives</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Barriers (external and internal)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Brüning/Kuwan</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>Barriers (further education/training) Reasons (for not taking part)</td>
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<td>122</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Baethge/Baethge-Kinsky</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Inclination (further education/training) Predisposition</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Barriers (further education/training) Obstacles</td>
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<td>62</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Schröder, Schiel/Aust</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>Interest (further education/training) Predisposition</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>Reasons Obstacles</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>98</td>
<td>Interest (further education/training) Need (further education/training)</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>Reasons (for not taking part)</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>Barz/Tippelt I</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>Interest (further education/training)</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>Barriers (further education/training)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Barz/Tippelt II</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>Motives</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>Refusal Obstacles</td>
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<td>92</td>
<td>Barriers (further education/training)</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>Wilkens</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>Goals</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>Barriers</td>
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<td>514</td>
<td>Interest</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>SOEP</td>
<td>506</td>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>511</td>
<td>Barriers</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>506</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>511</td>
<td>Reasons (for not taking part)</td>
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<td>Goals</td>
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<td>Motives</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Kuwan et al.</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>Motives (further education/training)</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>Barriers (further education/training) Predispositions</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>275</td>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>265</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Schiersmann</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Need (further education/training)</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Barriers (further education/training)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
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<td>47</td>
<td>(insufficient)</td>
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<td>47</td>
<td>Interest (low)</td>
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In a positive scenario--where the individual does participate--the implicit reason is said to lie in the person (however that person is conceived); s/he clearly has a sustainable self-determined influence on interest. In a negative scenario—where the individual does not participate--the implicit reason is said to lie in the world around them. These localisations contradict the underlying theories: the symmetry of the terms must also be reflected in a stable concept of interest. The Munich theory of interest understands interest as a specific relationship between a person and an object and is a good approach here. One of its proponents, Andreas Krapp, references life-long learning and adult education, therefore we prefer to refer to him here. Action that follows an interest always takes place in the social arena and is not spontaneous. Rather, it is based on individual development and historical backgrounds. Furthermore, its purpose is to generate a sense of belonging or distinction (Bourdieu 1987).

4. Habitual axis of interest development

Discussion of more terms would exceed the scope of this article, so we will merely look at interest and suggest a definition that takes into account two discussion threads. Firstly, we are talking about a pragmatic approach, which started with John Dewey (1913) and which clearly inspired the Munich interest theory (e.g. Krapp 2006). We will put this one aside.

The second thread is habitus theory, which traces interest back to social backgrounds as well as the habitus gained and forgotten there (Bourdieu 1987). We accordingly define interest as a specific relationship between the person, who takes action, and the subject area of interest. However, we revise this perspective to include the procedural axis (Dewey 1913) and the habitual axis (Bourdieu 1987). We examine various assumptions based on habitus theory in order to take a closer look at the social integration of interests. These allow us to gauge the social arena in medium-sized units, which can be localised between levels that are individual and those that include society at large. We believe that interests are not generated only individually and in current situations, but have their roots in habits and socio-economic structures. Therefore, this approach is important in order to describe how interests are generated. Therefore, a brief characterisation of habitus as a term is vital. Habitus can be considered as a place where external

\[ \text{Nota bene: We will not look at the link between interest theory and self-determination theory. We will be following Krapp and the Munich-based direction, which tends to be associated with action theory, but not Deci and Ryan and their needs-based theory.} \]
aspirations are internalised and internal aspirations are externalised. It is expressed in lifestyles, the systematic products of habitus and displayed in “endlessly redundant” (Bourdieu 1981: 347), often only sub-consciously perceived, distinguishing features such as language, clothing, posture, gait, manner etc.

“The habitus is both the generative principle of objectively classifiable judgements and the system of classification [...] of these practices. It is in the relationship between the two capacities which define the habitus, the capacity to produce classifiable practices and works, and the capacity to differentiate and appreciate these practices and products (taste), that the represented social world, i.e., the space of life-styles, is constituted.” (Bourdieu 1987, 277, own translation).

The recipe for creating and operating is taste. This dynamic generates elective affinities that interconnect via the subconscious deciphering of outer characteristics. Bourdieu states that taste is both the link between things and people, which match each other and, at the same time, the strongest class barrier (see Bourdieu 1987: 347). Social classes and sections of society are reproduced via innate aversions to other lifestyles. Taste appears to impose a hierarchical structure (ibid: 381). Elsewhere Bourdieu explains in more detail how strongly he believes job choices are influenced by the habitus, as

“a long dialectical process, often described as ‘vocation,’ through which people choose to become something that has been imposed upon them, they choose what chooses them. At the end of the process, various areas meet precisely those actors who have the habitus required to ensure that these areas function perfectly.” (Bourdieu, 1998: 124, own translation).

However, this remark is not to be understood in a deterministic manner. Bourdieu’s theory system does allow for a chance to transcend class barriers; however, this process usually entails losses for people (e.g. previous social relationships, confidence in their own habitus).

The habitual axis of interest development is particularly evident when we look at the importance of potential contact with a topic. What areas of interest people can encounter at all is primarily influenced by their social background. The habitual axis is evident in the importance of the others surrounding it. Our narrative data on interest development show that interest is generated based on contact with subject areas, but that this point of contact is forgotten. We also demonstrate that others can exert significant influence, but that this influence can be reinterpreted to the point that it is no longer recognisable. The result is that, in
the final analysis--and against better judgement--an ostensibly self-determined individual is created, who has free will to decide. However, does self-determination with regard to interest—particularly interest in further education/training--play any role at all?

5. Quantitative findings on interest in further education/training

Many studies explore reasons why people are interested in further education/training and education in specific topics. For example, Schmidt (2006) analyses the interest in further education/training by older employees and its genesis. The categories presented by Schmidt are, “requirement by the company,” “suggestion by superiors,” and “my own idea” (own initiative). Schmidt’s results show that employees over 50 (46.9%) more frequently take part in additional education/training than younger ones (44.8%). However, superiors suggest less frequently that older employees participate in a training course (20.4% v. 24.2%). Schmidt emphasises that assertions about interests can only be made by performing a differentiated analysis that includes significant main variables, such as vocational training, gender and the year the data was captured. We also have to ask whether the development of interest in additional education/training is experienced as being gradually self-determined or gradually determined by others. Schmidt’s study suggests that the localisation of interest development needs to be clarified further.

We find the same problem in our own small empirical study (n = 92), which we are carrying out for the Deutsche Forschungsgesellschaft [DFG]. One of the questions we ask is, with what level of interest people start a course and what their interest level is afterwards. Key questions are the connection between interest and self-determination, how the interest developed, and whether participation is voluntary. We included three different types of courses in our small survey: an academic course on life-long learning (WWB), a course for long-term unemployed female immigrants (MWB), and two career development courses (HWB & FWB). Three of the courses are open to anyone; however, the MWB course is obligatory and arranged by the employment office (MWB). Our questionnaire on interest in additional training/education (FSI-W)\(^2\) is based on the questionnaire on interest in a graduate course (FSI) (Schiefele et al. 1993). We only replaced the term “graduate course,” which occasionally emerges in

\(^2\) We could have called the new version FWI (questionnaire on interest in further education/training). However, since the items and scales in the FSI had to be changed only slightly, we chose to highlight the close relationship with the FSI by keeping its title.
FSI-W, with “further education/training.” All courses were surveyed with the FSI-W at the beginning and at the end of the course. All differentials in average values between the initial and final survey are statistically insignificant. This finding had a rather sobering effect on us because we had expected interest to rise throughout the course. However, the data spread is very wide, making it possible that the change in average values cancels itself out. For the academic course, interest stays at a high level from beginning to end (WWB1: 2.07 > 2.03 and WWB2: 2.10 > 2.06). The commercial career development course reveals similar results at the beginning of the course. The values at the beginning of the courses for female migrants are slightly lower, but the increase is higher (MWB: 1.82 > 1.93). One possible conclusion from these data is that people who start coursework in additional training/education are either already very interested (WWB, HWB, FWB), or were coerced to participate with the threat of negative consequences (MWB). However, based solely on these quantitative data, it is difficult to identify what role mandatory or voluntary participation may have played in the development of interest. Therefore, we also administered a survey that allows us to elicit retrospective reports of various types of interest development. With this, we can analyse the relationship between self and the world as described retrospectively by the subject. The data are based solely on successful progressions of interest.

6. Qualitative findings of retrospective accounts of interest development

The following excerpts are taken from a larger interest study with several theoretical and empirical approaches (Grotlüschen 2010). The categories presented here stem from a theory-generating analysis of the described interests. These were retrospectively compiled by over 80 students who reported on how their own interests developed. We followed a modified coding paradigm (Strauss 1996; Glaser 1998): Instead of “causes” that are easy to misunderstand and have causal-analytical connotations, we are assuming “reasons” for subjective logic in the action taken (similar to von Felden 2006). The theory system generated in this way includes several phases of interest development. These reflect the pragmatic axis of interest theory, which has been revised in this way, but does not take centre stage. There is still an intertwined structure of involvement and influences. In this article, we consider only how influences are considered by the subjects. These theoretical elements show the habitual axis of interest development and its progression. It becomes clear that there is a superficial perception of self-determined interest development, which is inconsistent with

3 These are two-year courses, so final surveys are not yet possible.
explicable influences. These are forgotten, which is the very type of incorporation that is a typical feature of the habitus. Forgetting the influences can be described, following Bourdieu, as a process of internalisation and naturalisation of the individual’s own social position (what Bourdieu calls social background or taste). But taste is by no means a natural characteristic of the individual; rather, it is gained within the individual’s social class. However, the acquisition of this taste has been denied for so long that its origin has been forgotten (see Bourdieu 1987, p. 123f.)

6.1 Lasting interest (attribution to continuity)

According to all the analyses we have been able to carry out to date, interest does not develop from within the individual, but requires initial—and usually several other incidences of—contact between active players and an interesting subject. This contact does however adopt a form of continuity, which probably develops to such an extent that the individual’s own points of contact with the subject are forgotten. This dynamic is called attribution to continuity. With hindsight, interviewees said that, ever since they had been capable of cognitive thought as children, they found interests or that they had been interested in a subject area from a very young age. Table 2 shows how similar the chosen wording is.

Table 2: Always had consistent interest (figures: person and paragraph of the interview)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Quote (qualitative data)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As a child already</td>
<td>I’ve always liked travelling since my childhood (72-2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I’m interested in football. I’ve been curious about this sport since my childhood (31-2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My interest in music stems from my childhood. In my family it was always quite natural to switch on the radio at any opportunity (56-2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>As a child I was always imagining I’d have a little town with real people in it (58-3).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I’ve been interested in music for a long time. As a child I already loved listening to music and watching the Mini Playback Show (34-2).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I’m studying to be a teacher of maths and biology/social studies. From a very young age, I was more interested in sciences (64-2).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 “Similar to any ideological strategy generated by the everyday class struggle, the ideology of natural taste draws its ideological veil and its effectiveness from the neutralisation of real differences. The differences in the methods of acquiring education, in a reversal of nature, as a legitimate relationship to education (and similarly to language) only allow aspects to apply which show the weakest traces of its development.”
| Since I can remember | Since I can remember, art has always been very important to me (7-2).  
| | I’m interested in veterinary science and psychology [...] Since I can remember, we’ve had dogs, horses and small animals (86-2).  
| | For as long as I can remember, my mum always played music in some form or other. So, back then, I had quite a lot of contact with music (56-3).  
| | I’ve been interested in music for as long as I can remember (63-2).  
| | For as long as I can remember, I always enjoyed interacting with children (57-3).  
| | I was just a few days old, when my mum took me into the stables. For as long as I can remember, I have always felt drawn to horses (73-2).  
| | For as long as I remember, I have always been interested in every aspect of sports (80-2).  
| Always | I’ve always been interested in photography (21-2)  
| | I have always enjoyed working with children (22-2).  
| | A career as a primary school teacher is, and always has been, the only thing that really interested me. However, this interest didn’t just suddenly develop on its own. It was much more the result of years of positive experience with pedagogical work (26-2).  
| | As my parents always worked, I always spent a lot of time with my younger siblings (12-2).  
| | The reason is probably that I grew up with two younger siblings and, as the oldest child, had to take responsibility for my brother and my sister at a relatively early age. We spent a lot of time with one another and often played together.  
| | From an early age, I knew that I wanted a people-based career, particularly something to do with children (41-1).  
| | That’s how it was with me, because there are a lot of teachers in my family. So, I was introduced to this career path at an early age (42-3).  
| | My interest in early childhood development and education started early on. When I was still a child myself, I already wanted to have children myself one day, look after and bring up children (59-2).  
| | At an early age, I realised that I was strongly drawn to children (47-2).  
| | I was interested in writing from a very early age [...]. I could hardly wait to learn to write at last and therefore express my opinions (76-3).  
| Similar: 81-4, 18-4, 49-2  

These key phrases show how much the subjects consider interest development to be a continuum; the starting point of this continuum is generated virtually before the person becomes conscious of it. It is interesting that of 85 interviews, some 24 do have this continuity aspect. It seems to be normal for individuals to use “always” when talking about their interests. There are also accounts that start with a continuity argument, with a process of reflection that occurs later, but
from which more precise starting points emerge. Therefore, each continuity aspect is not credible in itself: it is an initial approach to reflection and clearly a typical point of entry when individuals attempt to describe their own interest development. Interest development contains a moment of consolidation, which is reflected in the narration of continuity. Two aspects emerge here: On the one hand, interest occurs through contact, which becomes a continuum to perceiving an issue as a matter of course and is internalised in this way. At the same time, possible subject areas are co-determined by the individual’s family of origin and its cultural horizon. Music, for example, is not defined by an instrument, but attributed to contact with the “Mini Playback Show” on TV (the radio is adequate as well). It would be interesting to see how people from different social backgrounds respond to music and what horizons are opened up to, or removed from, family members as a result.

6.2 Forgetting Influences and Attributing Them to Self

Another key category in our data analysis is fully defined as, “Labeling interest development a decision not subjected to influence.” In the beginning, we coded the respective passages as “An illusion of self-determination.” This illusion becomes clear when we asked authors if they “decided themselves” on their desired occupations. More than a quarter of the group said that their choice of interests had not been influenced, even though they had referenced external influences only a few paragraphs earlier. Similar to ‘attribution to continuity,’ we call this dynamic ‘attribution to self.’ This includes passages that portray interest development as a decision in which influence has played no part and which contradict passages in the same account in which special influences were illustrated. When defining the category more precisely, it becomes clear that a dualism of self-determination and determination by others has no place here. Any confrontation with influence, including the rejection of influence, is always carried out in relation to the society around the individual. Therefore, even the most independent of decisions is already related to the actual society the individual has experienced. Consequently, this phenomenon is a contemporary label given to adults as free, self-determined and individual. However, in the final analysis, interest development is linked to the family of origin, the type of society and many other aspects. It is therefore worthwhile to take a discriminating look at the dividing lines drawn by those interviewed. In some cases, the subject explains interest as an individual development, while, several paragraphs later, a reason is found in other areas:
“I developed an interest in disabled children all by myself. [...] I’m glad that I’ve done a year’s volunteering in this area which triggered a new interest in me that I’d like to pursue job-wise” (9-4).

In some cases, stimuli from the individuals’ environment and peers are mentioned; however, they are not considered influences, but rather a reason to stop and reflect:

“I became interested because of things I’d observed and by talking to my own friends. So, the choice of subjects is up to me” (87-12).

This contradictory way of describing events in which decisions are simultaneously attributed to the subject and a third party or event, are retrospective constructions. They say more about the person’s self-image than about interest development as such. It is plausible that interest development only proceeds if it is compatible with the individual’s self-image. As a result, there are some actors who believe it is “natural” to decide on areas of interest solely on their own:

“Of course, I decided what I was interested in. I’m convinced that if you’re forced to do something, you lose interest in it straight away“ (55-12).
“Of course, at the beginning of my degree I did pick this subject voluntarily” (75-7).

These statements show that explicit types of coercion are considered damaging to interest development. It appears not to matter what an individual is forced to do – the mere perception of coercion destroys any interest from the start. Regardless of what it is, if you are forced, interest wanes:

“My parents never forced me to play sports and they always let me decide on my own whether and what I wanted to do. Otherwise, I think sports would never have become my hobby” (29-4).

As a typical reasoning pattern, this phenomenon is also encountered in the theory of learning based on the standpoint of the subject. The core of what is known as the “key inversion of the argument” (Holzkamp 1993: 450pp) is, ‘If school bombards me, the student, with a whole host of mandatory requirements and penalties to force me to learn specified content, the content cannot be particularly exciting. Otherwise they would not have to put so much pressure on me.’ However, in our study data, sometimes mandatory requirements are made that do
not destroy the subjects’ interests. Massive influence from third parties is interpreted in such a way that it appears non-compulsory:

“I should stress however that during this period I wasn’t pressured by my parents to perform in any way. Quite the contrary, I was allowed to make up my own mind. The only condition placed by my parents was that I was to take riding lessons every week to learn riding properly and not simply just gallop about the countryside” (6-3).

This author stresses that no pressure was applied on her. The condition (!) imposed by her parents is not interpreted as pressure or a restriction of her right to make decisions. The core characteristic of interest, i.e. to be free of any form of coercion, is therefore a question of agreement between the actors and third parties. If the obligation concerns an interest that appeals to the subject, interest development is not impaired as a result. Other subjects also perceive the influence of third parties but conclude that ultimately interest development came from themselves. In the following case, the family does have specialty magazines on the table, but interest is attributed to the individual:

“All in all, I would say that it was my own decision to tackle this area because I don’t have to do it and can stop if I no longer want to” (70-7).

In other words, this pattern – an option to opt-out – is the dividing line between self-determination and determination by others as far as interest development is concerned. Under these circumstances, influence by third parties is considered a cornerstone, providing stimulus or support or igniting interest:

“I think it was my own decision to pick this area, but the foundations were laid by the circumstances I was living in and by my parents” (86-2).
“I’m sure my mum influenced me in that direction [...] Nevertheless, I can’t remember ever having been PRESSURED to emulate her” (73-4, also: 85-3).

The person cannot remember and thus subtly hints that a process of forgetting occurred here, which is so characteristic of the habitus that it has to be reflected for the theory creation. Again, it becomes clear that the person’s “own decision” is only defined by an option to opt-out. As long as the person can opt out, the issue is judged to be their own decision. The subtle, or obvious influence by third parties or by history, by the media or by the person’s living situation is not perceived, not being reflected on, or has been forgotten:
“It was usually my own decision to take a trip. Sometimes I was influenced by people around me. But, of course, it was still always my own decision to travel” (72-5, also: 11-7, 21-9).

A decision made freely is understood as an option to reject something. As long as there is an option to opt-out, the influence of social background (which the interviewees clearly state and reflect) is still not considered to be dominant. On a positive note, not taking the opportunity to opt-out means to start or continue a matter:

“I think it’s up to me, I just carried on. If you are open to trade union courses, then you often feel that some things just fall into your lap. It was my own decision to carry on in this area” (71-7).

Sometimes the answer oscillates between influence and autonomy. At the same time, it does not appear to be opportune to generate interests that individuals do not present and decide on themselves:

“My interest in social studies basically developed all by itself. However, influence from my family can’t be neglected and ruled out. The interest in scientific issues appears to be in the family, as well as the interest in teaching. Despite this, I developed my own interests and am also focusing on a different direction”. (74-9, also 36-9)

Clearly, any steering in a particular direction by others appears to be not beneficial for the individual’s identity and concept of self-determination or – in vivo – their independence. Another narrative indicates the illusion that interest has “come from within.” The person relates that they grew up close to a foundation for people with special needs and got to know them when taking school trips there. The account finishes by mentioning a university course in pedagogy for people with special needs. Despite the description of how interest developed, the process is expressed not very clearly and more as intuition:

“I think I did make this decision on my own. But I don’t know how it came about unfortunately as it was a gut feeling, nobody forced me into it – I just felt it was right” (10-8).

The empirical data again forces us to pose the question about forgetting: Why is an important decision such as a career choice declared to be a gut feeling, although processes of gathering information and weighing possible pros and cons clearly preceded it? Is it not the case that the individual was driven by the
opportunities and information that the environment provided – only to remember later that the decision was taken freely? We believe that the importance placed on emancipating oneself from one’s parents should not be underestimated. This independence is characterised by the permission to make one’s own decisions:

“From a certain age, I have decided myself what type of sport I want to play and what I am prepared to invest in this area. I make these decisions myself” (81-10).

One particular argument—the different interests of siblings to underscore individualism vis-à-vis the influences of the family—is prominent:

“I think my family had a strong influence on this interest. […] Nevertheless, I don’t think that this was the only factor that played a part. My sister, who was after all brought up in the same way as I was, is interested in completely different things […]. I think that my own character also plays a role” (49-6).

It is not clear, of course, whether the parents encouraged these siblings to different extents. Nevertheless, this argument sums up how influence is processed individually. Denying any influence serves to maintain a self-image for which freedom, scope to act, and even autonomy appear to be vital. The option to opt-out, as long as it exists in theory, is sufficient to sustain this feeling of autonomy. The two attributes presented here (continuity and self-ascription) enable the localisation of an interest in an uninfluenced self. (Or, hyperbolically: interest development is presumed to be determined by the self). The ascriptions encourage people to forget and internalise—in other words habitualise—past contact with the world and influences from other people. Therefore, we believe interest development cannot only be gradually localised between self-determination and determination by others, in the sense of Faulstich’s “degrees of self-determination.” Rather, since these ascriptions represent an internalisation of influences from other people, we describe them theoretically as a habitual axis of interest development.

Our empirical results have certain limitations, of course. On the one hand, we need to ask to what extent generalisation of the quantitative data is possible; with such a small sample (n=92) and a lack of significant differences, we can only draw cautious conclusions from the data. On the other hand, caution also applies to the qualitative data. While over 80 stories on interest development were collected, they are of limited breadth, since we included only young adults who had been educationally successful. Therefore, we consider these data to be a module, which could be used for further research.
7. Elements of apparent self-determination

Two qualitative elements emerged in our work and combined to produce ostensible self-determination. From a subjective standpoint, interest has “always” been there and “I” decided to pursue it. Conversely, we maintain that a long tradition of research into target groups and interest has formed asymmetrical concepts, which remain unconnected. In this article, we uncoupled the Munich School’s incisive concept of interest from the needs-driven self-determination theory and recombined them with arguments based on habitus theory. Our quantitative findings show that self-determination is an important issue in interest research. The qualitative findings, however, show two elements: a continual ascription (always) and a self-ascription (I) in the development of interest. Both allow subjects to believe that they decided what they were interested in. However, if we look more closely, various points of contact with the world emerge that run counter the ascription of continuity. In other words, interest does not arise from within, but is a result of contact with the world. The influences of third parties are also easy to see; interest does not develop in isolation, but as a result of encounters with other people. At this level, inter-subjectively recognisable, gradual self-determination (Faulstich 1999) is apparent. On a second, more abstract level however, subjectively perceived self-determination needs to be examined again. Only in retrospect are interests seen as self-determined; in the beginning, they were only gradually selected or even without any element of self-determination.

This mechanism can be explained with Bourdieu’s habitus concept. Subjects attribute the role of self or continuity to the development of interest and forget the role of contact with other people and the world. As a result, interest development is seen as a personal achievement and as separated from socio-cultural influences. It appears that anybody could be interested in anything and that we have freedom of choice. Bourdieu exposes this analysis and refers to the habitus, which is incorporated particularly via the process of forgetting. However, habitus is always tied to the situation in the social arena; in other words, it is not individual, but has a social, historical and economic background. In terms of interest development, our conclusion is that the opportunities for developing an interest in something are not equally accessible to everyone; rather, they are structurally unequal. This inequality of opportunity is a fact that is too easily forgotten.
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Gender relations: From the standpoint of the subject$^1$

Judith Krämer$^2$

Abstract
This article provides an insight into the qualitative study “Lernen über Geschlecht. Zwischen (Queer-) Feminismus, Re-Traditionalisierung und Intersektionalität” (Krämer, 2015). In addition to presenting this project, the article focuses particularly on the relevance of the subjective perspective for conducting research into long-term learning processes in the realm of gender relations and subsequent changes in agency. The research question of this project aims at understanding how people who engage with the topic of “gender” on different levels experience these learning processes themselves and how these processes result in changes of agency. Interviews and analyses are based on the grounded theory research style (section 3). The question is not how learning processes on gender relations can be observed, assessed, or represented from the outside. In the following article, selected examples illustrate how the subjective perspective in these processes is realised. As a result of the study, several areas of conflict are presented that learning subjects necessarily have to face and engage with. Any ensuing theories about conclusions and connections provide further findings as regards the theory and practice of Critical Psychology and (political) education.

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$^1$ This article is an in-depth version of the article “Lernen über Geschlecht in Spannungsfeldern – aus der Perspektive des Subjekts“ that was published in the collection “Literalitäts- und Grundlagenforschung“ by Anke Grotlüschen and Diane Zimper at Waxmann-Verlag in Münster in 2015 (pp. 285-300). An English translation of that article (“Learning about gender in areas of conflict: From the standpoint of the subject“) can be found online at http://blogs.epb.uni-hamburg.de/leaverlinkungsstudie/files/2015/09/Learning-about-gender-in-areas-of-conflict-%E2%80%92from-the-standpoint_Kr%C3%A4mer_2015.pdf

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Keywords
agency, areas of conflict, critical psychology, feminism, gender education, gender relations, informal learning, intersectionality, power relations, subjective perspective

1. Background and rationale of the research issue in the context of feminist educational research and queer-feminist (critical) psychologies

My research is related to the history of feminist educational research, also called gender education research. For decades, feminist educational research has dealt with the importance of gender in learning and teaching, in terms of access to education, curricula, and the way teaching is carried out. However, only very few empirical studies have been conducted that look at learning about gender relationships in particular. This form of learning includes engaging with privilege and limitations, with privileging and discriminating structures and institutions and with cultural judgements and systems of reference along the category of gender, which is understood as a category interrelated with further structures of inequality.

The basis of this study is a critical, society oriented understanding of 'learning' that cannot be taken for granted and that thus needs a more detailed definition (which will be provided in the next section of the article).

The type of learning to which the study relates takes place in the context of gender-conscious pedagogy which, in turn, is an important part of political education that combats discrimination and prevents violence. The purpose of gender-conscious education is to enable and accompany the type of learning that creates room for action to be taken and provides access to resources, regardless of classifications into gender stereotypes and restrictive gender structures.

However (taking resistance to learning about certain issues as an example), practice repeatedly demonstrates that this type of learning about gender appears to be complicated from the standpoint of the subject and that a differentiated view is therefore required. Findings regarding resistance, typical counterarguments and actions against feminism have been collected for a long time and from different perspectives (for example regarding feminism: Dohm, 1902\(^3\), Beauvoir, 1945, Pusch, 1984, 129 et seq., Schüßler, 2002, 225; regarding defensive strategies against allegations of racism: Kilomba, 2010).

\(^3\) The women's rights activist Hedwig Dohm coined the term 'antifeminism' in German-speaking countries by publishing „The antifeminists – a defence” (1902). She analysed and criticised the reasoning and thinking of the opponents of the women's rights movement, therefore parallels to contemporary antifeminism can be explored.
It remains unclear how subjects retrospectively reconstruct resistance as part of the learning process on the way to greater agency. In other words, further investigation is needed to understand how these learning processes occur from the perspective of the subject and which obstacles and opportunities arise for those who are learning.

2. Theoretical framework

Firstly, the theoretical framework and the key terms of the research are described. In the following section, selected aspects will be discussed that illustrate the research perspective.

2.1 Gender between reification and the conflicting nature of social discourses

Gender will be understood as defined by more modern gender theories (Butler; West/Zimmermann), that is as a socially powerful construct. Gender is also understood as being intersectional. In other words, gender is intertwined with, and not detachable from, other categories of social differentiation (such as ‘race’, class and body).

This understanding of gender results in aspects that have consequences for research. Two highlighted here:

Firstly: The problem of reification

An emancipatory-critical reference to gender always faces the contradiction of having to constantly repeat and therefore create the category, and its normative-forced character, which it seeks to diminish. Judith Lorber called this contradiction “Using Gender to undo Gender” (Lorber, 2000) or the gender paradox (Lorber, 1999). As a result, research that takes into account the masculine or feminine influence of the way their interviewees act, still refers to the dichotomous category of gender. Therefore, on the one hand, from a gender-theory standpoint, the normative and forced character of these categories is reiterated, as from a mainstream standpoint, they are equated with essentialising attributes. However, reality is more complex; there are more genders, that is to say, there is more gender diversity beyond the binary gender system, such as

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4 With regard to the categorical use of the term ‘race’, my study uses the German word ‘Rasse’. In many German publications, the English word race is deliberately used due to the racist implications and historical associations that the word ‘Rasse’ implies in German. In my study I use “Rasse” in order to link to German history and society (see Eggers 2005a, p. 12). The word is placed in quotation marks in German in order to underline the reason for the category, when the biological construct of ‘Rasse’ is meant.
non-binary trans*\(^5\) or inter identities. On the other hand, highlighting and analysing traditional norms and the resulting findings can also help to address and break down outmoded gender structures. Spivak coined the term strategic essentialism to underline the politicostrategic aspect of this type of reproduction (Spivak, 1993, p. 3; Nandi, 2006). The reference to what appears to be rigid identities (such as women and men) can therefore only be understood as a temporary political-emancipatory method of action.

**Secondly: The conflicting nature of social discourses**

Gender as a construct suggests that a reflection of current gender debates would be helpful. Nowadays, hierarchical gender relationships are only apparent in a few clearly discriminatory laws (in Germany e.g. the so-called “Transexuellengesetz”)\(^6\). Thus, it is necessary to redirect attention to the interaction between people and to the discursive subjectification due to normalisation. Today, for example, the reason for gender segregation in the labour market (which still generates unequal pay between the sexes) is to a large extent the result of subjective career aspirations, or, in other words, the higher-education courses or apprenticeships young people choose and are encouraged to choose.

To summarise, gender discourses exhibit three directions that influence subjectification processes.

- **Anti-discrimination/diversity** has not only become a priority in Germany but in the EU in general. Institutionalisation processes led to the introduction of anti-discrimination offices and public funding for projects that combat racism and exclusion and that campaign for gender diversity and inclusion. Apparently, the issue of gender is of particular public interest. Political parties have adopted demands of feminist movements and have started to represent these. Gender has become a mainstream issue. In the public arena, some participants in feminist movements can still be seen and heard on the streets, in campaigns, and participating in activities.

- **Re-traditionalisation and conservatism**: Conservatism, biologisms, and tradition are still issues of public debate. Right-wing parties have been

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\(^5\) Trans* identities can also be understood and lived as binary identities and thus do not challenge the binary gender norm per se. Trans* is an abbreviating term that includes binary and non-binary identified transgender people, transsexual people, cross-dressers, drag queens and kings, transidents, genderqueers, and others. Some of the terms are applied synonymously and some of them are clearly distinguished from one another. The asterisk denotes the neutrality of the term and questions which concept should be used as an umbrella term and whether a concentration on one superordinate category is appropriate at all. This footnote reflects the German discourse about the term “trans*”.

\(^6\) A more comprehensive analysis of the TSG has been published at https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/service/publikationen/geschlechtervielfalt-im-recht/114072
gaining strength throughout Europe, the number of racist assaults is rising in Germany.\textsuperscript{7} “Masculinist” groups campaigning for male rights (see Gesterkamp, 2010; Kemper, 2011), as well as religious groups (Lambrecht/Baars, 2009, cite evangelical fundamentalists, for example) should be mentioned in this context.\textsuperscript{8} Various authors have made their voices heard regarding anti-feminist issues in major daily newspapers and magazines (Klaus 2008, p. 176). Conservative tendencies appear to be just as capable of becoming mainstream as the political strategy of gender mainstreaming itself. Examples abound in best-selling, self-help literature (Pease, 2000; Evatt, 2004).\textsuperscript{9} Anti-feminist comments are particularly common online where the men’s rights groups are active in numerous forums and networks (see Homann, 2013).

- Economic discourses and individualisation: The economic transformation processes of western, capitalist societies, as they occur during the globalisation process, have an impact on the current constellation of gender relationships\textsuperscript{10}. In this case, the growing subjectification of labour\textsuperscript{11}, the blurring of work and private lives, tendencies towards individualisation, the outdated model of the man being the sole breadwinner, demographic change, and the erosion of the traditional small family towards blended families all play a role. These developments are changing the dominant patterns of the gender-specific manner in which emotions are processed. As a result, they are transforming traditional gender structures (see Jurczyk, 2009).

Images in the media reflect how these three different discursive directions interact, often both supporting and contradicting each other. Traditional images of white\textsuperscript{12}, fit\textsuperscript{13}, heterosexual and cisgender\textsuperscript{14} people are still encountered that

\textsuperscript{8} Frey (see Frey 2013, p. 10 cf.) defines five groups of gender opponents: 1. The journalist gender opposition group, 2. evolutionary biology believers, 3. Christian fundamentalism, 4. explicitly anti-feminist players, 5. right-wing organizations.
\textsuperscript{9} An overview of current key anti-feminist sources, for example newspaper articles, books, networks and online literature is included in Hinrich Rosenbrock’s study (Rosenbrock 2012).
\textsuperscript{10} These processes of transformation take place on a global level, while the effects vary between nations. Since the interviewees have grown up in Germany and lived in Germany at the point of the study, discourses specifically relevant to German contexts are discussed.
\textsuperscript{11} Nowadays subjects are forced to organise labour individually more than ever: the number of employment relationships, the duration of contracts and the distribution of working hours is decreasing, while the responsibility to organise timing, location, steps, objectives, and quality around work is increasingly pushed onto the working subject.
\textsuperscript{12} The notation in italics point to the construed character of the category ‘white’. This notation is chosen deliberately to mark a difference to capitalizing the category 'Black,'
portray men as strong, muscular, competent, successful and in positions of leadership and women as caring, attractive, empathic and dependent. But images of the “new” woman and the “new” man can also be found. The “new” woman does, of course, work, is career-minded, assertive and rears children at the same time. The “new” man is a caring partner and father, while being a narcissistic consumer and still gainfully employed. His characteristics are strangely vague, but he primarily stands apart from the “alien”, “other” and “pre-modern” man (see Klaus, forthcoming, p. 12). Therefore, we refer “more to a modernisation than a radical change” of traditional female and male images (ibid.). Modernised role portrayals do not apply to everyone, but are mainly directed at white, middle-class, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied consumers of both sexes.

Even if we see those modernizations of gender roles that partly dilute gender dichotomies and are connected with economic transformation processes, the consequence is not equal distribution. It is much more about using the entire labour force available. This becomes evident in the following example: capitalist neo-liberal cutbacks, the drive for efficiency and questions of where businesses are located entail cuts in social areas; in other words, cuts to policies for gender-mainstreaming and women’s rights. The consequences are that in many places feminist achievements (such as refuges, girls’ meet-ups, counselling offices) are affected by, or threatened with, radical cuts.

2.2 Intentional learning

To understand the subjective perspective of learners, an understanding of learning from the standpoint of the subject is an ideal theoretical basis (Holzkamp, 1987; 1993).

The theory of learning from the standpoint of the subject focuses on the agency of the subject as the core category. The reason and goal of learning is for

which refers to “meaning of Black potential to resist that has been inscribed by Black people and people of colour.” (see Eggers 2005: 12).

13 'Fit' includes a number of different aspects ranging from the capacity to work to not being physically or mentally disabled.

14 'Cisgender' stands for the congruence between the sex assigned at birth and the gender expected by binary gender norms. The syllable 'cis' is derived from Latin and means 'on this side of'. The term is used by trans* activists to decentralise the dominant group and to highlight that cisgender is only one gender identity among others.

15 These modifications of the male image were referred to for some time as the ‘metrosexual’ man. As a narcissistic consumer, the man looks after his appearance, uses fragrances and cosmetics and attaches importance to clothing and the way he looks. This image “enables a much stronger inclusion of men in capitalist consumer industry than was possible when the traditional male image prevailed” (see Klaus in preparation p. 13).
those who are learning to be able to engage with society. Therefore, learning is always related to conditions in society. This is a significant point of departure from the majority of theories of learning, which focus on the individual’s behaviour or on neurophysiology. Subject-centered theories of learning also differ by aiming to understand individual perspectives, particularly of those on whom the research is being conducted.

One of the key assumptions is that, subjectively sensible reasons have to exist for those who are learning. Holzkamp maintains that the reasons for learning lie in subjective problems in terms of action: there is a perceived discrepancy between intentional action and action that is actually possible (see Holzkamp, 1993, p. 182).

Important for this perspective is Holzkamp’s analytical differentiation, which he performs in the two categories of restrictive and generalised agency. Restrictive agency, understood as remaining or arranging oneself in dependencies, is opposed to generalised agency as an increase in options available with regard to social conditions. Subject are therefore always in a position to decide whether to merely repudiate threats, or to change threatening conditions, themselves. Generalised and restrictive agency are always understood as constantly available poles, also called the two-fold scope of opportunities (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 370; Holzkamp, 1990, p. 37 cf.). Contradictory discourses (such as continuing (re-)traditionalisation that results in the devaluation of women and LGBTI* people despite official discourses of diversity policies), can hinder and slow down learning processes and lead to resistance to learning (e.g. through tiredness, feelings of repulsion, lack of interest)\(^{16}\). The legitimate fear of loss of resources may be one reason for the resistance. The fact that the subject is not aware of the options or the fact that areas of learning are intertwined with different, sometimes contradictory power interests, can lead to resistance to learning (see Holzkamp, 1987).\(^{17}\) However, the causes of resistance, and thus the interrelatedness between the object of learning and power interests, can be transformed into central motivations to learn more and hence promote further engagement with the issue.

### 2.3 Informal learning

By Holzkamp’s theory of learning, however, only intentional learning processes can be addressed. Since learning about gender extends far beyond intention-

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\(^{16}\) For a more comprehensive overview regarding resistance to learning in the realm of „gender“ see Krämer 2015, section 6.2.

\(^{17}\) Research on adult education has investigated resistance to learning in more detail (Grotlüschen 2003; Faulstich/Grell 2005; Grell 2006; Schepers 2009).
based learning practices and includes many informal learning processes across learners’ life spans, it is a good idea to complement this perspective with learning and interest theories proposed by Frigga Haug (2003), Käthe Meyer-Drawe (2008) and Anke Grotlüschen (2010). Similarly to Holzkamp, these theories focus on involvement in society and the subject’s agency, which is why they are relevant here.

Haug states that self-criticism and self-doubt need to be frequently perceived as an unpleasant, but necessary, part of learning processes (Haug, 2003, p. 156, 288).

Meyer-Drawe describes the origin of learning as an experience, as the origin of learning for which there are no words or terms and which cannot be fully articulated. This experience shatters the intention of consciousness by it being surprised and seized by the world (Meyer-Drawe, 2008, p. 188). This understanding explains longstanding interest, dedication, and a passion for learning (Meyer-Drawe, 2008; 2012).

Grotlüschen’s interest theory allows the observation of long-term learning processes in different phases; the social, habitual dimension becomes clear through routines and the fact that influences on learning are forgotten (Grotlüschen, 2010; Grotlüschen/Krämer, 2009).

Before the empirical analysis is discussed, the next paragraph will outline the study’s methodology and discuss its limitations and benefits.

3. Methodological and qualitative research design

The research questions aims at understanding how people who engage with the topic of “gender” on different levels experience these learning processes themselves and how a change in agency is achieved. Qualitative research design is appropriate to examine this question as it adopts the individuals’ perspectives as a place from which to start the research, identifies the interviewee’s subjective purpose and reveals how the reasons are related. The empirical analysis is based on eleven transcribed interviews with people who are or were involved in gender education. The interviewees have a personal, strong interest in gender issues, ranging from activist to occupational motivations. Interviews were structured by guidelines that were developed and revised during the research process in exchange with interviewees and fellow researchers. Interviewees were interested in the research question and open to discuss the question and the research design. Due to lack of resources, it was not possible to allow for reinterpretations of my interpretations by the interviewees at advanced stages of the research process. Thus, the degree of participation in this methodological design is relatively low.
and does not fulfill the strict standards of a research design from the standpoint of the subject.

In order to provide maximum contrast and considering theoretical sampling, interviews were conducted with people of different age groups, who have various social backgrounds, origins, family backgrounds, and lifestyles and different self-specified gender roles (cis women, cis men, trans*).

The analysis is based in grounded theory. Grounded theory poses a set of questions, the so-called called coding paradigm, to analyze the data, it is used here in a justification logic instead of a causal logical context (see also Nienkemper in this volume).

“Reason(s) for subjectively interpreted context action consequences”.
(See Felden 2006; Grotlüschen 2010, p. 177).

Using the grounded theory’s coding paradigm, the research process focused on the selective coding of three core categories (shown in the table below horizontally) as:
1. Reasons for tackling the subject area,
2. Reasons for not tackling the subject area and
3. Agency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase of the learning process</th>
<th>1. Core category</th>
<th>2. Core category</th>
<th>3. Core category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial contact with the subject area</td>
<td>Reasons for tackling the subject area</td>
<td>Reasons for not tackling the subject area</td>
<td>Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial learning process</td>
<td>Reasons for tackling the subject area</td>
<td>Reasons for not tackling the subject area</td>
<td>Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced learning process</td>
<td>Reasons for tackling the subject area</td>
<td>Reasons for not tackling the subject area</td>
<td>Agency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 1: Analytical focuses within the various phases of the gender-learning process

Each category appears in this table three times, because a subsequent section of the analysis looks at different phases of the learning process (shown here in the
dark grey axis in the left-hand margin). Each phase includes reasons for learning, not learning and agency.

Further differentiation, the distinction between the stages “initial contact with the subject area”, “initial learning process”, and “advanced learning process”, was set because of foci on the part of the interviewees and due to the theoretical contrasting with the three-phase model of interest development: latent stage, expansion stage and competent stage. According to Grotlüschen, (2012), each learner passes through different stages while tackling a subject area which can be observed in different attitudes to learning and changes in awareness. These stages cannot be demarcated exactly; rather they are characterised by fluent transitions and by moving forwards and backwards. During the latent stage, contact with the subject area takes place (sometimes across years, sometimes unconsciously) and is often forgotten again. Withdrawal from the area of interest is still considered. Tackling of the subject area is fragile. Pausing or detours in the interest process are possible. Drop-out of the interest process might also occur. The subject area is associated emotionally with aversion or attraction, which can result in feeling challenged or fascinated or in the pausing and stopping of the interest process if aversion is too big (‘resistance to learning’ can show up when unconscious aversion is mixed in). Outside influences are negated in the second stage, the expansion stage. Subjects experience their actions as self-determined. Interest in the subject area has stabilised and withdrawal is no longer considered. Steps in the development of interest are reported in linear sequences. The interest can be linked to previous and future areas of interest, and active tackling of the subject area becomes relevant, for example through aspirations of affiliation, opportunity for individuation, self-reflection, preservation and development of abilities. Finally, the interest process leads to the competent stage. During this stage, learning subjects take into account outside influences or actively participate in shaping their environments. Withdrawal from the subject area would result in major losses. The interested person autonomously generates knowledge about the subject area and is capable of raising questions, establishing connections and using abstract terms. This stage is also characterised by the adoption of a critical position within the area of interest; scopes are expanded, networks are founded, and exertion of political influence becomes very likely (see Grotlüschen, 2012, p. 290).

As a result, the analysis focuses on the following points (which have a light grey background here):

1. Reasons for tackling the subject area which were relevant to initial contact with the subject area

2. Reasons for not tackling the subject area (called resistance to learning by Holzkamp (1987; 1993) which occurred in the initial learning process
3. Agency which was generated at the advanced stage of the learning process

Next to the above presented theoretical perspectives about gender and learning, elements of intersectional inequality analysis (Winker, Degele, 2009) provided important tools for differentiation for the creation of categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructions of identity</th>
<th>Symbolic representations</th>
<th>Structures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reasoning of the subject, self-positioning, self-image, actions</td>
<td>discourses, social norms and values, images, unwritten laws</td>
<td>materialisations of symbolic representations: laws, concrete relationships (persons), institutions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 2: Three levels of analysis

These levels of analysis allowed an analysis of the subjective interpretations of the interviewees, such as an analysis of the subjective reasons for action and learning, resistance to learning and (self-)reconstructions. Degele and Winker follow a methodological approach in inequality analysis that combines deductive and inductive methods. After the first categorisations and dimensionalisations (presented above), phenomena became more comprehensible and tangible through the three-part distinction between structure, symbolic representation, and construction of identity. WHAT is winterschool [in the footnote]???

From an analytical perspective, the three levels are located on different dimensions and discrepancies can be experienced between them.

1. ‘Constructions of identity’ encompasses the level of reasoning of the subject. Self-positioning within social power relations, self-image, actions, but also the manner of self-reflection and self-awareness, are all part of it.

2. ‘Symbolic representations’ comprises social discourses and ideologies, i.e. what is defined as 'right', 'normal', and 'beautiful'. They refer to all unwritten laws, norms, values, and images that come into effect in any realm to which the dominant majority is oriented.

3. ‘Structures’ include all consolidated and formalised rights, traditions, habits, and experiences that have materialised within institutions, family structures, concrete relationships, and laws.

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18 I became familiar with this conceptualisation and applied these concepts to data at winterschool 'Intersektionalität' (intersectionality) in 2010. According to Degele and Winker, they are particularly relevant in the first steps of analysis.
4. Results: Learning in areas of conflict

So how are learning processes accomplished from the standpoint of the subject? Considering the above-mentioned theoretical framework and the coding paradigm, this question can be broken down even further: how are social frameworks reflected in the subjective perception of the person learning?

The data were used to generate sub-categories which will be described briefly below. This overview highlights (written in bold and italic letters) from which section the excerpts of the interviews were taken for this article.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase of the learning process</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Sub-categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial contact with the subject area</td>
<td>Reasons for tackling the subject area</td>
<td>• Gender-based reasons</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Political-ethical reasons</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Professional reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial learning process</td>
<td>Reasons for not tackling the subject area</td>
<td>• Defensive arguments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced learning process</td>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>• Internal conflicts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Deliberate (non) positioning</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Professional positioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Political positioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Contemplative/(self) critical positioning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: Sub-categories in the focal points of the analysis. The bold and cursive letters highlight the sub-category that the example stems from.

In the initial contact phase, three different reasons for tackling the subject area were identified: gender-based, political-ethical and professional reasons. Gender-based reasons include subjective reasons which are related to the gender-based identities of the interviewees. This denotes the self-image and biographical development of the interviewees as cis or trans women/man or non-binary trans* within the binary gender system. This positioning has, on the one hand, grown in socialisation processes associated with the person’s history. On the other hand, it is generated each day anew in active gender processes. The analysis category includes experiences of discrepancy between social norms and structures and the
person’s own personal gender perception which will be elaborated in more depth in section 4.1.

Political-ethical reasons include arguments and feelings that interviewees describe as the driving forces for confronting conflicts in the outside world, which are perceived as unjust, such as the 'unfair' treatment of boys and girls at school or at home. This category describes the discrepancy between perceived social realities and an individual’s own notions of justice and an ideal world. The category includes reasons and positions taken by the subjects on issues of justice, social inequality, or visions of what constitutes a good life.

Job offers, professional interest or career prospects are some of the reasons why individuals might start to grapple with gender-based issues (one of the interviewees rather accidentally started to engage more fully with the topic after a job offer). However, there should be no confusion here with the fact that a professional analysis of gender can also mean consistent continuation of a political or individual interest and can therefore frequently occur at advanced stages of the learning process.

In the initial learning process, the following categories were developed as reasons for not tackling the subject area: on the one hand, defensive arguments (reasons conveyed to the outside world for not learning) and, on the other hand, “inner” conflicts (these are inner reasons for not learning that were reflected on afterwards).

In the advanced learning phase, deliberate (non) positioning and three kinds of positioning were identified as agency.

1. Deliberate or ambivalent (non) positioning: it saves resources, protects individuals and is an economic-strategic way of acting. In certain situations it is considered necessary, unavoidable or dilemmatic.

2. Gradual or reflected (self-)positioning as professional positioning: conciliatory attitudes within teaching-learning arrangements are established which include patient justification, vivid explanations, transparent description of contradictions, but also the redirection of othering (one of the interviewees

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19 This positioning is not necessarily valid during one’s entire life time, but for the majority of people is subjected to a certain amount of inertia and continuity. Aspects that are considered male, female or trans* by individuals are comprised of an endless number of cultural, class-based, ethnic etc. assumptions.

20 Quotation marks are used as interviewees located these conflicts in themselves and as the conflicts are experienced through affects such as fear. Still, a dichotomy of internal and external conflicts would be misleading. One interviewee points out that one of his “inner“ reasons for engaging with the issue of masculinity and gender was the fear of being (perceived as) gay. That fear makes a reference to the heteronormative context as a social framework. Hence, “inner“ reasons/conflicts to avoid the subject area map the apparently “external“ social relations.
describes that he, as a person of colour\textsuperscript{21}, is frequently experiencing othering in his role as seminar facilitator by participants. By refusing and redirecting these attributions, he successfully promotes self-reflection processes among white participants).

3. Political positioning as a clear point of reference to a standpoint: by using resistant-strategic practices of designation and legitimisation, relationships to discourses and appeals are established.

4. As the fourth form of positioning, options of questioning positioning are looked at where a doubting and contemplative standpoint occurs, ambiguities in designation are uncovered (for example the balancing act between stabilizing practices of self-designation and the confrontation of fixed categories), boundaries are made transparent and future perspectives and utopias are developed (as an example, one of the interviewees opined that the time had come for a critical men's movement).

The key result of the study produced different areas of conflict where learning about gender relationships takes place from the perspective of the subject (see section 4.2).

4.1 Empirical insight: gender-based reasons to learn

In the following section, excerpts from interviews from the “gender-based reasons” sub-category highlight how one of these areas of conflict is shown in detail and what conclusions can be drawn as a result (an overview of all areas of conflict will be presented in section 4.2).

The presented quotes illustrate challenges that arise from the feeling of “not fitting in” or “not wanting to fit in” before or during early stages of consciously engaging with gender relations. Where conflicts between the individual construction of (gender) identity and gender norms were central reasons for learning, these conflicts are recalled in varying degrees of intensity and included feelings of insecurity, fear or confusion. Furthermore, conflicts in the construction of gender identity were closely related to “ideas of good life and justice”. They will be discussed as an independent category of reasons for learning (see Krämer, 2015, section 5.1.2).

\textsuperscript{21} The term 'person of colour' is based on the practice of self-designation among people negatively affected by racism. “It was coined as a political term in the US in 1960s by the 'Black-Power'-movement to point towards the commonalities between communities with different cultural and historical backgrounds. Thereby a solidarity perspective across racist divisions into ethnicities and 'races' should be established which promotes anti-racist alliances“ (see Nghi Ha 2009). This footnote reflects the German discourse regarding the term “people of colour”.
The following quotes are from interviewee Jan Biro; here, he answers my question about the beginning of his engagement. Jan Biro is interviewed as a queer-feminist activist. He is in his early thirties, was assigned female at birth and growing up, has a second-generation working class ‘immigrant background’ and identifies as a guy or trans*, depending on the context.

“I think I felt this quite strongly in puberty, I didn't use the term gender or sex then, but it was rather, uh, there are boys and there are girls and somehow girls should be like this and boys like this, and somehow they should like each other quite a lot, but somehow they cannot even talk to each other and I think puberty and my experience of not fitting into my role, or not wanting to fit in and to be too aggressive for a girl, or a woman, and my conflicts with the role expectations, but not from a position to riot, rather from a position of withdrawal or an internalisation of power relations, thus looking for faults in myself (…).” (Jan Biro, section 22)

Jan Biro describes his lack of terms like ‘gender’ or ‘sex’ as categories (see quote above). In retrospect, he can understand the conflicts between gender norms and gender relations that he experienced (e.g. “boys and girls should like each other quite a lot“ vs. “they cannot even talk to each other“). Personal reasons for learning that are understood as norm conflicts later in life remain vague and blurred at the time of the emerging discrepancy as there are neither supportive structures nor applicable concepts to comprehend this conflict, to question normality or rather allow another normality to come into being.

He describes his experiences of being “too aggressive for a girl“, of “not fitting” in, which led to “internalisation” of power relations.

“So, I felt very much depressed then […] I completely shut down emotionally and turned my aggressions towards myself, so I blamed myself and I possibly allowed myself very little.” (Jan Biro, section 58-59)

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22 All names have been changed.
23 The term immigrant background/migratory background contains several pitfalls (see Heinemann 2014, 16). On the one hand, the term evokes the idea of an homogeneous group. On the other hand, it may lead to stigmatisation. Furthermore, it suggests that “Germans“ do not have experiences of migration in the histories of their families (Broden/Mecheril 2007, 11). Thus, it produces a division between people with and without an immigrant background and thereby suggests that there are clearly distinguishable “Germans“ and “Non-Germans“. The benefits of the term ‘immigrant background’ are that it is currently the only term widely used and that it encompasses more than demographic aspects such as point of immigration and nationality (see Heinemann ibid.). Hence, I use the term to uncover a likely social reality. To underline the construed character of the category, quotations marks will be used in the text.
For Jan Biro, the experienced conflict, the long-term consequences for his well-being, are based on his unwillingness to fit the experienced gender norms. Thus, it is a conflict between the individual construction of identity and the socially dominant symbolic representations of gender that are expressed to Jan Biro through other people's expectations.

The quotes below are from interviewee Laura Janssen. She is in her thirties, white, self-identifies as cis woman with educated middle-class background and is interviewed as a feminist and lecturer in the field of 'gender'. She talks about the experience of discrepancy between attributions and the individual, gender-based self-image.

“As a child I was always told I was a tomboy. And that worried me because I knew I felt like a woman and that I was a woman. But at the same time I was given a characteristic untypical of women”. (Laura Janssen, section 2)

The fact that she feels “worried” indicates a confusing, physical experience. It could be seen as an unsettling doubt about her own perception. In the following section, Janssen describes her subjective experience of this type of unsettling moment even more clearly:

“... suddenly I felt weird or something was weird, something vague. And suddenly I was able to articulate what it was. But this unsettling feeling was already there earlier, that’s how I’d describe it”. (Laura Janssen, section 36)

This highlights a non-cognitive, affective experience of surprise and a sense of being powerless and of being at the mercy of things. It is connected with an understanding of learning as described by Meyer-Drawe. She describes a moment of sudden experience and of being overcome as the origin of learning and as the moment for developing a passion for learning. The quote from Janssen also shows that diffuse feelings were not reflected on until afterwards, in other words at later stages of Janssen’s learning process, when she is able to use new terms and language. There is a link to Meyer-Drawe here too: By developing terms later on, the origin of the learning processes can be picked up on and transformed.

The next quote from Stefan Krueger underscores how experience (here the example of falling in love) can promote processes of reflection and tackling of

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24 This transformation of diffuse aspects into a level structured by specialists terms is also contained in Scheper’s study based on the theory from the standpoint of the subject (2014).
the subject area. Stefan is *white* and in his thirties when the interview was carried out. He describes his parental home as middle-class and caring.

“Yeah, there are quite a lot of different aspects [that were relevant to start engaging with the issue of “gender”], I think one of the first one was that I fell in love with a [male] friend, I was 18 then. And I didn't manage to express it or to pursue it any further […] and I think I started to reflect on masculinity at that time and a certain type of masculinity or situations where men dominated spaces by being loud, it started at that time that this became very uncomfortable for me.”

“Why?”

“I don't know, that was never my way of being and I couldn't deal with it. It was a bit like “That's not me – and that's not what I want to be”. Maybe it was that, too. Yeah, but that was, I would say now, I didn't think about its meaning so much then, I also didn't think about it so much at some later point, it was more like a feeling.” (Stefan Krueger, section 1-4)

Stefan Krueger begins to consciously look at gender through the topic of masculinity after guessing as a teenager that he might be gay, which conflicts with perceived expectations of masculinity. He starts to perceive a certain hegemonic masculinity that “dominates spaces” as unpleasant. He experiences masculinity as related to heterosexual norms. Due to experiencing these external norms, he feels incapable of following his feelings and disclosing that he was in love feels taboo and shameful. It does not fit his former ideas of masculinity to fall in love with another man. At that point, the experience of 'unpleasantness' is vague, on the level of feelings and without appropriate terms.

In contrast to Stefan Krueger, Nazim Özer can hardly name the starting point of feeling uneasy with gender norms. Nazim Özer is almost 40 when the interview is carried out. He has a second-generation 'immigrant background' and self-identifies as Black (within the meaning of a political category).

“I can almost not relate to time, I think, not that exactly, I cannot say how it used to be, what is like now. Yeah, but I think that I am bit more exact, but maybe that's a consideration from today, I don't know, I would say that I actually always felt a little bit that this is not the beat I want to follow or so, and meanwhile I can argue for this better, I can understand it better and I can represent it better, too […]” (Nazim Özer, section 128)

In retrospect, Nazim Özer assumes that a certain type of 'spectacular' or sensational masculinity performance as it has been described in detail during the
interview by an observation of his son's sports class has never been “the beat he wants to follow”. According to that metaphor, the beat of masculine expectations did not resonate with him. The image points to the physical experience of discrepancy. It becomes also apparent that the first experiences of discrepancy between the individual construction of identity and gender norms remain very vague at that point and that they can be reconstructed only with difficulty in retrospect (“I would say”, “maybe”, “actually”, “not that exactly”). Like Laura Janssen and Jan Biro, he addresses the fact that the previous blurred feeling can only be explained through later verbalisations.

Following the discussed excerpts of interviews, these aspects can be observed here:

- Conflicts with gender norms that relate to the experience of not fitting in or not wanting to fit in are construed as starting points of the learning process by the interviewees.
- These experiences demonstrate how Meyer-Drawe’s phenomenological perspective strengthens the argument for the use of subject-centric learning-theory approaches to better understand long-term learning processes. The examples underscore how definition-based knowledge helps to describe an experience as one of discrepancies afterwards, in other words as a reason for learning and to categorise it in the learning process via gender relationships. As a result, an initially ambiguous perception is only given social meaning through language afterwards.
- Verbalisation can only be achieved within a secure social environment that provides options for identification, and thus a shared language (see quote Biro).
- The speechlessness and unpleasant feelings, however, also indicate the equitemporality of the reason for learning and learning difficulty which Holzkamp calls the two-fold scope of opportunities (see Holzkamp 1983, p. 345). In the initial stages of the learning process, Laura Janssen, Jan Biro, Nazim Özer, and Stefan Krüger find themselves here, still unreflective and caught in the conflict between experiencing their own gender-based form of expression and the normative expectations and characteristics ascribed to them by their environment. This conflict can also be considered one in the sense of the two-fold scope of opportunities: the interviewees feel they have a choice between the restrictive option to act and the generalised option to act. In other words, they have to opt for averting a threat by adapting to external expectations and acting out their own gender

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25 NÖ: […] “it was last week, one of the fathers came around […] there were some ropes in the gym dangling from the ceiling, and suddenly he climbs up a rope. And all the children “wow”, my son, too. (laughs) And then I realised that this is somehow – yeah, I don't want that, I don't want to be that guy […] I know, that is actually quite simple to be that spectacular …” (Nazim Özer, section 122)
identity. The result is a risk to the status quo, but also a chance to build on the action they and others can take.

- The analyses of the ‘resistance to learning’ category show that the unsettling moment of discrepancy from the norm might not be just a reason to learn, but also relevant to “internal” resistance to learning. If the gap between the subject and gender norms is perceived as being too vast, the subject may be unable to reconcile the advantage learning can provide. If there is no safe environment to start learning, resistance to learning might occur. These resistances can also take the form of turning the conflict against oneself or others, for example through auto-aggression, physical symptoms, aggression directed toward others, internalised and externalised misogyny, homo- and/or trans*-negativity. In other words, the subject has good reasons not to learn. If reasons for not learning dominate, then subjects do not learn even though the subject’s own personal freedoms, form of expression, or sense of justice are impaired.

4.2 Agency in areas of conflict: an overview

An analysis across categories makes clear, however, that the subjects rarely have to surrender to just one single experience of discrepancy regarding a topic of learning, but that it is much more about positioning in a field that includes different poles. This positioning is not to be taken one-dimensionally nor is it bipolar, but options to act and learn are often located on a continuum between two forms. Therefore, the contradictions, which exhibit what Holzkamp calls the equitemporality of the reason for and resistance to learning or two-fold scope of opportunities, are defined in the project as areas of conflict. These areas of conflict are shown in the following graphic (Fig. 4).

Graphics are problematic in that they are either highly complex or highly simplified. The advantage of the slide bar (also called a graphic equalizer, similar to a mixing console) is that complex positioning options can be captured two-dimensionally. The slide bars here act as metaphors for the subject’s positioning options within various areas of conflict. Depending on the situation, the person’s own history, specific integration in structures, routines and the extent to which they are affected by various hierarchical relationships, any positioning or action takes place in this range of contradictions.
The slide bar model provides an overview of these different areas of conflict.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In general</th>
<th></th>
<th>Throughout</th>
<th></th>
<th>Relating to particular issues</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>restrictive agency</td>
<td>I------------O-------------</td>
<td>I---------------O----------------</td>
<td>I--------------O------</td>
<td>feminism/gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>professional agency</td>
<td>I--------------O-------------</td>
<td>I---------------O----------------</td>
<td>I--------------O------</td>
<td>femininity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>restrictive ability to act</td>
<td>I--------------O-------------</td>
<td>I---------------O----------------</td>
<td>I--------------O------</td>
<td>gender studies</td>
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<td>I---------------O----------------</td>
<td></td>
<td>dramatisation</td>
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<td>gender relations</td>
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<td>(re-)traditionalisation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>removing dramatisation</td>
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Fig. 4: Areas of conflict deduced from the analyses in which learning about gender and gender competence are located. *(The location of the control buttons serves as an example and does not relate to a specific situation in the interviews!)*.

The control buttons (shown here in the form of circles) are never on the emancipatory pole in all areas of conflict. It can only be decided situationally from the standpoint of the subject which positioning will result in a rise of agency within a multi-dimensional field. In the model, this is highlighted by the fact that the circles are situated at different positions. At advanced stages of the learning process, the subject gains greater awareness of the multi-dimensionality of the field (however, this does not necessarily entail a greater sense of agency or more option for action). To shift a bar in an emancipatory direction, it must be considered whether a direct positioning, possibly as too fast a shift in one direction, could cause another bar to shift in an anti-emancipatory direction. Based on the overview, however, the meaning of the three levels (shown here in different shades of grey) will be explained.
“General” areas of conflict

The first level (a medium shade of grey) shows “general areas of conflict”: between generalised agency, restrictive agency, and professional agency. A third agency was added to Holzkamp’s definitions: professional agency, which can also be referred to as mediating or “conscious” agency. This was identified in the empirical analysis of agency at an advanced stage of the learning process. This denotes a deliberate course of action from within the ranges of poles specified. Therefore, the subject might be aware of the various options, as well as the contradictions of these options and the potential consequences. Acting professionally should not be equated to “acting as a professional”. However, professional agency is frequently expressed and useful in professional settings. “General areas of conflict” can also be called “areas of conflict of agency”. Regardless of the core issue, these general areas of conflict are encountered in learning processes again and again.

1. Restrictive agency <> generalised agency

Restrictive agency and generalised agency can conflict with each other. Restrictive agency is understood as the pursuit of security of social and material resources within a given structure, whereas generalised agency encompasses the pursuit of political-ethical expression and free (nonconformist) gender expression. This area of conflict is present in the first reasons for learning through vaguely defined feelings of unpleasantness and awkwardness. When resistances to learning are reflected, this feeling can already be described more precisely as fear and insecurity. At an advanced stage, this “inner” conflict causes actions to be postponed or suspended to later, more effective situations of (collective) action. This is possible without the experience of fundamental or existential insecurity for the learning subject as this person is already aware of options and fields for actions. When structures or hegemonic discourses (for example presented by supervisors or other people the subject is deeply dependent on) are threatening resources, non-positioning might be particularly preferred, or rather actions to save resources are chosen over free articulation. This point illustrates that a sufficient amount of resources (e.g. social integration and economic security) is necessary to allow for a nonconformist expression and emancipatory actions in the first place.

The desire for approval, affirmation, and appreciation by conforming to social norms is related to negatively experienced emotions such as fear (for example the fear of being gay or the fear of falling into old habits when speaking) in the interviews. The indecision between the pursuit of the preservation of resources (the defence against threats and the protection of the
individual options of action) and the development of agency can be understood as a reason for action and an “inner” resistance toward learning. In other words, subjects are challenged to learn while anticipating disapproval in their environment, experiencing physical sedimentation of the new knowledge, and developing a new sense of justice.

2. Professional agency <> generalised agency

This area of conflict is a variation of the previous one. Professional agency includes the ability to share knowledge and experiences in a useful and effective way. This implies, however, an awareness of the advantage in competence and professionality, that is to say, knowledge of the respective imbalance within teaching-learning arrangements. Individually perceived (or rather 'spontaneous') generalised agency can be in opposition to this attitude. “Professionalism” means therefore that acting subjects can only partially position themselves in a given situation. Individual needs to express personal or political opinions are set aside to facilitate long-term teaching processes. It can be effective for teachers and social workers in the field of gender to keep their personal opinions and the extent of consternation to themselves in certain situations when structurally misogynist or heterosexist comments are made by participants. While it would terminate cooperation to clearly challenge the argument in a political context or to show anger and feelings of hurt, professional conduct might, in some situations, include raising thoughtful questions and pointing out contradictions.

3. Restrictive agency <> professional agency

A third area of conflict arises between restrictive agency that aims at preserving the status quo and professional agency. Lack of funding or low salaries can compromise the conditions for learning, and thus professional agency, within pedagogical contexts. Wording in the context of announcements or funding requests, which necessarily refer to hegemonic discourses to a certain degree, provide an obstacle to the dissemination of content that is critical of society. When only a short one-time seminar is offered due to low funding, in-depth processes of self-reflection, often needed to promote justified and long-term learning processes, are inhibited through limitations in time. Another risk is that gender training in the context of gender mainstreaming sees gender competence as an efficiency-enhancing 'social skill' pursuant to the 'optimisation of human capital'. Professional trainers are under pressure; engaging with political and historical questions of justice provokes resistance and disapproval in funders, because these questions are deemed as irrelevant or insufficiently job-related. As a result, gender mainstreaming provides the possibility of funding, while creating
opportunities to simplify and appropriate feminist demands and contents. Again, this reflects the conflicting nature of social discourses in terms of options for action (see theoretical framework, section 2.1).

The second area in dark grey encompasses transversal areas of conflict. These refer to routines and subjective relevance or multiple relevance of differentiating categories (see Fig. 2).

**Transversal areas of conflict**

These areas of conflict can be applied to learning in general, but they are relevant to learning about social inequality in particular. For example, in subjective learning processes cissexism and experiences of racism can have an inhibitory effect. However, insight gained can be used by the subjects synergetically or reflexively and engender new reasons for learning or taking action.26

*Habit <> intended action*

Physical and emotional attachments to well-established ways of thinking and acting can thwart and undermine new knowledge and resulting ways of thinking based on understanding. Conscious and rational intended action can be destabilised through unconscious structures of the subject. Interviewees realize that falling back into habits causes problems, when for example, gender-neutral language is not used continuously, when emotions cannot be perceived adequately or dominant ways of speaking are apparently tied to the individual self as part of male habitus. Emotions such as fear and insecurity hint that relatively deeply rooted habits are questioned. That is to say: patterns of perception or evaluation cannot be clearly identified on the level of reasoning which relates to gendered aspects of identity or ideas of justice and a good life. They affect a more profound, subconscious, physical dimension that interviewees can hardly describe verbally and which underlies inertia and continuity.

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26 In theoretical debates around the issue of intersectionality during the last 20 years, theorists have moved away from an additive understanding of discrimination as this conception simplifies and homogenises distinct experiences or creates hierarchies between different power relations. The analysis of the present study showed that multiple affiliation with discriminated or marginalised differentiating categories can be subjectively experienced as a major limitation or challenge. The results of the questionnaire study published in 2012 by LesMigraS focusing on multi-dimensional discrimination in general and on racism, (hetero-)sexism, and cissexism in particular supports this finding (see LesMigraS 2012). Different axes of discrimination were often not perceived as equivalent, but as a combined burden by the participants even though discrimination operated quite differently. Further research is warranted to understand this aspect of intersectionality in more depth.
Inertia of habits was described as a function of habitus by Bourdieu (1987). Subjects are involved in power relations in a complex way; through taste, which is experienced as 'natural', informal, and unofficial power structures are established and habits are developed. That fact precludes the option of escaping power and refutes the assumption of a simple antagonism of social classes that clearly divides into 'oppressors' and 'oppressed'. An autonomous intentionality of the subject in the appropriation of the environment thus becomes apparent as an 'illusion of self-determination'. External influences are not reflected, because a typical function of the habitus is to make itself invisible. Social structures are established in the subject through habitus. Partial perception and reflection of physicality, which will never be fully understood rationally, cannot only inhibit, but also foster learning processes by providing new knowledge or promoting interest in a topic. This effect can be illustrated by the intersection of reasons for learning and 'inner' resistance to learning. In the interviewees' perception, emotionality and habit follow behind intellectual and rational understanding. Habits, old, deeply rooted patterns of perception and evaluation structured through habitus, are threatened at the initial stage of the learning process. Thus, they are first endangered through active engagement with an issue, but during that process the subject also becomes conscious of these habits, which then become susceptible to chance. Habits, also called incorporations, can only be identified by (time-consuming) reflections, and completely overcoming habits can never be guaranteed.

Interrelatedness between multi-dimensional power relations – e.g. experience of sexism <-> experience of racism

The interviews revealed an area of conflict through multi-dimensional experience of discrimination. These experiences suggest different strategies for action that partially contradict and complement each other. Thus, they provide reasons for contradictions and entanglements, but also occasions for learning. The interrelatedness of power relations is discussed in particular on the level of the subject and structures in the interviews (see Winker, Degele 2009, see methodological and qualitative research design in section 3, fig. 1). Primarily, interviewees who were affected by othering addressed this issue. As a result of the topics discussed by the interviewees, the following section focuses on interrelatedness between (hetero-)sexism, racism, and cissexism. The study provided several examples of how interviewees experienced the multi-dimensional belonging to differentiating categories during the learning process.

\[27\] “What the body has learned cannot be considered as reflectable knowledge, that's what you are.” (Bourdieu, Seib 1987, 135).
Areas of conflict were identified between identity categories that are either attributed by oneself or by others and that thus resulted in social hierarchies. Interviewees negatively affected by racism, for example, added further reflections on racist discourses when they talked about patriarchal family relations in their family of origin in my presence as a white interviewer. In contrast, interviewees without so-called 'immigrant background' could address patriarchal grievances in their family “without any problem” as they do not fear promoting racist discourses (see Krämer 2015a, 5.1.5.). This observation corresponds to the finding of Black activists and scientists, as well as of critical whiteness studies that privileges are invisible to the privileged.

At the same time, the interviews give examples how synergy effects (for example through recognition/analogies, empathy and solidarisation) can be used while learning about power relations, and thus promote interest (see ibid.).

The third area (shown in light grey in the graphic) illustrates the areas of conflict related to certain areas. The problem of reification and the conflicting nature of social discourses on gender that were discussed in section 2.1 are reflected here.

**Areas of conflict relating to particular issues**

**Feminism/gender <> conservatism/antifeminism**

The learning process and critical engagement with gender relations is particularly at odds with conservative and antifeminist discourses (see 2.1 in this article). The study provides striking evidence of the influence antifeminist arguments still have. Their effects can be observed on every level, but most accurately when looking at resistances to learning. Antifeminist discourses are referred back to defensive lines of arguments (for example, “gender is an issue for women”, “men are hated/disadvantaged”, “sex is natural or god-given”) and those discourses advance inner unsettling dialogues and feelings found in “inner” resistances (for example, the fear of coming out as gay or feeling constrained and restricted as a man).

Conservatism and antifeminism also have rather indirect effects through normalisation processes: gender-based attributions or patriarchal structures influence reasons for learning and agency at an advanced stage of the learning process (for example through anticipation of resistance, non-positioning or gradual positioning, or tabooing of homosexuality in gender trainings).

28“Migrants’ (hetero-)sexism has been repeatedly used in German public sphere to argue in favour of racist policies (see Messerschmidt 2016).
Feminism <> gender

An area of conflict between gender and feminism is reflected mainly in positionings. 'Gender' represents a professionalised and institutionalised realm in the interviews, while the term 'feminism' is used synonymously with (radical) political practice and critical and emancipatory acting that is conscious of historical (dis-)continuities. 'Gender' (conceptualised as a binary category) serves to legitimise learning within institutionalised contexts and networks, whereas the critique of the binary gender system is rather seen as (queer-/trans-)feminist and extreme (see gradual positioning through language). One interviewee described the dilemma between using the rather open and encompassing term 'gender', which is relatively meaningless at the same time, and the expression of a feminist viewpoint that is more powerful through clear critique, but also might have an deterrent effect. The controversy around feminism and gender is tied to several debates, for example to the discussion whether a change in gender relations is predominantly achieved inside or outside of institutions.

Gender studies <> gender training

Educators and gender trainers face a conflict between sharing knowledge related to job-based qualifications, so-called factual knowledge, and the promotion of social skills such as teamwork, reflection on privileges, or internalised oppression that are often neglected in job contexts because of a drive for efficiency. Gender competence, which is developed by gender training, is frequently understood as a 'soft skill'. This classification of gender-based issues as less relevant and important enhances resistance to contact among participants (reasons for resistance) and thus hampers gender trainers, feminists, and educators. Perceived hierarchies also prevail in the realm of gender-conscious education. One interviewee stated that pedagogical knowledge related to gender is often less appreciated and valued than abstract feminist theories. Transfers and synergy effects are thus prevented through the creation of hierarchies and the division into theory and practice.

Dramatisation <> removing dramatization

The emphasis on persistent gender inequalities, on the one hand, and the demand for a dissolution of gender categories, on the other, creates another area of conflict. This means that “dramatisation of gender” (through continued use of gender as a category for analysis) and “removing of dramatisation” (loss of meaning through strategies of difference and deconstruction) are in tension (see
the problem of reification in section 2.1). This conflict comes into effect in individual learning processes as well as in pedagogical practice. In professional positioning, the conflict is expressed through conscious weighing of options and through illustrating the area of conflict to the participants. Bearing that in mind, the use of examples is checked for each situation to examine which side they will benefit. These considerations are also relevant in regard to the self-presentation of educators (for example to make the decision to speak openly about their own heterosexuality in front of the participants and to reproduce dominant norms, or to come out as trans).

Gender relations <> intersectionality/interdependence of power relations

A certain limitation in topics is needed to engage with gender relations. As a result, an area of conflict emerges between the sharing of feminist history and theories and the simultaneous critical engagement with further power relations. There is the potential threat of losing sight of other power relations, such as capitalism and racism, when too much attention is paid to the success of feminist movements. Appropriate methods to approach intersectionality are still scarce in gender-conscious education. At the same time, educators struggle to raise awareness of the historicity of gender and the significance of gender as a structural category.

5. Conclusions and points of contact for theory and practice

The individual’s perspective proved a particularly good way of focusing on the complexity of subjective problems regarding taking action in learning processes. It emerged that research on the issue of learning about gender relationships also contributes to the empirical foundation of learning theory. As an example of learning about social inequality, learning about gender relationships shows that learning theories from the individual perspective must be supplemented by concentrating on experiences, spontaneous acts and crises. This suggests theoretical complements and provides categories for reflection about learning processes.

At the same time, the results direct attention to structures: how can the context for critical learning be safe enough for the subject in order to be open to
diverse feelings of insecurity that depend on the subject's position? Which structures can support the learning subjects and relieve isolation?

The study also highlights new issues that indicate a need for more research: which terms can be used to describe the subtle social influences even better? How can we make the inter-subjective level in learning processes accessible to the subject? How can we examine in even more detail the identity-related dimensions of resistance to learning that become apparent?

Finally, we need to ask which consequences the results could have on gender teaching and learning processes. The realisation that the reasons for learning processes lie in discovering structures that are personally relevant is not new by any means. However, the interviews showed the way in which, with regard to gender as an issue, core personal issues are broached, which are linked to deeper identity processes.

Emancipatory education and anti-discrimination education requires protective spaces for biographical reflection in which a renunciation of the competitive style of hegemonic idealised images (white, male, heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied, etc.) and allowing and sharing of feelings (e.g. sadness, shame, pain, etc.) is possible. The organisation of a learning setting that can temporarily offer the necessary (minimal) protection is dependent on the positioning of the subjects. Homogenous groups (cisgender, trans*, male, female, white, Black) are useful to engage critically with one's biography. Depending on the positioning in the respective power relation, these groups can provide space for empowerment or critical examination of their own privileges. This applies throughout the learning and interest process. In this case there is no insularity.

We might also argue that personal reflection without gender knowledge is not possible. It is only by applying knowledge that we can work through what appears diffuse and threatening, therefore putting us in a position to act.

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29 Inspiring ideas around this question can be found in the following publication: “Diskriminierungskritische Lehre. Denkanstöße aus den Gender Studies” (2016 Zentrum für transdisziplinäre Geschlechterstudien, HU Berlin (ed.))


Messerschmidt, A. (2016). Nach Köln–Zusammenhänge von Sexismus und Rassismus thematisieren. In M. Castro Varela; P. Mecheril (Hrsg.) Die Dämonisierung der Anderen (pp. 159-171)


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Subjects in gendered constellations of spiralling disempowerment: Situated, personal meanings of rape and other forms of sexualised coercion

Bodil Maria Pedersen and Christel Stormhøj

“I have always been careful before, just generally careful.

But ...I take extra good care of myself... because I just don’t want anything to happen again... I think I have become more dependent on other people than I used to be”.

(Project-participant)

Abstract

Personal perspectives on having been subjected to rape or other forms of sexualised coercion as well as its meanings/consequences in everyday life are sparsely researched in mainstream psychology. Furthermore, questions of gender, power and participation and their connections to personal perspectives are also rarely explicitly nor critically investigated. Similarly, gendered aspects of sexualised coercion are frequently underestimated in common everyday discourses. Thus, it is crucial to explore how questions of gender and power may be interwoven in this psycho-social phenomenon and its meanings. Therefore, we investigate: 1. Intersecting societal aspects of gender, power and participation, their connections to women being subjected to sexualised coercion, and the concept of (dis)empowerment. 2. Situated, personal and common meanings/consequences of concrete incidents of coercion for women having been subjected to them. 3. Connections between being subjected to coercion and being a subject and participant in this context of action. Our article is part of an exploration of 1st person perspectives of women who have asked for assistance at Centre for Victims of Sexual Assault in Copenhagen. The exploration is informed by an attempt at
connecting approaches from critical and feminist social theory and from the approach of Kritische Psychologie.

Our analysis indicates how situated societal conditions may result in ‘spirals of disempowerment’ through which women experience a sustained loss of agency during and after incidents of coercion. The analysis underscores the necessity of conceptualising connections between societal and situated conditions of ‘power over’ and ‘power to’ in gendered relations of relative dominance and subordination, sexualized coercion, (dis)empowerment, and possibilities for participation. As a consequence, and by pointing to, as well as developing inclusive agency-oriented support initiatives, psychosocial conceptualisations and practices may avoid contributing to disempowering spirals feeding on victimisation, individualisation, psychologisation, and pathologisation.

Keywords
gender, disempowerment, rape, women’s oppression.

Introduction

With an approach informed by both critical social theory, feminist theory, and Kritische Psychologie we want to develop an understanding of how societal conditions contribute to gender based violence such as sexual coercion. Furthermore, we want to explore how they are connected to constrains of women as a group ‘an sich’, and how they become elements of the difficulties experienced by women subjected to coercion. Hereby we wish to contribute to overcoming individualising and pathologizing approaches common in mainstream psychology (Pedersen 2011a).

Gendered aspects of life are depicted in ways that display serious problems. For example, in Denmark it is not unequivocally recognised that men’s sexualized coercion of women is a gendered problem connected to men’s and women’s unequal societal conditions for their participation in everyday life. The underlying and idealizing assumption is that everybody regardless of gender is a free and equal citizen in a democratic society. As in other western late-modern liberal-democratic societies, we adhere to a liberal equality ideal that is considered to be the foundation of a just societal order (Brown 2006: 21; Dahlerup 2001:31; Fraser 2003:56). This ideal implies that all must be understood and treated as autonomous individuals and not as members of social groups. Unequal access to resources, status, participation and influence related to a late-modern gendered power relationship thus become ‘non-issues’. Yet, informed by feminist scholars, such relations can be conceptualized as a gendered relationship of dominance and subordination (Fraser 2003; Young
1990), and in the vocabulary of Haavind (1982, 1993) further specified as relations of relative dominance and subordination between men and women. Silences concerning this relationship are, among other things, related to how dominant discourses represent Denmark as one of the most gender equal societies in the world (Borchorst & Siim 2008; Lister 2009). The obvious problem is that the rhetorical adherence to the ideal of gender equality risks disguises and conceals the extent of the relative subordination of women and men’s dominance. Consequently, an understanding of how these practices actually constrain and/or enable the participation of women and men in everyday life is out of reach.

With this article we want to investigate the following questions: How can we understand connections between societal conditions for relations between men and women and men’s sexualized coercion of women? Which meanings may rape and other forms of sexualized coercion have for women as a group ‘an sich’, and which meanings/consequences may sexualized coercion have for women having been subjected hereto? How may these meanings and the perspectives of these women be understood in an approach connecting social theory, a (dis)empowerment approach and the 1st person perspective approach of Kritische Psychologie? And what significance may this have for provided assistance?

From its onset Kritische Psychologie has had two interrelated critical aims. One is the critique of societal conditions and how they contribute to the suffering of subjects in their conduct of everyday lives; the other is the corresponding critique of an individualising mainstream psychology. Thus, working with questions such as ours as with other social problems, attempts at connecting social theory and Kritische Psychologie support the development of our critical understanding.

Why a gender perspective in research?

Research raising questions of gender inspired by Kritische Psychologie is with few exceptions (f. ex. Haug 1999, Kousholt 2006) difficult to find. But most research and debates concerning social problems draw on implicit assumptions concerning gendered differences that are embedded in gendered discourses and other social practices, concealing connections between these practices and social problems. Ronkainen (2001) uses the concept ‘genderless gender’ for practices in which gendered social dynamics play a part, but where meanings of gender are neutralized through discursive practices. She points out that in much research on women subjected to violence, they are referred to in a gender-neutral
terminology, for instance as ‘victims’ or simply as individuals. Their difficulties are also understood through the use of gender-neutralizing theories, as in the simplifying and generalising categorisations of diagnostic concepts, such as ‘Post Traumatic Stress Disorder’ (Pedersen 2011a).

Although women are prevalent in national and international statistics, in research on sexualized coercion, questions connecting personal and societal meanings of gender are often treated as a matter of secondary importance, if at all. But in Denmark a major study shows that 0.4% men report experiences of sexual coercion while the equivalent number for women is 4.7% (Kjøller & Rasmussen 2002). The latest national survey of victimisation between 2005 and 2015 reports a mean of 4700 women per year answering that they have been subjected to ‘coerced intercourse’ (Pedersen, Kyvsgård & Balvig 2016). Women are estimated to constitute 84% of all victims and men 16%. Both men and women are predominantly victimised by men.

Another aspect of research on sexualised violence is that it is generally pathologized and disconnected from gender. Emerson and Frosh (2001:85) argue that research approaches formulate problems that represent and depend upon ‘powerful pathologisation and individualisation’ of perpetrators. Such approaches ignore, or even contest, that sexualized coercion ’viewed as a sexualized expression of power, control and dominance can be seen to conform to rather than deviate from the values, expectations and discourses that configure forms of hegemonic masculinity and organize the apprenticeship of boys into its sexual and non-sexual expression’ (Emerson & Frosh ibid: 77; cf. Ryan & Lane 1997).

In agreement with Emerson and Frosh, we propose that research on sexualised coercion must be critical and gender sensitive, and that it must point to societal change. Without change, there will be no challenge to dominant gendered discourses and practices, and no alternatives for boys’ perception of masculinity (ibid:80). Neither will there be any improvement in women being subjected to coercion, nor for the support they may receive.

Feminist research aims at producing knowledge on gender (power) relations and their meanings, as well as insight into social organisation based on gender (Lundgren 1993:13ff). Looking at society through such lenses means viewing its situated processes of structuration as, among other things, organised on the basis of gendered power relations. This not only entails that socially produced work-, communication- and relations of participation are studied in gender sensitive rather than in gender-neutral perspectives, but also that these relations are understood and problematized in a power perspective (Stormhøj 2003: 371, 2004: 473).
In a social sciences approach to gender research, gender is understood as a basic principle of social differentiation that builds on a hierarchical relation of difference between the ‘feminine’ and the ‘masculine’ (Bourdieu 1999:12ff, Widerberg 2005: 610). One critical aim of gender research is to contribute to the social transformation of unequal gender relations within and across contexts of action (Stormhøj 2003, 2004). Another is to clarify personal meanings/consequences of concrete participation in gendered power relations based on approaches such as diverse schools of critical psychology.

To make complex relations between gender and power visible, it is imperative to draw on theories about overarching societal conditions that cast these relations as part of societal conditions for the participation of diversely gendered persons. Concurrently, such theories must be sensitive to the historical and the context-specific social organisation of gender.

**Gender power relations in a social-theoretical light**

The current relationship of relative dominance and subordination between men and women must be perceived as multi-dimensional, and as reproduced and/or changed by participants through ordinary or extraordinary everyday discourses and other social practices.

**Societal dominance and oppression**

Basically, we understand society as differentiated and hierarchical, and emphasize on-going struggles between dominant and oppressed persons and groups, who have conflicting interests in maintaining or changing social order and corresponding practices of everyday life. This perception benefits primarily from Bourdieu (1984, 1987,1992), Fraser (2003, 2005), and Young (1990, 2004). Hierarchical relations of difference between social groups are constituted as results of societal inequalities in access to resources, status and decision-making power. These inequalities make concrete situated practices for concrete persons possible, difficult or impossible, thereby constraining and/or enabling their participation in everyday life.

Along with the process of constituting society social groups are formed ‘an sich’, referring to how social groups are constituted through hierarchical differences-creating structurations, pervading society as a whole (Young 1990).

Oppression and dominance are concepts about societal conditions. Oppression implies systemic disadvantages and limitations for social groups constraining group members’ possibilities for participation, self-realization, and
self-determination, while dominance entails systemic advantages and possibilities for social groups which in contrast expand possibilities for participation, self-realization, and self-determination for group members (Fraser 2003: 13ff, 48ff, Young 1990:37). The fact that oppression has a systemic character means that it is produced by the normal processes of everyday life, and also that an oppressed group need not have a correlated oppressing group. For instance, not all men belong to the group ‘rapists’ nor do all women belong to the group ‘victims’. Whilst societal oppression concerns relations among social groups, these relations do not always fit the notion of intentional and conscious oppression of one group by another (Young 1990: 41). Rather, this kind of oppression flows from taken-for-granted norms, habits and values, assumptions underpinning institutionalised rules and practices and the collective consequences of following those practices and rules, which means that oppression is maintained and reproduced by people simply living their lives by the formula: business as usual. The practices of everyday life, societal conditions and institutional arrangements are interrelated and facilitate each other. This dynamic will be unfolded below in analyses of personal meanings/consequences of sexualized coercion for women.

Though oppression is systemic, it may also be conscious and intentional (Young 1990: 42). In many cases, as with sexualized coercion, it is often individual, identifiable men who knowingly and intentionally offend and do harm to women.

The late-modern relative relationship of men’s domination and women’s subordination

As a social group ‘an sich’, women can be perceived as relatively subordinated suffering from economically, culturally, and politically based forms of oppression (Fraser 2003, 2005). The economic dimension shows an unequal distribution of resources and burdens between men and women, producing and reproduced by gendered divisions of labour that constrain women’s possibilities for participation, self-realization, and self-determination i.e. their agency in everyday life. The cultural dimension is characterised by cultural value patterns privileging qualities coded as ‘masculine’, while devaluing traits associated with the ‘feminine’. These patterns imply status subordination. Generally, women enjoy less respect, recognition and prestige than men, which also reduces their possibilities for participation, self-realization, and self-determination in their conduct of everyday life. Such value patterns organise and pervade many contexts of action and are codified in many laws and welfare politics (Ehrlich 2001, Fraser 2003). Different forms of violence against women in general, and
sexualised coercion in particular, flow from gender-based status oppression, which women as a group ‘an sich’ are subjected to. In the political realm, unequal access to representation and framing of issues produces forms of political misrepresentation. Due to gender inequality in political participation and representation, women’s access to an equal say in common affairs and their framing are diminished compared with men’s (see also Siim 2000).

Supplementing Fraser’s arguments about sexualized coercion, Young (1990: 61ff) emphasizes that women’s possibilities for participation, self-realization, and self-determination are reduced due to the very risk of sexualised coercion, which all women potentially face. The fact that women live with the knowledge that they are at risk exclusively on account of their group identity limits their freedom of action. The awareness hereof figures as a real and restrictive condition for participation in many aspects of everyday life (Caiazza 2005). Consequently, oppression through sexualised coercion not only means that concrete women are being harmed, but also that on a daily basis, multitudes of women are conscious that they may be harmed because they are women. Therefore, with Young we may describe sexualized coercion as a social fact, as an aspect of gendered social practices, in the sense that everybody knows that it happens, and that it will happen again.

Women as a social group ‘an sich’ is produced by various forms of gender-related oppression. Yet, there are also hierarchical relations of difference between women related to class, age, sexuality, race/ethnicity etc. implying that concrete women are likely to be both oppressed along some axes of inequality and dominant along others (Fraser 2003: 26; Young: 1990: 42). We fully recognize the importance of analysing the varied effects and meanings of intersecting relations of privilege and lack of privilege in terms of sexualized coercion. Pedersen (2007) has done so in relation to the intersection of the social meanings of ethnicity and age. But the consequences of such intersecting relations for personal meanings of sexualized coercion of concrete woman will not be directly traceable in the analysis below. Our primary focus is on connections between personal meanings/consequences of sexualized coercion and women as a group ‘an sich’, and such meanings/consequences for women subjected to coercion. Women as a group ‘an sich’ have both different and common societal conditions, with the latter spelled out as discourses about and the prevalence of sexualized coercion, which they must relate to because they live a woman’s life. Hence, despite the differences in conditions and the unequal possibilities for participation that these differences generate, women overall face problems and develop understandings and strategies for action that are connected to common conditions for them as a group ‘an sich’, such as attempting to avoid or ignore the risk of sexualised coercion. A second crucial point is that the three different
dimensions of gender oppression (economic, cultural, and political) in practice often overlap, implying that they can enhance each other, which generates disempowering and/or empowering spirals. And a third key point is that despite hierarchical power that oppresses and constrains women as a group ‘an sich’, there is space for politics, for women’s agency to influence common conditions, as well as those specific to their concrete conduct of everyday life (Fraser 2005; Young 1990) (see also Lister 2003). ‘Power over’ then coexists with ‘power to’: power as enabling, as agency, even though, in some cases, it may be minimal.

Thus, we consider men’s violence against women in general, and sexualized coercion in particular as aspects of societies based on historically situated gendered relations of relative dominance and subordination, rather than as de-situated misdeeds of a few deviant or pathological individuals.

Furthermore, sexualized coercion as a societal form of oppression may well contribute to constraining relations and thereby overlap other forms of oppression that are indirect consequences of events of coercion. As the study we draw on illustrates, sexualised coercion may be followed by severe reduction of economic resources and by other forms of deprivation that influence personally important forms of participation (Pedersen 2011b). We shall return hereto in our analysis of 1st person perspectives of women participating in the study.

**A critical concept of (dis)empowerment**

Although it is also frequently used as an empty buzz word, we wish to use the concept of (dis)empowerment. Andersen (2005) argues that within a critical tradition of social sciences, the concept of (dis)empowerment is a complex analytical concept. Accordingly, a critical conceptualisation of (dis)empowerment must include processes that may support the capacity of underprivileged groups for overcoming powerlessness. Such processes should aim at enabling agents to become reflective and competent, and acquire voice and action capacity in an inclusive society (Andersen 2005:60). Empowerment processes may then be perceived as processes through which underprivileged individuals, social groups, and (local) communities improve their ability to create, manage, and control material, social, cultural, and symbolic resources (Hvinden & Sander 1996, Andersen et al 2003 in Andersen 2005:60). Such processes contribute to improve possibilities of participation in the societal processes of daily life. This conceptualisation of empowerment implies a generative concept of power: a ‘power to’ create and develop possibilities. In the critical empowerment tradition, aiming at changing societal processes of ‘power over’, focus is directed towards dialectics between societal conditions for the conduct of lives of persons and groups, and changes in consciousness, self-
perception, and action capacities of persons as well as groups. But an increase of personal capacities for action cannot stand alone if processes of disempowerment are to be broken. What is needed in order to enhance critical and transformative empowerment processes is change in the societal conditions of underprivileged groups and persons.

In our approach, sexualized coercion is an instance of gendered disempowering practices. Changes related to practices of relative gendered domination and subordination, such as the sexualised objectification of women’s bodies, as genderless gender discourses and practices of individualisation, and as pathologisation of persons committing and/or subjected to gender-based violence are examples of possibly transformative empowerment.

For change to occur, critical empowerment strategies that unveil and challenge relative dominance and oppression related to meanings/consequences of sexualised coercion must be incorporated in psychological thinking and practices, as well as in everyday practices. Our analysis is meant to contribute to such a change.

1st Person perspectives on sexualised coercion

Our discussion switches from an emphasis on social theory and overarching societal relations of dominance and subordination, to an emphasis on 1st person perspectives (Pedersen 2011a, Salkvist & Pedersen 2008, Schraube 2013) of women taking part in the empirical study informing our analysis (Pedersen 2011b). The 1st person perspective approach was fundamental to the study as such, but equally so to support conversations (Pedersen 2004).

Our approach to the analysis

Our switch in emphasis could have been conceptualised as a switch from a perspective from above to one from below, creating a division between societal conditions and personal perspectives. But since we understand social processes as intertwining and mutually interwoven practices connecting overarching societal with locally situated personal ones, we work with a connecting duality of emphases. Both societal conditions and personal and local aspects hereof are understood as always situated and concrete. They are also seen as changing and changed over time and place. But it is in the changing duality of 1st person perspectives and the meanings/conditions they are embedded in and create, that agency and (dis)empowerment unfold as situated in everyday life. Although there are, of course, diverse incongruities in and between our approaches, this
understanding is fundamental to our social theory approach as well as to Kritische Psychologie (Dreier 1995, 2008, Holzkamp 1998, Nissen 2005, Schraube ibid).

Since the main aim of our article is to discuss gendered aspects of sexualised coercion, and this issue of Annual Review of Critical Psychology is dedicated to Kritische Psychologie, we will not make an extensive presentation and discussion of hereof. In the following analysis, we simply wish to present how it may benefit our understanding of the meanings/consequences of a specific form of gender-based violence in the conduct of everyday life.

Our analysis does not go into depth with all the implicit gendered meanings represented in the experiences and perspectives of the women who participated in the study. This has been discussed in a separate article (Pedersen 2008a). However, we want to stress that as a consequence of our approach combining societal aspects of gender and Kritische Psychologie, we always understand meanings/consequences of being subjected to sexualised coercion as entwining with situatedly gendered power relations through personal trajectories of participation.

Furthermore, - and because personal meanings are ascribed in connection to participation in different concrete contexts of action - we understand meanings/consequences as concrete situated (im)possibilities, connected to unique and personal meanings that are developed and ascribed from situated perspectives (Salkvist & Pedersen ibid). We understand contexts of action as concrete versions of societal conditions, in and with which unique and personal constellations of meaning entwine with more overarching conditions.

Since events of sexualized coercion do not have one single personal meaning, we understand them as having personal constellations of meanings. Personal meanings and perspectives are developed and changed in and with trajectories of participation in the intersecting conditions of everyday life. These conditions may be said to have situated sets of possible meanings, understood also as consequences of specific and/or shared contexts of action. To underscore this double signification of ‘meaning’ we have used the combined concept of meanings/consequences. As the concept of meaning is one that points to the concrete societal as well as to the personal, it underpins the connection between the personal and the societal in our approach. It may be seen as their nexus. While this nexus diverges from person to person as well as across time and place, it may still form situated patterns in motion.

Although personal perspectives and situated constellations of meanings of coercion are embedded in gender/power/agency relations, this is not always recognized and/or voiced by the women who experienced subjection. The gendered aspects of social processes are frequently neither conscious nor
verbalised; nevertheless, they are ‘done’ (Butler 1990). This insight is related to a critical feature of a question concerning 1st person perspective approaches. Kritische Psychologie inspired approaches often emphasise this method; still, a first-person perspective method is more complex than sometimes recognized. It does not mean simply reproducing what affected research participants may say. As it represents a historical and locally situated approach, 1st person perspectives are to be understood as entwining in societal conditions and must also be seen as mirroring practices such as genderless gender discourses on violence. Therefore, such connections have to be taken into account in an analysis even when not directly articulated and addressed by participants themselves. Genderless gender and other aspects of gender-neutralizing symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1998, 1999, Pedersen 2011a) are at play in the 1st person perspectives of the participants of our study. Still, our analysis and discussion of the personal meanings which sexualized coercion were attributed point to interweaving constellations of personal, gendered, and other societal meanings, even when the participants did not themselves designate them as gendered.

The concept of participation is a specific exception to our decision not to unfold most concepts used in Kritische Psychologie. Working with this concept is particularly awkward when exploring meanings/consequences of incidents of sexualized coercion. We will return to this issue below.

The study

The study represented in our analysis and discussion was carried out at The General Hospital of Copenhagen in Denmark (Pedersen 2011b). Although it was carried out in 2004, it reflects present conditions and problems. Its aim was, over time and place, to follow changing meanings/consequences of having been subjected to sexualized coercion. It included 40 women who participated in diverse forms of conversations such as therapy/counselling, group meetings and other kinds of psycho-social assistance. Additionally, 15 of these women were interviewed from a few weeks up to a year after having first contacted the Centre of Sexual Assault. The relatively unique possibility of this study was to follow the women as long as they felt in need of support from the Centre. Furthermore, instead of starting with already defined difficulties as they were described and categorised in specific psychological approaches such as trauma theory, the attempt of the support initiatives was to focus primarily on what the women from their 1st person perspectives experienced as their personal concerns. As a starting question, they were asked to put into words what they, at the time, considered their most critical concerns. Pointing to the social character of the meanings/consequences of the events, it turned out that especially in the first
sessions these were concerns about who should be told of their experience, and in which way. Other issues, also mostly concerning social relations followed later. Subsequently, further aspects of more practical issues in their conduct of everyday life emerged. In their representations of and reflections on their difficulties, the ordinary and extraordinary emerged as interwoven (cf. Shapiro 2017), although neither the ordinary nor the extraordinary is always experienced as such. Nor are ‘ordinary’ conditions static repeated patterns. Persons involved must act in order uphold the ‘patterns’ of everyday life or to change them (Kousholt ibid). This clearly became very strenuous for many participants.

An (un)imagined risk

Mechanisms of individualisation through ‘genderless gender’ discourses and other practices, as well as Danish discourses of an ‘already implemented gender equality’ are in danger of superseding possible gender-sensitive perceptions of sexualised coercion (Johansen in prep). Moreover, despite massive coverage by media, concrete knowledge about personal experiences of sexualized coercion is difficult to obtain. This fact may enhance pervasive assumptions that sexualised coercion is practiced by mad strangers, who unexpectedly jump out from behind a bush (Pedersen, Kyvsgaard & Balvig 2016). Similarly, the ‘stranger assumption’ was one that several participants of our study expressed. Such common discourses interact and may contribute to a neglect of many other sometimes contradicting aspects of sexualised coercion, aspects voiced in the study. 43% of the women who contacted Centre for Sexual Assault at the time of the study had not been subjected to sexualized coercion by a stranger, but by a friend, a boyfriend, an ex-boyfriend, a classmate, a family member, a boss or some other familiar person (Sidenius & Madsen 2004).

Although sometimes not recognised in women’s participation in diverse communities of action, the risk of experiencing sexualized coercion constitutes an embodiment of gendered power relations (Cahill 2001, McNay 1999). Consequently, some women, like several in our study, may experience sexualized coercion as an imagined threat that has suddenly and unexpectedly become real (Bohner and Schwartz 1996), while others may be taken aback. In the study, women from the latter group had not imagined it possible that they themselves could be subjected to sexualized coercion, and/or had imagined being able to defend themselves.

One participant who had been subjected to coercion by a friend with whom she shared a flat, said in an interview that she wanted other women to know that:

“No matter how strong you feel, you must know that it is okay to be weak in such a situation. Do not think of that as a defeat. Because I did in the
beginning. I felt that one can just…fight it, that you can do this and that, well… it is important to know that this is not what you should expect. And if it is a defeat, well then you should learn to live with it. Because you can do nothing about it. No one can…”

Cahill (2001) believes that women may ‘forget’ that they are at risk. But since it must be presumed to be troubling and constraining to incessantly try avoiding the risk of sexualized coercion, women may more or less consciously seek to discount emotions and thoughts connected to this risk.

Accordingly, their ‘forgetfulness’ may be considered to be intentional omissions of considering the risk, and/or as a way of participating in spite of this risk. Furthermore, and related hereto, Denmark being branded as a gender-equal society exacerbates the likelihood of ignoring the risk.

That the experience by the participants of our study was often generalised in a loss of confidence in the reliability of others became clear. Brison who experienced rape as well as a threat to her life, similarly generalised her experience of sexualized coercion in the following way: When the unthinkable becomes real, one begins to question even one’s most realistic perception (2002).

**Articulated gendered meanings**

On the surface sexualized coercion, although it is extraordinary gendered oppression in one of its concrete forms, may appear to be more or less unique and incidental. Partly for this reason, it may also appear as a purely interpersonal, individual and private incident. Multiple and diverse individualising discourses concerning all persons involved corroborate to underscore this understanding. In spite of the disregard for the general risk of being subjected to sexualised coercion, of individualizing discourses and of other connected practices, several of the women participating in our study, like the two below, spontaneously suggested that all women risk be subjected to coercion while simultaneously implying that it would be by men:

“When I talk to other (women) about it, I always make sure to make them think it over once more. A little more than just superficially. They probably think the same as I did before, but just have them understand that (women), going about (freely) shouldn’t be taken for granted. You have to remember to think it over once more…”

And:
“Now, it was someone I knew… I learned that it can happen with almost anybody you know, right?”

In spite of it being individualised and seemingly unique and incidental many participants’ reasons for gendering their experience were that they had not expected that they themselves may be subjected to being over-powered, but that it did happen all the same. The experience of subjection occasionally also meant that they spontaneously reflected on other gendered practices of everyday life (Pedersen 2008a). They changed their perspectives on gender relations such as the pervasive and gendered sexualisation of the everyday lives of youths in Denmark (Johansen in prep.):

“I notice it more now. I don’t know if it was like this before, but I didn’t notice it then… that everything is about sex, all the time. It is very much about looks and about sex. And so many women, including my friends… Well for instance, if we’re going out… I just never thought of it in that way until now. They may stand for two hours putting on make-up and put on a push-up bra, and everything of this sort. So, start thinking: well, why all this for men?”

The experience is understood both as individual and personally transformed into a hazard for women in general. This reflects that subjection is both experienced as a concrete personal event as well as it being an event connected to practices of a gender dominance-oppression relationship, taking place in unique but situated circumstances (cf. Helliwell 2000). In our approach, an event of sexualised coercion is an embodied aspect of a gendered societal and concrete context of action. For a woman who is subjected to coercion, the experience is situated and a specific oppression of her as a subject. Lack of possibilities of negotiating the circumstances of her participation in this and diverse other contexts must then be understood as restraining her ‘power to’ in her personal conduct of life.

(Dis)empowerment is related to agency and possibilities for negotiating the conditions for one’s participation. Whether these conditions constitute participation in (overlapping) processes of political, cultural, or economic dimensions, co-determining our conduct of everyday life, they require confidence in our possibilities for participatory influence. The experiences women have with coercive subjection, as well as the meanings it is ascribed and other consequences it may have in the aftermath, contribute to different forms of gendered constrains in participation. Our analysis will indicate that such constraints may interlock and form ‘spirals of disempowerment’.
Economic resources

Most participants in the study were young, between the age of 16 and 25, and the conditions of their day-to-day life were not economically secure. Most were students and lived off varying part-time jobs, study grants or other unreliable sources of income. Only a few had steady employment and some lost their jobs. For some, being subjected to sexualized coercion meant temporarily postponing their education. Over time, this often had the effect of reducing their financial means and negatively impacting the trajectory their education. For instance, it intervened with active periods of studying, which may affect the allocation of grants and constitute consequences reaching into their futures.

As many participants had to give up their part-time jobs because of difficulties following sexualized coercion, they would occasionally, when having lost the right to a grant and not being entitled to unemployment benefits, find themselves without any economic means what so ever. Not being able to pay their rent, several women had to give up their housing arrangements. Because perpetrators knew where they lived, some also wished to move, but, like this woman could not afford to:

‘…that you can’t even really relax in your own home, because you, because I could see the scene of the crime from my balcony, right? Then you’re kind of trapped in your own home, right?’

Some could no longer afford to take part in activities with friends or even pay tuition. Some found themselves accumulating debt that they had difficulty paying back. While these young women were trying to establish less dependent adult lives, difficulties in sustaining their livelihood led to increased or re-established dependency on others, often on boyfriends and parents. In her study Caiazza (ibid) concluded that lack of control over economic means alone may limit women’s participation in civil life and vice versa. In addition, women who are engaged in active employment are usually the ones who participate most in other aspects of civil society as well as political activities.

The personal meanings/consequences of loss of income and a resulting sparsity of economic resources had significant intersecting ‘spill over’ effects on other constraints experienced by the women in our study. Feeding into spirals of disempowerment, economic problems for example contributed to loss of mobility and increased the dynamics of isolation and marginalisation discussed below. In the short and long run, the women who had been subjected to sexualised coercion were especially threatened with exclusion from participation in many contexts of civil life.
Freedom of movement

Limitations in freedom of movement is another example of several and coinciding conditions that increase the risk of marginalization that women experience in their everyday life, especially those who have been subjected to sexualized coercion. A large part of the activities that constitute participation in civil life, such as employment, volunteering, cultural activities, sports activities and socializing, takes place after dark. When the women in our study had been exposed to coercion outdoors in the evening and after dark, they experienced themselves as especially restricted in public spaces at these times of the day (Salkvist & Pedersen ibid). In the Danish winter, this may be up to 18 hours. Especially in the evenings, but also otherwise and in order to go anywhere at all, for instance attend classes, many of the women then felt obliged to hire a taxi, thus further straining an already strained budget:

A young woman who was a member of a band, and who was also active in both politics and community work had to quit these activities temporarily. She feared walking in the streets and lacked the means to afford taxi fees (transcript from group sessions).

All but one of the women felt generally less safe for shorter or longer periods after the incidents. A woman who had to move said in an interview:

“Now I have applied for an apartment, I have spent a lot of time thinking about where to live and stuff. But then, eh, you can say Sydhavnen, that might not be the coolest place… Valbybakke, well that is a nice neighbourhood and I feel safe there. And I can see lights all the way, right? Then I feel sort of, well that’s okay. But you know, I have become much more careful about where…”

Our study thus confirms Caiazza’s (ibid), in as much as women having subjected to coercion become especially restricted in their whereabouts. It also points to the ways in which - and to how significantly - this may be the case when experiencing lack of power to deal with aspects of their everyday lives. Furthermore, echoing Caiazza’s study (ibid), it indicates that feeling secure or insecure in public spaces influences women’s participation in civil life. Caiazza concluded that forms of constraint which women are subjected to through the reality of practices of sexualised coercion means that women as a ‘group an sich’ in comparison with men are limited in their possibilities for participation in the public sphere.
Isolation

Isolation may follow from restrictions of movement and participation in civil life, but other aspects of the possible aftermath of sexualised coercion interrelate herewith.

Events of sexualised coercion are over-determined by massive sensationalising, and often sexualising media coverage and multiple dramatizing discourses. Although diverse recent campaigns in Denmark and the western world have tried to overcome elements of some of these discourses, it is still difficult for women to talk about their experiences. Thus, sexualised coercion can be understood as non-events, meaning events that are so tabooed that they cannot be talked about (Asplund 1987). Both the - ostensibly contradictory - phenomena of massive media discourses and the character of non-events of the events of coercion were significant for the participation of the women in diverse contexts of action. Both contributed to potential isolation. One of the participants of the study expressed this in her way:

“You feel very lonely after an experience of assault, I think. Both privately but also when you are in social contexts, because you are suddenly so different. Something has happened to you that means you can’t identify with the group, and suddenly the group has other interests than you do… Suddenly you realise that your friendships seem very superficial, and that you have developed in a way perhaps they haven’t”.

In the everyday lives of young people in Denmark there is great focus on having fun, on sexuality and on partying, therefore friendships may prove particularly difficult to maintain (Salkvist 2006) in the aftermath of coercion. In the perspectives of the women, the sexualisation and dramatization, as well as the symbolic violent and at the same time heavy gendering of the events, contributed to their character of non-event (Pedersen 2008a). This equally contributed to isolation. A young woman suffered from insomnia, had difficulties attending her classes and stopped going clubbing with her peers. She explained:

“… I just don’t want to get totally wasted and then hook up with someone, and then… because I just can’t get myself to do that. Also, because I know that some of those people from my class… they just go with random men. And I’d never be able to do that...
Then people became very sort of stand-offish and were sort of… well, perhaps annoyed with me because I never went to classes. And yes, if I did go then I’d be so tired and perhaps I hadn’t done my homework one hundred percent and stuff… I think in a way they got a little scared of me”.
Many more extraordinary circumstances strained the women emotionally, cognitively, and practically and in doing so frequently led to marginalisation. These circumstances were connected to women having to deal with (re-)establishing ‘power to’ in their everyday lives, but also with such experiences as police interviews, waiting for court cases to start, and participating in trials (cf. also Guldberg 2005).

Furthermore, in and with marginalisation participants in the study suffered loss of social support now especially needed in their conduct of life. In this way, specific personal as well as common meanings/consequences of sexualized coercion further contributed to constrictions generating forms of communicative/social isolation (Pedersen 2011).

**Absence of institutional recognition**

Additional constraints intersected in contributing to experiences of lack of agency in the conduct of everyday lives. The narratives of the participants indicated that support from social security offices was scarce or non-existing. Sexualized coercion was not seen as an event that justified financial support. This may be connected to lack of societal and/or local recognition of the meanings/consequences of the gendered relations of relative dominance and subordination and of their ordinary and extraordinary consequences for everyday life. Social workers did not appear to be well-informed of the personal and societal meanings of sexualized coercion:

A young woman became pregnant as a result of her being raped. She had an abortion. In spite of the fact that she suffered from anxiety, insomnia and flashbacks she had managed to acquire a much-needed job. She explained that she lost her room in a shared apartment because the social security office declined helping her with the rent, until she received a pay-check from her new employer (therapy transcript).

Unless specific circumstances required them to do so, the women infrequently informed people outside their closest circles of the experiences of sexualised coercion. Most women did not wish to disclose details of the events or their emotional and cognitive difficulties, even to close friends and relatives. Having to disclose the reasons for their need of economical support, several women experienced their efforts to obtain assistance as humiliating, embarrassing and painful. Consequently, the young woman above and other women felt as if they had to beg. Despite the woman’s efforts she experienced the following:
She had been subjected to sexualized coercion by her husband as well as her father-in-law. Her husband had acquired debts that she was made responsible for in the aftermath. Furthermore, he stalked and threatened her. She informed a social worker about the experience of coercion and her social and economic difficulties. His answer was that he himself had once been subjected to violence from his wife, and that he did not believe this to be reason enough for economic help. In order to sustain a minimal livelihood, she was obliged to work weekends. Not being able to afford to buy food for her dog, she had to have it put down (therapy notes).

Although interest in and information about sexualised coercion have ostensibly improved in Denmark during the past few years, women subjected to sexualised coercion still seem to encounter similar difficulties, as these women did in 2003 (Aydin & Clasen ibid).

In the course of the conversations with the women visiting the Centre of Sexual Assault, it became very clear how the meanings/consequences of changes in the possible trajectories of participation in their everyday lives troubled the participants, feeding into and aggravating the difficulties they experienced.

**Blame and guilt**

The participants in the study considered and reflected on questions of blame or even guilt, aspects of the dominant discourses about experiences of violent events, especially rape and other forms of sexualised coercion.

In order to avoid the risk of being subjected to sexualised coercion, something she had already experienced once, a woman hired a taxi to return home from a party. She was raped by the driver. She explained:

“Sometimes I think that it was my own fault, for instance that I could have chosen not to drink… I could have defended myself… There are so many things…. I think that you also think that it is your own fault. Also, because he tried to… to…, he really tried to blame it on me. “

She not only associated her feelings of guilt to having been drinking, but also to having taken the front seat in the taxi, as well as to the driver’s accusations of her being flirtatious. She reported that several of her family members thought it was her own fault, because they thought she “drank so much”.

However, meanings of sexualized coercion, that is women’s personal assessment of such events, are not exclusively connected to the contexts in which acts of coercion take place, nor to pre-existing personal perspectives. As our analysis has indicated, they draw on and are entwined with overarching societal
practices. The attribution of guilt described by the women quoted here is often termed ‘victim blaming’ or ‘woman blaming’ (Roche & Wood 2005). Such practices of ‘blaming’ are also widely used practices in public places, like social security offices, police stations, and courtrooms (Ehrlich ibid, Laudrup & Rahbæk 2006). Their focus is on women’s actions instead of on the acts of coercive violence committed by offenders. Through their lack of recognition of coercion and its gendered character, such practices belittle and disregard what women have been subjected to and express disrespect for concrete women as well as for women in general. Thus, they become part of what Fraser (2003) terms status subordination, which is an aspect of a larger process of gendered disempowerment. In the ways in which they represented the experience of coercion and were interwoven in the contexts of the aftermaths, such processes contributed to and were attributed personal meanings by participants. Embedded in the contexts in which they participated, what the women experienced and how they dealt with the meanings/consequences of sexualized coercion interacted with what other participants expressed and did (cf. Refby 2001). The following example is just one, even relatively ‘harmless’, version of such discourses.

“… ‘often it is this; ‘how could you even think of letting him into your house?’ Well, we had had coffee before, right. And then …I have been told that ‘gosh you are naïve, you are so stupid’, or… And then I must say, ‘well then that is what I was’… “

This woman reflected on and challenged attributions of responsibility and guilt implicit in some of the comments she received. Yet, she was intensely and extensively affected by them. Challenge was one aspect of strategies of action she developed in order to deal with them; being obliged to do so further complicated her everyday life.

In general, rape and other forms of sexualized coercion are considered to be serious crimes. Still, discourses on women’s responsibilities for protecting themselves were at times constitutive of narratives developed by some of the women’s closest relatives. Since they themselves also drew on culturally dominant discourses of shame, blame, and culpability, it affected the women’s perception of their own actions. Furthermore, it affected their personal capacity to - and agency in trying to – counteract or solve other difficulties such as the ones described above, which became yet another facet of potentially spiralling disempowerment in their participation in and across intersecting aspects of diverse communities of practice.
Contesting blame

Women who challenged the discourse of blame they encountered, sometimes even from relatives, friends, police-officers, and hospital employees (who should have been aware of the common attributions of blame and culpability) experienced additional suffering. The women frequently reported that, when they tried to reflect on their own acts related to the incident of coercion, they were told not to think that they were at fault.

Although well intended and often helpful, this does not, in and of itself, change the societal conditions connected to and perpetuating women reproaching themselves for what has happened. An implicit individualisation of women’s responsibility for ‘looking out for themselves’ contributes to concealing overarching aspects of women’s conditions. Attempts at convincing them that they are not to be blamed for incidents of sexualized coercion may be overshadowed by such aspects of their conditions. Furthermore, women are at risk, and many women do in fact acknowledge that there is a need to be cautious, especially when they have already experienced a realisation of this risk:

“I have always been careful before, just generally careful. But …I take extra good care of myself. But it is mostly when going out at night making sure to be with somebody and so on, because I just don’t want anything to happen again. Eh… and then I have become more, I think, I have become more dependent on other people than I used to be.”

Women may be caught in contradictions between not thinking that they are at fault, and the need to be cautious in order to avoid harm and be attributed blame. Moreover, contradictions between discourses mirror contradictions in and of the conduct of everyday life: One is always a subject and a participant in a given context of action, even when being subjected to torture (Scarry 1987, Pedersen 2017). But we also always act in relation to, as well as in dependence of concrete situated versions of common conditions. Therefore, our possibilities and, as a consequence, the necessity of situated reflections on strategies of action are often limited by overarching contradictions. As is the case with all other contexts of action, the psycho-social meanings and situated problems related to sexualized coercion are neither exclusively personal, nor are they solely generated by diverse situated versions of common conditions. We are always subjects in complex patterns of contradictions, those inherent to societal conditions in and with which we conduct our lives, as well as those inherent to what we may call the human condition: Being subjects in the dual sense of being subject over and subjected to conditions of the conduct of everyday life (Holzkamp 1998). Concerning sexualised coercion, we must connect our understanding of
discourses on responsibility to contradictions characterising phenomena of genderless gender, other contradictory practices relating to gendered relations of ‘power over’ and ‘power to’, and to specific forms of gendered victimisation of women.

Besides, as in Herman’s influential contribution (Herman 1995), in much other trauma literature as well as in common discourses of everyday life, feelings of guilt are conceptualised as natural reactions to extreme experiences. Because they are not understood as contextually mediated but as individual, this contributes to their individualisation in practice, complicating difficulties integral to practices of blaming (Pedersen 2017, Pedersen 2011a).

Victims, Agency and Participation

As one expression of their being acting subjects, participants in our study reflected on the concrete incidents of coercion they had experienced, as well as on the contexts in which these were and became embedded. They raised questions concerning whether and how they could have avoided the incident, why they did not call for help, run away, ‘did not fight back’, or even why they did so. They asked themselves whether they could and should have acted differently. Their perspectives illustrated the diversity of their experiences and of their reflections concerning agency and their own use hereof:

“Even though I have wished so many times that I could just go back and do it over, be able to do exactly what I wanted… you know, kick him… do something. But it’s… all you think of is to save yourself. And when you… when someone does this to you, well then, then I don’t trust that person. You know, you don’t know what that person might do then. And then all you can think of is to get it over with.”

Because she had not been able to avoid being subjected to coercion, this woman apparently believed that she had ‘not done anything’. When in similar ways she and other women reflected on ‘not having done anything’ this was mirrored in whether they considered their experience to be an incident of ‘real rape’ and/or sexualized coercion (cf. Gavey 1999: 205).

Still, and contradicting a common discourse that experiencing rape is comparable to losing one’s life and consequently must be avoided at all costs, another woman also worried about having ‘done something’:

“Afterwards, what frightened me most was not the bullying, but how I reacted. I defended myself. I could have endangered my own life!”
In the aftermath, several women were met with disbelief or even with accusations of ‘not having done anything’:

“Well it is like this… ‘are you sure it wasn’t your own fault?’ And well, ‘you could have done something!’”

In our study, it became apparent that the participants were not ‘passive’, as it is also often implied in the concept of ‘victim’. The women’s accounts point to their having done what they thought possible and effective in order to limit further harm to themselves, also when they ‘did not do anything’.

In the aftermath of the incidents nearly all the women expressed strong wishes to act in ways that may be helpful in dealing with what they described as a situated cognitive/emotional uncertainties and lack of security, limiting their experience of agency. They wanted to be able to deal with their everyday lives and focussed on maintaining and (re-)establishing control in its day-to-day conduct.

Having experienced severe constriction of their agency, they all expressed dislike of, and distanced themselves from, discourses and other practices they now experienced as further victimisation in diverse contexts, and as constriction of their possibilities for participation in a variety of practices. Among other things they contested the concept of ‘victim’, a concept that several women disliked. Similar to others, one woman stated:

“‘I don’t want my life to change. I don’t want to become a ‘rape victim’. For instance, I don’t want to categorize myself as such or think of myself in that way. It does not fit with my life”.

The expressed aversion may be interpreted as a personally reasoned and intentionally directed attempt at (re-)developing and reclaiming possibilities in the conduct of every life (cf. Holzkamp ibid). One may understand this as the women’s attempt at neutralising potential spiralling disempowerment in the aftermath of coercion, in order to regain and/or maintain their positions as agents and participants with ‘power to’. But because concepts of agency, of agent and of participation are commonly associated with influence, power over, power to, or even culpability, using such concepts also analytically may appear as lack of recognition of, empathy with, or even insult to women who have been subjected to coercion. Still, and although their agency has been and is violently restricted, their perspectives and reflections suggest personal wishes to be recognised, although coerced and restricted, as agents. It suggests a need for theoretical and support approaches that recognise them as such.
Contradicting an understanding of them as mere victims, women seeking support at the Centre for Sexual Assault developed new strategies of action, new ways of thinking and new standpoints in the process. Several mentioned this in the concluding interviews:

“I’m better now at sort of letting things out instead of keeping them to myself all the time. I’m better at that. I never used to be good at that”.

And:

“It (the experience and the aftermath) has made me capable of managing unexpected situations”.

In the support sessions and in interviews, several women displayed remarkable ability to act effectively in unknown and complex situations. They dealt reflectively, intentionally and efficiently with unfamiliar situations as well as with new facets of well-known contexts. The young woman quoted below was, for the first time in her life, compelled to ask the social security office for economic support, was referred to an employment office, had to cooperate with sceptical police officers, and talk with medical personnel and lawyers about issues related to coercion, even as her boyfriend was leaving her:

“It was as if…, no this is enough, right? And then at the same time you got these, I don’t know how to put it… these days with victories, then you kind of felt: now I can… now things are going the right way”.

Likewise, Regehr, Marziali & Jansen (1999) highlight how, what they term women’s resilience and their creativity in the aftermath of coercion, impressed them in their support work.

In the sense of being subjected to sexualised coercion women are victims of gendered disempowerment. But simultaneously as subjects during incidents of coercion and in their aftermath, although victimised, they insist on and must be understood as participants, acting reflectively in diverse contexts. They are participants who from their situated personal standpoints are developing what they deem the most effective courses of action in trajectories of participation. They understand themselves and should be understood as responsible but not blameable agents, relying on their personal, situated but constrained agency. Although objectified through subjection they are not mere objects, but neither are they at fault. They are victims of societal conditions embodied in the acts of aggressors, victims also in a legal sense, but victims who refuse to be understood exclusively as victims, and whose sufferings are prolonged when they are. They
risk becoming further victimised by complex constellations of personal meanings/consequences of spiralling (dis)empowerment in, and through, their situated participation in an everyday life, characterised by women being positioned in relations of relative dominance and subordination. Resilience is thus not individual, but connected to a persons’ possibilities in diverse trajectories of participation. It is a realisation of past experiences in the present, connected to expectations for a possible future. As personal meanings/consequences are situated, they comprise the entwinement of the meanings of my personal perspective, my personal situated trajectories of participation, and of their connections to my conditions here and now, as well as to my imagined future. They are the axis of the (im)possibilities in the present of my past and my possible future. In the cases of sexualised coercion and other past and violent experiences, the personal meanings and situated consequences of events may dominate the present and continue to dominate the future.

**Some dilemmas in support**

In a critical empowerment tradition, empowerment, as we see it, is about creating a basis for processes through which underprivileged social groups may improve their abilities to create, control and manage diverse resources in order to counteract disempowerment. The aim of such processes is primarily to promote the development of reflective agents with voice and capacity for action in an including society (Andersen ibid).

Yet, critical research shows that support initiatives may become disempowering (Mardorossian 2000, Marecek 2005). Kitzinger (1997) proposes that psychologists, in order to change the world in which they themselves participate, use psychology in ways that reproduce existing societal conditions and thereby maintain conditions in which connected problems and suffering originate. When predominantly being understood and addressed as victims, clients risk being stigmatised and deprived of voice and agency. They may thus be further constrained in their capacity for reflection and action (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer 2003, Lamb 1999, Mardorossian Ibid). Other discussions of possibilities for participation as well as of ethical aspects of support have dealt with similar issues (Dreier 2000, 2008, Linder 2004, Paré 2002, Álvarez-Uria 2004).

With our analytical differentiation between ‘power to’ and ‘power over’, the concept of (dis)empowerment connects subjectively reflected and motivated strategies of action with existing situated possibilities for participation. They may scaffold interconnecting processes of personal and societal change, encouraging shared agency. Understanding empowerment in this way, as well as starting with situated personal perspectives, the concept of participation shows promise for
critical psychological approaches to support. With this concept, exploring perspectives and experiences with and of clients as well as related conditions including support, reduces the risk that approaches to empowerment lead to practices in which societal and personal aspects of (dis)empowerment are overshadowed by de-situated individualisation, psychologisation and pathologisation (Álvarez-Uriah 2004).

A critical anchoring demands not only that one grasps personal meanings/consequences of sexualised coercion, but also their connections to personal participation in an everyday life (Pedersen 2004, Salkvist & Pedersen ibid). Theoretically, a participation approach emphasises an understanding of women who have been subjected to coercion as unique acting subjects, subjected to embodied aspects of oppression. An awareness hereof is a prerequisite to exploring personal as well as shared societal meanings of gendered forms of oppression that manifest themselves in and through sexualised coercion. This approach has consequences for our personal and institutional support, as well as for our understanding of personal and common psycho-social meanings of coercion.

Empowerment processes require recognition of women’s unique 1st person perspectives, and of their wishes and possibilities for reflection in counselling, in therapy, in police questioning, in court, in medical treatment and in other contexts of their everyday lives. One example hereof is that in a participation approach focusing on personal reasons for action, the understanding of ‘not doing anything’ is reversed into its own negation. As mentioned above, it may consequently be interpreted as intentional self-protection from further coercion and sometimes from being killed (Salkvist & Pedersen ibid).

Therefore, and firstly, our approach means that meeting women who seek support means meeting women who have been subjected to coercive domination. One goal of a participation approach as an alternative to mainstream approaches, is to avoid further victimisation through common practices of symbolic violence. This means assisting them in exploring their unique needs and interests as concrete and societally situated, while avoiding psychologising aspects of support through predetermined understandings and practices. It also requires assisting empowerment through recognition of persons seeking assistance as knowledgeable participants, necessitating a focus on their situated 1st person perspectives. Thus, seen from 1st person perspectives, the point of departure is to explore which are the most important questions to work with.

Secondly, there is a dilemma mentioned above concerning the focus on 1st person perspectives in Kritische Psychologie (Pedersen 2011b). A focus on 1st person perspectives indicates, on the one hand, respect for personal perspectives. On the other hand, it also means taking into account that such perspectives are
related to participation in specific versions of constellations of meanings and interests at play in overarching gendered structurations of society. This may sometimes mean understanding the personal perspectives in ways different from that of the person who holds them, which, again, may indicate a need for assistance in exploring 1st person perspectives as possibly related to issues common to persons being subjected to similar conditions. One such issue could be what persons suffering in the aftermath of violent experiences may have in common (Pedersen 2017), for instance in the sense of how sexualised coercion may co-create conditions for conducting one’s life, such as marginalisation and further constrictions.

Thirdly, one additional dilemma involves specialised and institutionalised support and is in fact a dilemma twice over. Its first element is that professional specialists such as psychologists are intended to be just that, which implies that they are more knowledgeable of what the person in search of assistance needs than she is herself (cf. Linder ibid). This will in many cases mean (unintentionally?) belittling or disregarding her 1st person perspective. The second element is that professionals, on the other hand, are expected to disregard or exclude anything that may be understood as a ‘political perspective’, their own or that of the person primarily concerned. Like the claim of being more knowledgeable, this is an aspect of the definition and education of professionals (Callaghan 2005) that risks obscuring aspects connected to the meanings/consequences of the suffering of a client in the case of sexualised coercion, an implication hereof is that questions of gender are infrequently raised, or raised uncritically in an essentialising fashion. This contributes to an individualisation of the incidents and their aftermath, rendering them indecipherable, and stands in the way of participatory processes in empowerment-oriented contributions to change. Additionally, it may contribute to pathologisation, and as such again to disempowerment.

This study was carried out as part of the public health system which led to one of its obvious limitations, namely that it became partly subjected to the depoliticising approach, restricting, among other things, investigations of the meanings of gender. Yet, interestingly enough this might not have been the case if it had been based on a, often more legitimate, biologising approach to gender.

Fourthly, as assistance is frequently individualised, and sexualised coercion is a ‘non-event’, the possibility of sharing and comparing experiences, perspectives and reflections with others encountering similar difficulties in their conduct of life is severely limited. Drawing on de-situated generalisations from their own situated professional perspectives, the meanings of rape and other forms of sexualised coercion are commonly, even in the case of group sessions, primarily constructed by professionals. Being de-situated such generalisations
may disregard and dominate the perspectives of persons participating in group sessions. When this is not the case, participants in group meetings may recognise the specificities of personal perspectives and conditions as well as their common conditions, and obtain assistance in understanding and conducting their everyday lives (Pedersen 2008b). This is possible through shared and distributed development of perspectives and strategies of action, despite the fact that dominant discourses, like trauma discourses, may interfere with possibilities of empowerment.

Concluding remarks

In the tradition of gender and feminist theory, and wishing to make a contribution to an understanding of the personal meanings of gender in social theory as well as of relations between social conditions and personal perspectives and lives, we have attempted to connect the approaches of social theory and Kritische Psychologie. Rape and other forms of sexualised coercion have been the focus of this attempt. A clear limitation of our study is that it includes only women who have requested assistance. This means that the participants of our study may have had more difficulties than women who have not done so. But as the focus of our analysis is on societal aspects of gendered conditions and not the suffering of individual women, we propose that the analysis points to potential difficulties common to women in general and especially to women exposed to sexualised coercion. Not all women encounter the same problems, but they experience situated personal combinations of complex constellations of such difficulties and constrictions of their agency.

Although it is not always immediately or directly recognised, we see sexualised coercion as a gendered practice with gendered meanings/consequences. It emerges as a practice that predominantly women, living women’s lives as part of a ‘group an sich’ and in relations of relative dominance and subordination, are subjected to.

Because of the character and consequences of sexualized coercion as connected to relations of relative domination and subordination, women’s voices, in particular the voices of women who have been subjected to coercion, are often de-politicized, marginalised or silenced. Thereby, psychology, social politics, the public and individual women are deprived of the knowledge that these voices could contribute to. This also affects the shaping of possibly empowering support initiatives that women with their particular experiences and perspectives could contribute to improve. And because women’s perspectives, their lives, and their experiences with diverse forms of disempowerment connected to coercion cannot
be standardised, the diversity of perspectives and initiatives that they may contribute to develop is crucial.

Despite the situated extreme constraints they have often been subjected to, understanding women subjected to coercion solely as subjected objects or victims constitutes a reductive comprehension. Although the actions of others may be more or less constraining a person is never merely an individual nor an object, but always a subject in contexts. As during incidents of coercion, she engages in courses of action through reflected trajectories of participation. Her actions, feelings and thoughts before, during and after sexualized coercion are not simply unmediated re-actions to coercion. They are actions from her personal perspective in a specific situated gendered context. If we, in theory as well as in practice, fail to appreciate this, we deprive women of agency. We contribute to what can be termed processes of secondary victimisation, further constraining their possibilities for reflected participation in empowering activities.

The voices of the women participating in our study point to situated and intersecting forms of ‘power over’ at play in diverse spheres of their conduct of life, for instance in the case of the concrete incidents of coercion, and of diverse practices of blaming women. They also point to how economic problems, sexualised youth culture, social work and other conditions may scaffold gendered aspects of life in the aftermath of sexualized coercion, while co-creating what we term vicious spirals of intersecting constraints.

In such spirals, women are subjects in a dual sense: as ‘subjected to’ and as actively participating subjects with power to improve their personal and common lives. In these spirals, their experiences with gender and other relations of power point to complex situated societal conditions for women’s lives, and for women’s lives in the aftermath of sexualized coercion in particular. Understanding these conditions may form the basis for further analytically developed recognition (also in its double sense) of how gendered intersecting cultural, economic, and political conditions have meanings/consequences for and in incidents of coercion. It may also inform us of what it might take to avoid and to break vicious spirals and contribute to changes of involved overarching structurations.

In our article, we have presented some aspects of the conditions for and the meanings of sexualized coercion. Gender neutralizing, victimising, individualising, psychologising, and pathologising discourses, alongside other situated practices constitute hurdles for the transformation of sexualized coercion into a psychological/social/political issue, one that takes a critical analysis of gendered relations of relative dominance and subordination into account. The inclusion of these relations is necessary in critical empowerment-oriented analyses, discussions, social/political initiatives as well in support initiatives.
Including them is necessary in working towards prevention of sexualised coercion and with its meanings/consequences.

The point here is that sexualized coercion by virtue of ‘spill over’ effects from some forms of oppressive/constraining practices to others give rise to the spirals of disempowerment embedded in social processes which limit agency in everyday lives. It is therefore an interdisciplinary project to deconstruct/reconstruct dominant gender discourses and other gendered practices. Likewise, it is an interdisciplinary task to support women’s voices and participation in ways that benefit the development of changed practices connected to their safety as well as to the aftermath of gendered violence. In such practices, the connections between personal meanings of - and historically specific societal conditions for - violence must be explored further.

Concluding her study, Caiazza (ibid) claims that violence and the fear of violence must be central to our understanding of the conditions that (dis)encourage women to participate in civil empowering processes. She suggests that, since security encourages women to participate in civil activities, then security should be considered a political right.

The questions are then, which critical empowerment processes, including the prevention of vicious spirals are necessary to achieve security, and how sociological and psychological gender research may contribute to the development of such processes?

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A Life in My Father’s Violence: A critical essay (from a victim’s perspective)

Yngve Hammerlin

Abstract
This article is about my own childhood and adolescence in a totalitarian and violent family. Based on this experience and my professional knowledge as a researcher of violence for many years, I strongly criticize much of the field of professionals and expertise for having a reductionist understanding of violence and power relationships in families of this kind. In my view, it is necessary to distinguish a greater range of different forms of violence. Through a conceptual, epistemological and ontological criticism, I identify six main categories of violence (and their subgroups) which I consider crucial to understand the complex relationships between violence, power and oppression that existed in my family. I also discuss the underlying structural conditions that permitted the acts of domination, power and oppression in our family. My studies are based on different philosophical and professional traditions. I have concentrated on studying aspects of violence and suicide from a broad philosophical, socio-philosophical, sociological and psychological perspective. Activity Theory, Critical Sociology, Critical Psychology, existential philosophy, phenomenology, critical situational philosophy and practice research (developed within Critical Psychology) have been fundamental to my research.

Keywords
In a letter to his father, Franz Kafka answers his father’s question as to why he is afraid of him. The fear of his father’s reaction makes Kafka unsure how to answer, but he parries the question by saying that the subject is so big that it goes far beyond his reasoning and memory. For me, the situation was different. When I wrote my book *A Life in My Father’s Violence* (I fars vold, 2000), under the pseudonym Mogens Møller, I had come to an existential and analytical crux: I had grown up in working-class Oslo, in a very violent and totalitarian family. Because of this experience of violence, I, for many years, immersed myself empirically, philosophically and theoretically in the phenomenon of violence. My aim was to convey the existential suffering and oppression I felt under my father’s violent regime. I was not satisfied with much of the established research on violence nor the current professional approach. In my opinion, the conventional professional approach did not satisfactorily explain the phenomenon of violence and power: Several studies also had a distorted conceptualization, lacking adequate understanding of the power, force and the structural violence involved in *living in* a violent environment on a daily basis – especially in which I have termed the *totalitarian family*. My dissatisfaction with much of the understanding of the subject, therefore, could only be resolved by taking a more critical approach – one result of which was my book *A Life in My Father’s Violence*.

*A Life in My Father’s Violence*, was followed up with further studies of violence, several research reports and a number of articles. In 2014, I published together with Paul Leer-Salvesen, a new book: *Faces of violence. A dialogue about evil, responsibility and hope*. *Faces of Violence* is a theoretical and philosophical dialogue about evil, power and violence. Besides being a continuation of my epistemological and ontological criticism, Leer-Salvesen and I take up a number of ideological, philosophical, ideological and axiological issues. Conceptual criticism is of prime focus in *A Life in My Father’s Violence*. But the book is also a dialogue addressing responsibility, reconciliation and hope. Other studies of violence also became important: Research colleagues and I conducted a series of studies of violence in Norwegian prisons between 2000 and 2012. It turned out that the violence in prisons, with their totalitarian and powerful regime, had many similarities to the forms of violence exemplified in *A Life in My Father’s Violence*. To expose the violence in prison, an extended and deeper analysis of the prison system’s socio-economic and contextual conditions was required. Life in prison has of course, its own distinctive features that need to be analysed individually – especially those related to the legal criminal ideologies that are politically determined. These ideological structures also produce a concept-usage that can explain the many different forms of power and violence witnessed in such institutions.
In this critical essay, I have restricted the perspective to revealing and discussing the various forms of power and violence that I have experienced being used in a violent and totalitarian family; and this is the principal theme of my essay. I have developed a perception of violence based on more forms of violence than is commonly found in conventional analyses of violence. This extended understanding of violence coupled with the various forms of violence and power that I present in the essay give, in my opinion, a more realistic picture of the suffering, lack of freedom and oppression that rages in a totalitarian and violent family. With this extended understanding, conceptualization is also better guaranteed and is not so reductive or diluted as is found, and remains, in more conventional works.

The essay is organized thus: I start by justifying my criticism of the conventional research on violence in families and close relationships. There follows a brief section in which I explain some aspects of my theoretical, philosophical and methodological foundation. I then follow up with some thoughts about the relationship between power and violence. Next, to my main theme: the complex and multi-faceted violence, which existed in my family. It is especially in this section that I present a broader understanding of violence and justify my expanded conceptual use. I conclude the essay with some reflections on my father’s social situation and his motives to suppress us through his massive use of power and violence.

My studies are based on different philosophical and professional traditions: From the early 1980s to the present, I have worked on violence and suicide issues from a varied philosophical, socio-philosophical, sociological and psychological perspective. In addition to activity theory, critical sociology and Critical Psychology, existential philosophy, phenomenology, critical situational philosophy and practice research (developed within critical psychology) have been fundamental to me. I will explain later in more detail my theoretical foundation.

**Justification for this critical analysis**

As my father was still alive when I wrote *A Life in My Father’s Violence*, I published the book under pseudonym Mogens Møller. The book was primarily an analysis and study in the use of violence and power in a totalitarian family. It was not intended to be a personal confrontation with my father. I had no intention of hurting him. Both ethically and principally, I have always rejected retribution and revenge. In addition, he had by now a new family life with a new wife. They lived well together, and in this family, he had assumed a totally different way of
life. He and his new wife should, of course, be allowed live in peace. It should also be mentioned that this opened the possibility for a better relationship between him and me, as well as him and my children, although it remained somewhat distanced. One reason for this is that he never admitted his violent manner of oppressing us, and as a consequence of this, he showed very few signs of remorse. His self-criticism stayed away, with that also the lack of confidence for reconciliation.

I had several other motives for writing the book, and I open this essay with the following explanation:

Firstly, I was motivated to write *A Life in My Father's Violence* as there are few professionals who have grown up in a violent home and who have also written about their life experiences and feelings. My inherent, existential and ontological in-depth view thus differs in perspective and objective from the approaches of many others. (The subject-perspective is important also in relation to practice research in critical psychology.)

This gave nutrition to my second motivation: I had difficulty recognising myself in many of the studies I had read on violence and power structures in families and close relationships. In my opinion and experience, most of the professional studies I have read did not managed to expound sufficiently, the complexities, processes and diversity of the repressive and offensive conditions involved. Nor did they adequately analyse the repressive violence and power structures found in everyday life. Most of the conventional academic works I had studied gave a diluted ontological picture of the oppression, suffering and lack of freedom found in totalitarian and violent family life. Further, there lacked insights into the *existential being* both inside and outside family life. Because of these deficiencies, I felt the need to contribute with an improved understanding, better conceptualisation and dissemination that could clarify the complexity and diversity, not only in the apparent power and violence, but also the hidden power, oppression and violence.

The French philosopher Alain Badiou’s explanation that the philosopher's task is *to see the unseen* (Badiou, 1989; 2009), became therefore an important methodological and analytical guide for me. In my opinion, there was much, in relevant existing literature, that remained unseen. My understanding of Antonio Gramsci’s coda on “the forgotten possibilities” also gave reason for further reflection.

Thirdly, much of the conventional professional approach was too narrow, reductionist, uniform – and even repetitive. These are tendencies that are still found today. The image of violence is often presented in a mechanical, reproducing manner in which physical and mental violence have become the dominant forms, often not clearly understood (I will return to this later).
Internationally, there has also been a trend for some theorists to recognize violence in its physical form only. The reason for this is probably that physical violence has a “measurable” operational definition, paints an incomplete, false and foreshortened picture of the reality of violence, and in my opinion reductionist. The fact that some professionals and their academic environments operate only with the categories physical and mental violence is also an expression of this ontological reductionism. This does not imply that physical and mental violence are less important, but begs the classical philosophical question: what now if? Yes, what if one has to witness and understand something more or something else to form a more complete picture of what is happening in such families? What if life and everyday life with violence, with its many forms of discipline, control, power and abuse, and its existential contradictions and tensions in everyday life, has to be studied differently and more thoroughly to understand what, in fact, is happening. Within the disciplines of philosophy and sociology there is, at present, a tendency to employ a more diverse and expanded conceptual apparatus to reveal the complexity of violence and power problems in their many forms (see Bourdieu, 1993, 1999, 1999; Žižek, 2009; Arendt, 1970, 2004; Byung-Chul Han, 2012, 2013). To explain briefly why such an approach is necessary: Too often, the structural practices of everyday life and the existential and ontological living conditions fade into the background of conventional violence studies, as do the socio-material, cultural and ideological frameworks of power and violence. Often, analyses reduce the problem violence and the understanding of its nature to specific relational situations and the psychology, predisposition and individuality of the individual exercising the violence. Such an over-simplification does not explain my subjective experience of the reality, which my father had spun, into a refined network of compulsive and oppressive structures by using different controlling techniques, dominance, power and violence to ensure his powerful regime and hegemony.

To summarize: Not only was the understanding of violence and power in some professional work insufficiently developed when I wrote A Life in My Father’s Violence, but as explained above, much of the conceptualization was unclear. This still applies today, and especially to some psychological (and psychiatric) studies. Often, these works are restricted to an abstract and methodological psychological individualism in which the person is seen more or less separated from a social existence and sociological relationships. It seems that the importance of the basic conditions for violence and the suppression of power, which should be seen in relation to everyday socio-materialism and structural practices, is greatly underplayed. In this way, a symbolic, isolated interactionism and a narrow methodological individualism relates only to the one exercising the violence and the person (s) exposed to it. Mainly inspired by activity theory and
Klaus Holzkamp and Ole Dreier’s Critical Psychology in the 1970s and 1980s, I saw the need for a widened perspective and a reinforcement of the criticism of conventional psychology and its conceptual use.

But how should we understand everyday life? The methodological and theoretical inspiration for everyday analyses I conducted from the 1980s to the early 2000s, arose from my studies on suicide and violence. This indicated the necessity of coupling accepted sociological perspectives, with phenomenological, existential philosophical and situation-philosophical approaches. For me, space-sociology and space-philosophy became an important contribution to this research (see, amongst others, Henri Lefebvre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Martina Löw, Pierre Bourdieu, Georg Simmel). In my opinion, the fact that new materialism, spatial turns, etc. have again taken hold in continental Europe is an important theoretical, ontological and methodological continuation of methodological individualism and cognitivism that has characterized many works in the past twenty-thirty years.

My fourth reason should be seen as an extension of the above paragraph. It is based on the fact that many professionals in the field of violence-research had a predetermined theory and an excluding conceptual apparatus which they forced upon the subject matter, thereby concealing reality in order to adapt, “tweak”, and transform empiricism to fit in with accepted theory. I chose the opposite approach in writing *A Life in My Father’s Violence* (and other prison studies): Most importantly, analysing the specific living conditions and daily oppressive regimes as practice forms and structural ideas. However, it also provided an understanding of our personal and subjective relationship with the conditions of life and oppression. The goal was to expose the daily life of the family and, specifically, the conflicting tension-relationship between my father and us. This had to be done in light of the sociomaterial and structural conditions that formed the framework for our family's life. But it also applied to our patterns of living, our values, ideals, thinking and our manners and habits. In other words, our subjective and personal relationship with the outside world and life situation had to be understood as an inner dialectical relationship. It also applied to life outside of the family arena - that is, everyday demands, structures and activities in other social arenas. Such a practice-oriented approach was not least fundamental to my understanding, conceptualizing and theory-development. Among other things, Pierre Bourdieu’s analysis of social fields and arenas became an analytical tool for me. It also made Ole Dreier’s concept of crossing contexts and participation in various social practices – as well as his understanding of everyday life’s personal and social events. Regi Th. Enerstvedt’s many works on activity-theory from the 1970s and 1980s, and especially *Mennesket som virksomhet*
(Human Being as an Activity) (Enerstvedt, 1982) have been essential in the development of the discipline in Norway.

Enerstvedt (and many others) was very important to my theoretical approach. I had studied intensely, Activity-theorists like L.S. Vygotsky, A. Leontev and A.R. Luria during 1970s, but my studies also included L. Sevés and S.L. Rubinstein’s theoretical reflections. Within Norwegian activity theory, some of us combined activity theory with Critical Psychology; Pär Nygren’s work became an important inspiration coupled with theoretical input of Critical Psychology from Holzkamp, Dreier and Morten Nissen. Egil Larsen’s and my books (1997, 1999/2002) and articles about the conception of the human and Human values in theories of mankind also opened new inspirations to my thinking on personality- and subject-understanding and the relationship between the individual and the outside world. Fundamental to my studies were elementary Marxism, existentialism and phenomenology.

A fifth reason for writing A Life in My Father’s Violence was my opposition to the stigmatizing and socially determinist typification often presented as a hallmark of those growing up in a violent family. The argument is as follows: “Children who grow up in a violent family become violent themselves”. In meetings with many professionals, this determinist generalisation is still almost causally expressed – as growing up in a violent home predisposes the child to become violent. In this way, we not only struggle with the victims of violence, but also the diagnostic stigmatization of the outside world and certain professions - often based on sociological, psychological or biological determinism But what does this stigmatization build on empirically? I have found that many professionals often substantiate the claim with reference to studies that have the same methodological approaches. I therefore question whether the applied reference-linking, when viewing “social” or “biological background” has adhered to appropriate professional standards of research. Or if reference usage has become uncritical and mechanical in certain studies. This stigma – a form of branding – has been created by the professionals and has become, in itself, a form of “social violence” against children and adolescents who have grown up in violent families. Very many children who grow up as victims of violence renounce violence themselves; they shy away from it and become distressed by it. The focus of researchers has insufficiently been directed at those who are victims of violence but do not themselves commit acts of violence. Further, what of those who have grown up in a non-violent environment, but who do exercise violence. Women (mothers) who are very violent and power-intensive in close relationships have also received insufficient attention of researchers (Sogn & Hjemdal, 2010; Plauborg & Helweg-Larsen, 2012).
A sixth critical objection is directed at another standard assertion - that children who grow up in violence are witnesses to violence. This concept is certainly created with the best of intentions, but I think it is ontologically reductive and deceptive: Children who grow up in such families are not only witness the violence; they are themselves victims of the violence; they are in violence. These children are engaged in the everyday power-struggles and violence structures – day and night, year after year, and they are directly and indirectly victims of, not just witnesses to the violent assaults. The assaults affect the shared family fellowship and the child, as a witness, automatically and, by definition, becomes a victim. The acts of violence become part of the everyday structure – they “sit in the wall”. I have countless memories of how we children actively tried to barricade ourselves in, trying to intervene, tearing at my father’s clothes or hanging on his legs and arms to stop him.

Finally, what do I mean by the term a totalitarian and violent family? I developed the concept of the totalitarian family to understand better the oppressed life of a family where the use of despotic control, discipline, domination techniques, insults, power and violence, form a lasting, stable, compact and structural feature of family life. There was an image of supreme authority allied with a power-logic and a distinct human-value system in which my father (in other families, it may be mother or others) gave himself the right to use violence, to suppress and to violate, but also to shape the life of all family members, both materially, socially, symbolically and ideologically. My father was guard, judge and executioner in one and the same person. The home became an enclosed social space in which our submission, self-discipline and overriding fear became the normal way of life. Such a family differs from other family relationships, in which violence can be equally brutal and threatening, but more episodic and situational.

The North American philosopher Martha Nüssbaum expounds in the Swedish Kvinnors liv och sociala rättvisa (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 292), that the family can equate with love, but also with neglect, exploitation, and humiliation. The family reproduces itself. She explains further: “Although the family can be a school of virtue, it can also – often at the same time – a school of unequal conditions for forming sexual identity, and a basis for attitudes that not only make the new family an image of the previous one, but also affects society outside and its policies.” Nussbaum adds that the social conditions, ideological structures, cultural conditions, society’s laws, norms and forms of life (or lack thereof) obviously affect inner family life.

In the next section, I will present some more of my theoretical approaches and professional platform.
My critical-theoretical foundation - *an excursion*

My theoretical approach was undergoing continual development in a mutual relationship with my empirical studies. As stated, actual living conditions and events required a theoretical and methodological approach, adequate to reveal more realistically, the *daily life* of violence and the production of suffering and oppression to which we were subjected. Daily life, immorality, subjugation and the many violent events became the basis for the development of my professional platform. The theoretical approach and conceptualization has thus been developed as an internal interaction between practice and theory, where the suppressed daily life of the family has been the object of research and the item of focus.

A further question was, how could I expand the conventional perception of violence that I found reductive – and how could I adequately convey, analyse and query the concrete reality my family and I had experienced? How could violence, abuse of power, oppression and immorality be understood and conceptualised? Among other important issues was the relationship between life, as determined by oneself; and life, as determined by others. How could anything be self-determined in such a totalitarian and oppressive family regime?

Naturally, I studied very many works and theories of violence, the conceptual and perceptional critique of conventional psychology and of Critical Psychology, in an attempt to discover new analytical pathways. These studies, naturally, also yielded important constituent-knowledge. Very important too was the critique related to conceptualization. A number of philosophical studies gave important inspiration: As mentioned above, Badiou clarified the philosopher’s task as seeing that which is not seen. This influenced my methodological thinking when writing *A Life in My Father’s Violence*. In later works, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben clarifies that the purpose of philosophy is to look at what is hidden by the established conceptual usage – a theoretical warning. Finally, the classic philosophical question, *now what if?* (which I have also touched on above), took on a new, challenging and extended meaning for me after reading Žižek’s (2008) *In Defense of Lost Causes*.

In this section, I would like to refer to more academic and theoretical incentives that have introduced me to a new approach on studying of violence and suicide. Earlier in this article, I have briefly referred to some theoretical considerations and theorists from whom I have gleaned inspiration. They present a broad philosophical, sociological, and psychological approach, which has also been, and remains an essential working principle. The various theoretical contributions that follow have been used either as direct or indirect inspiration in the segmental-analyses of the violence problem – or have been essential to my
thought processes. Fundamental to my analytical process has been activity theory, Critical Psychology and sociology. A number of theorists in activity theory and Critical Psychology who are respected professionals have been important discussion partners for me. These include Regi Th. Enerstvedt, Pär Nygren, Benny Karpatschhof, Uffe Juul Jensen, Tove Borg, Charlotte Højholt, Jens Mammen, Nils Engelsted, Ole Dreier, Morten Nissen, Kristine Kousholt and Charlotte Mathiassen. As previously mentioned, Critical Psychology and Klaus Holzkamp’s works have also supported my fundamental approach. This applies not least to the science of subject-orientation, where actual living conditions, seen from a subjective viewpoint, can only be experienced by the individual concerned – an even then, only in relation to its social dissemination. Recently, Ernst Schraube’s and Ute Osterkamp’s (2013) overriding criticism of conventional psychology helped to strengthen my subject-understanding. More recently, I have also become familiar with Bodil Pedersen’s important work on violence and rape. Her articles reinforce the epistemological and ontological criticism of the conventional perception of violence (Pedersen, 2004, 2011). Her central thesis is the professional necessity of raising awareness of the experiences and feelings of those who have been exposed to violence and to relate to them in a subjective first-person perspective. In this way, she also criticizes the inhibiting objective perspective of conventional psychology. This also applies to Ute Osterkamp’s *Lebensführung als Problematic von Subjektwissenschaft* (2001) and her reflections on a subjective first person perspective in a contextual and socio-social context. Osterkamp’s analyses of the importance of the subjective perspective of former concentration camp prisoners’ relatively self-determined way of life – even during the extreme, cruel and totalitarian violence are also important contributions. Many KZ prisoners’ feelings of shame and guilt are also a problem that Leer-Salvesen and I discuss in *Voldens ansikter (The Face of Violence)* (Hammerlin & Leer-Salvesen, 2014). Like Osterkamp, we also discuss the problem of violence as found in known literature by Jean Améry, Primo Levy, Imre Kertész, Tadeusz Borowski and more – all of whom are known former KZ prisoners. Also, Zygmunt Baumann’s, Hannah Arendt’s and Harald Weltzer’s theoretical reflections on totalitarian evil became important to us in *Voldens ansikter*. Osterkamp’s problematizing of “truisms as a determining factor for our thinking and action” as long as we “profit from the current conditions” has become a very relevant contribution to my thinking. In addition, Holzkamp and Osterkamp’s use of the concept of *way of life* as the most concrete form in which individuals structure their lives, is a useful analytical tool; this also applies to the idea of the individual’s handling of his existence as a “social inclusion”. 
I have also received inspiration for further reflection through a recently published book, edited by Ernst Schraube and Charlotte Højholt (2016), *Psychology and The Conduct of Everyday Life*. The book presents some very important analytical contributions to a critical understanding of psychological everyday life, which has, for many decades been ignored in conventional psychology. On the other hand, in phenomenological, existentialist, ethnometodological and activity-theoretic sociology, everyday life has been the focus of analysis. Ethnomethodology and everyday- and action-sociology have been an important foundation for me for decades.\(^1\) The *Lebenswelt* concept, understood as the event-horizon of implied symbolic contexts for understanding actions, is another perspective that has given me inspiration for further thinking. Berger and Luckmann’s concept (1966) of “the social construction of reality” also became significant for me in these studies. Through my studies of “symbolic interactionism”, I also saw the danger of a reductionism in the form of symbolic interactionism: In my opinion, much of the conventional perception of violence is characterized, not only by methodological individualism, but also a reductionist interactionism and methodological institutionalism (Hammerlin, 2004, 2008, 2015).

In my studies on violence and suicide, I have developed the concept of the *societal production of suffering in everyday life* to reveal the economic, ideological, ethic principles and sociomaterial production, and ways of life that lead to the oppression and suffering of many people. The production of suffering occurs in various social arenas – the workplace, the neighbourhood, school, etc. Individual integrity is not only pulverized within powerful and violent family situations, but also outside of the family and by other means, and in other social contexts. As Dorte Kousholt claims, it is necessary to look more closely at how the various forums in a child’s life are important for its upbringing – not just the family arena. There is a need for research to embrace many disciplines.\(^2\)

Violence and the misuse of power occur in sociomaterial spaces and arenas. Essential for my studies, therefore, are the space-sociological, space-philosophical and situational philosophical approaches to reveal the sociomaterial activity and living conditions for the individual. New ways of thinking, which are developed in new materialism, are referred to as “the material turn”, “the topographic turn”, “the spatial turn”, “the human turn” and “thing power”. Further, "the human turn", etc. has given me a new and expanded

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\(^2\) Interview in *Dagbladet Information* with D. Kousholt, 15.05.2017: Opdragelse er ikke kun et spørgsmål om børn og forældre. (Upbringing is not just a question of children and parents.)
opportunity of viewing human beings as a product of their personal relationships with their material environment – both natural and man-made. Important for me therefore is, H. Lefebvre, Regi Th. Enertvedt and Dag Østerberg’s development of the theory of the relationship between the active and the creative subject, and of the material conditions of life. Interesting theoretical reflections in space sociology and topography have been made by German sociology professor Martina Löw and Danish anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup. From Critical Psychology, I have also benefited from Holzkamp, Osterkamp and Dreier’s subject- and community-oriented behavioural analysis for a more comprehensive understanding. I should also mention Erik Axel’s many fine works that I include in this tradition. A number of sociological theorists have also given me significant impulses: Apart from Karl Marx and other Marxist theorists, I have received important inspiration from Pierre Bourdieu, Dag Østerberg, Regi Th. Enertvedt, Max Weber, Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, Richard Sennett and Anthony Gidden’s theoretical reflections. I am also indebted to philosophers and social philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Agnes Heller, Karel Kosik, Slavoj Žižek, Alain Badiou, Axel Honneth, and Judith Butler. They have clearly influenced my socio-critical way of thinking. The same can be said of Norwegian sociologists and philosophers Nils Christie, Thomas Mathiesen, Dag Østerberg and Arne Vetlesen.

The presentation above illustrates the various forms of theoretical and professional inspiration I have had in research into violence and suicide. Within Norwegian activity theory and Critical Psychology, we have, since the 1980s, tried to strengthen the theoretical and practice approach by the conscious and critical application of adequate theoretical diversity (without becoming eclectic); at the same time taking care of and developing the bases of activity theory and Critical Psychology. This has also been a topic we have discussed on several occasions with our Danish and Swedish colleagues.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that the aforementioned philosophical and theoretical inspirations obviously influence, directly or indirectly, in my thinking, approach and presentation.

Writing *A Life in My Father’s Violence* posed great academic challenges. One problem was the epistemological and ontological-theoretical basis. Another, had a more ethical-professional dimension: How to write the book without it becoming “pornographic” or pathetic? How to “raise” the understanding of the violent and existential life up to an analytical level that permitted a deeper understanding of a life in violence? How could I, as a subjected victim of violence, develop an objective understanding, conceptualization and a theoretical approach that would reveal the power and constraints structure and this enclosed non-family life? How could the many forms of power and violence to which we
were exposed, be conceptualized to allow a better understanding of the violence and the reality of our everyday life experience in the violent totalitarian family? It was crucial and necessary to uncover the powerful abuses we experienced in other social arenas and in the world of life beyond the family walls. In the next sub-sections, I will address this essay’s main theme – the various forms of violence. First, I would like to say something about the relationship between power and violence

The relationship of power and violence – approaches to further studies

Violence and power become transmuted conceptually, both historically and culturally. Aiskhylus, in the drama *Prometheus Bound*, with its roots in Greek mythology, depicts violence and power: Zeus’ henchmen, Kratos (Power) and Bia (Violence or Force), bind Prometheus to the rock by chains with links from Hephaistos’ forge. Both Kratos and Bia are depicted as unsympathetic hooligans.

Hannah Arendt (1970) argues that violence is the most open manifestation of power, whereas Elias Canetti (1995) describes violence as more compelling and immediate than power. Power is the use of force, but can also be understood as a means of inducing others to perform acts with or without compulsion. One can have the power over, but also the power to, the power for and the power because. Power is not synonymous with nor identical to violence. Power and violence must therefore be determined contextually where they: (i) under certain conditions and circumstances must be understood in an internal, conditional and dynamic relationship with each other, and (ii) where they must be understood as different and distinct. In other words, there exist power and power relationships that are not violent, but it is hard to imagine violence that does not require the use of power. Different forms of violence must be understood as having an inner relationship with power and as means of exercising a particular form of power. Violence forces itself into, or threatens human integrity, health and quality of life, causes suffering and is insulting; this, as Jean-Paul Sartre (1985, 2013) points out, often has destructive consequences for the person against whom action is taken. Violence is thus an aggressive and hostile power form in many different guises – open or hidden, raw or subtle, direct or indirect. I also see violence as a form of communication and as a means of maintaining, changing or enforcing certain power relationships. Morten Nissen claims that violence is the ultimate expression of power. He emphasizes that violence, momentarily withdrawn, constitutes a new form of interaction and a new power relationship (Nissen, in Møller, 2000). My understanding of power is both substantial and processual: Substantial by identifying and locating the actual power alignments and power constellations – not least, who has the power and in what way;
processual, by studying the abuses of violence as processes, actions and the course these actions take. Thus, Michel Foucault’s procedural and dynamic understanding of power can be an important contribution, but in my opinion he fails to address the more substantive and structural fundamentals inherent in power.

A single act of violence often actually consists of several forms of abuse, not just a single form of violence that hurts, abuse or suppresses. Saying that one is just a victim of physical or mental violence therefore produces a very fragmented view of the reality. Even when using only these views on violence – in a reductionist perspective – a complex pattern of violence and violation can be observed. Corporal violence not only causes physical harm but also the damages the individual’s psyche and social relationships; psychological violence has the same result but I will return to this later. Accordingly, my father’s displays of power unfolded in cynical hard-handed cruel brutality, but he also used an arsenal of cunning, sly, and invisible forms of violence and abuse.

In the next section, I will review the various forms of violence that he used. This I have done by using an analytical presentation in which the various forms of violence are presented separately. Ontologically speaking, however, the different forms of violence must be seen in the context of an existing inner relationship but also from incidental images; the whole episode manifesting itself in various forms of violence and the exertion of power resulting in an experience of abuse and pain. Depending on the situation, some forms of violence can be felt and experienced more powerfully and painfully than others; the extent of the violence does not necessarily directly relate to the victim’s subjective experience.

This means that it is not necessarily the most extreme form of violence that is the most painful or crippling; often, the focus on corporal violence can overshadow the use of the other forms of violence that are equally destructive and crippling. Žižek writes in his book Violence (2008) that in the context of violence, the victim's painful and humiliating experience can, in many ways, be so chaotic that it is difficult to distinguish exactly what is taking place. In a chaotic and violent situation, it can be difficult to identify different forms of violence: Violence and power forms are often experienced in a compacted confusion.

**Incidence of violence – Types of violence**

As written above, I have tailored my concepts and methods of analysis in order to reveal the comprehensive and diverse image of violence, and the social spaces and contexts in which they manifest themselves. As such, this article seeks to expand existing conceptual and theoretical criticism. It is also attempts to understand the individual’s experiences, feelings, and way of thinking in the
context of various social arenas in which the individual – as a subject – takes part. A person cannot live within a society while remaining free from society – or free its conditions and constraints. The mindset of the person is shaped both in a creative and destructive relationship with the outside world – to the outside world and to other people. The ideal and necessities for existence appear as indirect and direct constraints and opportunities in different social arenas. These have practical, emotional and physical consequences for the everyday activities related to the individual’s development and quality of life. To understand this, it is necessary to see the relationship between the individual and society, to comprehend the individual’s participation in different social arenas, and to be aware of the intricate and complex contexts in which the individuals, as Dreier emphasizes, “affirm their participation across multiple contexts in distinct ways” (Dreier, 2013, p. 12). It is also necessary to understand and to explain the various arenas and the context in which they are rooted. The individual lives a complex life in a complex social arrangement where different living standards, norms, values, limitations and opportunities influence relationships with others. As Vygotsky explains: “Life shapes”. A Life in My Father’s Violence describes an upbringing in a restrictive, oppressed family arena; it was a life that was formed in an atmosphere of totalitarian oppression resulting in a repressive powerlessness. The individual is not just a social hieroglyph, a reproducing puppet or a socially wounded victim, but a functioning personality – an active and creative being, forming and being formed by different activities, practices structures and actions. However, a disqualifying social loss-list can also be produced in other everyday arenas – the school, the neighbourhood, the workplace, etc. Abuse and oppression occurs in open and hidden forms.

In the following, I will present an analytical presentation of the various forms of violence that I consider necessary to understand the life, suffering and oppression of a totalitarian and violent family.

I will first consider (i) **physical** and (ii) **psychological violence**. Then I will explain the different forms of (iii) **social violence**. Social violence is often not conceptualized and used by professionals. I also divide (iv) **symbolic violence** into three sub-categories: **verbal violence, nonverbal violence** and **signs and symbols as violence**. In addition, I look at the heavier forms of power and violence (v) **ideological violence** and (vi) **structural and systemic violence**. To repeat an essential clarification: An act of violence usually consists of several forms of oppression and violence, which are embodied in certain structural, ontological, ideological and situational conditions. The different forms of violence are not always visible and direct, and must be understood in light of both a procedural and a substantive power-theoretical approach. It may be argued that using such a diverse system of categorization, all actions can be interpreted
as acts of violence or expressions of power. The problem, however, is quite the opposite: Much of the conventional and established research has an overly reductive perception of violence and purely analytical approach, resulting in the violence and image of reality being foreshortened. This reductionism can have negative consequences for the development of adequate prevention, help and care measures. Further, if the academic focus is solely on selected aspects, such as physical and mental violence, then the other important forms of violence and oppressive power relationships can be ignored or overseen. Thus, the understanding of the use of violence and power and the oppressed life in the totalitarian family is weakened. Not only that: Often, the various forms of powerlessness and counter reactions that victims respond with result in a more subjective orientation (Cf., Pedersen, 2004, in her studies of sexual assault).

I start this analytical review of physical violence in which I distinguish between two types: corporal violence and violence directed at objects and materials.

**Corporal violence** is that which is directed at the body in which the aim and motive may be to harm and chastise the victim – or to cause pain, suffering or distress. Historically, politically and militarily, there are many examples of violence being directed at groups of people, areas, cities, etc. where the goal is physical destruction. Most often, these are legitimized or legalized in national or political-ideology. In its extreme expression, corporal violence equates with killing, misery, torture, sexual assault or other forms of mutilation. “During the period 1990 to 2014, there were 867 homicides in Norway. Of these, 206 (24%) were categorized as in mate partner homicide” (Vatnar, 2015, p. 18).

Also included in the corporal violence group are such actions as slapping, tugging, spitting and unwanted physical contact that violates personal integrity. Actions breaching personal integrity can also be experienced as extreme violence – depending on the situation and the victim’s values and cultural identity. Such actions can often be a symbolic expression of force. Several prison officers who have been exposed to violence, have told us that the blows and kicks they received were painful, but being spat upon was worse: they perceived it as a strong symbolic sign of contempt for them as individuals.

My father used bodily violence as a means of neutralizing, punishing, scaring, exerting pressure or forcing us into submission. It was one of the most predominant ways in which he demonstrated his supreme power – both symbolically and socially. He got no sadistic pleasure from hitting – bodily violence was instrumental. Instead it was used to mark and secure his supremacy and to reinforce his absolute power. This was the power that he invested in himself, giving him – in his view – the legitimacy and moral right to use violence against us as he saw fit, often in conjunction with other forms of violence. Such
displays of power became a definitive and powerful conclusion to a violent event. The blows could come abruptly and unexpectedly. The corporeal violence could also be enhanced symbolically with humiliating power, for example, when he brutally knocked down my brother; bloody and crying, my brother said, “Now look what you've done to me, father.” My father’s insulting, destructive reply was: “Yes, looks like you’ve got some paint on your face!”

Evidence of physical violence is difficult to hide and can be very unpleasant socially. These marks are not just bruises on “body and soul”; they are a strong social and symbolic stigma. My mother called them “shame spots” – thus the marks themselves became visual examples of social violence in the form of stigma. Family violence, or the seriousness of violence, is often equated with “physical violence”, and the severity of violence is measured in visible injuries. Certainly, visible harm done to the body is an important sign, but when the serious consequences of other forms of violence are neglected or downplayed, then the violence is interpreted wrongly in the reductionist mode.

In war, cynical, military and political logic is demonstrated by destructive bombings that not only kill and main, but also result in massive material destruction of the environment, cities and cultural sites. This is violence against things fundamental to human livelihood. The ruins we see speak volumes. But what about the material violence in violent families and close relationships? This is often forgotten and often trivialized. Destruction of objects is an effective technique of domination. It can be soul-destroying when things are smashed and discarded with intent to shock. Worse, destruction of things having affection value is offensive and insulting. The Norwegian expert on violence, psychologist Per Isdal (in Møller, 2000), says that growing up in a family and regularly witnessing material violence, is, for children, like growing up in a minefield; at any time it can explode. Again, it is important to stress that living in, and with, violence means existing in a state of fear and anxiety. Violence against objects, functions like shock grenades that cause a cacophonous and material chaos. And the noise? Walls do not exist that could shield our neighbours from the noise and us from shame: The social loss-list just grew and grew and spread into more and more social arenas.

(ii) Psychological violence is an important and well-used term, but has become diffuse, cloudy and uninformative. Its use often reflects psychologism. Psychologist, activity- and science theorist Benny Karpatschof (2011, as cited in Hammerlin, 2015, p. 191) uses the concepts of psychological megalomania and psychological provincialism. He emphasizes that when psychologists (and other professionals) are professionally megalomaniac, they believe that they can answer far more questions than is the case. “It will often be psychologism, i.e. reductionism in relation to the treatment of social science issues.” Psychological
**provincialism** is characterized by the professional environment that stubbornly remains strictly within the boundaries of its own discipline, excluding adjacent and related disciplines and schools of thought. Psychological provincialism refers to philistinisms’ restrictive megalomania of its cross-border form. “In both forms, the essence of this provincialism is having no knowledge of, or real interest in, what lies beyond the borders of their own subject area” Another psychological science theorist Niels Engelsted (1995) points out that psychology is making the mistake of explaining something non-psychological in psychological terms. Psychologism is structurally blind, says psychologist K. Holzkamp (as cited in Dreier 1979, p. 76; my translation), and continues: “As traditional psychology only views the individual variations and considers them to be representative of the whole, it turns its back – as it were – on the objective necessities of life.” Among other things, psychologism does not sufficiently take into account that society is evolving nor the social context (…), but conceptualizes everything (or almost everything) from an individual psychological or a one-sided psychological perspective (methodological individualism). The term “psychological violence” – in the psychological sense – thus overshadows other forms of violence.

After discussing psychological violence as a concept with Danish psychologists and philosophers – several of whom rejected the term, arguing that it was not sufficiently explicit – I concluded that **psychological violence** needed a more precise definition that separated it from **social violence**. Mental abuse must have the victim’s mental state, emotions and cognitive activities as a direct or indirect target. Psychological violence must be understood as an act of violence aimed at the mental health of the individual, the goal being to create mental disorder, discomfort, fear and uncertainty in the victim. The term embraces the use of various psychological methods to gain mental power over human other beings: crush them, dominate them, and make them suffer. Fundamental to the definition of psychological violence is that the target is the individual’s mental health. Otherwise, as some of my interlocutors insist, it can be difficult to distinguish psychological violence from some forms of bodily violence (including torture) that do not leave immediate visible physical signs, but have mental and social consequences.

A woman who was exposed to excessive violence from her husband gave me a good example of the man’s use of mental torture: "I'm struggling with sleep problems from the effects of mental violence," she said. “It was pure bed-time terror. He kept me awake, prevented me from sleeping. I dared not sleep because of the fear that he might strangle me while I slept. In periods, I saw sleeping as risking my life. But he also had other strategies. He could make noises to disturb me mentally.” The terror of noise, the fear of total disaster and powerlessness and
the resulting despair, characterizes what many of us who have lived through in the hell of the nights of terrorism.

What then do I mean by social violence?

Forms of (iii) social violence became a comprehensive expression describing much of the everyday violence to which we were exposed. Several forms of social violence were omitted from the collective term mental violence. This is probably a result of many psychologists having limited knowledge of sociology, but as Karpatschof claims, it is due to psychologism in the form of provincialism and megalomania. Zygmunt Baumann (1991) has also warned against violence being reduced to a collection of mental mechanisms and personality traits in the perpetrator. He points out that there is a need for deeper understanding of the concept of violence. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1947) goes even further. According to him, social violence is to be found everywhere in society. I restrict the term social-violence to mean a form of violence that explains the social forms in which it manifests itself, its context, goals, meaning and importance. Social-violence becomes very burdensome and insulting, and it may strike in many social arenas. Social-violence consists of different forms of social oppression, social segregation, marginalization and exclusion. Other examples include discrimination, racism and cultural xenophobia, but also social rejection, social exclusion and isolation – as well as social rejection, social devaluation, ridicule, alienation and invisibility. Victims are strongly affected by a stigmatizing and alienating encounter with an outside world characterized by exclusion, socially offensive and a controlling scepticism. In addition, our studies from prisons show that some prison officers and prisoners claim that becoming a victim of social-violence was the worst experience of violence.

For many, school is just one of several arenas of misery: Many children who experience ruthless violence and power displays day and night, struggle to follow up school work and concentrate during lessons. What child can concentrate on maths and other subjects when fear, despair, sorrow and turmoil occupy their thoughts: Is mother lying in a pool of blood when I get home – mutilated, beaten, killed...? There has been a tendency for professionals to concentrate on the learning activities of children with secure backgrounds. What about the learning activities of children living with violence in intrusive and marginalized family relationships? The social loss-list becomes a heavy burden, it accumulates and spreads. And the victims? Many are burned out, emotionally exhausted and socially insecure. Reading Axel Honneth’s Kampf um Anerkennung: Zur moralischer Gramatik sozialer Konflikte in the 1990s strengthened me professionally: Social and aesthetic violence is part of Honneth’s (2000; 2003) analysis that violations destroy the victim’s self-confidence, self-esteem and self-image.
In some contexts, social violence is enhanced by the use of *aesthetics’ violence and domination techniques*. My father alienated us, and our mother was subjected to humiliating and degrading attacks. The outside world’s judgment gave him the right – for “how could he, that attractive man, be expected to live with such a scruffy and slovenly wife.” No one saw her beauty; no one questioned why mother was so worn out. This situation had evolved after years of his violence, and her, a weary working woman, continually bearing such a very heavy burden. The alienating, hideousness of *aesthetic violence*, is also witnessed in political and ideological violence: There are many examples of concentration camps and institutions of torture in which torturers create a gulf between themselves and their victims by various dehumanization and marginalization techniques. Marx and Herbert Marcuse’s use of “alienation” gave a new meaning to me in my studies on violence.

Social-violence has several other forms. *When noise conquers, silence becomes a powerful weapon.* An unpredictable pressing and threatening tension occurs – a kind of stifling, existential cramp. “Silence filled the room” I wrote in *In my Fathers’ Violence*. In deafening, troublesome silence, my father prepared the scene for violence. We knew what was to come – in an hour, two, maybe three hours...? Several years later, through my suicide research, social-violence gained another meaning for me, in which withdrawal strategies are chosen as a means of protection. Octavio Paz (1998) describes “the labyrinth of loneliness”. Man is troubled by isolation of the withdrawal. However, a withdrawal may also have another motive that Sartre actualizes with the term “defensive violence.” Defensive violence, as opposition, is a retreat where the victim becomes inaccessible and invulnerable to others so that the oppressor becomes consumed with shame and guilt over what they have done. The extreme example of defensive violence is suicide as revenge against survivors where the motive is to make themselves inaccessible forever.

*A life in violence* has many forms of *(iv) symbolic violence and power* – ranging from verbal outbursts such as threats, scolding, insulting remarks and chastising, to the use of *non-verbal forms of communication* – body language, facial expressions, gesticulations and more. The symbolic expressions of violence and power can be experienced directly or indirectly. In some social situations, verbal or non-verbal forms of power and violence are experienced as extremely socially destructive – for example, when ridiculed, rejected or degraded. Not only that, a comment that may seem trivial in other social contexts can be given a different meaning and be extremely devastating in a violent family. In addition, the use of items associated with violence (such as a knife, a swastika, a cross beside a name etc.) can be perceived extremely frightening and fear provoking.
Language is power, and power can be mastery of words and expressions. Language philosopher John L. Austin (1977) emphasizes that speech-acts generate actions, thoughts and ways of being in one form or another. Words that form a threat for example, can be seen as an action resulting in existential fear and despair. A speech-act in the form of a promise can also engender actions – expectations on the part of the recipient. Threats are sickening and unpredictable – there is always the possibility of them being implemented. How often did we retreat to places that gave a certain degree of security – secluded places where we could be at peace and feel protected?

But the symbolic violence was not only father’s powerful weapon; we were exposed to verbal forms of violence in other social arenas – in the form of sarcasm and mocking outbursts from teachers because homework was not done, resulting in fear-filled nightmares with resulting insomnia. And the signals? Non-verbal displays like hopeless grimaces from teachers, and poor scholastic results were strong symbols of what a complete failure and how useless we were. *A Life in My Father’s Violence* embraces a social diversity and many social fields outside the family arena. It never ceases to amaze me that so many professionals are unable to see this all-encompassing violence and the power in language that plagues many children as victims of violence. This does not mean that they are blind to the diversifying nature of violence; the problem is that they interpret the violence, the power and the bullying techniques used in different arenas (school, neighbourhood, etc.) as abstractions. Many professionals are so fixated on the individual displays of power and violence in the family and close relationships that they see them in isolation and not in the broader perspective of the world around.

In a totalitarian family, there is always a struggle for “the soul” – an ideology that can be termed (ν) ideological violence. My father used many techniques to incorporate us into his world of ideas and his values. Being exposed to his attempts to force his own beliefs and ideas upon us, being pressurized and forced to accept his values and his understanding of the world was one of the worst assaults against us. As I wrote in *A Life in My Father’s Violence*, “I experienced it as spiritual rape. Franz Kafka also addressed the problem when he wrote to his father: ‘…in all my thinking I was, after all, under the heavy pressure of your personality, even in that part of it – and particularly in that – which was not in accord with yours’ (Kafka, 1993, p. 27).” With Pierre Bourdieu we can define ideological violence as a distinctive form of symbolic power that is, he emphasizes (1996, 1999), a form of power used to construct a reality based on its own interests and which threatens or executes acts of violence against the integrity of others. Forcing one’s own opinions and beliefs on another, is a form of symbolic violence if it is done in such a way that the
recipient cannot avoid the influence without adverse consequences. Ideological violence must of course be understood as a dominating ideology that legitimizes an oppressive regime. In *Masculine Domination* Bourdieu (1999, p. 8) writes: symbolic violence can be “a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely, misrecognition), recognition, or even feeling.”

This extraordinarily ordinary social relation thus offers a privileged opportunity to grasp the logic of domination exerted in the name of a symbolic principle known and recognized both by the dominant and by the dominated – a language (or a pronunciation), a lifestyle (or an act of thinking, speaking and acting) – and, more generally, a distinctive property, whether emblem or stigma, the symbolically most powerful of which is that perfectly arbitrary an non-predictive bodily property, skin colour. (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 8)

The ideological violence is thereby legitimized, idealistically, morally and functionally, and is difficult to resist in a regime of total oppression. Of this, there are plenty of historical examples; men’s violence in the family exhibits a contempt for the integrity and the rights of women and children to a meaningful life – in which a negative view of the female is ideologically ingrained. Conversely, the man has a socially self-assertive view of himself as a man. Such a masculine attitude is characterized by a false self-awareness (Marx) and a distorted perception of his own sex. In essence, this abuse of violence reflects an absence of respect and a degrading and condescending view of humanity. Further, it displays a contempt for individuals and groups, a despotic attitude towards, and a flawed understanding of, the principles of equality and democratic interactions within the family. A violent family is a birthplace of the lie. *Lying for malicious reasons* is an assault on the integrity of others. Sartre (1947/2013) describes lying as a serious assault, in the sense that we deliberately leave another human being to deal with a reality and situations on completely erroneous premises. Under certain conditions, this may have catastrophic consequences. Peter Sloterdijk (1988) is also concerned with the idea of the lie as

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3 In Jan Guillou’s autobiographical book *Ondskan* (1981), one can be distressed by the brutal ritual power, violence and controlling techniques used by the older students against those younger than themselves at the elite public school that Guillou attended. “The brutal entry rituals” have apparently continued at school, writes Malin Schmidt in the newspaper *Dagbladet Information*, and shocking revelations continue to this day. New, serious ritual violence and scandals have recently been exposed at The Lundsberg elite school (identical to Guillous Stjärnsberg) (*Information Weekend*, 28-29 September 2013).
an aspect of power. He maintains that domination is dependent upon deceit, and that manipulation and seduction are necessary tools of one who wishes to rule. In *A Life in my Father’s Violence*, I suggest that there may be a connection between lying and ideology in the sense of wanting to create false awareness. However, the lie can also be a defence strategy: We resorted to “white lies” to protect ourselves individually, and each other, from violence.

But what summarized a life in violence? What conditions were necessary to allow such a state of affairs to exist? What was the framework for interaction? In order to understand the violence and power relationships of the violent and totalitarian family, I collected inspiration from (vi) **structural and systemic violence**. Both exist in open and hidden forms and are systems of violence and power structurally organized. Sociology professor Johan Galtung (1981) developed the concept of structural violence: He claimed that violence deprives people of life by killing them, but that everything else that unnecessarily reduces their quality of life is also violence. The relationship between the industrialized and the developing countries is an example of structural violence. The Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek refers to **systemic violence** in his book *Violence* (2009). He states that systemic violence is a power form embedded in a system – with methods of enforcement that ensure submission (he also distinguishes between subjective and objective violence). For Žižek, violence and power are also expressed through structural, sociomaterial, repressive measures and organizations – in, and through, different relations, activities and actions. They can be open and formal, hidden or subtle. The burden of every day existence can become interwoven with other structures of oppression in other social arenas – for example, being marginalized in the neighbourhood, or by social exclusion and the negative reactions that are a consequence of failing to follow school requirements. The existential feelings of powerlessness expand, becoming clustered and reinforced in the different social arenas.

In *Faces of Violence* and *A Life in my Father’s Violence*, I wrote, “The totalitarian, violent family is a home’s panopticicon”, and referred to a metaphorical inspiration from Michel Foucault (2002): Power is everywhere. As with the “panoptic system”, which produced the “guard” so my father, developed a control and disciplinary system that subordinated us. However, as Foucault explains in his description of J. Bentham’s panoptic system, *the guard sees the guarded, but the guarded may not see the guard*: the guarded, however, feel and know that they are constantly being watched. It is an all-pervading burden. The guard is there all the time, even when not physically present. Seen in this light, self-discipline is thus the perfect submission. My father organized his oppressive and controlling power in, and through, the prevailing structural conditions and the sociological circumstances. For us it became a daily expression of a life of
oppression. In *A Life in my Father’s Violence*, I wrote, “You (my father) arranged it so that you saw everything. You split up and divided life into a series of various control measures. There was nothing you did not register. Traps were laid, we were caught. We knew we were being watched and you controlled our slightest movements. Therefore, we disciplined ourselves, shaped a way of life completely adapted to your structural power.” Sociology professor Thomas Mathiesen (1978) has, with his term “the hidden discipline”, developed a useful analytical tool that can be used to uncover the hidden disciplines in a totalitarian and violent family. I wrote to my father in *A Life in my Father’s Violence*, “This structural, disciplinary power was nevertheless just one of the methods you used,” adding: “Your register of power and violence was extensive” (Møller, 2000, pp. 51-52). Using Foucault’s vocabulary, we can say that we were regulated and trained by the power of microphysics. This is the effect of power on the body. Self-censure was a necessity. Even when my father was not physically in the room, we exercised a self-control designed to match his despotic requirements. Our daily activities forced us to employ this self-censorship - everyday conditions were established and routines adjusted in order to comply with his demands. His display of power was both visible and invisible. Nevertheless, in spite of his power seeming so total and detailed, we obviously found our openings, our free-areas and counter-strategies. No totalitarian system can be completely controlled; the outside world affected us for good or evil and in certain situations, our participation in other social arenas could become “neutral areas”.

Being oppressed in a totalitarian and violent family, one exists within a force-field and one is constantly subjected, consciously and unconsciously, to the power structure. I have pointed out that daily life is unremittingly flattened by the spatial-material organization. Like Sartre’s main character, Roquentin in *Nausea* (1985), I felt the nausea: “The Nausea is not inside me: I feel it out there in the wall, in the suspenders, everywhere around me. It makes itself one with the café, I am the one who is within it” (Hammerlin, 2000). The French author Edouard Louis has the same thoughts, as he writes in his book *Historie de la violence*, describing his experience of being subjected to attempted rape and assassination by the abuser Reda. “He was on top of me, but he materialized in everything that was around me (...) everything became a sort of extension of Reda, the whole darkness was Reda, the sheet was Reda” (Louis, 2016, p. 127). And to use the French writer Marguerite Duras’ picture, my father was there all the time, as if he was “moulded into the room”. We simply lived in a repressive sociological field of power that removed any quality of life from us in our everyday life – this, then, was the repressive and destructive power of our existential reality.
In my experience, the structural and systemic forms of power and violence are extremely important in understanding the violence, the production of suffering, the compacted burden of power and the integrity of a totalitarian family. The inherent misery in our daily life can be explained by the powerful forces constantly exerting a disciplinary and all-pervading pressure on us. It was not least in, and through, these structural and social devices and the ideological frameworks that my father could tame us into accepting this lack of freedom. But within this sociological and ideological framework, we structured ourselves into a captive existence, through our self-disciplinary way of thinking and behaving. We recreated the regime of power and violence and became our own oppressors. In this way, our un-free life was not only a result of "the dictatorship of paternal power", but as a result, we also suffered from our own self-disciplinary submission and the totalitarian power and repressive tolerance of others. The practice of daily life also reinforced the legitimacy of ideological violence – and vice versa: The realization that one was the victim and the subject of self-repression was, naturally, unbearable. This admission, however, also strengthened the desire to free oneself from submission. Later, recognition of our self-oppression has been a driving force that has led to self-scrutiny – also resulting in elements of shame and guilt.

By only looking at physical and psychological violence, or the interpersonal relationships – and by not studying the structural, sociological and ideological conditions of power and violence – one can only partially grasp the oppressive and repressive forces at work. My studies have led me to recognize how important sociological concepts, everyday sociology, activity theory and critical-psychological research in practice are, to understanding the power and violence issues in a totalitarian family. Constraints and discipline are not only relational and expressed by direct power and violence as means or instruments in a power regime; studies of family violence necessitate identifying all the functions and consequences of power and violence that are embedded in the family pattern and the individual's living conditions. Other factors to be scrutinized are: rules, norms, routines, habits, resource allocation and other aspects of daily life.

Suppression and subjugation were produced constantly, not only by my father and by his totalitarian regime but also, as previously mentioned, as a result of the burden of extra-familial activities and the growing social loss-list in other social arenas. Moreover, economic dispositions, in themselves, became a powerful suppressive and disciplinary agent. In A Life In my Father's Violence, I also describe my father’s control of the purse strings as an expression of power. American philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum (2002) concurs when she claims that the asymmetry of the economy in many families is a strong structural agent of power.
Understanding, motives and reasons

How should we understand such a violent way of life? Was my father a violent monster who could be diagnosed within psychiatric parameters, or could his attitudes and way of thinking, be deterministically explained by a social background or biological factors? Should we see him as a product of his social environment (sociologism) or perhaps simply a biological and physiological phenomenon (biologism)? Perhaps even, his violent behaviour could be explained as indeterminism. I have studied many works and theories of violence based on different disciplines and the different schools of thought they embraced. Several of these studies, of course, give some insight into abuse, violence and aggression problems, but many were not sufficient to cover my needs to understand and to find explanations. Many were, and remain, too reductionist either as psychologism, biologism or sociologism.

From the 1970s, I have worked with activity theory and Critical Psychology of the inner dialectic relationship between individual and society and the dynamic view of these theories. The individual is not simply a product of the social environment (sociologism) but also an individual playing an active role in the evolution of his own personality – be it creative or destructive – and his relation to the world around. The world of the individual is indivisible from the world around. One is socialized by the community; one lives and learns, incorporates, processes, expresses and develops skills, competencies, demands, values, attitudes and norms. “Emotions express societal relationships,” says Enerstvedt (2011, p. 28) – among these emotions are feelings of, hate, resentment, tenderness, jealousy, despair, joy, and solidarity They occur in the past and change over time in content and meaning. Living in a society means taking part in its dialectics (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Enerstvedt, 1982): We cannot live in a society and at the same time be free from it (Hammerlin, 2008). Society’s ideologies, its policy-practice measures, its laws, norms and values work with varying force on the individual’s roles, existential wellbeing, emotions, feelings, thinking, and way of life - as well as the individual’s own mental and physical health. The public and private regulatory structures that characterize our lives, reflect the ambiguous and contradictory nature of society. We relate in our own personal way, both conformally and deviantly, to the freedoms and constraints inherent in a societal existence. People also live under varied social class structures, with different social and material living conditions, different needs, ideals and values. Our lives are organized and structured according to sex, age, competence, positions of power, and social class, but also in accordance with diverse religious and ethnic affiliations. Through its activities, the individual relates to the various subsystems and subcultures of society and
either adopt or repudiate the ideologies, values and activities of its dominant or subsystems. Many relationships in our community-created reality may be experienced as threatening, destructive and dangerous; of these many are characterized by specific power-suppressing and exploitive structures. In addition to my studies on violence-theory and the above-mentioned scientific and ontological discourse, my analyses have been focused on two other levels: First, I directed my attention to the inner and external life of our family in a dialectical relationship – as in “the family in society and society in the family”. Further, I analysed each of us individually in wider social and existential contexts – as “individuals in society and society in the individual,” and “the individual in the family and the family in the individual,” and “the individual in groups and groups in the individual,” etc. Based on my previous scientific theoretical works (books on human values, suicide, violence and prison research), I have come to an understanding of the individual, its personality, and its way of thinking, from a compatibilistic rather than one-sided deterministic and indeterministic perspective. Further, in my prison and violence research, I realized that the individual could not be reduced to the sum of certain specific and dominant single acts: the killer did not exist, nor the violent person. However, there are people who also have killed and people who also have committed acts of violence, some also have committed a long list of violent and cruel actions over a long period.

Secondly, the question of humanitarian values and the evolution of the individual personality with its own social and personal history became an important analytical premise for me. As previously mentioned, activity theory and Critical Psychology became especially important, but equally relevant, has been existential philosophy, phenomenology, ethnology and the sociology of everyday life.

I have also analysed my father’s motives, his understanding of power and his need to resort to violence. I did this by having conversations relating to his violence, studies of our daily lives and our experience as victims of his violence. Since my father per se, is not the topic of this article, I will consider only some fragments of the analysis.

We know little about my father’s family background and upbringing. He grew up as a foster child in a working-class family in Bergen – a family life that did not give him social and personal security. It was this persistent social insecurity that characterized his behaviour throughout his life: he wanted control. As many young working-class men, between the wars he, from an early age, had to fend for himself. He left Bergen for Oslo in 1930s and supported himself with various jobs.
As a working man, before and after the war, he was strongly affected by socioeconomic demands structures, prominent power mechanisms and social class-based life and discipline structures. Daily life was shaped by both external production- and life requirements and by subjective social interpretations that strongly influenced his behaviour and thinking. The working-class life drained him socially, physically and mentally. Wages were such that it was difficult to survive and he had to have more than one job to manage the financial burdens. His standard maxim was “As a working man, I can’t afford to…” Despite this assertion, he used much of what he earned on himself, buying clothes and on attending to his general appearance. He learned that by exploiting his attractive outer appearance he could attain a higher social position in certain social arenas. His outer symbolic manner was regarded as vain, pedantic and self-opinionated; this, in contrast to us others in the family who presented an image of poverty. In a number of other social arenas, his social position was very weak, and in the workplace, there often arose conflicts between him and his workmates. He belonged to the trades-union movement, maintained a strong working-class identity, yet was not an integral part of it. Outside the family arena, he tried appear to “tough”, show power, always be ready for a fight. This is how he was he was perceived by many. Perhaps Holzkamp’s and Critical Psychology’s conceptualized centered and decentered approaches may explain his behaviour, especially his self-centered and restrictive conduct that was aimed at securing benefits for himself within given power relationships. His adaptation, however, also had clear elements of subjectivity – that is, expressing individual needs and interests. His self-determination and self-discipline were considered uncharacteristic, but also had some reality-oriented and liberating elements within the conventional “constraints” (see Osterkamp & Schraube, 2013; Osterkamp, 2001). Or was his behaviour an expression of conflict between self-esteem and self-deception? Activity theorist and philosopher Uffe Juul Jensen says it is through self-deception, we create the conditions that permit us to increase self-esteem; he continues: “Self-deception is a way of trying to survive under conditions where our self-esteem is threatened or undermined” (Jensen Juul, 1987, p. 31). Could this not also be the suppressed’s attempt to maintain the conditions for his own oppression? Juul Jensen continues (p. 36): “Self-deception is one of the more refined and insidious mechanisms in the persisting display of power.” Behind these self-deceptive strategies are examples of power and ranking – but also rules, procedures and social forms (p. 75). They are also behavioural patterns that are internalized and then acted out in a personal way.

My fathers’ childhood and upbringing, was characterized by a stressful social and personal history with many insults, betrayals and disappointments. In a similar fashion, he related to the outside world as an adult: Confidence of others
was fundamentally weakened, and in many ways he was alienated, awkward and clumsy in relation to others in various social situations. He had few friends but he found life joy in nature, sports, music and reading. He was a creative worker, creative and wise, but he was angry at life – and at himself: he was despondent over not having an education. Self-esteem, the organizing of the self-determined life-style and the self-reflective social identity began to show major cracks. In the face of others, he was often reserved, irritable, temperamental and violent. But while he encountered resistance in a number of arenas within the family, he could unfold and exercise his position of power unrestrained and without resistance. The socially established liberal-political idea of “private life” gave him patriarchal legitimacy and complete ideological and practical right to family life, which, for us, became a life of violence without freedom. Although many “outside” knew of the conditions we were living under, no one intervened. His attitude to women and children was one of depreciation and devaluation, but it was also his view of himself as a man. He wanted the violence and needed the power. “He was a bad father”, people have said in later life. A bad father? I reply: “He was not a father at all.” In fact, the relationship between him and us was one of alienation. We were a social burden for him.

In my works investigating the totalitarian family, I have tried to uncover my father’s motives and his need to use of violence and exercise power. Again, the presentation in this article is somewhat abridged. In general, the motive can be defined as the mental processes in which importance and meaning arise; needs can be interpreted as social, mental or physical deficiencies, but also as the ideological, religious or ethical requirements of existence. Needs are always desires for something not yet fulfilled and they are formed, shaped and rendered in, and through, an existential framework of various activities (work, learning, art, play, sports, and metabolism with the environment...). “Human needs can only be formed, acquired, and learned through individual human activities within a particular society,” says Enerstvedt (2011, p. 27). It is the inner relationship between needs and motives. Needs and motives are formed, reproduced and transformed into practice throughout life in various social arenas. In the individual’s personal or collective relationship with the outside world, different needs, feelings, thinking and ways of life and behaving are developed and shaped in, and through, diverse activities – created within the prevailing social conditions. Needs and motives give meaning and importance to actions – including violent ones. Violent actions must also be understood contextually and processually according to the goals, motives and needs of the individual. The motive can originate in a thorough and thoughtful process, but may also be rooted in a confused, uncontrolled and spontaneous impulsive act. It can have origins in objective and factual occurrences, or be shaped in light of a distorted
perspective of reality. Using A. Schütz (2005) as my point of reference, I distinguish between the *motive to...* and the *because motive....* The *motive to...* is forward-looking and has two forms: To achieve something or to avoid something. The *because motive...* also has two forms: the individual is motivated because something *has happened*, or *in spite of something that has happened*. There is a dialectical interaction between these two forms – as there is between past and future, between determinism and free will (Enerstvedt, 2011, p. 28). My father’s violent actions can be understood both by the *motive to...* and the *because motive...*, but the motives varied according to the actual situation. His dominant motive was to *secure, protect, control and reinforce his powerful dominance* where systematic control, discipline and insults were important weapons in the oppression strategy. We were “imprisoned” in the structures of his power, demands, and violent actions. He also dominated us with his ideas and opinions: threats rained down on us, and his manipulative, ideological and symbolic violence and power reflected his ideas and reasoning. He used violence, power, and control techniques to *humiliate, subjugate, harass and degrade*. The motive for these violent episodes could be to penalize or be an act of retaliation; not rarely, the use of violence, power and control were also displays of tyranny from an if-so logic. In other situations, the purpose was the need to restore his own sense of honour, often justified (by himself) morally. Sometimes the aim of his violence was to entertain, especially when ridiculing my mother in an effort to make others laugh. We did not experience sadistic or sexual violence, but the violent outbursts could be a result of my father’s frustration, hate, fear and anxiety. Certainly, the use of violence had an indeterministic perspective: he wanted to, and chose to use of force and power. He was aware of what he was doing and he saw the pain he inflicted on us. However, he sought a form of social-deterministic protection by explaining his actions as a consequence of being a victim himself. Later, he said that he was simply unable to control his temper. Strange then, that he always waited for the right time and place to exert his wrath on us! An acknowledgment of turbulent feelings should then morally, result in seeking help in managing them.

But the use of violence has be understood dialectically: violence does not only produce impotence, but many reactive power strategies as well.

**Finally...**

The manner in which violence and power are displayed in a totalitarian and violent family is complex and varied. We noted similar patterns in our prison studies on violence and victims’ descriptions of their experiences. My personal
experience as a victim of violence coupled with my studies on power and violence as a phenomenon enabled me to develop a scientific theoretical criticism on an ontological and epistemological platform. In addition to my criticism of reductionism and conceptualization in the perception of violence, I also condemned the tendency towards methodological individualism and viewing violence only in the relational sense, more or less detached from its structural conditions.

In certain situations, it is difficult to isolate the individual forms of violence from one another, but from an analytical point of view, it is important to see the various elements collectively. However, a comprehensive analysis requires that studies focus on the direct, the indirect, the open and the hidden forms of power and violence. We are talking about viewing the parts constituting the whole, and whole as the sum of its constituent parts: that is, the power and violence in a completely structured and structuring everyday existence. My own experiences as a victim of the totalitarian family, and my recent research work, became as mentioned, the foundation for developing an analytical and theoretical tool that, in my opinion, could provide us with a more adequate picture of the life of the oppressed and the uses of violence in such a family.

As a victim, this was a process of conscious awakening, but also an acknowledgment of liberation. It was no longer (in the words of the Irish writer Samuel Beckett) "vaguely seen, vaguely speaking", but had evolved into a picture of violence, which is much more detailed, but also more adequate to analyse violence in a totalitarian family. Even though the relationship of power may appear static, new power, control, repression and violence systems are constantly evolving. Important to note, however, is that the use of violence and power did not occur without resistance even though the episodes occurred mostly in concealed and indirect forms; eventually becoming more direct. We also sought succour in free zones that gave room for reflections

My father’s abuse and violence taught us a vital lesson: Through a life of violence and his violent and controlling behaviour, he taught us to detest violence, oppression and stifling captivity.

When my father’s power-foundation disintegrated, he stood, a weakling, pitiful and lonely again. He never took a self-critical appraisal of his use of abuse and violence. Consequentially, I ended up writing A Life in my Father’s Violence in second person pronoun form: “Your language of speech still hurts – albeit in another way and with different force.” I continued: “You refused to respect our integrity, you mutilated it. Your lack of recognition is one of the greatest abuses against us. You thereby violated our opportunity for creative amity. You excluded an important prerequisite for growth; you took the quality of life from us. The violence became existential.”
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References


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What can psychotherapists learn from a materialist science of the subject?¹

Leonie Knebel

Abstract
The opening question of this article concerns how a psychotherapeutic practice can be formed in a way that enables emancipatory potentials to evolve. In the 1970s, Critical Psychology in Germany inspired an array of critical therapy projects. However, these could hardly establish themselves and have therefore only been developed sporadically. The contributions of Critical Psychology to critical therapy approaches will be traced in their historical developments and lines of conflict. Reference will be made respectively to a behavior-therapeutic, depth-psychological, and family therapy casuistry of the critical psychotherapists in order to consider not only the ideas but also the practices of these approaches. The article will conclude with suggestions for the further developments of emancipatory-oriented psychotherapies with a subject-scientific and historical-materialist foundation.

Keywords
German Critical Psychology, critical psychotherapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, psychoanalysis, family therapy, humanistic therapy, class and gender relations

All present psychotherapeutic approaches are oriented in subject science, taken here to mean as being derived from the subjective experiences of the individual.² Their promise to rid the afflicted of their grievances without infringing upon social relations accounts for the appeal and short-lived functionality of these approaches (Holzkamp, 1988, pp. 28-29). Thus, societal life conditions and

² This approach is partly avoided in behavioral therapeutic manual treatments; though individual case concepts are common in outpatient practices.
power relations play a neglected role in the various schools of therapy. This
dearth of “societal diagnostics” (Keupp, 2009, p. 130) has been problematized by
community psychologists as well as by feminist and critical psychologists of all
movements. In past decades, some of these critics have attempted to develop
alternatives within classic psychotherapy. This has resulted in a variety of
feminist therapies (e.g. Ballou and Sanchez, 2014; Brown, 2008; Frauen beraten
Frauen, 2010), as well as therapeutic approaches inspired by poststructuralism
(e.g. Loewenthal, 2015, Tarragona, 2008) that have found footing in German-
speaking countries in the form of counseling centers and other psycho-social
institutions, but not in the system of healthcare-subsidized psychotherapies.

Though the feminist, poststructuralist, and historical-materialistic views
may seem similar at first glance – since they agree in their critique of the
unhistorical and psychologizing approaches in science and daily life – they do,
however, differ in how they determine the basis upon which emancipatory
psychotherapy must be developed. Critical Psychology, anchored in materialist
theories of action, assumes that we must analyze historical, concrete reality in
order to be able to influence it. In the tradition of poststructuralism, Critical
Psychology adopts the strategy of questioning all truth claims as a way to enable
resistance, and feminist approaches focus on appreciating and giving voice to the
truths of oppressed persons.

Equating truth with the subjective perspective of oppressed (women) has
contributed to a problematic voluntarism. The once politicizing statement “the
personal is political” makes a return in the neoliberal therapization discourse as a
personalization of the political. Ballou and Sanchez write that “the principles of
feminist therapy are grounded in a double perspective: psychological and
sociopolitical. ‘Personal is political’ or, more recently, ‘Political is Personal’ is a
vital and empowering context for the principles of feminist therapy theory”
(2014, p. 716). This political sentiment runs the risk of placing social interactions
and cultural norms at the center of the battlefield without taking into account
political and economic macrostructures, which are not easily deconstructed
verbally or personally (Knebel, in press). By equating the personal with the
political, one can harbor the illusion of being able to directly change society
through therapy and self-awareness. In this way, single persons and speech acts
are attributed more power and responsibility than is justified by their real and
limited influence.

Another problem is the anti-scientific and practice-unrelated relativism of
current, poststructuralist-dominated critiques of psychology and psychotherapy.
Ian Parker, for example, assumes that any form of psychology that claims to
describe how we develop ourselves and learn tends to ostracize and pathologize
other ways of thinking and learning (Parker, 2015, p. 43). Without scientifically-
based criteria for determining what is conducive to health and development, professional practice would have to be consequently abandoned and replaced by self-help. Parker does not draw this conclusion and it would be interesting to see how he and other postmodern sceptics of psychotherapy work in their own therapy practices without a theory of psychopathological developments.

Boris Friele (2007) problematizes the one-sided critique, present also in the Berlin school of Critical Psychology, of personalization and psychologization. In his opinion, looking only at developmental constraints outside of the person ignores genuine therapeutic interrogations. He sees it as evident that experiences such as physical and sexual abuse, emotional neglect, and unpredictable behavior in relationships will lead to damages in the personality, meaning they will leave behind painful emotional patterns, particularly in children. However, by referring only to societal structures there could arise the problematic consequence that influence over life conditions would only mean “the establishment of a type of legal claim to protected spaces” (p. 407).

I agree with Friele, but would add that a one-sided critique of psychologization and pathologization that does not attempt to understand and treat psychopathologies differently (at least within the Berlin approach) can only be observed within the last decades. There were many attempts in the 1970s to reinterpret traditional therapies and develop new approaches to therapy that, in my view, serve as a rich source for future approaches. Because they have not been translated into English, they are not widely known internationally. I will begin with a historical categorization of the debate that took place at the Psychological Institute of the Free University Berlin and in the magazine *Forum Kritische Psychologie*, and then present the individual therapeutic approaches in their practice and development (1.). Finally, I will discuss what we can learn from this, i.e., which mistakes can be avoided, what can be built upon, and which gaps could be filled (2.).

1. Many critical psychotherapies or none?

Klaus Holzkamp, the founder of critical psychology at the Free University (FU) in West Berlin, argued on a discussion panel that critical psychology is not in competition with existing schools of psychotherapy: “One does not deduce ‘the’ critical-psychological therapy, rather, within the new paradigm, there can be many different therapies and forms of therapy in competition with one another and… which have to prove themselves empirically.” (Dannenberger, Dreier, Drummer, Jantzen, Holzkamp & Schubenz, 1980, p. 165). Holzkamp, who came out of general psychology and social psychology, was not himself a
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psychotherapist. Then, in 1986, Siegfried Schubenz, along with colleagues from the FU, founded the pedagogical-psychological institute for therapy (PPT) in Berlin. This begs the question of why there were hardly any publications on critical forms of therapy printed in the subsequent years and, instead, reflection upon one’s own professional psychological practice and critique of psychotherapeutic approaches as adaption technique and therapization (“psychoboom”) were pushed to the forefront in the debate around psychotherapy. Along with this has come a turn towards alternative concepts of psycho-social care and pedagogical counseling. Many critical psychologists took part in the development of theories and methods within the history of psychology and the psyche in general, social psychology, developmental psychology, and the research on institutions and practices. Others preferred to participate in political-economic change and switched over to other disciplines and areas of occupation. Attempts at structural and personal change were, in part, posited as contrasts rather than investigated in their relationality to one another. In this respect, practitioners of critical psychology felt confronted with the difficulty of having to complete the advanced therapeutic training they themselves found problematic. With this problem in mind, Holzkamp made the case for the organization of advanced training options with a Marxist foundation as a way to overcome the eclecticism in the practice, which he described as follows:

Even though I’ve learned that psychoanalysis is problematic, it still has its good parts and I approach it critically, the result of which being that I take the good parts out and leave the bad.’ I think this is an illusion. I think this is an absolute illusion. It doesn’t work! This is Habermas, the role distance: One internally compares oneself in contrast to this, one is constantly running around, so to speak, with a revolutionary inner life. Nevertheless, I see the objective need resulting from a lack of collective-organizational development in our work. (1980, p. 153)

Although he emphasizes here that critical psychology cannot simply adopt the theoretical processing of the therapy experience (p. 155), this is exactly – with a few exceptions – what takes place in the decades to come: At the FU Berlin, only a few training options for counseling and therapeutic approaches (e.g. Bergold, 1985) were developed, no new psycho-diagnostic procedures or therapeutic techniques were worked out and, after 1980, no further large case studies were being published. Instead, “therapeutic technology” (Dreier, 1988, p. 52) and “help ideology” (p. 58) came under increased criticism and, in the setting of the theory-practice conferences attended by professionals from both the university and practice, the working conditions of the professional practice were taken into account (Markard & Holzkamp, 1989). Consultative research of practice in the
sense of a critical-psychological intervision and supervision was thus developed (Fahl & Markard, 1993; Markard & ASB, 2000; Erckmann, Kalpein & Zander, 2013), but not therapy for mental disorders. For example, Regina Scholz (1980) dealt pointedly with the ideological foundations of person-centered therapy following Rogers, which she characterizes as secularized religion, but does not go further into therapeutic practice. Gerlinde Aumann’s (2003) discussion of gender relations in Freudian psychoanalysis also remains theoretic-historical. Sylvia Siegel (2013) proceeds in a similar way in her critique of the “immediacy thinking” (Unmittelbarkeitsdenken) of gestalt therapy. Although she works as a gestalt therapist in a private practice, the theoretical discussion occupies a lot of space while the practical alternative, which she acknowledges in reference to her short case study, requires further elaboration.

The difficulty with developing an alternative therapeutic practice that goes beyond critique might have to do with the critical-psychological dilemma “of wanting to develop an emancipatory practice in line with one’s scientific and political demands, while simultaneously knowing that this is one of those tasks that cannot be solved under the conditions of capitalism” (Markard, 2000, p. 15). A deciding factor in more recent work is likely due to the fact that, since the closure of the “Critical” Psychological Institute (PI) at the Free University of Berlin as a result of the austerity program of the Berlin Higher Education Structure Plan of 1993, there has been a lack of institutional anchoring and thus of resources and working contexts. In 1983 Holzkamp was already hinting at the role of defensive struggles in the internal processes of differentiation and fractioning at the PI (p. 25), the result of which was that individual fields of work diverged. Heiner Keupp recalls in hindsight that it was already apparent in 1985 “that the social-liberal democratization and reform approaches of the 70s that had enabled important psychosocial projects would be thwarted more and more” (2018, p. 23). This makes it understandable that the spirit of optimism of the 1970s gave way to an increasingly defensive stance, with a tendency towards isolation and fragmentation of critical voices in psychology. This process must also be considered against the backdrop of neoliberal austerity policy in public institutions, the defensive workers’ movement in the centers of capitalism, and the ideological “crisis of Marxism.” However, a corresponding analysis would go beyond the scope of this article. In the following I will go into reinterpretations of (cognitive) behavioral therapeutic practices (1.1) and the development of

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3 There is, however, a counseling center “Solidarische pyschosoziale Hilfe Hamburg” (Solidary Psycho-Social Help Hamburg) for people who have fallen into mental crises as a result of joblessness or material poverty, as well as a guided self-help group “Projekt Selbstverständigung über Drogengebrauch” (Project Self-Understanding on Drug Use) in Berlin for people who would like to discuss and change their drug use, both of which use critical-psychological concepts.
pedagogical-psychological children’s therapy for learning disabilities (1.2), present the reinterpretations of the psychoanalytic conflict model (1.3) and (systemic) family therapy (1.4), and, finally, trace how phenomenological and humanistic principles have been reinterpreted for critical psychotherapy for psychosis, addiction counseling, and gestalt therapy (1.5)

1.1 Activity Psychology and the Behavioral Therapeutic Practice

A discussion on behavioral therapy appeared in 1975 in a special edition of the magazine *Das Argument* entitled, “Critical Psychology (I)”. At the time, Eva Jaeggi was trying to work out the implied theories for a behavioral therapeutic practice that could be upheld for a progressive form of therapy. She was of the opinion that critique of the authority-stabilizing theoretical foundations of behaviorism did not go far enough. Here, she was not referring to the theoretical self-understanding of behavioral therapy (BT) but rather to the fact that, within the practice, an idea of man was emerging not dissimilar to that of activity psychology. BT could be understood as “guidance to action” (Jaeggi, 1975, p. 426). In practice it is about planning, exercise, directed activity, current determination, and the specificity of the case: planning demands a transparent, goal-oriented, rationally-controlled approach; exercise enables a slow, step-by-step process; and directed activity requires people to actively shape their inner world through external activities. By assuming a current determination, present life conditions are made the starting point for therapeutic changes and the specificity of the case is taken into account by using various methods that make it possible to learn at different cognitive levels (pp. 427-438). There was no initial follow-up on Jaeggi’s approach within critical psychology. Yet in the tradition of community psychology, a social-scientific, action-based theoretical line was developed in behavior therapy, which can be seen, among others, in the “union orientation” (Henkel & Roer, 1975) of the German Society for Behavioral Therapy.

Also, in *Das Argument*, Irma Gleiss (1975) criticized the term behavior, proposing instead the term activity, which could overcome the juxtapositions of individual and society and of behavior and consciousness. She argued that all forms of psychotherapy are unable to change people alone or the social reality per se; neither are they simple behavioral correction nor reducible to a discovery process, but instead change the relationship of the person to objective reality (p. 440). In terms of therapeutic process, BT’s claim that there are neutral methods for any goal contradicts itself, as seen in this example from a pre-school: a child has to learn not to hit other children. BT might punish the hitting with isolation, for example, or else try to erase the behavior by removing positive
reinforcements. The pedagogical-psychological therapy favored by Gleiss attempts through a restructuring of the play situation to show the child that individual interests cannot be asserted at the expense of others. Ideally, the child’s behavior would be the same – no more hitting – but the reasons for this differ greatly: one is the fear of isolation; the other, insight into the necessity of cooperative relationships.

Following this, Wolfgang Maiers (1975) made an attempt to describe a historical-materialist differentiation between normality and a pathology of the psychological. He thanks the social-behaviorist model, in particular the labeling approach, for drawing attention to the stigmatization caused by certain psychiatric-psychotherapeutic practices and to the formation of secondary symptoms due to hospitalization, but he criticizes the one-sidedness of the analysis, which dissolves the connection between the origin of pathological symptoms and the ways they are valued and sanctioned by society to the benefit of the latter (p. 464-467). Following his argumentation, the norm is not an outcome of the average, rather it is determined by that which might be possible under the given societal conditions. The ideal norm of mental health cannot conform to the present mode of the psychological, as possibilities for individual development separate as a result of the given productive forces and their realization through the restrictive relations of production. The full development of the personality can therefore be understood only as a “concrete utopia” (p. 480) of the opportunities for society’s development as a whole. Using the idea that psychological disorders are a normal reality in a pathogenic societal system, he applies socio-critical and destigmatizing perspectives to mental suffering.

According to Maiers, the therapeutic setting is not predestined to lead the joint fight against disabling conditions – for this, one would need a practical connection among people who are objectively in equal situations. If a person falls behind the given opportunities to conduct a social lifestyle because of a psychological disorder, then he sees no reason against pursuing a behavioral-therapeutic or similar approach as a way to reduce the pressure of suffering. However, the extent to which contradictions in the everyday reality of bourgeois living conditions have direct pathogenic effects he sees as a therapeutic necessity, meaning that it is a question of therapeutic efficiency to consider these contradictions along with their ideological distortion and concealment (pp. 491-420). To that he proposes a form of counseling to be developed that relates

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4 The notion at that time that, in “militant life” (Sève), the partial anticipation of the unalienated life would take place in a classless society (ibid., p. 483) could have possibly been a theoretical answer to the pathologization attempts of socialist activists and intellectuals as defiant rebels, dangerous fools, and leftists nutcases.
“subjective purpose and societal meaning,” and which would require an “analysis and discussion at the level of reasonable political action” (p. 493).

I would like to use an example of outpatient behavior therapy from my training in order to examine such an approach more closely. The behavioral therapist Peter Fiedler (2003) suggests that therapists should take on the role of a competent lawyer in a joint social action against adverse living conditions (for example in women’s shelters or in order to support people who are bullied or bossed as employees of a company). The example shows that hasty partisanship or solidarity is not always sensible psychotherapeutically, since the client may be the one bullying others. Thus, on a micro-level the client is not (only) the victim of circumstances, but also contributes to diminishing solidarity by striving for her own agency. These contradictions can be analyzed in an emancipatory way using critical-psychological concepts. Agency refers to the fact that people aspire to participate in having influence over their own living conditions. This is not meant as a normative concept advising people to fight for their agency, but rather as an analytical tool. In order to describe two types of agency, we must first differentiate between restricted and generalized agency. Restrictive agency refers to action under restrictive conditions that involves the arrangement and reproduction of power relations and oppression as a way of securing one’s own agency (against others). Generalized agency refers to action that calls into question restrictive conditions and changes them (together with others), but it carries the risk of losing one’s own agency. With this example I would like to examine how critical-psychological analyses can complement cognitive behavioral analysis.

Özlem Yiğit came to Germany when she was seven years old. Her parents had found work in Germany and later brought her and her six siblings with them. Though this meant the end of a more than two-year separation from her mother, she lost a familiar setting. She quickly learned the new language but still felt strange and had to look after herself, since her parents were working and fighting a lot. She developed a great sense of independence and pride in her intelligence and strength. She worked for more than 30 years in a hospital ward, but described the increasing economization and intensification of the work meant that there was hardly any time left for the patients or one’s own recuperation. She went for the first time at the age of 50 to an outpatient psychotherapist because of severe depressive symptoms, without really believing that anyone could help her and not thinking much of doctors and psychotherapists especially. Yet she found

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5 This has also been conceptualized from a feminist perspective as the “complicity of women” (Frauen beraten Frauen, 2010, p. 25) by Christina Thürmer-Rohr.

6 The client has read the description and agreed to its being published in an anonymous and modified form.
it relieving to talk about current conflicts and earlier, painful experiences she had otherwise kept to herself.

One day she came to therapy very down and exhausted. She explained that she had shouted that day at a colleague who she said was completely inept and had mistreated a patient. After learning more about the situation, it became clear that the ward was understaffed and that her colleague had made a mistake because of how hectic and overwhelming things were. When asked about her feelings, Ms. Yiğit said that before she got angry, she had also been feeling very overwhelmed and helpless. She had already learned as a child to react with force and anger to powerlessness and helplessness and could even describe how she at first felt good and powerful in the situation. Her guilty conscious came later and she said things were already tense among the team. She had actually wanted to apologize, but was too exhausted and felt that it wouldn’t have helped anyway.

Like cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), Critical Psychology looks for the subjective premises that make why she is feeling and acting in this way understandable. Her automatic thought was: “I have to do all the work alone since my colleague doesn’t do her work properly. I can’t deal with this anymore.” The conditional assumption behind this was: “When I feel powerless, I must show strength.” And the basic assumption was: “No one can help me.” A critical-psychological analysis does not just stop at understanding the biographical conditions for these patterns, rather it shows how these patterns are anchored in current social and professional life situations, which are in turn embedded in societal power structures.

Also, like CBT, Critical Psychology looks for the subjective functionality of behavior. Cognitive behavioral analysis helps one to understand that shouting helps to let go of unpleasant feelings of frustration and helplessness, but there must also be a critical-psychological consideration of which opportunities to act appear too risky and must therefore be avoided. Here it is necessary to understand the hospital as a societal constellation of meanings and to recognize, ask about, or refer to her position therein.

Ms. Yiğit had already mentioned the understaffing. Further conversation revealed that this shortage of personnel, resulting from job cuts and the increasing duties of documentation, have become a normality at the workplace. Yet frustration about this could only seldom be addressed to those responsible, as they were not reachable during the day; on top of which she felt that a confrontation with staff management or the board would be quite risky. Under these restrictive conditions, taking her frustration out on her colleague was functional in the short-term, but it also undermined team solidarity, making it more difficult to find common strategies for improving the situation. Ms. Yiğit
criticized her colleagues’ unwillingness to strike and lamented the fact that she is always the only one to complain about new impositions.

Here it was important to address the interpersonal dynamic among the team, but also to discuss concrete possibilities for change at the corporate level. Working conditions had worsened over the past few years due to the introduction of case rates, which had meant more patients had to be treated in less time. This simultaneously presented new possibilities for collective labor struggle (Wolf, 2013). A strike at a different hospital in 2011 had been very effective – no new patients were being admitted and, over the course of a week, many beds and stations had to be closed, leading to massive income loss and ultimately forcing management to give in. The new “form of strike with empty beds” enabled wide-scale participation in the strike despite emergency service agreements and the sense of responsibility to the sick. The employees’ caretaking ethos even had a mobilizing effect (good care, more hospital staff) and lead to increased solidarity (an alliance of patients, nurses, and citizens since 2013). A discussion of these structural constraints and possibilities was able to bring about a depersonalization of reproaches and make overcoming these injustices conceivable.

Seeking an opportunity to talk to colleagues, addressing one’s frustration to those responsible, and testing the collective potential for power are ways of examining the basic assumption that “no one can help me” and undoing the generalization of biographical experiences of powerlessness into the present. Whether this works depends not only on the therapy and on Ms. Yiğit, it depends also on the strength of social and political struggles. I hope to have shown with this example how a cognitive-behavioral therapeutic analysis at the micro-level, in consideration of short and long-term consequences and certain biographically-derived assumptions, can be fruitfully combined with a critical-psychological analysis of agency with respect to macro-structures.

1.2 Pedagogical-Psychological Child Therapy between Learning and Attachment Theory

At the Legasthenia Center (LZ) in Berlin, founded in 1970, a pedagogical-psychological therapy was developed for the treatment of developmental disabilities and school failure among children (Pilz & Schubenz, 1979). Using the morpheme method, Siegfried Schubenz developed a linguistic learning-theory approach using insight into the sensible construction of language to help dyslexic school children with acquiring written language in order to keep them from being transferred to special schools. The children’s lack of motivation and resistance nevertheless proved to be an insurmountable hurdle in practice. A refusal to learn was considered indication of the child’s powerlessness in the face
of the adults’ demands. Because of these experiences, communicating written language for the benefit of cooperative interaction in the group was given lower priority. In reference to critical-psychological findings on societal nature, children should not be therapized individually, rather their specific disabling circumstances should be taken into consideration. This involves, on the one hand, parents, childcare providers, and teachers, and offers, on the other hand, treatment through performing subjectively and socially meaningful tasks in cooperation with other interacting difficulties and learning obstacles. Central was overcoming social ostracism, which could be traced to the special circumstances (e.g. overprotection or neglect) of the parent-child relationship. The reception of early-childhood attachment theory into the tradition of depth psychology began with the focus on problematic family relations, which in later publications plays an increasingly central role in comparison to critical-psychological theory (von der Lühe, 1988, Schubenz, 1993).

In a review of Pilz and Schubenz’ edited volume, Ole Dreier inquired about the critical-psychological foundations of the L.Z. The idea that a written language disorder was the result of a lack of willingness to communicate and cooperate seemed too general to him. As such, the cognitive learning problem is reduced to a social-emotional problem in the parent-child relationship, and the development of skills is neglected in favor of the seemingly self-determined social interaction in the therapy room. The unequal distribution of power between adults and children is not dismantled but instead redistributed to the effect that children become the ones in power: “This sounds like a traditional humanistic notion of inner freedom and external constraint, whereby, consequentially, the external influence – reduced to a pure constraint – simply needs to be eliminated in order to reach the realm of freedom and self-determination.” (1980b, p. 98) A laissez-faire style is thus practiced out of fear of an irrational exercise of power. Self-determination is not defined as greater influence over relevant, objective living conditions, rather one is lead to believe that this happens through an unimpeded development of spontaneous present needs in the sheltered therapeutic environment (p. 103). Concerning the therapy of the therapists, Dreier notes that subjective feelings are not considered in their relation to objective social conditions, so that emotions are not understood as an evaluation of the opportunities and limitations to personal development. As a result, a split is made between the cold, objective, environmentally-centered aspects of competition and job performance, and the warm, sentimental, internal and vague aspect of sensation. According to Dreier, this split produces a hostility towards theory within the practice, so that everything that can’t be experienced directly is considered irrelevant, thereby reproducing the general split between the societal and private spheres. A similar line of thinking can also be seen in a question
posed by Markard (same volume) on whether experience makes one wise: Experience can only ever serve as the beginning, not the end, of an argument, otherwise the “recourse to experience [would be] critique-immunizing and thereby affirmative” (2018).

At the colloquium on the work of the LZ (1980), employees of the LZ did not feel Dreier’s critique fully grasped them. They accused Critical Psychology of not developing concepts sufficient enough to work in practice. Though they all agreed to continue the discussion, no more related contributions were published following this in the “Forum Kritische Psychologie.” This is an indication of the break between proponents of pedagogical-psychological child therapy and those of critical psychology. The LZ inspired and influenced many similar projects during this time. Schubenz and others founded the Institute for Pedagogical-Psychological Therapy, which was renamed the Institute for Psychological-Psychotherapeutic Therapy and Counseling, where one can today complete methodologically-pluralistic, privately-financed training programs in behavioral therapy and depth psychology following a master’s degree. Like Critical Psychology and Community Psychology, their approach was ousted from the Free University.

1.3 Conflict model and gender relations in psychoanalysis

In their discussion of psychoanalysis, Ute H.-Osterkamp (1976) and Manfred Kappeler (1977), in contrast to the LZ, arrive at the opinion that an explanation of mental disorders from early childhood experiences amounts to “de-actualization” and “psychologization” (H.-Osterkamp 1976, p. 459). What these critical approaches have in common, however, is that resistance to authorities is supported as healthy conflict and not pathologized as a behavioral disorder. H.-Osterkamp defines “mental symptoms as disorders of agency” (p. 432), which emerge following a failed process of repressing conflicts. These conflicts relate to the antagonism between a need to determine one’s own life conditions and being excluded from this right by capitalist class rule. Neuroses develop in those who must repress their needs in order to partake in the power of the ruling class, but who damage themselves and others in the process. H.-Osterkamp takes up the concept of defense mechanisms in her conflict model, but rejects the duality of nature and society as a basic human constant. In her reinterpretation of Freudian psychoanalysis, she historicizes the neurotic as a “privileged dependent” (p. 440), who orients themselves with power relations in order to receive short-term, individual advantages, and who “becomes neurotic to the extent to which this role appears unbearable to him, but is then again one from which he cannot find
the energy to free himself” (p. 441, emphases removed). In this regard, she shares the Freudian claim, “that unhappiness is not coextensive with neurosis” (p. 398).

According to H.-Osterkamp, critical-psychological therapy should be a “consciousness-raising therapy” (1976, p. 448), in which the awareness of one’s own entanglement in concrete societal reality and the imparting of skills to better cope with one’s life situation are at the core.

Therapy is to be primarily structured as preparation and follow-up in regards to the client’s life practice outside of therapy: The therapeutic reappraisal of the client’s history, but also, for example, activities involved in the acquisition of various kinds of knowledge and skills, in working towards clarifying and improving the client’s life outside of therapy, are a prerequisite in the improvement of the subjective mental state and agency… (pp. 462-463)

The therapeutic reappraisal of one’s history is thus relevant insofar as it involves adequately comprehending one’s own history in order to, on the one hand, better understand the biographic particularities involved in the development of conflict-resistant tendencies that are currently operative and, on the other, uncover the subjective reinterpretations of personal experience that justify one’s life choices, for which the use of objective data is necessary.

The reconstruction of personal history through pure ‘descent’ into the phenomenological ‘inner world’ of one’s past is inaccessible under both aspects. In the therapeutic process, not only must the client’s current life situation be as permeable as possible, but also their individual formation of the objective general societal traits of class position and specific societal location manifesting themselves within them. The client must understand to what degree and in which way possible restrictive or random parenting practices from his/her own parents are not simply explicable in terms of individual characteristics, but are themselves expression of their location and class position. (p. 472)

Knowledge of social circumstances is therefore of great relevance for critical therapists, since this serves as the backdrop against which the client’s scope of action can be realistically evaluated. A “competency difference” (p. 460) with regards to knowledge and insight can emerge between the therapist and client at the start of therapy but should be reduced over the course of it. The rejection of psychoanalysis’ “neutrality claim” as a therapeutic stance does not mean advocating for an intimate involvement in the client’s personal fate and thereby the dissolution of the special therapeutic situation into a normal, everyday relationship. “‘Egalitarian’ notions of abolishing any difference between therapist
and client as a ‘progressive’ concept of therapy… are theoretical nonsense and both humanely and societally irresponsible.” (p. 481) The incorporation of personal experience is meaningful to the extent to which generalizable insights, which are used to explain the client’s situation, could be derived from them.

Psychoanalysis is still easy to recognize in the conflict model of mental disorders, but in the therapeutic practice aspects of the psychoanalytic method, such as neutrality, free association and interpretations of countertransference, are rejected in favor of behavioral therapeutic principles, such as preparation and follow-up work for daily life, learning skills, and transparency. It remains to be seen which methods Critical Psychology will make use of for calling into consciousness.

What Osterkamp tackled theoretically was attempted independently in practice by Manfred Kappeler. In his examination paper at what was then the only training institute for psychotherapy in West Berlin, he ventured a discussion “between psychoanalysis and Marxism” (Kappeler, Holzkamp & H.-Osterkamp, 1977, p. 28). In the case report for the psychoanalytic treatment (1969-1972) of a 14-year-old boy who, because of a “neurotic maldevelopment,” had problems with communicating, parenting, and learning, Kappeler increasingly rejected psychoanalytic methods in favor of dealing with current problems in the home and at school. The predominant method seems to be a dialogistic conversation for clarification in which the boy reports on difficulties and experiences while the therapist listens attentively but also offers possible explanations as societal mediatedness and, when asked, expresses these and thereby actively supports discussion. In addition, Kappeler described “soliloquizing role plays” (p. 48-9) in which the boy invoked the parental arguments against his needs and actions and in doing so discovered that these had in part already turned into his own. In this way, his ambivalent attitude and feelings toward his parents could be explained and recognized as the source of his self-blame and feelings of guilt, which helped him to remove constraining parental requirements and actions through open conflict.

At the beginning of therapy, Kappeler was successfully able to trace instances of personalization back to the objective position of members of the family, thereby facilitating mutual understanding so that conflicts could be dealt with more constructively. The parents complained, for example, in parallel counseling sessions about their son’s “outrageous sense of entitlement,” whereas he would call them “authoritarian squares.” Kappeler explained to the parents that the demand for more allowance had developed out of social comparison to his schoolmates, most of whom came from well-off, middle-class homes. In a similar way, he also attempted to explain to the boy the frugality and rigid parenting practices by the fact that it was only in doing away with directly
satisfying immediate desires and strict discipline that his parents had been able to
work their way up from a working-class environment into a position as lower
wage employees and afford a small house. His politicization through the student
movement enabled the boy to overcome his social isolation and, following his
school expulsion, his father sided with his son in opposition to the school
authorities, which brought lasting improvements to their relationship.

Holzkamp and H.-Osterkamp used this case to concretize concepts of
therapy in Critical Psychology. They first came to know of Kappeler as his case
in Berlin had become a scandal because he did not pass his examination.
Holzkamp and H.-Osterkamp saw Kappeler’s critique of the psychoanalytic
practice as a social worker’s protest against their tendency to psychologize and
emphasized the methodological primacy of objective life conditions in their class
specificity and individual particularity, which had to be included in a diagnostic
process independent of subjective standpoint (Kappeler et al., 1977, Chapter 3).
In order to overcome the weaknesses of isolated individual treatment, they
recommended establishing therapeutic cooperations with various competencies
and alliances in different socially-relevant forces. With this goal in mind,
practice-integrating study units were introduced as a pilot project at the FU. At
the 1st Critical Psychology Conference in 1977, critical-psychological concepts of
therapy were fervently discussed and, according to the critique, Kappeler’s case
was stylized into the “non-plus ultra” (Braun & Holzkamp, 1977, p. 197) of
Critical Psychology, even though it actually presented as a classic approach of
social work. The observation is undoubtedly accurate that the boundaries
between the improvement of life circumstances, psychological counseling, and
psychotherapy as conceived by Critical Psychology are fluid (Kalpein 2007) and
still require clarification. However, this accusation ignores the fact that social
work is rarely grounded in Marxist analysis in the sense of deciphering
individual problems as class problems. In 1978, the meaning of emotions as the
“guidelines of therapeutic conduct” (H.-Osterkamp, p. 69-70) was highlighted. A
significant task of psychotherapy in Osterkamp’s view is to support the
individual to unreservedly acknowledge their needs to themselves and to others,
and to prepare them to handle the pushback. Nevertheless, support in arguing out
necessary conflicts is contrary to the conflict avoidance of therapists and must be
understood as a problem of their professional position.

In retrospect, the conflict model of Critical Psychology can be
problematized for making the restrictive agreement with the prevailing
conditions the categorical key to understanding mental disorders. In Maier and
Markard’s (1980) considerations of the mental consequences of unemployment,
it is being at the mercy of uncontrollable forces that plays more central a role
than one’s own embeddedness and unconscious self-hatred: “Psychological
suffering is, generally speaking, an expression of radical hindrances to being the subject of one’s own life conditions, meaning that reducing suffering is linked with the expansion of subjective agency” (p. 94). Dreier sees “critical conditions” (p. 61) as the reasons for the development of mental disorders. These he means less in terms of unresolved developmental work, strokes of fate or accidents: “They are based primarily upon people in operational relation who use these conditions to mutually obstruct each other from the possibilities to overcome present problems.” (p. 62) Under adverse conditions, this kind of conflict regulation could lead to the internalization of conflicts, if, for example, one is unable to communicate one’s needs. “As a result, conflicts appear misplaced and in such a way that actual problematic relations are denied.” (p. 64) Although Dreier places the focus on interpersonal conflicts, he otherwise follows H.-Osterkamp’s conception. Markard (2009) criticizes this concept of mental disorders for threatening the negative consequences of the arrangement and attempts to punish opportunism preventively. Additionally, he formulates the question the other way around:

Couldn’t one go insane from precisely not ‘recognizing’ this power? Has it really already been constituted on a categorical level that every delusion, every depression has at its core the recognition of the power of the rulers? Can’t he who has been barred from a profession as part of the struggle against the rulers also become depressed? (p. 194)

Furthermore, Christian Küpper (2011) points out,

many manners of psychological suffering are the results of experienced violence as well as massive infringements of personal integrity and subjective scope of action (e.g. torture, rapes), so that there is no way to reasonably speak of agreement with the prevailing conditions. (p. 89)

The conflict model must be reconsidered in light of these objections. Reductionisms have arisen presumably as a result of the focus on the psychoanalytic etiology of neurosis. For example, the diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder, for which helplessness and the threat to one’s life are etiologically central, was first admitted in the 1980s in the USA and in 1992 into the ICD-10 of the WHO. Ariane Brenssell (2014) discusses the diagnosis of PTSD which, on the one hand, recognizes violence but, on the other, pathologizes the afflicted.

Nonetheless, the reinterpretation of the Freudian concept of the super-ego as the “inner compulsion” (Holzkamp, 1984, p. 20) is relevant for developing the theories of Critical Psychology and as the dominant hypothesis regarding the
origin of certain forms of psychological suffering, in which internalized (performance) demands, punitive voices, etc. become agony. In 2008 Zander and Pappritz published a research guide for understanding agency as psychological conflict. From my perspective, this does not differ much from a psychotherapeutic questionnaire and it does not devote enough attention to questions regarding objective life situation and the significance of structural and interpersonal violence; the only question going beyond a classical concept of therapy references the power relations that stand in the way of generalized agency, which can be overcome in affiliation with others. Another peculiarity is that the questions are addressed to oneself and not to the other person.

This can be contrasted to Gerlinde Aumann’s (2003) reinterpretation of gender relations in psychoanalysis: She emphasizes the significance of structural violence in Freud’s early theory of trauma, but argues that tying women down to repressed childhood experiences of sexual abuse ignores the significance of present conflicts and other forms of instrumental relations. Freud’s concept of the “distressing antithetic idea” and “hysterical counter-will” are “a vivid and differentiated phenomenal description of contradictory tendencies in connection to extremely contradictory life demands” (p. 58). Yet the latter is not problematized explicitly in Freud’s theory. According to Aumann, interpersonal dependencies and instrumentalization within the family can be addressed successfully using the Oedipus complex theory. Freud’s categories discussed “the instrumentalization of genders and the unequal distribution of life chances (among genders), as well as women’s resistance – even if mystified neurotically – against social exclusion.” (p. 81) In her view, Freud discussed gender-specific socialization in terms of a girl’s sexual inhibition and feelings of inferiority for not being a boy on the one hand, and biologized the differences using the terms “penis envy” and “castration complex” (p. 142-43) as anatomic facts on the other. He explained the devaluation of women within the framework of a boy’s castration anxiety, which could be reinterpreted to suggest that power relations also threaten men with loss of control if they are unable to define themselves through the devaluation of those women who have been confined to the private domain. Furthermore, Aumann pointed out that psychoanalysis is connected to

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7 a) Which needs am I attempting to satisfy through my actions? Which interest am I pursuing? b) What needs am I thereby preventing from being satisfied? Which interests can I not realize in this way? c) Am I perpetuating my problems through my own actions without being conscious of it? d) What risks would I be taking by giving up previous and testing new ways of acting? What power relations could be at stake in the perspective on generalizable agency? e) Am I psychologically rejecting recognition of the conflict? In what form? f) In which relationships and relations on the occasion of which results was the problematic behavior suggested to me? g) How can I make the risks that are being taken in the attempt at new behavior manageable? (Zander & Pappritz, 2008, pp. 374-379)
both the discussion of violent relations and their reduction to sexual violence as a way of excluding structural violence in the interest of the customer. This relates historically to the distribution of labor and function within the bourgeois family, the result of which being that gender relations are “privately-shaped” (p. 182), which goes hand-in-hand with a woman’s disadvantage in professional life. Romantic relationships have thusly been regarded as pure social relations, since mutual cooperation is made more difficult through the separation of the spheres of production and reproduction, which reduces happiness to satisfied sexuality. Because Freud limits himself to an understanding of sexuality as an obvious tension between genders, he loses sight of the unequal life conditions. A woman’s immediate dependence on a man also infers attributions that the man is oppressing the woman rather than considering the structural dimension of the gender-specific distribution of labor at the end of the 19th century. In a reinterpretation of the case of Dora, Aumann shows the functionalities of reducing problems to sexual wishes and infatuation with the therapist. Freud was able to play off the interests of the father (his customer) against those of the patient with regards to honesty and support in the face of the sexual assaults from a family friend – with whose wife the father was likely having an affair, explaining his lack of interest in pursuing clarification of the involvements.

1.4 Family therapy and societal analysis

In his therapeutic analysis of a working-class family in 1974/75 in Denmark, Dreier (1980a) takes an approach that Holzkamp described in his forward as follows: he does not reduce

the societal conditions to mere objective frameworks that act upon the family from the outside and against which family members’ concrete courses of actions are necessarily inconsequential and indifferent. Neither does he fall for the common misunderstanding that a subjective determination of conditions is only possible from the level of political or union organization, while in the family it is merely private-social relations that are taking place, that the ‘psychological’ dominates and there is no room for ‘politics.’ (p. 5)

In fact, it shows more that the contradictions of society did not have to be blindly asserted in forms of familial regulation and psychological forms, so that family members could consciously take their lives into their own hands and collectively improve their situation by, for example, systematically restructuring the division of labor within the family as a way to overcome deadlocks, aggressions, discomfort, and resignation as emotional dilemmas.
Thus the family might find new courage, even more consciously take charge of their extra-familial life conditions, no longer accept with resignation heteronomous existence, so that in this way a politicization is able to develop. (p. 6)

In addition, Holzkamp emphasizes that critical psychological therapy does not differ fundamentally from an empirical research process; rather, practical insights – which can be generalized beyond the individual case and thus lead to the surmounting of psychological difficulties – are gained in line with action-oriented process research involving the participation of persons concerned. Here he refers to a research project on early childhood development that had a therapeutic effect on participants: “The extent of this ‘therapeutic effect’ is to some degree almost equivalent to the knowledge gained in critical-psychological individual research.” (p. 7)

In the manner of family therapy, Dreier’s therapy team initially analyzed the entangled family constellation and how the nine-year-old boy with a diagnosed “borderline psychosis” became a symptom carrier. Here it was apparent that the children mostly quarreled in the presence of their parents and that later anxiety symptoms appeared primarily when they were there. They attribute this to the fact that parents do not pay enough attention to the children and only formally regulate the disputes (who started it? Who does the toy belong to?), the result of which was that boy was continuously ostracized by the family as the “fight starter,” so that through his increasing disintegration he developed, anxieties, hallucinations, and nightmares with evil figures, which of course meant his parents would care for him again. The bourgeois “mine, yours” conception of property stands as much in the parents’ way of a constructive conflict resolution as do the abstract “everyone gets the same” notions of equality they had in the above-mentioned project on subject development in early childhood. The children made the problem clear to their parents, for example, if they all wanted the middle seat in the car (Ulmann, 1987/2003, pp. 109-110).

In order to understand the parents’ behavior, the therapy team traversed the immediate level of familial interaction to tie in working conditions (factory and homework) with ideas of family life and parenting. In this way, they were able to detect contradictions between the demands of wage labor and parenting: The father must function under rigid monitoring at work without support and he applies these demands to the parenting of his son; such demands are, however, dysfunctional in this context as they impede developmental stages (rigid homework monitoring leads to lack of motivation to study, forbidding the use of the father’s tools prevents learning related skills). A therapeutic model for ideational realization lies in comparing and contrasting work life and family life
with the father as a way to work out contradictions. Abstract personal characteristics are made visible in their mediatedness (Vermitteltheit) with real life conditions instead of their being situated exclusively in childhood or genes, so that feelings of guilt or of being alone disappear with the problem, new possibilities for action are discovered, and there could be more understanding for people in similar situations in the future. Other contradictory messages from the parents (“I like you just as you are” vs. performing at home to maintain sympathy) were processed similarly.

Dreier’s third large family therapy study (2008) does mostly without reference to Marxist analyses of the class-specific situation and societal structure, examining instead the interdependence of diverse social practices. A central aim of the therapeutic approach is still uncovering the personalizations and de-subjectivizations of mental problems (pp. 62-63) for which Holzkamp’s functional critiques of the terms personality (1985) and practice (1987) are important reference points.

Referring to Dreier’s critical family therapy, Friele (2007) developed a differentiated critique of systematic therapies, which he illustrated using multiple case studies, along with several criteria for an alternative practice: Firstly, an interpretation of psychological problems cannot curtail the needs of the individual, rather it must make these visible. In this sense, feminist and systemic critiques and further developments of psychoanalysis are progress (p. 23). Secondly, an emancipatory psychology must be capable of recognizing both the potential and limitations of individual strategies, like learning and therapy, for problem solving, and of offering criteria for rational behavior (p. 409). For this, he uses the categories of Critical Psychology while critiquing them in their problematic aspects.

At first glance, it would seem as though Critical Psychology had finally found a therapeutic approach in systemic therapy, with its intention to contextualize the individual-centrism of psychiatric and traditional psychotherapeutic perspectives, and replace the objective judgement of professionals with constructions of reality that are equitable for all involved. This should lead to more respectful and democratic conduct with clients and relatives, release feelings of guilt, and finally overcome the limitations to self-determination within therapeutic relationships. On the basis of the professional literature, case studies, and the ethics guidelines of the German Association for Systemic Therapy, Counseling, and Family Therapy, Friele highlights the problem that rational reasons for action, responsibility, social understanding, democracy, and humanity must be repudiated as scientifically unsustainable.

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8 i.a. he introduces Dreier’s case analysis in contrast to Satir’s growth therapy as an example of family therapy without familialism.
categories. The discourse that everyone has their own truth and that planning contradicts freedom is firmly anchored in the everyday thinking of neoliberalism. Nonetheless, the rejection of modern notions of reality has a certain validity according to Friele, for example in its critique of the predictability of social processes and the normative overload of theories of action.

In opposition to the radical constructivism of Glaserfeld (1996) and his terminology of viability (functionality), Friele argues however that even if reality is not recognizable as such, the term truth does not have to be surrendered, and that the search for truth is an interminable clarification process about statements, “the meanings of which have been communicated in so far as there are corresponding actions along the lines of these shared understandings and the consequences of these actions fit these shared expectations,” for “as contested as the criteria for validity, assumptions, and possible reasons are individually, without a terminology of truth, one cannot operate with statements and action is no longer possible.” (p. 51) Countering the assertion of systemic therapists that they are not normative or that they act beyond power and control in not having claimed a truth for themselves (p. 95), Friele argues that either the random values of individual practitioners or the prevailing normativity will be implemented if they have no criteria for their interpretation of problems and suggestions for solution. If viability is the only criterion for therapeutic action, then there is no room to address in whose interest and under which conditions the problem is to be resolved.

He explains the attractiveness of constructivism for therapists in terms of the social changes that took place starting in the late 1970s, including an increasing liberalization, individualization, and flexibilization tied to a utilitarianization of relationships, which made it more difficult to define therapeutic goals as there were no clear prevailing norms for coexistence beyond striving for one’s personal gain. Thus, the feminist therapeutic goal of promoting independence is also unable to counter the constructivist paradigm. Feminist therapies come into conflict with systemic approaches only when feminine values are strengthened in opposition to the prevailing logic. Strengthening the feminine was more or less abandoned in the wake of 3rd wave feminism, so that the deconstructivist-feminist therapeutic approaches had to fit smoothly into the constructivist-systemic paradigm.

In the final chapter, Friele discusses what systemic thinking and critical psychology can learn from one another. The concepts of individuation in the tradition of the multi-generational perspective could fill critical psychology’s gap in terms of a personality theory and render visible familial involvements and parentification. Friele does, however, problematize the fact that individuation, under neoliberal conditions, could imply “irredeemable requirements for
performance and autonomy, lowering the demands for quality of life, and the rejection of a meaningful life in general.” (pp. 401-402) He uses the critical psychological category of agency to try to find a remedy and therapeutic orientation of action that goes beyond adapting to societal demands. The subjective conflict in power relations arises between “the acceptance of restrictions to agency and the risk of resistance.” (p. 413) The criteria for good and bad action is not, as Friele emphasizes once more, determined by an external norm, but rather by the justified assumption that it is possible to collectively and democratically change living conditions, that quality of life can be improved, and that suffering and conflicts can be systematically alleviated. He follows the (self-)critique of Markard (1998) concerning the postulated self-animosity of restricted autonomy, which states that adaptation and opportunism are in no way self-antagonistic but instead well-founded in personal interests. According to Friele, it is only subjective suffering and its relief, not an emancipation of society as a whole, that can become the standard of rationality for individual action (pp. 11-12).

1.5 Phenomenological and humanistic therapeutic processes

Social psychiatrist Erich Wulff developed another psychotherapeutic approach in his book “The Logic of Madness. The Understandability of Schizophrenic Experience” (Wahnsinslogik. Von der Verstehbarkeit schizophrener Erfahrung, 1995/2003). In reference to phenomenological and critical psychological theoretical traditions, he presumes that the incomprehensibility of psychosis is produced by a denial of shared social meanings through which subjective purpose and objective meanings collapse, so that intersubjective understanding is periodically and partly suspended (for criticism, see Küpper 2011). For example, when, as a result of individual life experiences, the only reasonable way out of certain situations remains a denial of intersubjective foundations because this signals life-threatening danger (Wulff, 2003, p. 36). As a first step towards renewed recognition, Wulff emphasizes radical acceptance and involvement in an intersubjective encounter, in which the therapist stands with one foot in the world of the patient and with another in his or her own, and together they explore the biographical map of the centers of recognition and denial. On the phenomenon of addiction, Wulff also proposed a description of socially-mediated rationales that could serve intersubjective understanding:

With addiction, a person is trying to become the master of his own happiness without having to do anything else other than enter into a situation of release that is available at any time if possible... Such addictive wishes become over-powerful during times in which satisfaction
is hard to come by in the socially-integrated ways of coping with life.
(1997, 4th thesis)

The critical-psychological project, Projekt Selbstverständigung über Drogengebrauch (ProSD – Project Self-Understanding about Drug Use), tries to go beyond state health policy to find an alternative approach to problematic drug consumption in the form of a guided self-help group. In his article “Drug use as a reasoned act” (Drogenkonsum als begründete Handlung, 2012), Christoph Vandreier uses case study examples to work out the social structures of stigmatization, subjectivization, precarization that serve as typical hindrances to action and comes up with – in relation to Wulff – additional rationales. Much like initiatives for the afflicted, ProSD problematizes the expert status of professionals who are providing psychiatric and psychotherapeutic treatment without relinquishing this entirely. As a psycho-social association, they try to reunite subject-scientific practice and research. Within this framework, a critical application of client-centered counseling techniques following Rogers, which were used partly as guidelines for group moderation, took place: In accordance with Rogers, the “unconditional acceptance” of the person can be reinterpreted as the “universal understandability” of the reasons of human action. Thus “empathy” represents a rather important prerequisite, yet the expression of empathy can also be experienced as encroaching and get in the way of understanding. “Authenticity” must be conceived as irreconcilable with the idea of a “congruent subject,” as contradictions would have to be disregarded instead of understanding oneself as living under contradictory conditions. (Merz, 2012, p. 90-97)

Sylvia Siegel (2013) presents a similar reinterpretation of gestalt therapy. With its dialogical stance, consideration of the singularity of a given person and his/her specific situation, appraisal of subjective perception, investigation of frames of references, and demand that therapists continuously examine their hypotheses, the phenomenological approach has a depathologizing, resource-oriented direction of impact aimed at supporting understanding. Though gestalt therapy understands the relation between the human being and the world as a holistic model of interdependence between organism and environment, it does not make a distinction between the societal, social, and natural environment, and thus leaves the form of interdependence diffuse. Siegel criticizes, in particular, the prevailing “immediacy thinking” (Unmittelbarkeitsdenken) that looks only at the individual, thereby contributing to “soft control” (p. 246) that empowers the subject to approach the pole of restrictive agency. She illustrates how the figures

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9 Brigitte Schigl (2010) provides a similar appraisal of the emancipatory aspects of gestalt therapy from a feminist perspective.
of thought in immediacy thinking presuppose the notion of unrestricted access between subject and counterpart, which sprang up historically with the emergence of the bourgeois individual and has ties to the idea of an autonomous subject and the negation of dependencies. She also shows how, in practice, relational connections cannot be entirely disregarded, since both clients and therapists must find their way around societal contradictions.

2. Suggestions for a critical-therapeutic orientation

Finally, for anyone not wanting to abandon the demand for an emancipatory practice, the question arises of what mistakes should be not be repeated and which insights can be used if psychotherapeutic practices with a critical-psychological foundation are to be (further) developed.

It is my opinion that one must avoid adopting a postmodern attitude or anti-authoritarian reflex that completely rejects all interventions, disorder-specific theories, or professional action and makes absolute the idea that sympathy and understanding are the only emancipatory approaches, as is partly the case in the tradition of person-centered therapy, or idealizes psychological suffering itself as a political expression already (“turn illness into a weapon”), as is the case in some anti-psychiatric groups, or else uses a constructivist stance (“everyone has his/her own truth”) as occasion to extract oneself from the responsibility and obligation to state reasons for one’s own therapeutic theories and interventions.

It is especially the nuanced assessment of the life situation and its societal mediatedness, as seen with the critical-psychological and feminist approaches that make reference to social-psychological and socio-economic analyses of family, career, gender relations, racism, and discrimination, that is to be preserved and further developed. I believe that historic-materialist analyses of meaning structures are indispensable for the comprehension of our societal foundations, our ability to critique them and thereby identity scopes of action. Without adequate analyses of conditions, premise (subjective meanings) cannot be understood and possibilities for action cannot be broadened, meaning that those active in the psychotherapies must be trained further in this regard and that advanced training of this sort must be offered. The notion of subject-oriented psychotherapy that psychological symptoms can be decoded as subjectively functioning patterns of meaning that appear without clear reason, as a way to apprehend previously incomprehensible things, must also be maintained. To achieve this, it is necessary in Critical Psychology to consider the relationship between being at the mercy of objective limitations/violence and the defense/suppression/blocking out of risky possible actions, and to understand
more precisely the relationship between biographical developments and the actual genesis of psychological suffering. With regards to these questions and the handling of psychological and political resistance, the creation of a critical-psychological theory and practice could learn from feminist debates on therapy and counseling (e.g. Hill & Ballou, 1998). Furthermore, a look at the concept of resources could also be informative, such as the critical-psychological one Silvia Schriefers (2007) mapped out with Bourdieu to help refugees cope with trauma.

For therapeutic relationship building, taking up and practicing a two worlds position could be highly promising. Wulff (2003) describes his basic therapeutic position as one of an intersubjective relationship in which one enters into the world of the other without identifying oneself. Osterkamp (1976) locates the therapeutic relationship in the tension between personal engagement and distanced professionalism. How this concretely looks in practice has been discussed over the last decades primarily by feminist therapists with the term “differentiated partiality” (Frauen beraten Frauen, 2010, p. 15). What this means in terms of a basic feminist position is answered differently depending on the school of therapy, and ranges from the demand for political statements, to solidarity with women’s concerns and appreciation of the female experience, all the way to abstention: meaning, adopting a stance that does not reveal personal opinions or evaluations but accounts for gender differences. In order to overcome the opposition between, on the one hand, uncritical partisanship and a friendly egalitarian relationship and, on the other, a seemingly neutral position and an intact competency discrepancy, it would be important to further develop the concept of partiality in dialogue with critical psychological and feminist therapists as an alternative to the so-called multi-partiality of systemic approaches. Markard (2009) differentiates between partisanship (Parteinahme) and partiality (Parteilichkeit) with regards to critical science: Partisanship is concerned with our personal ideas, wishes, intentions and consequences, and refers to our engagement in those instances in which our psychological action is implicated in societal and institutional contradictions whenever we want to or must take a position; Partiality refers to the extent to which our personal partisanship has been scientifically identified, thus “partiality’ is a concept used to identify the extent to which societal contradictions are dismantled or disregarded by scientific terms and approaches.” (p. 70) In this regard, partiality is not seen as politically connoted – rather, to a greater degree, it is insight and critique that represent two sides of a coin. In the context of the therapeutic process, partiality does not mean partisanship for the perspective of a person or group of people. It can instead mean, for example, adopting a detective stance towards the problem and tracing its social embeddedness, since addressing and dealing with a problem requires not only empathy for the subjective experience...
but also an adequate comprehension of dimensions that are not directly experienced or conscious. It is then partial to involve mechanisms of exploitation, oppression, and exclusion in the sense of a generalizable perspective of self-determination.

Extensive considerations for reflecting upon one’s position in the therapeutic relationship as a way to reduce the existing discrepancy in power and competency, along with the resulting long-term dependencies, have been developed for behavioral therapeutic, humanistic, and feminist approaches in particular. Furthermore, it is necessary to reflect upon one’s own tendency to psychologize conflicts in order to preserve one’s professional position or because traditional psychotherapeutic procedures have been adopted uncritically. It is exactly the psychotherapeutic competency in and art of abstractedly solving problems without regard to concrete life conditions that has fascinated people with psychology. Critical Psychology must resist this temptation. For this reason, critical reflections on practice are important as regular intervision and supervision. Here, Parker’s (2015) proposals for an analysis of therapists’ class positions and personal interests should be taken into consideration. Even the portraits of practice (Markard & Holzkamp, 1989) and internship (Ulmann & Markard, 2000) produce questions that offer instruction for understanding and communicating the societal mediatedness of individual activity as a method for working through conflicts and contradictions in the practice rather than disregarding these with recourse to psychological theories, accusing oneself, or placing blame on the client.

Emancipatory therapy concepts must be evaluated in terms of whether they contribute in practice to making visible and tangible the possibilities of consciously and collectively creating the societal conditions for a self-determined life, i.e. to enable self-enlightenment, to free oneself from harmful dependencies, to open up new possibilities for action, and to include societal conditions. Psychotherapy, however, is not a form of politics that creates universally valid guidelines for living together. Therefore, the emancipation of society as a whole cannot be an aim of psychotherapy, which consists only of reducing suffering and making needs visible. Exchange, networking, and cooperation with other agents of change – like neighborly help, legal counseling, political projects and unions – can help keep the boundaries of psychotherapy with an emancipatory intention from stretching too far, while at the same time drawing the client’s attention to these possibilities so that psychotherapy, counseling, and legal, financial and political interests are able to complement rather than replace each other.

The therapeutic methods are more or less problem and treatment-specific, making general statements difficult. The above-presented case studies involve
methods that recognize contradictions and deal more consciously with problems. There are existing guidelines and instructional videos on feminist approaches, but there are no such materials on critical psychological approaches, likely due to a fear of technification. To be able to examine and communicate the therapeutic practice and to keep the therapeutic act from being mystified as a purely intuitive process, it is necessary to cite explanations for the therapeutic procedure. This is in need of development. It is also necessary to once more establish a critical psychological *casuistry* that, using therapeutic processes and self-experience, offers its own knowledge and language for mental suffering, along with possible methods for coping. As a general guideline, Wulff’s estimation still seems current:

> Here, the task of critical psychotherapy would be the development of an alternative semantic net that can appropriately define and order the therapeutic process for previously outlined – certainly not all – psychological suffering... Probably the process of slowly evolving and distinguishing oneself in practical-therapeutic work is just as painstaking as it was in the case of psychoanalysis. (Wulff, 1977, p. 535)

It must be added that, in order to make this possible, associations are required that are able to compile these insights, arrange exchanges, and finance the research.

**References**


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Subject positions within addiction treatment

Daniel Sanin

Abstract
Contrary to the common notion of a neutral relationship of experts and patients in the field of drug therapy, this article explores the various ideological premises implicated herein. With the analytical approach of Critical Psychology and its concepts, the obstacles for a subject-to-subject relationship are outlined. The concept of “daily conduct of life” helps to understand the often opposing interests of the involved subjects in concrete situations, while the concept of “restrictive/generalized action potence” is needed to highlight the “conservative” and “progressive” moments in subject’s actions.

Keywords
Critical Psychology, drug help, drug therapy, addiction, addiction treatment, addiction therapy, subjectivity, science from the standpoint of the subject, action potence, daily conduct of life

Introduction
In the following, I will provide an analysis of conditions and significances of the drug help field according to Critical Psychology. Critical Psychology written with upper case refers to Marxist psychology as science of the subject as it was developed in Germany starting in the late 1960s. There are a few basic principles on which Critical Psychology is grounded. First, humans are fundamental societal beings. They reproduce themselves through society and its structures/significances. Therefore, the need of access to or control over one’s living conditions is a fundamental one. Every human action takes place within societal conditions and thus refers to societal structures/significances. Every human action is meaningful even if the meaning is not evident. There is no concept of irrationality within Critical Psychology. Science from the standpoint
of the subject implies that the subjects are co-researchers and at no point in the investigation objects of research. There is no interpretation of human actions without the concrete humans concerned.

In my paper, I do not report on a specific subject science research project, but, rather, provide a preliminary theoretical approximation to one. Here I will provide an analysis of the conditions and significances in the drug help field based on my local and professional knowledge and experience as a clinical psychologist, which could be the first step for a thorough subject science investigation.

**Medical model, psychologism, drug mythology**

In general, one could assume that subject positions within addiction treatment should not be much of a problem. On one side, we have the addicted subject in need of help and, on the other, the expert subject that tries to help the former.

My hypothesis stands in opposition to the above. I say that in the vast majority of cases there is a steep hierarchy within the field of addiction. The standard relationship within addiction aid is hence a subject-to-object one. The objects – the addicts – are the target of various interventions that aim to change them, heal them. If these objects are non-compliant with the interventions, they may be not ready yet or too sick/disturbed. Usually there is little or no discussion about the treatment and consequently no participation in the development or implementation of interventions. The experts – doctors, psychologists, therapists, social workers etc. stand within a “professional distance” to the patients or clients. The gap that is thus produced varies in width. In my experience, it is biggest with doctors in in-patient treatment facilities and smallest with social workers in harm reduction projects.

This problematic constellation between experts and patients has its roots in the fragmented medical approach, the psychological reductionism (psychologism), and the broader drug mythology. The first factor means that the vast majority of doctors usually treat symptoms, not persons. If I suffer from insomnia, I will get sleeping pills; if I’m depressed, I will get an antidepressant. The psychological, social, or biographical factors are mere optional ornaments, but not relevant for the treatment. The second factor is psychologism. With this term, I address the tendency of standard –or mainstream– psychology to neglect society, both as a factor of socialization (we grow into “our” society, it is the air we breathe, the water we swim in) and context (in which society do I live, what are the dominant cultural norms, who’s in power, what are the social strata/classes, the mechanisms of oppression, segregation, stigmatization,
labelling, and so on). The third element is drug mythology. The field of drugs, addiction, and therapy is profoundly ideologically distorted. The common beliefs such as: addiction is a brain disease (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: 3), drugs are dangerous and thus prohibited (Hart, 2013), drugs are the cause of addiction (Alexander, 2008), addiction is a lifelong disease, etc. may sometimes bear a grain of truth within, but are, in their central messages, severe distortions. Regardless of numerous scientific results that provide other – sometimes opposite results – these “mythological truths” remain hegemonic knowledge. A good example is provided by the US Surgeon General who, in his 2016 report repeats the ultimately unsustainable theory that addiction is a brain disease (Schumaker, 2016).

Bruce Alexander conducted a series of experiments (1988), known as the Rat Park Experiments, where he tried to “produce” addiction in rats who were placed not in the usual single cages, but in an expansive cage where they were together and could interact with each other, play, hide, etc. It was not possible to reproduce even one result of the single cage experiments. Even rats who got addicted in the single cage all but stopped with their addictive behavior when put in the park (where the drug was freely available).

In addition to the fact that there is no proof for chronic brain alteration in “addicts,” Alexander’s findings emphasize the utter importance of context in addictive dynamics.

Knowledge and power

The story of the Rat Park Experiments is also a good illustration of Kuhn’s theory of knowledge production (1970). In a nutshell, Kuhn points out that knowledge is not produced as a part of steady scientific progress where we come closer to truth step by step (as suggested by theorists such as Popper), but rather as fitting in a broader established body of knowledge shared by a dominant collective within a discipline. The state of the art proclaimed by this collective is challenged when another collective gains influence and power or when its representatives leave the field (by death or retirement). But when an individual tries to establish insights that contradict the dominant truths she will encounter difficulties in doing so. This may include even sanctions. In the case of Bruce Alexander, no main journal accepted his Rat Park paper. Furthermore, his university cut the funds for continuing his research (Slater, 2004: 154)

The Rat Park Experiments are still widely unknown, although Hari (2015) has made quite some efforts lately to change that with his successful and broadly received book.


**Restricted and generalized action potence**

The puzzling question is thus why some findings – although indisputable – are so fiercely fought against. The answer may lie in the degree of threat they are posing to the established body of knowledge and its concrete and practical structures.

In Critical Psychology, there is a central category, which in English is sometimes called agency or action potence (Tolman, 1994). Action potence refers to the fact that for humans as, first of all, societal beings it is crucial to have control over the means for the reproduction of their existence within the conduct of daily life. Daily life occurs not within genetic, hormonal, or other biological frameworks, but within complex societal contexts, with their rules, mechanism, tools, relationships and so on. I have to conduct and reproduce my life in direct or indirect cooperation with others. In such complex societies as the capitalist western ones, the cooperation sometimes disappears from our conscious perception and is also actively pulled out from direct reach. As a human, I have a choice of acting within the established rules or trying to change the rules, the framework. This abstract “dual possibility” of human action (Holzkamp, 1991: 50pp.) is concretized within capitalism into (1) restrictive action potence – which means securing my agency without touching the framework and hence contributing to the segregating, exploiting etc. status quo – and (2) generalized action potence: I act with the goal of changing the circumstances into more including or just ones.

Getting back to our Rat Park example, we can now understand Alexander’s experiments as a form of generalized action potence, an attempt to change the established framework. The circumstances of addicted behavior seemed to play a central role here. However, he had no – or not enough – supporters. His opponents on the other side saw their spheres of authority in danger and decided –consciously or unconsciously – to fight his research. Similarly, his superiors seemingly perceived their position in danger if they stood with their scholar, so they gave in to the pressure and sacrificed him for their own sake.

Restrictive and generalized action potence are just a tool to analyze a situation regarding to the practical circumstances that may favor some actions and disadvantage others. The specific reasons behind an action can only be guessed; alternatively, they have to be identified in collaboration with the person. Consequently, in Critical Psychology there are no interviewees, probands, participants etc., but co-researchers (cf. Tolman, 1994).
Action potency within drug treatment

What are the consequences for positions subjects are relegated in the context of addiction treatment? First of all, we have to look at the specific arrangement that is constitutive for the treatment center. In the following I base my analysis on my knowledge of the drug treatment system in Vienna, Austria.

As in many other places, Viennese drug facilities can be assigned to three categories: basic/low-level (harm reduction), mid-level (outpatient centers), and high-level (inpatient centers). Since all drug help institutions follow the medical model, there is a (sometimes implicit) professional hierarchy that places doctors at the top. In low-level institutions, the prevalent psycho-social professionals are social workers; in mid-level facilities, the number of psychologists and psychotherapists increases; and in high-level ones, it does so even more, although there are still some social workers. While in basic centers, classic harm reduction treatment prevails (syringe exchange, opiate substitution, etc.), in mid-level centers, there is also (pharmacological) psychiatric treatment.

The (implicit) hierarchy in mid- and high-level institutions, which places the medical element higher, has its roots in the medical model of addiction, in which the three objectifying factors mentioned above – the western medical approach, psychologism, and drug mythology – merge to different extents.

The medical superposition is backed by the standard classification systems of diseases, the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM), where physical withdrawal symptoms and out-of-control cravings are described as core symptoms of “dependence syndrome” (the “correct” term for “addiction”). The drug starts a dynamic that, at a certain point, gets very physical and seems to change something in the body. Nowadays even classical psychological disorders are phenomena of the body, they all are diseases of the brain, at least that is what biological psychiatry claims (although biological psychiatry is challenged more and more it is still hegemonic, alas). And since at the root of “addiction” lies a pharmacological agent – that involves psychological factors as well, but they’re not causal – this disease has to be treated with other pharmacological agents.

In the world of biological psychiatry and the medical model, “addiction” is also chronic. In the case of opioid dependency, substitution therapy is therefore the treatment of choice. The illegalized opioid (heroin, e.g.) is replaced by a legalized one (methadone, e.g.). Opioid substitution therapy has a whole range of beneficial effects – the user does not have to rely on the black market, the quality is guaranteed, one is regularly seen by doctors, and so on (Kermode et al., 2011) – but also a bunch of negative ones. In theory, on substitution therapy, one can conduct a “normal” life, but in reality, it’s not that easy. In Austria, if you’re
unemployed, you have to get your drug daily at the pharmacy. If you’re employed, you get it for the whole week. If you want to go on holidays, you have to discuss your plans with your doctor, who can give you a special vacation prescription. This prescription – like every other substitution receipt that is longer than three days – has to be approved by a public health officer. It happens regularly that the public health officer rejects take-home permits or holiday prescription. The substitution patient thus relies on three authorities: the prescribing doctor, the public health officer, and the pharmacist. Every element in this chain can interfere with the patient’s autonomy, and can compromise his/her integrity – for instance, by stigmatizing or discriminating behavior/attitudes. If a person has to get his/her substitution drug daily, the pharmacist has to make sure that the dosage is taken right away. Some take this duty very seriously and perform visual control of the mouth cavity. This control practice is carried out within the regular service hours and regardless of the presence of other customers. Many describe this practice as very unpleasant and humiliating (Tiapal & Sanin, 2016).

Since in the medical model “addiction” is an autonomous dynamic, the person cannot be trusted. One of the defining symptoms of “addiction” states that the substance becomes more and more important, so that, little by little, all other interests and duties are neglected. Another one says that the behavior is maintained even as the harm that it causes is evident. A person who is subject to such a dynamic will thus do everything to obtain the drug of choice: lie, cheat, blackmail, steal, threaten, etc. It is almost as if the person was possessed: it is “addiction” that speaks through her/him (Sanin 2015).

The helping professional now has the duty to act against the primary will of the person just to serve them better in the long run. Objectifying the person becomes functional for strengthening her/his subjectivity in the end. This self-understanding as a helping professional, who sometimes has to act against a person to serve her/him better in the end needs the distorting mechanisms of the medical model to function. Without them this fragile arrangement collapses and another possible reality becomes intelligible.

To elaborate on this hypothesis I shall operate in the following with the Critical Psychology concept of “conduct of life” (Bader & Weber, 2016).

“Conduct of life” in Critical Psychology

Since the evolutionary principle has been replaced by the historical-societal one as the core of processes of change or progress for humankind, it is not biological or genetic mechanisms, or basic learning schemes that shape human behavior,
but reasons. (I’ll get back to this.) Society is not an aggregate of individuals, as mainstream (social) psychology might suggest (if the term “society” is even used), but the foremost frame of reference. All of our thoughts and actions take place within a societal framework, with innumerable connections and cross-references. In Critical Psychology this complexity is analyzed with different concepts. A central point is that no action can be fully understood without societal references. All such explanations are either psychologisms or individualisms, with psychologism referring to the reduction of complex causes into the psyche with concepts such as personality, traits, genes, etc.; and individualism meaning that the societal ties are severed, which results in such ideas as “life is what you make of it,” “everyone is the architect of her_his fortune“ and so on. But Critical Psychology is also critical towards sociologism. This term targets approaches that aim to explain human behavior through conditions and circumstances. Individuals are not “produced” by their circumstances. This condition-grounded approach is opposed by Critical Psychology with a reason-centered one. Human behavior always has its reasons, even when the acting person isn’t aware of it herself. Reasons are thus not to be understood as conscious decisions but rather as a sometimes complex combination of feelings, perceptions, thoughts, both conscious and unconscious. These reasons can only be analyzed by the subject itself. Researchers, counsellors, etc. can help in this process, but in Critical Psychology the subject is a co-researcher, not a study object. The subject’s actions take place within her_his daily conduct of life. Within objective societal conditions, which are perceived not in their objectivity but as significance, the subject extracts some aspects as premises for her_his actions. Let me try to explain this better with an example: We live in a complex capitalist society run by the principles of representative democracy (objective condition). I may see this as the result of a historical process of struggles for power; another one sees this as the actual point of a natural progress of humankind; a third person interprets it as mere decadence and sees the ancient rural past as the peak of humanity, etc. (significance). In our society one has to work to get access – through money – to take part in “normal” social life. Which kind of career I choose – if I have the luxury to choose – depends again on my view of society and the part I can play in it. If I have a critical stance, maybe an anti-capitalist one, I may choose a career that aims to change something (ecology, e.g.) or tries to soothe the devastations produced by this system (social worker, psychologist, etc.). If I agree with the system and want to make money I might pursue a career in the financial field (premises).

This analytical scheme – conditions, significance, premises, action – can be applied to any human behavior/action. The specific human condition, the core difference to other species, is that humans shape their world completely. Humans
don’t have an “environment”, they have their own world, created by them. This fact tends to be forgotten and the perception of an environment can therefore emerge. Humans fully create their living conditions (as society). Therefore, the ability to control one’s own living conditions is a core need (Holzkamp, 1991: 58pp.).

With regard to action potence, this leads us to the concept of double possibility: with every action one can decide to (try to) change the conditions in which the action shall take place or leave them as they are. Under the general conditions of capitalist dominance, though, this double possibility becomes a lot trickier. The concept of restrictive/generalized action potence allows us to analyze human actions under “hostile” conditions. Humans can reproduce themselves only through cooperation. Western capitalist society is based on competition, however. Cooperation takes place only as long as it serves the goals of the participating subjects. At the moment when cooperation interferes with the individual goals it will be replaced with competition. Critical Psychology thus differentiates between intersubjective relationships, where the subject’s reasons are made transparent, and instrumental ones, where one’s reasons are kept hidden and the interactions with others are maintained only as long as it serves one’s purposes. Our society is hence characterized not by cooperation and solidarity, but competition and instrumentality. All the conditions and relationships I depend on can dissolve or be withdrawn. So, every time I want to change something about the conditions, I have to fear losing the partial control I had in the first place. If, for example, I want to change something at work, and this change could possibly interfere with the interests of my employer, I may lose my job. So, to keep the partial and restricted control given to me, I may act according to the declared or assumed rules of the employer. This kind of action is classified as restrictive action potence, since I try only to secure my own (partial and conceded) access to the conditions in which I’m placing my actions, even at the cost of oppressing others. Generalized action potence, on the other hand, would apply to an action that aims to more (collective) control over conditions and is beneficial for me and others as well. Our daily conduct of life consists of innumerable actions of varying complexity. Since our whole existence is societally mediated, every thought, emotion, or action involves societal categories and concepts, of which we are usually unaware. In the case of a concrete problem, a difficult decision I have to make, e.g., the involvement of concepts and structures becomes more apparent. In the case of restrictive action potence, I act against my own higher interests: I reproduce the conditions of exploitation and oppression. I may profit from such a situation for a certain amount of time, but it is always possible that the degree of control I have over a situation and the conditions diminishes or vanishes. It would be in my very
interest to conduct my daily life under conditions of which I am – together with others – a direct participant/contributor. My self-enmity in restricted action potency becomes unconscious, since I cannot consciously act against my interests.

“Conduct of daily life” in the drug treatment field

Let us now explore two models of conduct of life, one of an addict searching help in a drug counselling center, and the other of a counsellor working there. I’ll pick some typical details of the clients I work with: male, unemployed, without final degrees, living off welfare, in opioid substitution treatment, drug use patterns oscillating between stable and polytoxic (using various substances simultaneously). A typical day consists of getting up early (many suffer from sleep disorders) and getting ready for the pharmacy, where they get their daily dose of substitution. Maybe they take their dog for a walk before they have to leave. Many have dogs or cats, and those are often the dearest relationship to them. After the pharmacy, if they don’t have an errand to run (work agency, doctor, social service or the like) they go home and watch TV. Sometimes, in the afternoon, they meet friends, who are mostly also in the substitution program. Often they smoke hemp together. It is to some extent quite a dull life, from which they suffer themselves. On the other hand, they see – quite realistically – not many options for a change. We are dealing with vulnerable, fragile subjects here, with a sometimes terribly troubled past, prison experience, experience of neglect, abuse, exploitation, and, maybe most of all, stigma. Society wants them to integrate themselves into “normal” lives and, at the same time, offers almost no possibility for achieving this goal.

So, this prototypic person I’m thinking of here just tries to get along. Often they are quite isolated because they try to avoid “the scene” or other people who consume wildly, and many times most of the old friends are dead. Since they have a lot of experience in being rejected and stigmatized, also in their daily errands (at the general practitioner, the pharmacy, offices, etc.), they try to lead quiet lives. This approach keeps them out of trouble most of the time, but at the price of loneliness, emptiness, and boredom. The only peaks may be a bit of weed, some alcohol, or sometimes an extra dose of the substitution drug. This fragile routine is highly dependend on the “cooperation” of others. Since the general attitude towards addicts is defined by skepticism, caution, and suspicion, this routine is in constant danger: the medical officer wants to change the take-home arrangement, the prescribing doctor doesn’t want to prescribe the usual dosage any longer, the work agency case manager assigns a useless course, etc.
Any change in the conditions of this daily conduct of life is highly threatening for the subject and he will try whatever possible to prevent changes to her disadvantage, including omitting information, lying, cheating, being aggressive, threatening, and the like. From the perspective of the subject, these behaviors make perfect sense: they are measures to keep restricted control over the conduct of daily life, if necessary against the interests of others.

These ‘others,’ in our example, would be the drug center professionals. To examine a prototypic conduct of life here, we first need to look at the logic of drug help facilities and institutions in society. The “drug problem” is in its core a moral issue. It is not about harmful substances, it is not about a “disease” called addiction, it is about class and lifestyle, it’s about the dispositif (Agamben, 2009) that defines, monitors, and regulates what is good, acceptable, etc. Blaming the destructives sides of certain addicted lifestyles to personality traits or drugs is a scapegoating strategy. With dispositif I mean – following Foucault – a complex of ideas, institutions, and individual practice that defines and handles certain topics. In the case of drugs the ideas are prescriptive: drugs are illegal because they are dangerous; citizens need to be protected from them; in the case of illegal drug use, users must be assessed if they have criminal motives or are driven by sickness (addiction); children, youth, and adults need to learn that drugs are dangerous; sick individuals must have treatment, and so on. The corresponding institutions are thus drug laws, special police units, school prevention programs, public campaigns, drug help facilities, etc.

This dispositif shapes the reality of the subjects. All pieces fit into each other and make the material world manageable and provide sense and meaning (but only as long as it is not questioned). If I’m conducting my daily life within and according to the dispositif, the roles are clear: on one side, there are the (addicted) drug users (I can see them as deviant, sick, victims etc.) that need interventions (help, corrections, assistance, support, therapy, medication), and on the other, there are the professionals (doctors, psychologists, social workers) who have an objective and science-based view of the problem, who can identify the problems and best interventions, and who try to nudge the former to embrace what (I say) is best for them. If I identify more with a humanistic approach, I may emphasize more the victim side of the biography and may try to involve the other in decisions about interventions. But even a humanistic approach just reproduces the societal problems if these are not reflected (cf. Sanin, 2016).

I will now draw a prototypic conduct of life of a drug help professional, again a mixture of personal experience and personal observations. I have gone through a long educational career, studied medicine, clinical psychology, or clinical social work, have specialized maybe in psychotherapy, psychiatry, or the like. If I’m a psychologist or social worker, I may be happy to have an
(underpaid, but) decent job. (As a doctor the pressure of keeping a job by all means is less. In my education and practice, I learned how to identify and classify certain behaviors/problems and how they should be dealt with. My work provides certain instruments I should use and some duties I have to fulfill (questionnaires for specific data, e.g.). My work also provides me with a professional role and corresponding “rules of conduct” (cf. Bourdieu, 1987): what is professional/unprofessional (emotional distance, clinical glance, etc.). My work also gives me a position within society (doctor, psychologist), maybe even with some prestige, and it provides me with money (for selling my workforce), so I can participate in capitalist society (buy, own, consume). All these aspects arrange my reality, put things and people in their places, and provide (restricted) control over my living conditions. Since I try to fit in the general order – although I might aspire to change something in my direct environment, like working hours, precise duties, target groups, procedures, e.g. – I automatically reproduce the bigger structural inequalities. My workplace relies on specific drug laws, on the medical model that assigns certain individuals to treatment, and on societal mechanisms of sanctions and stigmatization.

My actions and routines are also woven into the whole of actions and routines of my colleagues. I follow rules and protocols. Only within this framework can I find or conquer individual “freedom,” develop “my style” in doing what has to be done. I also have to develop and maintain my position with regard to my colleagues in a mixture of cooperation and competition.

The interaction with clients/patients should run smoothly as long as their interests don’t interfere with mine. But when they do so, I’m confronted with the “double possibility” of human agency: do I change the conditions of the situation I’m in or do I just act within them? The likelihood of choosing the first option is influenced by my own motivation (“Why should I do it?”) and the possible risks I face by changing the conditions (troubles with my co-workers, boss, the law, my reputation, etc.). So, if I opt for the restrictive option and hence act according to the established rules and within the conceded framework, I simultaneously opt against the interests of the other, in this case the client. In failing to address (and attempting to change) the unjust structures I abstain from trying to improve my own conditions, too, thus I am acting against my greater interests. This self-enmity is suppressed and made unconscious.

The failure to address the other’s interests is usually attributed to general norms or laws (“I’m sorry, my hands are tied”) or directly to the client (“s_he’s too unstable for a take-home prescription,” “s_he’s not trustworthy enough for medication switch,” “s_he’s too unrealistic to be assigned for reduction treatment,” etc.). Often these judgments about the other’s realism may even be justified or accurate, nonetheless, I’m directly interfering in the other’s daily
conduct of life in negating her_his needs in this moment. With the view of oneself as the healthy professional and the other as the sick client, I’m also occulting the underlying structures of power. In the concrete societal situation, I’m actively participating in putting the addicted person in his_her place. The person’s structural dependence is seen as necessary part of the relationship health professional–sick person. As long as the broader societal framework (conditions and significance) remains unquestioned and unaddressed, it seems “natural” or “inherently logical” to explain or justify actions with “professional standards” or the “patient’s condition.”

Concluding thoughts

The conditions “suggest” or “impose” certain actions, thoughts, or logic and “disadvantage” or even “penalize” others. The conditions as basis for human actions (mediated through significances, premises, and reasons) are naturalized and often simply neglected or “forgotten.” The actions of individuals hence appear not grounded within societal significances, but as expressions of “personality,” “traits,” “disorder,” “illness,” “disability,” etc.

This individualization has to be addressed, analyzed, and reconstructed to facilitate a subject-to-subject relationship in an intersubjective mode, thus transcending the instrumentality that characterizes the vast majority of interactions in our competitive and individualistic society. But before, and most of all, we have to reflect on our own involvement in the dominant structures and our benefit from it. We must investigate against our mechanisms of repression, since we have to deny our involvement in and complicity with the interests of the ruling class, and hence our self-enmity in acting against our own broader interests.

Bibliography


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Self-education between everyday conduct of life and biographical sense

Konstanze Wetzel

Abstract
In public debates on education the term “education” is often associated with school education, which due to episodically recurring debates on the results of international pupil’s performance comparison studies as for example “Programme for International Student Assessment” (PISA), “Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study” (TIMSS), is not surprising. However, the reduction of education to abstract learning processes due to the one-sided scientific orientation of the school curriculum is not uncommon. Furthermore, the term education is in part generally rejected with regard to the so-called “idealistic” tradition of “classical” German educational theories or their supposed deployment as an elitist instrument of power. In contrast it is assumed here, in the sense of a verifiable and revisable perception, that education a) refers to people, persons, individuals, subjects, the self – obviously in a societal context; resulting in the context of a twofold story: the individual-biographical history and the societal-epochal history; b) and that it has something to do with “developmental fact” (Bernfeld), that is, how the specific human potential of personal ability to act, reflect, experience and enjoy, results gradually in the perspective of responsible, or emancipated economical, governmental and cultural citizens. How this can be done is dealt with in three aspects, which I consider to be of exemplary importance for a critical social work: (1) Education and corporeality: self-education as an emancipatory sensuality; (2) life management in the area of conflict between generalized and restrictive capacity for action; (3) education and biography: sense - education.

Keywords
biographic sense-draft, everyday conduct of life, existential education, psychosocial conflicts, sense-education, self-education

1 This is a translation of my publication from 2015.
Introductory remarks

In public debates on education the term “education” is often associated with school education, which due to episodically recurring debates on the results of international pupil’s performance comparison studies as for example “Programme for International Student Assessment” (PISA), “Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study” (TIMSS), is not surprising. However, the reduction of education to abstract learning processes due to the one-sided scientific orientation of the school curriculum is not uncommon. Furthermore, the term education is in part generally rejected with regard to the so-called “idealistic” tradition of “classical” German educational theories or their supposed deployment as an elitist instrument of power.

In contrast it is assumed here, in the sense of a verifiable and revisable perception, that education

a) refers to people, persons, individuals, subjects, the self – obviously in a societal context; resulting in the context of a twofold story: the individual-biographical history and the societal-epochal history;

b) and that it has something to do with “developmental fact” (Bernfeld), that is, how the specific human potential of personal ability to act, reflect, experience and enjoy, results gradually in the perspective of responsible, or emancipated economical, governmental and cultural citizens (see Klafki/Braun 2007 chapt.: 7.2, Klafki 1996, 49 et seq.). How this can be done is dealt with in three aspects, which I consider to be of exemplary importance for a critical social work:

1. Education and corporeality: self-education as an emancipatory sensuality; (2) life management in the area of conflict between generalised and restrictive capacity for action; (3) education and biography: sense - education.²

1. Education and corporeality: self-education as an emancipatory sensuality

Firstly, I would like to classify the self-education concept within the approaches to life surroundings³, as it was historically developed in the context of the

² In doing so, some argumentation of Braun/Wetzel (2011: Chap. 2) are included and furthered, deepened or supplemented.

³ Another theoretical historical context results from the relationship between the concepts of the “self” and those of “education” in the context of classical German philosophy (and pedagogy) as they had evolved between 1770 and 1830 (see Taylor
phenomenological philosophy of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Husserl understood it as an alternative to the predominantly technocratic and instrumental self-conception of modern (European) sciences. He criticized their single-minded orientation towards the scientific, in particular the common self-conception and the associated irreconcilable distance to the everyday life experiences of the people, which ultimately resulted in the elimination of the subject from the field of research in modern science.

“Merely fact-minded sciences make merely fact-minded people.” (Husserl 1992: §2: 4) This represented the abandonment of questioning the meaning or meaninglessness of the whole human existence. Husserl saw this as one of the causes of the enforcement of German and international fascism and the destruction of European culture and its humanistic traditions (see. Husserl 1992, §§ 8-13).

This critical temporal diagnostic component has often gone unnoticed in the reception of transcendental phenomenology and its life-world approach. More seriously is the fact that an integral part of this life-world approach, that of corporeality (cf. ib., §§§ 28, 47, 60 and 62), has largely been disregarded. This is all the more astonishing, as the subject of this approach is particularly clear. For corporeality is, so to speak, the mediating medium between the physicality and the sociality of man and his lifestyles. 4

We understand corporeality to mean the psychophysical constitution and the behavioral potential found within the human being (brain/nervous system, skeleton/muscles, organs/tissue, skin/sense organs, digestive system and gnomic information), as they have evolved in historical anthropogenesis through the successive transformation of the faunal organism-environment context to the specifically socio-historical human-world context (cf. Rittelmeyer 2002, Chap. 1 and 4 - 6, Schurig 2011: 114 et seq. and Chap. 2.2).

This insight is not fundamentally new, as in the context of experiential pedagogy, this connection has been thematised in many ways. Surprisingly however, these debates have so far only influenced life-orientated social work in a very limited way. For this reason, here are some concise considerations:

Experiences are first to be understood as a direct sensory reference to the world of events. Thereby the sensory reference to the world of events is twofold

a) Experiences as a sensory perception of objective reality.

b) Experiences as spontaneous, emotional assessments of aspects of reality.

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4 Compared to the pedagogical relevance of the concept of corporeality Meyer-Drawe (2001) and Rittelmeyer (2002), a reference should also be made to the articles in Bilstein/Brumlik (2013), even if the concept of the “body” there was favored, but which show a high level of overlap with the corporeality used in my sense.
N.B. a) Sensory perception is the medium of our immediate contact with reality. With it I enter into a relationship with nature and society and myself, as a child and adolescent, but also as an adult and older person. Thus, for example, I perceive the rising and falling noise level during a football game, or I can see how my perception of space changes when scaling a climbing wall.

These senses, tracing back to the sensitivity of the sense organs, are always directed towards a significant division of the world and self, according to my location and my perspective, I perceive its figuration and its outlines, and at the same time spontaneously produce references (e.g. between the nature of a white water and the characteristics of a mountain range). In this respect, our orientation is holistic – without our being conscious of it or making a conscious effort to achieve it. Thus, all immediately relevant aspects are perceived in their reciprocal references (if, for example, I cross a canyon on a rope bridge).

The difference between sensuousness and reflexivity as the key dynamics of an emancipatory sensuousness is therefore never absolute, because it always depends on the knowledge of what I perceive (e.g. I observe interpersonal conflicts in a youth center differently if I know something about gender-specific socialization processes and forms of communication). However, perception and cognition are never identical: I cannot explain certain perceptions at first, they challenge my thinking (e.g. if I observe a solar eclipse for the first time); and conversely, I can anticipate perceptions in the cognitive imagination, before I actually do so in the context of events (e.g. I imagine the sound of music of which I only so far know the musical score).

N.B. b) In every perceptual process, spontaneous evaluations are a measure of our needs and our currently dominant emotional condition (e.g. what I find “cool” within a youth group and what I find “absolutely lousy”). At the same time, our immediate, emotional relation to reality creates our sensuous-vital needs, simply by the necessary need of bodily self-preservation to overcome certain conditions of deficiency. Thus, for example, hunger can be satisfied by a snack in a mountain hut, or by an 8-course menu at Siebeck’s, thirst quenched by pure spring water or by a Rothschild wine vintage 1975, the need for protection against extreme heat or cold by a bunk in an old barge or a fully air-conditioned suite on a cruise ship, etc. In deliberate contrast to my everyday life, I can choose specific deficit or luxury situations – within the possibilities/limits of my own

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5 This relationship was controversially discussed in phenomenology from the outset: while Merleau-Ponty (e.g. 2003: 28ff) radically assumed a priority of perception against thought – in the tradition of Kant, Cassirer advocated the contrary thesis of the perception through the concept (cf. the discussions between Cassirer and Husserl Möckel 1998: §12); in contrast, Husserl (1992: §§ 25-3. and 56) adopted a “middle” position – in direct confrontation with Kant.
specific material, social, cultural situation, in order to satisfy my needs and not just an extraordinary experience, but building on this to experience something special.

Contrary to some misinterpretation, luxury also has experience potential, because the good life is not identical with that which is bare (it is, for example, both a luxury and a lifetime experience for children from a “district with special development needs” to fly with a glider or airplane during their summer camp). The opposite of luxury is not poverty, but the common (Coco Chanel).

Vitality, of course, includes sexual needs as a specific moment of interpersonal closeness, familiarity and intimacy, and so a truly emancipatory, in some ways “complete” sensuousness. This insight is often not acknowledged and given the importance it deserves in experiential pedagogy, and also within the profession and discipline of social work.

2. Life management in the field of conflict between generalized and restrictive capacity for action

The idea of emancipatory sensuousness also contains a normative perspective, which can only be fractionally implemented under the conditions of domination and class. I would like to outline here which psychodynamic constellations are thus relevant for life-orientated social work.

2.1. Psychosocial conflicts and ways of dealing with them: psychodynamic processing vs. defense

People do not react to everyday experiences with the same feelings, stimuli, attitudes, expectations, opinions, findings, etc. towards the same conditions (e.g. unemployment of parents, poverty), (as an example: some feel sympathy, others are encouraged to better school performance, others are “cranky” towards their

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6 Cf. subject-scientific reasoning of the conceptual pair generalized vs. restrictive action capacity and its differentiation conception vs. interpretation, “internalized force” vs. inwardness, Holzkamp 1993: Chap. 7.5, cf. on the general meaning of the critical psychological inter-subjectivity concept for (life-orientated) social work, Braun (2012).

7 Cf. here detailed Holzkamp-Osterkamp (1976: Chap. 4.3. "The nature and origin of motivated and forced life of man", as well as Chap. 5.5. “Reinterpretation of the Freudian concept of the ‘super-ego’ and the identification by the development of the critical-psychological conflict mode: infantile socialization as a process of transformation and defense”), cf. the meaning of this psychosocial conflict model for social-pedagogical action – subsequent to the understanding-concept of Dilthey - Braun/Braun/Gekeler/Wetzel (1989: Chap.2.2).
parents, because they cannot provide them with enough, etc.). Social conditions as such, do not say anything about the psychological processing by the children and adolescents as well as their parents, friends, etc. At the same time, however, their attitudes, expectations, and moods are also not independent of these conditions and thus the chances of social inclusion.

The connection between material and social conditions and the mental state is therefore neither clear nor arbitrary. Rather, it is about analyzing these complex and contradictory interrelationships and making them the guidelines for pedagogic learning and support processes.

First of all, it is necessary to understand the internal, mental processes as a more or less accurate interpretations of the outer, social milieu. They say something about the practical relationship of people towards these conditions, which aspects seem important and beneficial, and which they experience as restrictive and causing anxiety. This subjective-scientific approach is objected to, even today, in parts of the field of social work, the objection being that children and adolescents cannot adequately estimate their emotional condition or the range of their subjective interpretation, and would thus, more or less, need professional help to be socially included. Since this is in their own interest, even if they cannot yet see this at their current stage of development (e.g. in relation to certain requirements of scholastic teaching content and performance assessment procedures). It is already a logical contradiction that one wants to force a person into something that is supposed to be in their own interest – and of course the suspicion arises, that this form of social constraint results in the opposite effect, namely social exclusion, which is concealed by superficial and ostensible adaption processes in certain cases (e.g. striving for improvement in scholastic learning culture, is sometimes replaced by a mere “checking off” of performance requirements).

This basically authoritative, sometimes also openly authoritarian approach cannot be sustained even from the perspective of general psychology or anthropology. After all, children and adolescents are, like all humans, first of all “aimed for society”, they turn to this society voluntarily, want to know what is happening in it, why it happens and what this means for them (e.g. where and why are there wars, which people are rich, and which poor, and why are there such differences?).

The less children and adolescents grow up in a sheltered space, the more they are confronted with ecological and social problems, even catastrophes – whether through the mass media, or through the stories of others, or even through their own concern (e.g. the increasing social indifference in our society). In such cases, general psychological conflicts arise: as a child or adolescent, I turn towards society, which I am curious about, which I want to influence, because I
depend on it. At the same time, I realize that such an influence is very difficult, that many events that I hear, see or experience, frighten me because I feel threatened by them, and at the same time I only have little hope that the causes of anxiety (e.g. the extreme work stress of my parents that they and I suffer from) can be alleviated any time soon, or can be overcome. In this respect anxiety is not somehow “irrational”, but the true negative emotional assessment of a life circumstance and situation, in which I feel or know I am objectively threatened.

The psychical development thus always unfolds in the polar tension between joy and fear, between confidence and suffering, between hope and despair. In other words, social inclusion within the conditions of a pluralized class society is not an easy, smooth process, but is confronted with numerous obstacles. Thus, this results in psychological conflict dynamics with the following alternative constellation:

On the one hand, I know what I would like to be and to have, what I would like to do, what is important for me, and I also know some ways that I can achieve this (e.g. how I can enjoy school lessons more, how I can improve my performance and so can perhaps fulfill my wish to learn a certain profession – like a pilot or designer – and later get a job). On the other hand, I know from my own experience and that of others that the realization of my interests and needs is difficult, and will be confronted by many obstacles (e.g. that ways to improve the atmosphere when learning in school are full of conflict, that they may meet the resistance of certain teachers who then “have it in for me”, that training places on offer are rather confusing, and the future of the labor market is quite unpredictable).

These obstacles thus threaten my developing needs and anxiety arises. In the state of anxiety, however, I am quite incapable of acting or deciding and feel blocked. When faced with these difficulties and in order to remain socially included, I am confronted with the alternative of either sticking to my developmental needs and expectations of happiness and keep looking – despite failure – for new ways to implement and reach them in spite of all obvious and hidden obstacles; or, this is all too much for me, too difficult, too dangerous, too exhausting and I quite voluntarily give up. I then look for goals that are not so demanding, that are simpler, reachable with less conflict, I “make do” with less, become “modest” and “realistic”, so that I do not end up ultimately empty-handed – and console myself precisely in order to justify my lack of commitment to my own interests and needs, to myself and others – why I therefore prefer the many “small solutions” to the one “big solutions” (Andersch).

In this context, the following facts are of particular importance: it is part of the essence of childhood and adolescence to be particularly dependent on adults and their world, to be in need of their protection and support in order to
increasingly relativize this dependency, and finally abolish it. The interactional relationship between children and their parents, between pupils and their teachers, between the members and the (older) leaders of a youth group in an organization or club, etc., form a development framework that must be appropriate for their individual interests, needs, competences and readiness. And which must constantly change, so that the adolescents can finally become fully-fledged responsible, economic, and cultural citizens.

This, however, is opposed by diverse resistances - conveyed in a societal-structural and institutional way – by various groups of adults. Thus, in an authoritarian parental home a girl especially is constantly burdened by being called on extensively to do housework, and so she not only neglects her school work, but also her friendships and becomes increasingly socially isolated, and as a consequence feels misunderstood, not taken seriously, and lonely. At the same time, she loves her parents, even though they overhear and ignore her “complaints”. So, the girl faces the difficult psychological alternative of either insisting on increasing independence and so risk losing the emotional affection of her parents and perhaps be perceived as an “ungrateful daughter”. This triggers anxiety. She can then, however, also look for friends of the same age and/or adults, who are understanding towards her growing requirements, who support her emotionally and provide an emotional cushion, comfort and encourage her to remain true to herself. Or, the girl forgoes these wishes for greater independence and increased social inclusion, tries to adapt herself to the existing interactive development frame, to relativize her own needs and interests (“This is not so important to me”) and to give in, in order to minimize conflict, to “soft-pedal”, because otherwise she must realistically fear that her situation may become more stressful and possibly unbearable. Here, it would be necessary to ask if the empirically frequently established sociality of girls is not the expression and result of such restrictive adaption processes.

In the first case, we talk about conflict processing, because the conflict in its severity is cognitively and emotionally perceived, individual interests and needs and their justification are further acknowledged, and ways are sought for their demanding and realistic realization. The opposite of this can be found in the second case, conflict resistance: here I give in; I deny my requirements and perspectives even though they are really important to me. And, at the same time, I make an attempt to persuade myself and others into believing that it is much better for me this way, and that “you have to be realistic and forget your childhood dreams”, etc. In this case, it is quite clear to me as the person affected that I do not believe this justification myself, it is only an excuse, I only want to comfort myself, but in reality, it is a lie. It is exactly this psychological state of uncertainty that cannot be maintained for a longer period. It leads to a clear
limitation of the ability to act, to reflect, to be ready and able to enjoy, and leads to psychosocial insecurity becoming dominant.

Therefore, as an additional alternative constellation, the possibility arises that I am either more aligned to my acknowledged needs and looking for new ways of realizing them; or, I tighten the process of resistance and after a certain time no longer am aware or conscious of what I originally wanted, why I did not deal with this conflict and why I withdrew.

This transition from the preconscious to the unconscious psychological conflict of my everyday life and biography involves not only the systematic suppression of my former interests and needs, but also the psychological suffering about the fact that I have now abandoned a higher level of self-determination and social inclusion. In this context, to talk about psychodynamic conflict defense makes sense, because it “goes deeper”, and at the same time is not external to the person concerned, although they know little about this. The particular difficulty and challenge of processing a pedagogical – dialogical problem, results from the fact that these unconscious processes are something like psychological processes of “another”, a “third person” within me. These are the psychodynamics of the self-alienation processes. This also results in the development tension that the affected people, the children and adolescents, can only know themselves which problems they actually have, but they themselves do not (sufficiently) know, because otherwise these problems would lack such severity.

The authoritarian tendency of some pedagogues to act in an interventional way instead of dialogically, because of allegedly “better knowledge” or because of supposed “life experience” or even because they have the authority to do so, can also always be interpreted as an escape from this challenge to a deeper understanding of the psychodynamics of socially induced suffering. In this sense, Burkhard Müller characterized the “black pedagogy” as an expression and result of uncontrolled closeness in the pedagogic context (cf. Müller, 2006. 143).

3. Education and biography: sense-education

3.1 Everyday conduct of life in the field of tension between everyday routine and “real life”

The living environment is at first centered on everyday life, and this is the foundation of world and self-reference of the subjects; at the same time, the self-socialization process always contains more or less developed forms of self- and world - drafts. This tension between reference and view constitutes the core of
Sense education and thus personal social integration for the following reasons (cf. also Braun, 2003):

- It has already been intensively referred to by Husserl (1992: §§ 28f and 34) that the life surroundings of the subject are self-evident; however, this unquestioned intimacy is a secondary naturalness, because it is based on a complex subjective work of construction. Everyday life particularly requires,
  - that the diversity and inconsistency of societal requirements (e.g. of work, family and school) “bring about” a cyclical recurring everyday life and therefore build correlating structures of relevance (“What is important?”) and develop time budgets (“How much time do I need for this?”).
  - This also needs a corresponding level of coordination of people with whom I share my everyday life (e.g. parents, siblings, and friends) and a group identity based thereon.
  - All this is to be consolidated into practical routines and intersubjective obligations that become more and more natural, but at the same time reproduce collective forms of life (social problems always occur at this level when complex coordination efforts [cannot] be – sufficiently – performed anymore).
  - The uniformity of everyday life indeed relieves the need for permanent decision-making, but also creates the feeling of boredom (“Is that all?”) and its timelessness is broken by the limitation of individual life by death. To the extent that the irresolvable tension of world time and life time (cf. Blumenberg 2001: 86 et seq. and 257et seq.) is cognitively experienced and emotionally admitted to, the actual search for sense as an open educational process and transcendence of the ordinariness of the life surroundings begins. This means on the other hand, that social problems (can) also arise, that people are so busy coming to grips with their everyday life, that they (apparently) cannot afford the “luxury” of essential questions, and thus are in danger of “becoming hollow on the inside” and therefore possibly susceptible to being manipulated (e.g. by consumerism as a replacement for sense or esoteric tendency or right-wing populist interpretations and movements).
- Individuals can in fact not leave their own everyday life, but they can exceed the range of its interpretation and the interaction zone of its pattern of behavior by placing themselves in a conscious relationship to this
everyday dimension of the world of life, learning to question the secondary naturalness step by step, and so becoming increasingly conscious of the necessity of the cognitive and emotional - motivational *justification* of their own actions (Husserl 1992: §§ 38, 40 and 49).

In this way, they gradually establish their own biographical life plan, which at the same time interlocks the individual biography with the collective life forms and establishes relations to the overlapping structures of the objective world and so to the time of the world. – Or, in other words: the living environment is characterized by its *half-transcendence*, in which everyday life (in the sense of a naive “normality”) superimposes with the normativity of a more successful life in a just society.

For this reason, sense-education as the core of social inclusion is a *two-sided process* of personal and collective development and learning, through which the self- and world-consciousness expand; in this respect, the living environment is closed *and* open, obvious *and* dubious and its rationality is measured by the extent to which it suggests and supports a post-traditional self-identity. – Social problems arise, if these sense plans are either removed from social and personal reality, become hardened and dogmatic, thus making people insecure and helpless in the face of the dynamic of social change (although they should promote the exact opposite, namely orientation safety and decision making ability); or if the patterns of personal action become increasingly random and arbitrary, and people try to adapt in an opportunistic way to a wide range of systematic and life-world requirements and expectations, and are still able to maintain a balance of capacity for action and the joy of life.

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8 Cf. Habermas (1988; 190 et seq.197 and 205 et seq.), in terms of the “internal context between structures of the living surroundings and structures of the linguistic image of the world…, language and the cultural heritage take, in a certain way, a transcendental position against all that can become part of a situation. Language and culture neither agree with the formal cosmic concepts with which all communication participants define their situation together, nor do they appear as something internalized. Language and culture are as such constitutive for the living surroundings. Neither do they build one of the formal worlds, which the communication participants assign parts of situations, nor do they meet as something in the objective, social or even subjective world. The communication participants move by acting out or understanding language use so much within their language that they cannot bring a current utterance as something intersubjective before them in a way as they would experience an incident as they would meet a behavioral expectation as something normative or a wish, would experience or categorize a feeling as something subjective. The medium of communication remains in a strange half transcendence.” (Habermas 1988:190)
3.2 Existential education: the search for the sense of being human and for one’s own life

The increasing self-evident nature of everyday behavior causes the real illusion of timelessness, of the “keep it up” and so also of one’s own “immortality”. However, at the latest stage in the transition from childhood to adolescence the tension between everyday routine and the biographical claim to the realization of “real life” (classical: the claim to happiness) comes fully to bear:

“From the character of everyday cyclical as a vehicle of elementary life security, it is clear that everyday life cannot be the whole life for me. Although it is the basis for everything else, through it my existential anxiety is repressed, in other words it has got my back: The ‘real’ - productivity, intoxication, happiness, sense fulfillment, joint struggle - is, however, perhaps somehow in its creases, but quasi vertical to the cyclicity of the way of life: in this way, the everyday troubles of that which is always the same are bearable, indeed, they are pushed to the edge by the consciously filling breadth of ‘real life’. This may be a dynamic in the direction of the real transgression of everyday life, defiance of its regulations, ignoring its daily requirements – with the risk of perhaps not finding the way ‘back’ again and so losing the elementary basis from which the ‘real’ can yet grow. On the other hand, the monotony of ‘everyday drabness’ (…) can for me consciously gain breadth, and so the resigned to despairing question imposes itself on me, why, what should I get up for every morning, because (…) life is really only a ‘burden’ for me.” (Holzkamp 1995: 845)

This charged relationship can intensify in the phase of adolescence when I learn biographically about the temporal limitation of my existence and thematize my own mortality. Thus, I become aware of the fact that not only the “human as such” is mortal, but that I, in my own unique existence will die, and that with my death my personal microcosm will cease to exist. As a result, the cognitive and emotional challenge results in treating my lifetime in a meaningful, reasonable, conscious way. In other words: everyday life with its synchronicity and cyclicity is almost timeless, it is reliable because nothing crucial changes and so it relieves me of a constant pressure to make decisions (e.g. I don’t have to decide every morning if or when I get up, if and what I eat for breakfast, if and when I go to school). To this extent, it is timeless – and yet this timelessness is a real semblance, because it conceals not only the subjacent societal and social changes that also refer to my everyday life (e.g. new requirements in school or new educational pathways after school), but also that with my death my everyday life simply expires. Individual death is a significant challenge, it is a, if not “the”, central source of meaning, for nothing is more boring, more “deadly”, than immortality. Because then I could do everything at any time, I would never miss
anything, I could always make up for it (e.g. start a relationship, learn a new profession, emigrate, move back home, etc.). This would also abolish the spatial-temporal integration of everyday life as well as the view of one’s self and the world.

In summary, I would like to conclude:

Self-education and learning processes are realized within the field of tension of mental-linguistic, bodily and personal-biographic situatedness. Education takes place in the context of the individual biography – always as a penetration of the overall social interdependence of my individual life and livelihood – in the field of tension of the past, the present and the future, whereby the present is perceived in the field of tension of biographical past and future, of experiences and expectations, and the past as the future past, and the future as the future past. This biographical situatedness demonstrates the necessity of developing personal relevance structures with regard to the educational and learning processes to be subjectively pursued on the basis of subjective decisions. (Cf. Holzkamp 1993:263 et seq.).

The inter-subjectivity or reciprocity of such an understanding of education is inherent, and this is a thoroughly social concept:

“It is only through the personal situatedness of others – by being the other for the others, we recognize each other as subjects, whose principles of action are fundamentally mutual to each other – also my situatedness is that of this particular individual, in the way in which “I stand here”. From this perspective, personal situatedness is, precisely because in this case my own condition in the world is brought into the concept in its possibilities/limits – because the mutual constitution of my world – and self-experience by which the other is compulsorily included – a genuine social concept.” (Holzkamp 1993: 264)

Bibliography


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Mindfulness and the psychodynamics in high-reliability-organizations: Critical-psychological considerations for a research on high-tech work

Ines Langemeyer

Abstract
High reliability can be seen as a quality of collective and collaborative work activities which ensure that damages and disasters are avoided. Especially dealing with advanced technologies – like infrastructures of energy or medical supply or information processing – require high reliability since damage can be extensive. According to research conducted by Karl Weick and Kathleen Sutcliffe, this particular quality of ‘high reliability’ at work emerges from collaborative activities and dynamics in teams. It is called ‘mindfulness’ which indicates that workers are prepared to notice relevant changes in complex processes and to anticipate risk that will need intervention. However, explanations of mindfulness often refer to the individual mind only. The teams’ capacity to collaborate intellectually remains the question. The theoretical problem consists in determining the relationship between the organizational and the individual plane of development. Therefore, a model to understand the psychodynamics of mindfulness in cooperation is presented and explained in view of the scientification of work. Against this background, societal problems of collaboration within competitive occupational systems or alienated forms of work are revisited.

Keywords
mindfulness, high reliability organizations, cooperative competence, scientification of work, action research, activity theory
1. Introduction: Mindfulness as a topic of Critical Psychology

High reliability can be seen as a particular quality of collective and collaborative work activities which ensure that damages and disasters are avoided. It is especially necessary in using advanced technologies for energy, medical supply or digital infrastructures. According to research conducted by Karl Weick and Kathleen Sutcliffe (2010), this quality of high reliability at work can be called ‘mindfulness’. That implies that mindfulness is interpreted as an organizational feature and indicates that workers are prepared to notice relevant changes and risks in complex processes so that intervention in a timely manner is possible.

However, explanations of *mind* as well as *mindfulness* often refer to the individual mind only. Weick and Sutcliffe (2006, p. 515) citing the ‘Dictionary of Psychology’ (Reber 1995), state that the mind stands for a ‘totality of hypothesized mental processes’ to which psychological studies ascribe ‘explanatory power’ regarding behaviour, or approaches seek to study ‘a collection of processes’ such as perceptions and cognitions which altogether would ‘constitute mind’. Mindfulness, originally a topic of Buddhist religion, is then defined as the meditative experience of individuals in relation to their mind as something impermanent, to an ‘impermanence of the activity of the mind itself’, so that an ‘actual experiential sense of no one home […] called selflessness or egolessness’ is acknowledged (Weick & Sutcliffe 2006, p. 514). Both concepts, mind and mindfulness, are thus phenomena constructed from an individual-psychological perspective.

It is therefore remarkable that Weick and Sutcliffe (2006, p. 515) integrate these concepts into their organizational studies. To do so, they need to translate the concepts from an individual to an organizational plane of theorizing. This can be observed in the following considerations: “If *mind* in the broadest sense is about a totality or a collection of processes, then mindfulness is about ‘ways in which these diverse processes interrelate’ (Weick et al., 1999, p. 88).” (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006, p. 515) Thus, Weick and Sutcliffe invoke “interrelation” phenomena of the individual mind to enacted features of an organization. More precisely, they pay attention to

- how mindfulness is “grounded in distinction making, conceptualizing, and refinement of concepts” (Weick and Sutcliffe, 2006, p. 516),
- how “a rich awareness of discriminatory details is generated by organizational processes” (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006, p. 516) and, finally,
Like this, the authors also invoke a parallel between that meditative experience of mind’s impermanence and organizing, as also the latter would be “about impermanent special cases, impermanent fitting, and impermanent repertoires of actions” (Weick and Sutcliffe, 2006, p. 514). They summarize five interrelating aspects of high reliability organizations to constitute mindfulness:

[These organizations spend (a) more time examining failure as a window on the health of the system, (b) more time resisting the urge to simplify assumptions about the world, (c) more time observing operations and their effects, (d) more time developing resilience to manage unexpected events, and (e) more time locating local expertise and creating a climate of deference to those experts. These capabilities have been labelled mindful organizing (Weick and Sutcliffe 2001). (p. 515-16)]

Although this summary of enacted features of high reliability organizations is quite illuminating, the critical question must be raised whether the authors switch from psychological to organizational qualities without clarifying the relationship between the individual and the social level. Their argument assumes qualitative changes induced by individuals’ mindfulness to the organizational level, yet leaves the question unanswered, whether effects are unidirectional or whether effects from the latter to the former must also be considered, and if yes, in what ways.

By referring to Lev Vygotsky’s framework, these questions can be sharpened. What is important is that a proper understanding of human capacities that does not imply an individual vs. society dichotomy. Rather, the entire “human development [is] interpreted as a process of enculturation and humanization, in which biological and cultural lines of development [are] interrelated through a co-evolution of the societal basis as an ‘environment’, on the one hand, and the individual development in different forms of social agency and activity, on the other” (Langemeyer & Roth, 2006, p. 25). Consequently, cooperation is not a special case of human activity. The (re-)production of the life of humans must be seen as social and cooperative from the beginning. However, historical developments of bourgeois society have generated forms of private individualism and atomism so that cooperation appears more or less as a particularity. The atomized individual though and its individualized and egoistic stance are mistaken as something ‘naturally’ or ‘generally’ given, as a phenomenon that would not need further explanation nor critical reflection. Theoretically, this reduction is reproduced by methodological individualism (cf. Duguid, 2005) and haunts a number of concepts in psychology and sociology (cf. Holzkamp, 2013).
Against this tendency to naturalize forms of bourgeois and capitalist relations, the issue of mindfulness shall be revisited. Weick and Sutcliffe describe by ‘mindfulness’ a certain cooperative capacity to act. But not only individual behaviour can serve as an explanation if we consider the societal level as influential to any concrete form of activity.

Holzkamp’s (2013, p. 20-21) concept of “generalized agency” (sometimes translated as “generalized capacity to act”), for example, indicates analytically emancipatory developments in both, the individual as well as the societal, direction (cf. Langemeyer, 2017a). This is explained as follows: Holzkamp assumes two extremes to be discerned through analysis in every practice, forms of restrained and restricted agency on the one hand, and generalized agency on the other. Restricted capacity to act refers to “human suffering or, generally, any injury, including anxiety,” which contributes to the “quality of being exposed to and dependent upon other-directed circumstances, dissociated from possibilities of controlling essential, long-term conditions, i.e. constraints on possibilities to act” (Holzkamp, 2013, p. 20). In contradistinction, the “generalized capacity to act” highlights that someone “by attempting to obtain some discretion to act through participating in power and utilizing the allowed leeway,” he or she does not “concurrently confirm and reinforce the conditions of one’s own dependency” (p. 24). Rather, generalized capacity to act implies “real improvement in the subjective quality of my life” and “is synonymous with enhanced influence over my objective life conditions – that is, with my opportunities for forming alliances, i.e. uniting with others” (p. 21).

These considerations have obviously no direct correspondence with Weick and Sutcliffe (2006). Nevertheless, with the topic of organizational mindfulness some cognate concerns of Critical Psychology are addressed, especially, regarding the potential of overcoming the restraints of individual sensual perception and individualized capacity to act and to think by collective forms of knowing and problem-solving. Following this track of commonalities between mindful organizing and developing “generalized agency”, several new questions can be raised:

1. In what ways is that particular collaborative capacity to act of teams ensuring high reliability interdependent or even identical with emancipatory forms of agency? In other words, in what ways is this capacity to act related to or even grounded in societal action possibilities, which do not empower the actor(s) at the expense of the other’s freedom and autonomy but in consonance with it?

2. In relation to the nature of intellectual cooperation, is organizational “mindfulness” more than the sum of inner states of team members? In
other words, how can the level of the organizational development and the level of the individual development be conceptualized as interdependent? Weick and Sutcliffe’s insights are thus not rejected. However, further theorizing is required with regard to (a) the psychodynamics of mindfulness dependent on societal context and (b) to collective forms of knowing. The problem that the theory of mindful organizing falls short of conceptualizing the organizational plane of knowing, the “scientification” approach is presented (cf. Langemeyer, 2015a). Here, “scientification” refers to both, a change in the societal nature of work as well as a change in the workers’ capacity to act. But before these theoretical issues are addressed in the next section, concrete examples of mindless and mindful organizing are described and discussed.

2. Critical incidents

On March 11, 2011, when the nuclear reactor Daiichi in Fukushima was damaged, not only forces of nature were taking effect. As one can learn from the protocols, the technically recorded data and the reports by the operational force, serious errors were made by the team of technicians in the control room. According to an analysis by Steve Burns, the core meltdown in the reactor block 3 could have been averted. To corroborate this thesis, Burns re-enacted in the documentary “Chronic of a disaster” by means of a computer simulation how a crisis developed among the specialists. The following insights are given: After the earthquake the electricity broke down but was restored automatically by the emergency system. For a moment, the situation in the nuclear reactor seemed under control. However, as the tsunami followed, the challenge was more significant than the team had expected. Because of the intrusion of the water mass, electricity provided by the emergency system was suspended for several hours: a period in which the team had to take important measures.

At this moment, the technicians searched for an applicable plan. It turned out to be a severe mistake that the team did not know about the fact that, in case of an electrical breakdown, the condensers of the emergency system were automatically shut down and consequently the valves of the condensers had to be opened manually. If someone had opened them immediately, cooling water would have floated to the rods. However, only two hours after the accident, operatives were sent out to check the cooling system. When they measured radioactivity, they cancelled the operation to avoid damage to their health. Thus, the approaching catastrophe was unnoticeable for a longer period. What experts at this instance assumed to be implausible, occurred already during the night: the core meltdown.
The analysis highlights how several circumstances aggravated the disorientation of the team. Hence, displays switched off after the tsunami, the technicians had no idea how fast the level of cooling water was decreasing. When they finally realised that the valves had to be opened manually, the cooling water arrived at overheated rods so that water steam returned to the condensers of the emergency system.

Fig. 1 – Screenshot from the documentary “Chronic of a disaster” by Steve Burns

Fig. 2 – Screenshot from the documentary “Chronic of a disaster” by Steve Burns
The sensing element responded to pressure only and therefore displayed the level of cooling water incorrectly. Due to the steam, the needle signalled an increasing level although the cooling water was in fact missing. Despite recognising the escaping steam at the condensers, no one among the team was surprised about rising measuring values.

This historical disaster thus gives us an account of how security and reliability of a highly sophisticated technological system depended on the collaboration of a team. Here, mistakes and a scattered mind had tremendous effects.

The likeliness of disastrous turnarounds, the scope of damage and destruction, the possibilities to avoid or to solve problems is however often not immediately visible to those who face them. All this, as the research by Weick and Sutcliffe shows, becomes recognizable only by an intelligent communication and cooperation among the team, an endeavour to detect critical incidents or possible measures of intervention and to provide an intelligent, flexible or ‘mindful’ behaviour while monitoring processes with high risk.

Surprisingly, the effectiveness of this form of cooperation could be detected just 10 kilometres south of Daiichi in the sister plant, Daini. Ranjay Gulati, Charles Casto and Charlotte Krontiris (2014, no pages) come to the conclusion that the team there worked better and they underscore this argument with Weick’s and Sutcliffe’s concept of mindfulness. They highlight that mindful organizing is also a “sense-making”-process, because, similar to Burns, they surmise that the main problem in the nuclear plant was disorientation among the workers after their expectations were “violently shattered”. Questions like “What happened?” and “Was the worst over?” were tormenting them. Against this backdrop, Gulati et al. (2014) emphasize the action of the superintendent Naohiro Masuda to make sense of the workers’ engagement:

To assess the damage and begin the dangerous work of restoring power to the reactors, Masuda did not simply make decisions and issue orders. He knew he had to persuade people to act—against their survival instincts. His technical competence, knowledge of the plant, and diligence helped him earn their trust. However, more important, Masuda acknowledged the evolving reality in which they were operating. He shared the burden of uncertainty and doubt, engaging in what the organizational theorist Karl Weick and others have described as the “sense-making” process: He arrived at a common understanding with his team members by revising and communicating what they “knew” so that they could together adapt to each twist and turn. As a result, workers at Daini did not lose focus or hope. While they acted, some things became more certain (“What’s broken in the plant, and how can we fix it?”); some became less so (“Am I in
danger from radiation?”); and some remained as unpredictable as ever (“Will these aftershocks lead to more flooding?”). Until the last reactor went into cold shutdown, Masuda and his team took nothing for granted. With each problem they encountered, they recalibrated, iteratively creating continuity and restoring order. (Gulati et al., 2014)

This analysis shows: Understanding this mindful capacity to collaborate more comprehensively, means to analyze how it develops. Collective capacities of acting and knowing are not identical with the sum of individual capacities which are usually (through methodological individualism) conceived of as stable and inner properties. These concepts abstract from context and social entities. What is important here is a dialectical approach. For dialectical theorizing is eligible to “highlight that the societal powers in human practice do not exist outside or independent from subjective powers but interdependently and only available through each other” (Langemeyer, 2017a, p. 43).

In that sense, science as a social practice and as a societal line of development becomes paramount. The argument concerns two aspects. First, the interpersonal function of scientific activities by which people are able to organize and re-ensure inter-subjectivity in communication and richer awareness for the situation (instead of some selected aspects of it and instead of superficial perception). Second, the intrapersonal function of science: This refers to metacognition and imagination. Thinking scientifically includes logics, but also the imagination of normally unthinkable issues, issues that contradict everyday-life experience.

Ethically, this entangles also questions whether technologies like nuclear plants are to be seen as neutral, while only their particular societal use seems to be problematic.

### 3. Science as a joint between the societal and the individual level of development

Science’s relevance to mindfulness in complex cooperative work is not immediately evident. The question can be posed as to why and how science has an impact on cooperative practice as it exists nowadays and as it transforms societal relations. Doubts that science could easily play a positive role in this context may arise however with good reason. Mindfulness is construed as a virtue that cannot simply rely on scientifically approved knowledge. Eventually, this could easily turn out to be a way of being mindless. If someone regards scientific expertise – very generally –, e.g., to be in itself ‘good,’ ‘powerful’ and
available ‘out there’ in society, an understanding of responsibility as a personal engagement is repelled. Correspondingly, ‘science’ (as if it exists as a solid bloc of intelligence) is taken for granted as a societal competence to solve problems of risk in advance. A dualism between individual and societal responsibility is invoked. But these assumptions are highly problematic.

How could the many scientists scattered in different universities and institutes detect any possible risk and foresee when exactly it might threaten the well-being of humans and/or the planet and its ecosystems? Knowing and recognition, also in a scientific manner, is time and field dependent, because it always remains a subjective engagement (cf. Langemeyer, 2017b, p. 19). In addition, scientists often lack the powers to decide politically how to shift, e.g., from perilous technologies to safer ones. And, last but not least, why should they collectively strive for certain solutions, if stakeholders of the economy exert influence on scientific institutions to pursue goals in their interests?

Separating responsibility in society from scientific engagement fosters technocracy. While this might be obvious, it is not so evident that many theoretical concepts in educational and social sciences support this technicism (cf. Langemeyer, 2015a, ch. 1.6). Against this backdrop, criticism remains weak when it perceives scientific knowledge e.g. as an antagonist to the intuitive or implicit knowledge. ‘Science’ (including its objectified form of technology) cannot meet expectations invoked by its overestimation as a superior problem-solver. Simultaneously, criticism of scientific practices and achievements on a societal level is immunized when the blame for occurring disasters is put on individual experts only. Against this stalemate, it is reasonable to emphasize like Weick and Sutcliffe the mindfulness as a systemic feature of a team. But how does this quality emerge systemically?

If we regard exactly these virtues as enacted qualities through cooperation, they are not available without the development of scientific thinking, research and inquiry from within, from the concrete forms of human development, i.e. from inside their practices that should be improved and controlled with high reliability standards (cf. Langemeyer, 2012; 2014). To state it clearly, ‘scientification’ then should not be mistaken as an expanding influence of experts and expert knowledge (often the term ‘epistemification’ is used for this ‘spill-over’ of expert knowledge to other practices; cf. Langemeyer, 2015b). Very roughly, this influence is then depicted as an ideational impact of ‘science’ onto ‘society’. Instead, ‘scientification’ refers to the practical side of how expert practitioners (like the team of the technicians) or even laymen strive to see their problems from different angles and to make better judgements about what should be done. In relation to this kind of engagement with reality, they attempt to bring different perspectives and kinds of knowledge into a holistic or systemic view on
what is going on. That means, they collaboratively try to gain an overall comprehension of reality which does not come divided into psychological, social, and technological reality.

Correspondingly, ‘scientification’ is a development which stems not only from a societal change driven by and embodied in technology and technical processes. It concerns as well the concrete human activities such as work activities and the workers’ capacity to act as a potential and power to pursue long-term goals. It is concrete human development, encompassing people’s societalization as they decentre from the first-person perspective to reach out for understanding different perspectives, meta-perspectives, exact forms of observation, rational ways of thinking, as they theoretically reflect generalizations in common sense knowledge and correct misapprehension etc. The altered psychic structure of expert practitioners is considered as equally necessary for the scientification to take place in working and organizational life. Science must become a joint between the individual and the societal plane of development.

4. Mindfulness in Cooperation

Various forms of cooperation have been an essential feature of the reproduction of our lives in modern societies. The disaster of Fukushima depicted in the previous section gives an account as to how far failures in cooperation go. Neither nuclear plants nor damages in these technologies can be controlled without cooperation. But how can we scrutinize the concrete qualities of the work practice of cooperation facing the challenges of high-technologies? It is not automatically guaranteed that concrete behaviour (including thinking and knowing) reaches higher levels of knowledge and practice just because some references to scientific concepts, methods or research results are made.

The sociology of organizations has highlighted a remarkable difference between “organization” as a state and “organizing” as activity thereby problematizing also the role of scientific knowledge:

A distinguishing feature of organization is the generation of recurring behaviours by means of institutionalized roles that are explicitly defined. For an activity to be said to be organized implies that types of behaviour in types of situations are connected to types of actors. An organized activity provides actors with a given set of cognitive categories and a typology of action options. On this view, therefore, organizing implies generalizing; the subsumption of heterogeneous particulars under generic categories. In
that sense, formal organization necessarily involves abstraction. (Tsoukas, 2005, p. 124, as quoted by Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006, p. 514)

Tsoukas’ argument highlights not only the different perspective on activity (rather than states) but also the precarious emerging quality of organizing intelligent activities in general. But according to Tsoukas, this quality is said to depend on cognition in the shape of abstraction and generalization, i.e. on thought when this cognition is completed. Since both, abstraction and generalization, are said to be not only cognitive schemas but also features of an organizing activity to establish a certain order, the quoted argument is challenging us to reflect on the practical outcome of these processes.

If abstraction and generalization are not seen as a purely mental act but also as practical and material features of organizational life, then it is not the question whether one could work either with or without them. More or less visible, they regulate practice in society. The question is therefore how abstractions and generalizations prescind from concreteness. E.g. power relations are concrete features of organizational life, but not always immediately obvious. Sometimes they become more powerful, the lesser they are conceivable. Therefore, the main point is whether generalizations and abstractions support restricted or generalized forms of agency by fading out the existence of power (Holzkamp, 2013; see above). Against this backdrop, mindful organizing can further be reflected as generalized rather than restricted capacities to act.

Mindfulness is a subjective and possibly collective form of practice in which consciousness is needed in terms of a horizon of both, imagination (or anticipation) and reflection. And this imagination and reflection is simultaneously situated, generated and enacted in practice insofar as the subjective sense-making of one’s activities and engagements is always related to the concrete practice. It encloses, as the scientification-approach underscores, the cognitive power of exceeding the situation as it appears only immediately to its participants. Therefore, their conscious practice vacillates. It tends to be either under-determined by ignorance and distraction or over-determined by positive visions (conscious or unconscious desires) and other forms of anticipation like negative knowledge, i.e. experiences of incidents that one knows as something to be avoided or to prevent. In other words, the acting subjects situated in a critical incident are constantly oscillating their states of mind according to a certain type of psychodynamic in their practice. Being present in a situation therefore can be enhanced by a certain meta-cognition about this oscillation between anticipation and reflection of matters while one copes with a certain situation.

This transformative quality of thinking in practice is certainly a central issue of the Vygotskian approach. But similarly, also Piaget related any development of becoming conscious of something real to the “coordination” of
behaviour when the subject is challenged to “transform” the objects in order to “know” them: He or she “must displace, connect, combine, take apart, and reassemble them” (Piaget 1976, p. 12; cf. Stetsenko 2016, p. 149). But transformation is always a psychodynamic process as well. With regard to the particular quality of psychodynamics, people’s conscious actions can be proficient or rather confusing, increase cooperative agency or paralyze those involved. This is what shall be scrutinized in the following section.

5. Experiencing and psychodynamics

Vygotsky (and similarly Piaget) stressed that the mind is constantly transformed by being an active participant engaging in several societal contexts, co-creating the conditions under which someone thinks and acts (a similar perspective is advanced by the “transformative activist stance”-approach, cf. Stetsenko, 2015; 2016; cf. the clinic of activity approach by Clot 2001; parallels exist to action research, cf. Toulmin/Gustavsen, 1996; Eikeland, 2012).

In what follows, the argument will therefore concentrate on the psychodynamics of anticipation and reflection depending on someone’s previous experience and cognitive development (cf. Vygotsky used the word “perezhevanie” and determined it to be the unit of analysis of psychological research which cannot and should not be destroyed by breaking it down to its elements).

Being present in a critical situation is not just a manner of being somewhere (locally), it also means being aware of what matters in a certain situation – not just in terms of abstract facts, but as practically relevant sense embedded in a given practice or situation. This awareness can be conducted or “coordinated” (as Piaget terms it) consciously by being ready to ask (oneself as well as other people in that situation) questions – for example:

- by doubting that immediately visible, audible or sensible aspects are sufficient when one tries to understand the whole,
- by withstanding seductive and distorting forms of sense-making or
- by reflecting unconscious expectations or pressures that someone tends to become impatient or lazy which is why one oversees important clues (for an error or a risk) in a situation.

Therefore, it is reasonable to interpret different forms of the capacity to act in relation to someone’s capacity to think as someone’s qualitative presence or attentiveness in the world as Bengt Molander suggests:
Attentiveness belongs to the whole human being. It is not purely “intellectual”. Emotions, attitudes, questions, sensory presence and much more are actually (constitutive) parts of the knowing human being, thus of knowledge. Sometimes the term “presence” works better than “attentiveness”. Presence focuses on being there, not only sensory presence as openness to various aspects of the world, which in itself requires learning and practice, but as being in the world (in practices) together with other people. (Molander, 2009, p. 68)

Being present includes being aware of one’s own conduct of behaviour in relation to the task someone wants to accomplish or the action someone wants to master. This is something that also be called “competence” or, according to Piaget, “intelligence”. And if a person is not fully present in a certain moment and context, it can be interpreted as incompetence with regard to a particular challenge to master this situation (Langemeyer, 2015a, ch. 2; 2013).

It is important to strengthen here the argument that competence/incompetence is not constructed as an entirely stable feature – as a “trait” in conventional terms so that one excludes the other. Rather, the understanding is psychodynamic and implies that competence and incompetence can occur simultaneously. To develop my argument here (also with regard to the initial problematic of mastering the risks and disasters of our times), I will discuss the model of a contemporary approach to personality and motivation developed by the psychologist Julius Kuhl. As a psychological model, its angle is the individual psyche, not the social cooperative action. Therefore, the next section will transform this model to a collective level and discusses its socio-critical potential.

According to Kuhl’s research, the psychodynamics of personality can be theorized by means of four interacting systems. Each system is a generalization of psychic structures or functions. These functions are assumed to exist as biological entities but undergo developmental processes both, psychologically as well as socially, because of their interaction in face of real situations.

One system is called “intention memory”. It operates as a memory for plans and is activated as long as one tries to complete an action. In general, it is adjusted to conduct serial action (“step by step”). Its activation usually stems from affects that indicate difficulties and the importance to plan instead of going-on. A second, complementary system to this first system is the “intuitive behaviour control”. This system is not automatically activated by conscious control. Quite the contrary, it comes into play rather spontaneously and follows patterns of intuitive or automated behaviour. Affects that trigger on and maintain this ‘intuitive behaviour control’ are positive feelings such as joy, happiness and self-assurance.
The third system is specialized on “object recognition”, a system that helps to perceive and analyse details. It is activated by affects of pain, fear or cognitive dissonances. Similar to the first two systems, it has a complementary system: the “extension memory”. This memory contains personal experience in terms of generalized aspects of a number of experiences that have become important to feelings of “self” and “self-congruence”.

Kuhl argues that personality development depends in the long run on the connections between all four systems. Especially two forms of “emotional dialectics” are however salient: the interrelation between the intention memory and the intuitive behaviour control in terms of “volitional efficiency”, and the interrelation between the object recognition and the extension memory in terms of “personality growth”. To explain these emotional dialectics, not only their “functioning” but also their failure is illuminating.

In contrast to desirable forms of development, Kuhl’s research has revealed that people can suffer from a fixation on planning and thus from an inhibition of impulses to leap from planning to action. The development of volitional strength takes place when fixations or inhibitions are overcome and the subject’s action are in line with its intentions. Similarly, Kuhl’s research has shown that fixations on reflecting pain, fear or dissonances can impair personality growth. On the plane of psychodynamics, this is explained as an inhibition of the extension memory while the object recognition system is activated. The disadvantage of
this inhibited dynamic is that the intuitive support for decision-making or for gaining an overview in a complex situation is restrained. Empirical studies demonstrate that people suffering from this inhibition are more vulnerable to misjudge what options would increase self-determination and self-coherence and what options are chosen due to internalized constraints. They regret more often the choices they made than people with a good integration of their extension memory (i.e. with higher “self-congruence”).

This model of psychodynamics is now used as the grounds to elaborate a concept of mindfulness as cooperative competence and to explain why the scientification for individual as well as social development plays an important role.

For this purpose, four systemic aspects of cooperation – similar to the four psychic systems – are described. The first aspect (in the figure 2 the grey box up on the left) captures the inscription of plans, strategies or rules into collective practice. The second aspect (the grey box down on the right) depicts all spontaneous and practiced or routinized forms of behaviour that participants in a team perform. Thus, it can also refer to intuitive group dynamics. According to these aspects, one task of cooperation is to coordinate and ensure that a certain plan is executed. This coordination develops and can be enhanced when team
members develop volitional efficiency. It also aims at ensuring greater precision and effectiveness with it. But within changing situations, a plan can always turn out to be ‘wrong’, i.e. that it falls short of resolving the problems at stake. This turns out to be a core problem when teams are dealing with complexity and high reliability at work.

Organizing reliability by routines and pure training these routines is therefore quite conventional, although, in many contexts, their effectivity is already approved (Aggarwal et al. 2004). On an individual level, this type of training depends on volitional efficiency or volitional strength. However, as an organizational strategy, that type of training has a great affinity to the visions of technical rationality where the goals of a concrete practice are undisputable. This may likely unravel contradictions if the respective routines and trainings largely deny or violate against changing influences as well as personal needs and habits.

Therefore, this form of organizing reliability can be contrasted by mindfulness that stems from a scientification of the team’s capacity to act. Here, the cooperating team members frequently dedicate their efforts to analyses of failures and mistakes or to experiments with particular (e.g. unexpected) processes to gain a sufficient empirical basis for generalizing critical knowledge and developing a holistic or systemic view of the practice (3rd aspect, grey box down on the left). That means that they spend time primarily on the critical evaluation and construction of their knowledge (relevant to that particular practice) so that they are no longer bound to mere appearances or restricted to isolated (i.e. private) ways of thinking and feeling. Instead, the construction of their knowledge is a product of collaboration, because the cooperating team is ambitious to constantly challenge their own knowing and comprehension by means of various unresolved problems and unpredicted outcomes. The team is keen to work with generalizations but simultaneously to overcome the shortfalls of confusing the abstract with the concrete. Self-critique is embraced by them as a necessary cathartic moment which is why striving for self-determination is a key. This commitment does not indulge to the “habit of ‘cheating with reality’ in organizations” (Bonafond et al., 2016, p. s44). Along with it a kind of flexible, vigilant and agile knowing emerges boosted by several crises of practical and theoretical experiencing which shall be termed “professional knowing” or “professional knowledge-in-practice” (4th aspect, grey box up on the right).

To summarize the arguments:

A team’s knowing/knowledge-in-practice is defined as

- a form of presence or awareness of a certain matter – mentally produced and organized by mutual action,
- a way of organizing thinking and opening one’s awareness so that a particular form of mindful capacity to act is activated – this is achieved by
making a more generalized (or holistic) goal or perspective emotionally and motivationally relevant, in other words, by making it subjectively reasonable and attractive as it contributes to self-determination, and finally - it is an awareness about other possible orders (or systems) of theorizing, so that it is possible to interrelate different perspectives (while collaborating with others for example) and to overcome idiosyncratic or partial ways of knowing.

Mindfulness is then a form of knowing
- when people’s awareness is not congealed by a certain state of mind (allegedly as the only possible one) or by a passivization (affects that induce passiveness),
- when people’s awareness is not foreclosed to unexpected or undesired processes,
- when people’s capacity to act is not inhibited by surprise or by dissonance, pain and frustration and when they manage to reorganize their concentration and agility to manage the unexpected turns of a critical situation.

The psychodynamic perspective on cooperative agency thus helps to analyse disastrous shortfalls in teamwork like in the case of Fukushima’s nuclear plant Daiichi. Here, the technicians’ feelings of being under pressure were accompanied by the problem of being mentally and thus practically disoriented without the information provided by electronic control and safety devices. Instead of looking for possibilities to gain holistic or systemic insight into the processes to bring under control, the team was assumingly fixated on isolated objects such as displays or prescriptions from a manual. Their imagination and anticipation were not open to search for orientation and action possibilities independently and “off the beaten tracks”. Fearing radioactivity, they were not ready to go out of the control room to search for relevant insights about the risky processes going. Mentally, they were probably stuck in efforts to remember relevant pieces of advice and to search for prescriptions to follow. Thus, they were distracted from being present in that situation and by searching for holistic or systemic comprehension of the processes to bring under control.

Accordingly, we can describe more generally psychodynamics that bring about similar impairments to mindfulness in cooperation.

- Teamwork can become ineffective and careless when its members fixate on prescriptions, controlling and planning processes, or on blatancies, personal advantages, petty jealousies etc., but do not pay attention to the changing conditions and influences. The team focuses on an assumed state, regularities, or on an ideal plan without considering possible intervening conditions or reflecting possible misjudgements. The team is
not ready to revise judgements timely and to undergo a cathartic process of experiencing and reflecting errors and therefore is driven by a distorted self-confidence (sometimes fixated on the erroneous persuasion that their plan is correct and will work out or that symbolic compensations are necessary). In sum, the team is not able to reflect their knowing as time and field dependent.

- Another problem can be that cooperation is organized without providing the participating actors with relevant insights into the societal or socio-technical work relations and the real forces to bring under control. Then the workers suffer from under-education. If time-pressure, goals of economic rationalisation or hierarchical orders dominate the situation, the cooperating actors may (quickly) execute a plan or react spontaneously to a situation but they are not prepared to search effectively evidence for the causes for unexpected errors, tensions or breakdowns. They may likely feel irresponsible for the situation as they have become used to being degraded to cogs in the wheel. Their capacity to imagine theoretically alternative explanations may not be developed and they lack ideas as to how they could test the validity of different explanations and assumptions. They are not experienced in generating realistic imagination and anticipation. They have no shared professional knowledge and experience with this so that they cannot discuss these problems thoroughly or effectively with others in their team or with experts from outside.

- The cooperating actors may have professional knowledge, but they do not know each other well. They lack personal relationships which means that they have no experience of understanding each other when solving together complex problems. To mutually comprehend how the other defines the problem and how they envisage the necessary steps to undertake a transformation of the entire situation, also metacognition is paramount. Given the capacity to reflect one’s one thinking and its references, team members identify more easily the background of the other’s way of thinking and knowing. This form of experience includes insights about why and when to make one’s own implicit forms of knowing explicit to others. The development of collective knowing and mindfulness is however interrelated with forms of both, either restricted or generalized forms of capacity to act, unfolding its particular shortcomings or potentials.
6. Concluding remarks

These issues and problems of cooperative competence and mindfulness raised here can be reinterpreted and deepened in the light of the research of Klaus Holzkamp and collaborators on ‘generalized agency’ (cf. Schraube & Osterkamp, 2013; Schraube, 2009). Internationally, it is also important to see alliances with cognate approaches like Anne Edwards’ work on ‘relational expertise’ (Edwards, 2005; 2012), Anna Stetsenko’s work on the ‘transformative activist stance’ (Stetsenko, 2015; 2016), Cathrine Hasse’s work on the ‘Anthropology of Learning’ (2015) as well as Yves Clot’s work on the ‘clinic of activity’ (Clot, 2001); all their perspectives contribute to deeper insights (cf. Langemeyer, 2015a; 2017a). The particular research on mindful cooperation however tries to take this kind of research further to understand not only the ‘functioning’ and the construction of power in cooperative agency but also to reflect thoroughly the challenges of collaborative knowing and mindfulness within the concrete developments of the scientification of work. It emphasizes dialectical theorizing to scrutinize the reciprocal effects between someone’s capacity to act and someone’s capacity to think as well as reciprocal effects between the individual and the social/societal level of development. Thereby, it is also part and parcel to research on the concrete transformations of a high-tech world. It renews the questions of emancipation and self-determination as urgent to engage collectively with the general or the whole of society as we may long for and imagine it.

References


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Trade union research from the standpoint of the subject: Worker's collective action from the perspective of Critical Psychology

Marcel Thiel

Abstract
Trade unions play a minor role in psychological research (Frieling & Klein, 2010). When done, psychological research on unions mostly consists of traditional questionnaires and attitude research. Innovative research on unions, at least in Germany, is predominantly carried out in the fields of political science and sociology. However, the question of whether or not one engages in unionism is a genuinely psychological one. From a critical psychological perspective on authority and exploitation, this topic is essential as unions constitute an action possibility for transcending individual coping strategies and jointly expanding one's power to shape one's own living conditions in business and society in solidarity. Critical psychology’s concepts of pedagogical behavior and learning theory (Holzkamp, 1993) have been widely received in the union's educational work (e.g. Allespach, Hilbert & Wentzel, 2009), yet there remains little critical-psychological research on one’s reasons for union engagement in relation to the amount of quantitative-psychological or sociological union research. Despite this, critical psychology may very well prove useful in this field. This article will present selected concepts, research methods, and union-related studies in the field of critical psychology, illustrating the cornerstones of “union research from the standpoint of the subject” and its benefits for union research in terms of a “science of de-submission” (Osterkamp, 2003). In doing so, the article provides an overview of critical psychologists' works on the reasons behind engagement in solidarity and unions, as well as showing the methodological shifts in union research offered by critical psychology.

Keywords
critical psychology; Kritische Psychologie; trade union; labor revitalization studies; action research; collective action
Trade unions play a minor role in psychological research (Frieling & Klein, 2010). When done, psychological research on unions mostly consists of traditional questionnaires and attitude research (Klandermans, 1986; Bamberger et al., 1999). Critical psychology differs substantially from mainstream psychology in that it pursues the claim that the subjective perspectives and reasons for action of the persons concerned in the research should be developed as fully as possible and analyzed in their overall social contexts. From the point of view of critical psychology, potential insights in mainstream psychology-oriented trade union research are neglected if (a) due to their methodology, subjective forms of expression by wage earners or union members are limited to pre-formulated question components, and (b) if the self-view and world-view of the respondents is not considered in the overall societal context, and (c) recorded only as quantitative-statistical correlatives. Even if participants in questionnaire studies are understood by the researchers as societal beings, questionnaires generally only provide information about correlations between response components to contents of awareness (e.g. importance of trade unions) and 'socio-structural factors' (such as status in operation) (Schnabel & Wagner, 2005, Ebbinghaus & Visser, 1999). However, as Heiner Keupp (1987) notes, with regard to network research, social reality cannot be adequately dissected into individual operationalizable 'factors' without neglecting the entirety of social relationships. This is especially true when the social reality that has been dissected into 'factors' is "pieced together again in the methodological mechanics of its covariance" (ibid., p. 154). From the point of view of critical psychology, there is the danger that the inner connection between the objective (contradictory) reality, its individual interpretation, and the resulting actions becomes lost along the traditional psychological route. Psychological trade union research that is limited to questionnaires is therefore not very suitable "for self-enlightenment of the people about their societal and social dependencies" (Holzkamp, 1972, p. 32) or for contributing to their overcoming.

Trade union research in Germany is predominantly carried out in the fields of political science and sociology (Müller-Jentsch, 1997, Schroeder, 2014, Schmalz & Dörre, 2013). The question of why people become unionized seems to be recurrent in sociological and political scientific research (e.g. Ebbinghaus & Göbel, 2014, Müller-Jentsch, 1997, p. 119ff). In terms of methodology, however, these works are sometimes problematic: they adapt methods of psychological questionnaire research (e.g. Pyhel, 2008, Behr et al., 2013), which goes hand in hand...
hand with the cognitive limitations of traditional psychological trade union research (see above), or they use rationalistic rational choice approaches as a theoretical background (Müller-Jentsch, 1997, p. 119-123). In addition, sociological trade union research usually includes social and organizational processes – such as, for example, union organizing projects and their interactions with the institutional system of industrial relations – and not the experiences and reasons for action of those affected (e.g. Nachtwey & Thiel, 2014, Thünken, 2018). Moreover, as in quantitative-psychological trade union research, respondents are usually not involved in the discussion of the results or in drawing theoretical and practical conclusions.

Although a growing interest in the subjectivity of actors can be seen in German trade union revitalization research (e.g. Nachtwey & Wolf, 2013, Singe & Wolf, 2013), union research is not thoroughly and consistently carried out from the standpoint of the subject. Here, critical psychology's concepts of pedagogical behavior and learning theory (Holzkamp, 1993) are well received in German trade union educational work (Allespach, Hilbert & Wentzel, 2009, Allespach, 2015). Trade union involvement can provide an action possibility for wage earners to transcend individual coping strategies for unreasonable business and societal demands and jointly expand one's power to shape one's own living conditions in solidarity. If and why this is or is not the case is an open, empirical question to be clarified. Critical psychology, as will be shown, is an appropriate tool for this question.

To highlight the implied distinctiveness of critical-psychological trade union research, Table 1 compares it – in a deliberately pointed and simplified way – with purely quantitative-psychological and sociological trade union research.

Table 1: Comparison of subject-scientific trade union research

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<th>Quantitative-psychological trade union research</th>
<th>Sociological trade union research</th>
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<td><strong>Object/Focus</strong></td>
<td>Trade unions and the living environment, as experienced by the subject</td>
<td>Concept-based query of the phenomena of consciousness</td>
<td>Reconstruction of social and societal processes (institutionalized patterns of action, organizational rules and processes, societal processes of change)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Typical research aim</strong></td>
<td>Practical reflection for those &quot;concerned&quot; and understanding union</td>
<td>Theory/concept development</td>
<td>Development of societal interpretative knowledge and/or strategy consultancy aimed at the trade union</td>
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In this article, this distinctiveness will be elaborated upon step by step. The aim is to present selected concepts, research methods, and thematically relevant studies in the field of critical psychology, in order to illustrate the cornerstones of trade union research in terms of a "science of de-submission" (Osterkamp, 2003).

1. Fundamental concepts: Motivation and agency

The distinctiveness of critical psychological methodology does not derive from favoring certain methods (e.g. interviews) or methodological orientations (qualitative vs. quantitative), "but rather from the categorical and consequent methodological determinations" (Markard, 2015, p. 171). In other words, critical-psychological union research is based on an elaborate "subject concept".

In general, critical psychology starts from individual societality. This is the result of natural history development (e.g. Holzkamp, 1983). Human beings are the only species that "from adaptation to existing circumstances [have] moved to a mode of existence of cooperative production through labor" (Maiers, 1996, p. 173). Human beings live under social conditions which they themselves (re-)produce.

Societal conditions therefore represent an ensemble of possibilities for and impediments to action for the individual, according to which one can behave. A human being is conceived as a subject, which is not determined by external living conditions, but is also not independent. An action is "for me, as the subject, always based on my humanly-designated needs situation" (Holzkamp 1983, p. 350). When workers do not organize themselves in trade unions in order to

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<td>Typical research addressee</td>
<td>Those concerned (wage-earners, active union members and full-time employees)</td>
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<td>Typical status of those concerned in the research process</td>
<td>Co-researchers</td>
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<td>Preferred methods</td>
<td>Repertoire of qualitative, participatory research methods</td>
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<td>Examples</td>
<td>Held et al., 2011 Schmalstieg, 2015</td>
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remedy their dissatisfaction, it is neither irrational nor caused by restrictive living conditions. Objective-economic (living) conditions are perceived by the individual from his life situation and position. This view of the world forms the premises of individual action. The conditions accentuated in this way are called meanings and constitute the subjective scope of possibility of the individual. From the point of view of the subject, the central critical-psychological unit of analysis is premises-reasons relations "in the breakdown of which the psyche is to be understood from the mediation relationship between societal and individual life acquisition" (Markard, 2015, p. 54).

This "mediation relationship" between subject and world is captured by the central critical-psychological category of agency. An individual develops personal agency through the control that “an individual has of his or her own conditions of life through participation in the generalized control of the societal process" (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 241). Trade union organizational offerings are therefore to be understood as a way of securing or broadening their own agency.

Holzkamp (1983) differentiates between restrictive and generalized agency: These two polar points of the term depict the contradictory nature of life experiences in the context of capitalist socialization. They raise the question as to how far "in an attempt to cope with life/handle threats, contradictorily one's own generalizable life interests are simultaneously violated" (Holzkamp, 1990, p. 38). According to Holzkamp, restrictive agency is a certain way of coping with life, which consists of arranging oneself with the dominant conditions and powers, thereby displacing the self-destructive consequences that lie within them (ibid.). In restrictive mode, I always gain my agency under acceptance of the dominant conditions of action. In generalized mode, I develop my agency by disposing of or changing societal conditions – potentially in solidarity with others (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 367-369).

In their study on solidarity orientations and practices of young workers in the service sector, Josef Held et al. (2011, p. 27-29) describe the restrictive mode as coping action and the generalized as a resistive engagement.

Emotion, motivation, and cognition are understood as aspects of individual agency (detailed in Holzkamp, 1983, Chap. 3). Motivation refers to the subjective willingness to exert effort in order to preserve or broaden one's own agency in perspective. Motivated action can only exist if three conditions are fulfilled: (1) the connection between individual action and the safeguarding or expansion of one's own agency exists objectively; (2) this relationship is adequately represented in societal forms of thought; and (3) it is recorded individually (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 299f). An individual has to cope with the so-called motivation contradiction: namely the contradiction between the emotional evaluation of future agency and the emotional evaluation of the expected efforts
and risks along the way. This motivation contradiction is to be regarded as a central topic of trade union research from the standpoint of the subject because workers depend on their social position as wage-dependents to earn a living by selling their labor power. Questioning the status quo through trade union participation is a fundamentally conflict-laden and exhausting undertaking.

Critical-psychological trade union research does not focus on wage earners, but rather on the world as experienced by them. The central issue is the "subjective meaning" of trade unions and trade union courses of action. The question is how this part of everyday reality is perceived depending on the individual situation, available interpretations of society, and action possibilities (Osterkamp, 2001, p. 8).

Purely quantitative-psychological trade union research typically deals with psychological concepts (such as union commitment) that represent subjectivity in an ambiguous way and their correlation with other psychological concepts or socio-economic variables. By contrast, sociological trade union research typically focuses on the reconstruction of societal processes (e.g. union strategies and union organizing processes).

2. Dimensions of trade union action: Collective action, resistance, solidarity

Catharina Schmalstieg (2008, 2015) has significantly contributed to making critical psychology beneficial for trade union research. She coined the term "unions as a platform for action":

"Trade unions can [...] act as a platform for action by introducing individuals' collective actions into unionism, conveying information and knowledge, and shifting individual anxiety and frustration away from isolation into organized collective action." (2008, p. 144)

To further understand the specifics of individual action on this "platform", it is necessary to refer to a conceptual distinction made by Lucie Billmann and Josef Held (2013). Within individual coping action, they distinguish between three forms of engagement, which aim at a liberation from coercion and domination: collective action, resistance, and solidarity.

According to them, collective action is characterized by common goals and interests, with which a large number of people work simultaneously (ibid., p. 21). How these interests are formulated is part of a stand-alone analysis that focuses on why and in what way unionists in collective action have formulated shared
interests. The question is whether the common interests are "oriented towards
general interests or merely represent common partial interests" (Holzkamp, 1980,
p. 211). After all, collective action can also be an expression of regressive
movements. One example is right-wing extremist organizations (see Marvakis,
2013). Trade union organizations can also serve partial interests, for example, in
supporting ecologically hazardous technologies or moderate wage demands to
safeguard national competitiveness. In contrast, collective action in the sense of
generalized agency is to be understood as "a directional determination"
(Holzkamp, 1980, p. 211), which contains a utopian element – namely the search
for action possibilities free of social coercion and domination:

"The general interest is largely determined by the fact that, on the whole, it
cannot be directed against the interests of certain persons or groups. The
general interest is therefore always – as it becomes more concrete – an
interest in overcoming human being’s oppression of human beings, i.e.
directed towards the disposition of the people over their own affairs, so
that they do not subject themselves to foreign contrary interests and want
to surrender to the arbitrariness of the powerful. One can summarize this
as follows: The only interest that can be identified as a general interest is
the interest in freedom, which is thus mankind's greatest possession. [...] 
Contrary to the specific interest of oppression, the universality of the
interest of freedom is by no means restricted, but only a condition of the
enforcement of the universal, because the fight against oppression
unavoidably involves the fight against the oppressors." (p. 210f)

If freedom is understood as a "conscious collective disposition over one's own
affairs" (ibid., p. 212), then collective action in the general interest is always a
resistant action against restrictive social structures and normative requirements.

As resistance can also be practiced individually, it must be conceptually
23f), resistance is characteristic of "following one's own needs and intentions,
which are contrary to external demands". Trade union action articulates itself
against requirements in business and society and is thus resistant action in
collective form. Individual forms of resistant action must therefore be regarded
as the nucleus of trade union action. The history of the working-class movement
is familiar with a large number of such practices (see Thompson, 1980,

According to Billmann and Held (2013, p. 24f), solidarity is distinguished
from oppositional and collective action by emphasizing social relationships and
emotions. Solidary action with common interests is considerably based on social
bonding emotions (such as care and friendship). Solidary action with different
interests is based on empathy, compassion, and recognition. The latter depends very much on taking over the perspective of those with whom I act in solidarity. Solidary engagement with regard to divergent interests does not focus on expanding one's own agency, but rather the agency of others. Even in the case of oppositional and solidary action, from the point of view of critical psychology, one must ask to what extent it serves the general interest or is guided by specific interests.

Trade union action is composed of all three modes of action. It involves participation in an organization whose foundation is the collective and solidary engagement of various groups of wage earners in order to organize their resistance against the 'employers'. It is not only actions, such as the collective refusal to work or the participation in rallies, that express the collective solidarity character. Even in cases of largely passive memberships, consisting of nothing more than paying a monthly fee, there is still a degree of solidarity and collective action.

Resistance, solidarity, and collective action among or between wage earners can also take place independently of trade unions (see Müller-Jentsch, 1997, p. 34ff, Silver, 2003). However, in these cases, it assumes a quasi-union character. Furthermore, in many cases, such forms of action (such as, slowdown strikes) are pre-forms of trade union action. In short, the "action platform" union offers the possibility to convert individually resistant action into collective action, which benefits a more or less far-reaching conceived solidarity network.

3. The ‘justification logic’ of trade union action

In her study on unionization of precarious workers in the US security sector, Schmalstieg (2015, pp. 155-162) distinguishes between three basic patterns of dealing with trade union courses of action. The approaches range from active acceptance (1), to overcautious interest (2), to rejection (3). She differentiates the basic pattern of 'rejection' from 'strong rejection' (3a) and 'lack of interest' (3b): "The reasons for this are manifold, and the spectrum of rejection ranges from other priorities, to bad experiences with other unions and mistrust, to great fear" (2015, p. 156). In addition, some employees simply had no knowledge of the trade union offerings because the union's efforts of communication did not reach them. At this point, I would like to focus on the pattern of active trade union engagement. The willingness for trade union action from wage earners can, in

2 As far as motivational psychology is concerned, trade union action of full-time employees is different from that of personnel and members. The former live from the organization; in a way, they embody the organization. Even though they play a central
my opinion, be analytically itemized into six psycho-logical dynamics. To reconstruct this ‘justification logic’ of trade union action, I refer to Schmalstieg (2008, 2015, pp. 237-245), Billmann and Held (2011), and supplement elements from Mobilization Theory by John Kelly (1998).³

1. Dissatisfaction with the status quo: The starting point of trade union action is a feeling of dissatisfaction. This presupposes that the individual recognizes and acknowledges his or her own or others’ needs and ultimately comes to the conclusion that they cannot be realized under the given circumstances of life – in business and/or society. The dissatisfaction in the status quo becomes the dissatisfaction with the status quo.

2. Collectively shared injustice: By recourse to subjectively important (justice) standards, needs can be legitimized and transformed into a consciousness of injustice. Unless this injustice is understood as a collectively shared circumstance, individually resistive action, at most, is conceivable, in addition to various forms of coping action. The recognition of a common situation, however, is not a given, but rather must be understood by a corresponding interpretation of the living conditions. Collective (trade union) actions, spaces of understanding, and community-building symbols can promote this process of recognition and thus counteract individualistic orientations, divisive differentiations, and hierarchies between different workforce or wage-dependent groups (e.g. through racism or sexism) (Schmalstieg, 2008, 2015, p. 238ff).

3. Responsibility and changeability: For a collective action, it is necessary that the situation recognized as unfair be experienced as fundamentally changeable. An actor must be held accountable for this situation on or against which trade union action can be directed (see Kelly, 1998, p. 30).

4. Collective action possibilities and effectiveness: Unless alternative collective action possibilities are subjectively identifiable with the previous courses of action, individual exit or resistance strategies may remain. If alternative interpretation patterns convey collective options for action, then the goals associated with them must not only be considered meaningful/desirable, but also as enforceable/realistic and conclusive, beyond broadening personal agency. It therefore requires the assessment of collective effectiveness.

5. Motivation contradiction: Collective options for action are justifiably motivated only when the above-mentioned motivation contradiction is resolved

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³ With this approach, Kelly provides an explanation of how collective action emerges from workers. In his Mobilization Theory he integrates concepts from various strands in the field of social movement theories and the social psychology of protest (see Tilly, 1978, McAdam, 1988, Gamson, 1992, Klandermans, 1997).
in favor of collective practices – that is, when the subjective evaluation of future quality of life outweighs the efforts and risks of the journey. The risk that the initial level of individual agency could be jeopardized by the envisaged "conflict with those in power" (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 378) is the logical basis for the foundation of restrictive agency. It therefore requires the (self-)understanding of the dangers underlying the fears (e.g. threats of dismissal).

Abstract appeals to individual courage, or similar qualities, tend to displace the real problem from the perspective of the subject. Therefore, what is required instead are: a) collective strategies to jointly reflect fears and minimize individual dangers and b) graduated courses of action and related interpretation and knowledge offers (e.g. in the field of labor law). Collective courses of action must therefore be experienced from the perspective of the subject as not only meaningful, conclusive, and realistic/enforceable, but they must also be "worth it", in order to accept any negative consequences. This also means that other action possibilities could not be carried out or not to the desired extent. Since trade union action forms part of one's own way of coping with life (see Held et al., 2011, p. 32f, Hillebrand, 2012), ultimately each individual must evaluate different fields of action for themselves. For this reason, trade union action can be individualized. For example, it can be put on hold in favor of other organizations or help in the family environment, although the range of trade union courses of action still seems just as significant, coherent, and realistic.

6. Experience of collective action/effectiveness - Premise update:

In practice, the extent to which union action has actually made it possible to change one's own living conditions ultimately becomes clear. Depending on this, an update or review of the action premises is necessary. Individually, questions arise, such as: Did my dissatisfaction come to an end? Have my needs changed? Do you need further or other collective action to become collectively effective?

The motivation contradiction is updated depending on the extent to which the expectation of an expansion of agency is fulfilled or becomes doubtful, from the point of view of the subjects – be it either because the goals of the trade union organization have strayed from their interests or vice versa; the opposing power built up by trade union action, contrary to expectation, is not sufficient; or the individual risks are rising or falling short of the status quo, etc.

This ‘justification logic’ is not to be understood as a linear process, but as an ideal-typical reconstruction of psycho-logical based thought/action steps.\footnote{This reconstruction focuses on the subjective requirements of trade union action. According to Kelly (1998, 2005, p. 502), further processes are necessary for successful implicit trade union action, some of which were implicitly assumed in the reconstruction: a) a resource-mobilizing trade union organization, b) a trade union leadership (group), which is prepared for collective mobilization, c) a favorable balance of power, d) an opportunity for mobilization. These prerequisites make it clear why the}
should be noted that trade union action can certainly also be carried out for reasons that are not aimed at a generalizable expansion of agency, for example, if the reason is to succumb to the peer pressure of colleagues. Another reason for becoming a union member is to become eligible for membership bonuses – ranging from union services, such as legal protection, to collectively agreed benefits of members compared to non-members. In this sense, the ideal-typical reconstruction outlined above is one of several possible reason patterns for why people become union members.

Each logical step in this ideal-typical reason pattern is a process in itself. For example, in the course of a trade union campaign, experiences of collegial solidarity are accumulated, which may alter the assessment of collective agency or the expectation of positive or negative consequences. Other actors, such as business owners and the state, are entering the debate with new interpretation patterns and possible sanctions. These processes continue, just as each and every one of the participants, in the context of his or her – changeable – life situation, is continually able to regain his or her relationship with the trade union courses of action and draw new conclusions.

This is followed by an important conclusion formulated by Held (2016) on the basis of the aforementioned research project on solidarity understanding of employees in social services:

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5 This reasoning is referred to in the purely quantitative-psychological study by Bert Klandermans (1984) as 'social reward' and includes expectations about the positive/negative reactions of relevant significant others. This is one of several important 'variables' that explain willingness to participate in union action.

6 To explain the individual willingness to participate in trade union action, relatively solid individual orientations (not: attitudes) must be taken into account. These orientations must be understood in the light of a specific historical context, as well as social orientation offers (see Held, 2016, for the definition of the term 'orientation' and its distinction from the traditional-psychological term 'attitude', Held 2015, see also Markard, 1991). In other words, from the point of view of critical psychology, biographical and/or family-mediated experiences can lead to orientations that favor or inhibit trade union engagement (see the example of committed trade unionists: Hillebrand, 2012). However, such orientations vary considerably. Here, not only subjective contradictions and problems play a role, but also whether the individual has alternative courses of thought and action available.
"Overall, it can be stated [...] that solidarity is not a general socialization product, that it is not a personality trait – and that it is not self-evident, but that it arises in practice. Practical experience is therefore, above all, the precondition for a solidary stance, for solidary engagement, and for solidarity in action. In practice, this does not only refer to resistant action in operation, but rather action on site overall." (p. 176, see also Held/Billmann, 2014)

In my opinion, this statement applies not only to solidarity, but also to individual willingness to act within trade unions.

**Lack of motivation for trade union action: Manifestations of restrictive agency**

A critical-psychological analysis has to pay attention to the reasons for trade union action in its overall social context, as well as broken or lack of motivation. Primarily it is not about "attitude issues or whether there is a 'will' to change. Rather, the 'terrain' of the potential space of collective action must be taken into account (see Fantasia, 1988, p. 227), which in addition to trade union courses of action always includes intimidation, threats, and sanctions on the part of companies and other living conditions" (Schmalstieg, 2015, p. 223). This can also include courses of action "for participation in the power of the rulers" (Holzkamp, 1983, 375): "Here, the arrangement with the rulers thus includes the attempt of participation in their power to secure/expand their own agency at the expense of foreign interests, in which the suppression from 'above' is passed 'down' in a variety of ways to those at whose expense their own partial interests are to be enforced" (ibid.). Cooptation offers (e.g. bonus payments for non-membership) are a typical fission tool which employers use to prevent trade union action of their workforce (see Penney, 2004, Dörre et al., 2017, p. 123ff).

For illustrative purposes, some potential psychological manifestations of restrictive agency are described below (see Held et al., 2011, pp. 141-145, Holzkamp, 1983, Chap. 7.5). These are potential aspects of the subjective justification for not participating in a trade union, although the possibility for participation exists:

- **Interpreting** is often associated with: the suppression or repression of unjust structures (right up to the "belief in a just world"); a tendency to subordinate oneself to authorities and to follow accepted rules without question (authoritarianism); the belief that you are always responsible for your own well-being (self-orientation); static thinking instead of developmental thinking.
• **Restrictive emotionality** is often associated with: dissociation of emotions from the real cognized living conditions; internalization or purposeful control of the emotions; comparison of 'feeling' and 'understanding'.

• **Internalized compulsion** is often associated with: supposedly purely subjective discomfort and individual techniques for 'motivating' oneself (see Holzkamp, 1983, p. 402ff).

In her case study on the organization of precarious workers, Schmalstieg (2015) comes to the conclusion that, for various reasons, union activists have a hard time motivating their colleagues to engage in trade union work: they must argue against solidified orientation patterns, against corporate propaganda, and against societal hegemonic discourse, all of which suggest individualized strategies for coping with life and conflict resolution: "The [colleagues'] feelings of being threatened cannot be 'discussed away' in view of the abundance of precarious risks and constantly threatened agency, the discussions must be conducted continuously and arguments must be substantiated with results" (ibid.: p. 162). According to Schmalstieg, a full understanding of the action orientations of precarious workers only becomes possible if one considers that precarity depends on the entire life situation. Therefore, in trade union research from the standpoint of the subject, the living conditions of the respondents should be given full attention – not least the housing conditions, the family reproductive arrangements, or the accessibility to public infrastructures (ibid.: p. 221-223).

**Agency through trade union action in the conflict area of available expansions and restrictions**

Whether and to what extent the trade union platform is rated as a subjectively important expansion of personal agency in a concrete case is to be determined empirically. The expansion of agency need not be exhausted in the improvements of living and working conditions, but may also include the expansion of skills, knowledge, or social inclusion. This can also include an increased self-confidence and confidence in the variability of living/working conditions. This can even apply to employees who are not unionized because they indirectly learn something about their rights and thus learn to better assess their objective scope of possibility (Schmalstieg, 2015, p. 164f, see also Markowitz, 2000).

Critical-psychological trade union research analyzes trade union action offerings as a conflict area between expanded courses of action and subjective problems. Problems with the 'action offer' may explain some manifestations of broken motivation for union action. Such problems include the disregard for worker participation wishes of those affected or the overburdening of individual skills. Depending on the nature of the problem and the individually perceived
reaction possibilities, various actions are justified: From loss of motivation (withdrawal), to "learning loops" (Holzkamp, 1993), to resistance to one's own trade union organization (for exemplary sociological case studies on the subject see Markowitz, 2000, Simms, 2006, Nachtwey/Thiel, 2014).

This conflict area is associated with a typical contradiction in the practice of trade union work, namely that between leadership on the one hand and individual worker participation in trade union activities and goals on the other (Schmalstieg, 2015, pp. 246-251). This is the consequence of the fact that the trade union is an "organized form" (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 414) and thus brings with it action constraints. Critical-psychological analyses therefore have to keep an eye on subjective skills for worker participation, as well as the subjective significance of bureaucratic processes in the trade union organization.

4. Methodological consequences of trade union research from the standpoint of the subject

In a review of trade union research deficits, Gregor Gall and Jack Fiorito (2012, p. 718) claim that "studies should construct their research sites as foremost being the psyche of individual workers in order to better examine the potential variability of motivations (and configurations thereof) that lead to the same outcome and the contribution of social relationships and processes with other workers to that process." This is where critical-psychological trade union research begins, but what Gall and Fiorito suggest is primarily a quantitative-psychological research paradigm, which ends with the cause-effect relationship of various correlated concepts that should 'represent' consciousness and behavioral phenomena – such as the statistical connection between 'union commitment' and 'union participation'. Their method of choice is therefore standardized questionnaire studies.

The choice of the concrete method of collecting and evaluating trade union research from the standpoint of the subject must correspond to the above-described critical-psychological understanding of object matter. The method must be tailored to the specific question. This question ideally arises from the subjectively relevant problems of those affected. Qualitative survey methods – such as open structured interviews, participatory observation, or group discussions – are often the method of choice, but – taking methodological suitability into account – can also be combined with quantitative methods (for considerations on the possible combinations see: Held, 1994, Bibouche/Held, 2002, for an implementation in the context of trade union research see: Held et al., 2011, Held/Billmann, 2014).
In order to take into account the fact that people not only live under specific life circumstances, but also (re-)produce them through their actions, a form of action research suggests itself. In this, recognition is closely linked to the changing of one's own life practice. Ideally, the participants do not have the status of research objects and passive data providers, but instead become active in the research process – as co-researchers (see Markard, 2009, pp. 274-277). In a critical-psychological action research project, Ute Buggeln (2015) investigated and influenced the reform process of a branch of IG Metall. Along the way, she was able to work with various full-time and volunteer trade unionists to identify blockages and scopes of possibility for participation-oriented consensus-building and decision-making processes in the branch.

In the context of critical psychology, we can also draw on analyses that do not have a direct reference to action and change. From the point of view of temporary agency workers, Jan Aleith (2010) examines what prevents regular employees, employee representatives, and temporary agency workers from working together in solidarity for better living and working conditions (see also Aleith/Barf 2015). The investigation on "solidarity ideas" of young service workers is just as informative for trade union practice (Held et al., 2011) as the elaboration of five ideal-typical ways of dealing with social workers with their neoliberally restructured paid work (Eichinger, 2009). All three studies uncover subjective motivations and norms that can be useful for union practice of full-time and voluntary unionists. This is because they show barriers to collective action and solidarity which should be taken into account in trade union strategies; they uncover individual practices that are resistant to employer demands and that can be transformed into collective union actions; they expose subjectively highly significant professional standards that cannot be realized under working conditions, which could make them the linchpin of a union campaign; and, they reveal contradictions in the coping action of workers, to which alternative – 'destabilizing' the adaptation to the prevailing conditions – trade union interpretation offers can build on.

There are also two other critical psychological studies that give impetus for the reform of trade union organizations: The study by Julika Bürgin (2012) examines the demands on workers who face new forms of work in trade union education, such as indirect control. Bürgin shows that, far from relaying a fixed body of knowledge, there is a great need among the interviewees to communicate on their own work conflicts, dilemmas of collective action, and risky individual coping strategies. From a biographical angle, Katrin Hillebrand (2012) reconstructs the motives for trade union engagement of five female union members. In doing so, she uncovers androcentric aspects that hinder women's involvement in trade unions (such as the sanctioning of atypical behavior or the
lack of attention paid to the inequality of private care work between the genders) in the trade union organization and culture. She then discusses reformative steps (such as the establishment of women's networks, mentoring projects, and new forms of participation).

The works of Nora Räthzel and her colleagues, who are inspired by critical psychology, are also worth mentioning. For example, they analyze the labor regimes, gender relations, and workplace practices of trade union representatives from the perspective of workers in various plants of the car manufacturer Volvo (see Mulinari et al., 2011, Rätzhel et al., 2008, 2014). In a recent study, they conduct biographical interviews with ecologically-minded trade unionists to investigate "the biographical circumstances under which individuals are able to work with environmental issues in unions. The analysis shows that the conditions for integrating environmental issues are weakened by the hierarchical culture of the organization and by high levels of institutionalization" (Lundström et al., 2015, p. 166). Finally, the qualitative evaluation of two organizing projects of the United Services Trade Union by Marcel Thiel (2013) should be mentioned. The study is not an evaluation carried out solely from the point of view of the persons concerned but, for the evaluation of the projects, the author also inquired about the assessment criteria of important union activists and highlighted conflict areas according to the demands and experiences of the activists and the process of the projects.

It should now be clear: in union research from the standpoint of the subject, theories and concepts are bound to action problems. While quantitative-psychological trade union research is typically aimed at "abstract theoretical tests," critical-psychological trade union research aims to "reformulate immediate ideas and perspectives in such a way that other courses of action become conceivable. (...) The case-related critical-psychological research does not rule out the use of concepts developed beforehand, nor that theoretical work is carried out on a case-by-case basis or in the absence of specific cases. Their theoretical as well as practical relevance, however, cannot be separated from the associated possibilities of individual and societal emancipation" (Markard, 2009, p. 298f).

Are traditional-psychological or sociological theories and studies meaningless for such union research? The aim of critical psychology is to subject these theories and studies to criticism and to work out potential premises-reasons-relations. For example, sociological studies may describe the objective reality in trade unions or organizational processes, highlighting that a participatory organizing project involves significant membership growth and participation in union activities. To elicit the subjective significance of these courses of action would, as already mentioned, be critical psychology's objective. Its purpose is to identify why people opt for membership and participation, and
why others simultaneously choose not to do so. In addition, statistical correlations from sociological or quantitative-psychological research can be the starting point of a critical-psychological study, for example, to examine the statistical relationship between unemployment and union withdrawal. Such correlations, however, should not be regarded as "statistically-inductive explanations [...], but merely as descriptions of a fact requiring explanation" (Kempf, 1992, p. 106). Qualitative data would clarify correlative relationships without, however, being subjected to the misunderstanding that this means statements about single individuals become possible. Thus, from the perspective of the subject, there are quite different "good reasons" for remaining in the union despite unemployment, or for withdrawing on the occasion of unemployment.

5. Conclusion

Trade unions and union organizing are the subject of countless publications. Compared to the amount of quantitative-psychological and sociological studies, there has been little critical-psychological trade union research so far. This is regrettable because critical psychology, in my view, provides the necessary conceptual tools to clarify the question of whether or not wage earners organize themselves into unions and more or less engage as members. The aim of the article was to prove this. For this reason, the terms and methodological cornerstones of such research, as well as relevant critical psychological studies, were presented. This laid the foundations for practice-oriented trade union research with the help of critical psychology.

The next step involves the reinterpretation of existing theories and studies on the reasons for action in trade union engagement on this basis. The reasons for union involvement or engagement are discussed in numerous studies in the field of traditional psychological or sociological trade union research. The statements articulated therein would then have to be questioned as to whether implicit premises-reasons-relations are hidden in them (see Holzkamp, 1986) or whether they theorize the question about reasons for union action in an inadequate manner. For example, they would be inadequate, from the point of view of critical psychology, if the orientations of wage earners a) are detached from their life contexts and thus solipsistically curtailed, or b) are derived from societal structures. Thus, declarations of union abstinence of many workers who emphasize "individualization" as macro-societal development should also be dismissed as curtailments, just like the theorizing of workers as individual cost-benefit maximizers who wondered what monetary value they received from services for their union contribution.
At the same time, such a reinterpretation must recognize the relative gain in knowledge and the practical relevance of quantitative-psychological and sociological trade union studies. In Germany, for example, following the Labor Revitalization Studies and the Public Sociology debate, sociological trade union research that is oriented towards dialog and practical relevance for full-time and voluntary trade unionists has developed (Urban, 2015, Dörre, 2017). Within this framework, innovative trade union strategies such as organizing projects and relatively spontaneously initiated unionization processes were examined (see, e.g., Dörre et al., 2017, Schmalz/Dörre, 2013). Here, not only were the organizational strategies and tactics and their sociological effects reconstructed, but also – albeit relatively unsystematically – reasons why workers organize or worries from the employee's point of view were outlined. The article concludes by asserting that a productive interplay of the three outlined trade union research methods not only forms the basis for better understanding of trade union action by individuals, but also paves the way for more emancipatory trade union practice. Such a practice can be described as "comprehensive" or "understanding trade union work" (Schmalstieg, 2015, pp. 233-236):

"'Understanding trade union work' or, better, 'understanding membership work' aims at the reason patterns, motivation and needs of the members, which are thought of and anticipated in the context of institutional and societal action possibilities." (pp. 235-236)

For practitioners, this would mean trade union work that explores the reason patterns of the addressees of trade union offerings in order to understand their reasons for action and to then develop courses of action and forms of thought that offer alternatives, in the general interest, to settling into the status quo. Such an understanding of union work would not be limited to encouraging resistance and collective solidarity in action at the corporate level. Rather, it would also pursue the aim of providing possible interpretations and courses of action in the general interest with regard to societal processes. In the face of stronger right-wing populism and the spread of exclusively-solidaristic attitudes in the workforce, this is a most urgent task.

References


Chimirri & Petersen (see this ARCP special issue)


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Identifying and analysing personal participation in Finnish pupil welfare work

Teemu Suorsa

Abstract
In recent years, our research group at the University of Oulu has developed, in a dialogue with German-Scandinavian critical psychology, a model of empirical research that strives to understand the changing participation of individuals in maintaining and changing societally produced conditions and meaning structures. In this article, I present an empirical analysis from a research project where subject-scientific ideas have been used and developed in relation to pupil welfare services in Northern Finland. I begin with a short description of the project where professionals in pupil welfare services discussed the current challenges in their everyday work in supervised peer groups and describe the data that was created during the project. Next, I describe how personal participation is identified and further analysed in relation to sociological research on the development of mental health work in Finland. In the discussion, I suggest that the knowledge created in this kind of analysis can be used in developing structures of pupil welfare services and in supporting professional growth.

Keywords
subject, society, participation, professional agency, pupil wellbeing, psychiatry, educational psychology, fabric of grounds

1. Introduction
The relationship between subjective experience and societal conditions is a central question in any research on human experience and action. In recent years, our research group at the University of Oulu has developed, in a dialogue with German-Scandinavian critical psychology, a model of empirical research that
TEEMU SUORSA

strives to understand the changing participation of individuals in maintaining and changing societally produced conditions and meaning structures. The model was first developed in practice research related to the training of professional interpersonal skills for educators and other professionals working in educational contexts (Suorsa, Rantanen, Mäenpää & Soini, 2013). The approach has been developed further in a dialogue with a theory of organism-environment system (Järvilehto, 2009) that has strived to conceptualise human beings and their environment as a unitary system (Suorsa, 2015a; Suorsa, Rantanen, Siipo, Laukka & Soini, 2017). The model has also been discussed in relation to solution-focused practices (de Shazer et al., 1987) which focus on the participants’ everyday activities and experiences, social relations, and their visions about future (Suorsa, 2015b).

In this article, I present an empirical analysis from a research project where subject-scientific ideas have been used and developed in relation to pupil welfare services in Northern Finland. I begin with a short description of the project where professionals in pupil welfare services discussed the current challenges in their everyday work in supervised peer groups (Soini, Jämsä & Kuusisto, 2006; Suorsa et al., 2013) and describe the data that was created during the project. Next, I describe how personal participation is identified and further analysed in relation to sociological research on the development of mental health work in Finland. In the discussion, I suggest that the knowledge created in this kind of analysis can be used in developing structures of pupil welfare services, and in supporting professional growth.

2. Description of the SOLMU-education project and the data

Our research group has provided in-service training programs – called SOLMU-education – in professional interpersonal skills for employees working in the field of pupil welfare services. “Pupil welfare services” in Finland refers to a multi-professional collaboration between teachers, principals, school psychologists, school social workers, special educators, school nurses, and other professionals who have their own duties in the process of enhancing pupils’ wellbeing and learning at schools. Current legislation emphasises the role of communal pupil welfare work that focuses on developing the school community into a better place for all students and teachers. Often, however, professionals' everyday work consists of handling individual pupils’ problems rather than developing schools as organisations.

Since 2005, 71 professionals have participated in the SOLMU-education program that consists of lectures, seminars, and supervised peer group meetings.
The participants, mainly female, were 25–50 years of age, with more than five years of working experience, mainly in comprehensive schools as teachers, principals, special educators, psychologists and school social workers (see Suorsa, 2014). Some of the participants also had experience in preschool education. The totality of the data consists of several sources that typically comprise audio, video, and written materials produced during one training program that lasts from 6 to 12 months. An example of the educational training structure is described in the Table 1 (see also Soini, Rantanen & Suorsa, 2012; Suorsa et al., 2013).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event (6-8 hours)</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Opening seminar   | 24 professionals | • Orientation  
                                                • Experiences of pupil welfare work  
                                                • Professional interpersonal skills |
| 3 training days   | 6–8 professionals per group | • 2–3 counselling conversations (per day) on a topical, personally meaningful matter in participants’ work that is observed and discussed in the supervised peer group |
| Evaluation day    | 6–8 professionals per group | • Watching the videoed counselling conversations  
                                                • Structured discussions on the interaction between the counsellor and the client  
                                                • Discussing the clients’ “problems” |
| Theme seminar     | 24 professionals | • Solution-focused counselling |
| 3 training days   | 6–8 professionals per group | • 2–3 counselling conversations (per day) on a topical, personally meaningful matter in participants’ work that is observed and discussed in the supervised peer group |
| Evaluation day    | 6–8 professionals per group | • Watching the videoed counselling conversations  
                                                • Structured discussions on the interaction between the counsellor and the client  
                                                • Discussing the clients’ “problems” |
| Ending seminar    | 24 professionals | • Discussing the insights into professional interpersonal skills and problems in pupil welfare work  
                                                • Innovating new practices for the everyday pupil welfare work |

Table 1. Structure of SOLMU-education.
During the training year, participants take turns acting as counsellor, client, and observer. In the role of the client, participants are asked to discuss ongoing, topical and personally meaningful matters emerging from their work (Soini et al., 2012). The counsellor listens and helps the client to handle the topic, practicing counselling skills, such as listening and asking specific questions. The observer comments on the interaction between the client and the counsellor. Also, the client’s problem is addressed in the peer group. The supervisor moderates the conversation in the group and points out important aspects that emerge from the counselling conversation. The training sessions are video recorded for educational purposes but they also offer a good opportunity for analysing the conversations. The training model has also been developed as a particular method for researching experiences (see Soini & Tuominen-Eilola, 2004) where the experience is first “released”, as the client starts to describe his / her problem to the counsellor. Then the experience is “specified” and “enriched” in the conversation with the counsellor and the whole group. Participants also regularly recognise similarities between clients and their own experiences, as well as common aspects of the experience and its context. Thus, the structure of the training session brings together the experiences and expertise of all participants, creating the possibility of “generalising” individual experiences through pointing out the commonality of individuals’ shared experiences. This step of the SOLMU-education programme can be seen as the first step toward an actual generalisation as it is carried out in the research process (see Chapter 3.3. About generality and particularity of personal participation).

The data package that is used in this article consists of 48 videoed training sessions (incl. one-on-one counselling conversations and discussions within the group, 60–90 minutes per session). The training sessions took place over the course of one year. In this paper, I focus on the analysis of an individual participant’s description of a topical, personally meaningful everyday situation occurring at her place of work. The detailed example documented here is chosen to illustrate the problematic role of psychological and psychiatric expertise in pupil welfare work that can be identified in several cases in the data.

3. Subject-scientific research on pupil welfare professionals’ experiences

The starting point in this research has been the subject-scientific idea of “discourse of reasons” that emphasises that the environment does not “condition” human action and experience (Holzkamp, 1983, 1996; Markard, 2009). Rather, a person’s actions and experiences are seen as already “grounded” in the bio-socio-material environment (see Suorsa, 2015c). Klaus Holzkamp (1996) described a
person’s grounded participation in their scenes of everyday living as a proper object of psychological research. Ole Dreier (2008, 2011) has further refined the concept of personal participation in terms of (trans)located and positioned taking of a personal stance in a historical situation (Suorsa, 2015b). This taking of a personal stance can be seen in relation to the subject-scientific concept of agency (Handlungsfähigkeit) that emphasises a person’s restrictive and generalisable participation in maintaining and changing their life conditions (Markard, 2009). The concepts “restrictive” and “generalisable” denote a central contradiction in the lives of western individuals: on the one hand persons are able to consciously participate in maintaining and changing their living conditions in accordance with their own and common interests and needs; on the other hand, they also need to hold on to their current possibilities for this participation, and thus are inclined to ally themselves with current power relations, even if they are far from optimal and equitable, because changing them could endanger the resources they need and that matter to them.

3.1 Identifying personal participation: FOG-analysis

Participants’ subjective standpoints in different situations were summarised as fabrics of grounds (FOG) that include a description of 1) the situation, 2) the participant’s thinking, feeling and/or acting in the situation, and 3) the participant’s subjective reasons for thinking, feeling and/or acting a particular way in (and in relation to) the situation. The FOGs also included the intended next step of the participant in this situation. The reconstruction of FOGs has been described in Suorsa et al. (2013). In Suorsa et al. (2017), we described the identification of fabric of grounds as FOG-analysis. During the research project the reconstructed FOGs were presented to the participants so that they were able to make corrections and integrate specifications. In all, there were 48 FOGs that described personal stances that had been adopted in different situations in everyday pupil welfare work.

The themes in the FOGs were categorised by Peltola, Suorsa, Karhu & Soini (Under review) using grounded theory. The main themes of the discussions were described as ‘Resources, division of labour and changes in duties’ (23 units), ‘Coping and limits of work’ (46 units), ‘Client-related concerns’ (15 units), ‘Unprofessional practice of a colleague’ (17 units), and ‘Organisational culture and interaction’ (42 units). The analysis showed the ‘concern for pupil welfare work’ as a general characteristic for all the discussions. The contents of FOGs were also analysed in relation to the concepts of feeling rules (Hochschild, 1979; Karhu, 2015) and psychological capital (Borén, 2017; Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). These analyses have shown that FOGs can be a reasonable starting point for many kinds of research and that they can also function as a
bridge between different traditions in psychological research. The knowledge that we have created about the concerns and affective rules in pupil welfare work has been welcomed among the pupil welfare service professionals as articulating the dilemmas in their everyday work. The focus on psychological capital highlighted the strengths and hopes that sustain the motivation of poorly paid and highly educated professionals in their difficult work.

3.2 Analysing personal participation

In Holzkamp’s (1996) terms, the reconstruction of FOGs can be seen as descriptive attending to a scene of a participant’s everyday life. Even though the researcher’s interest is theoretically motivated by the idea of “discourse of reasons” it is still the main focus in the reconstruction of FOGs to describe a participant’s experience at the level of her self-understanding (see also Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). If the reconstructed FOG is presented to the participant, we are – following Holzkamp (1996) – already attending constructively to the scene of their everyday living, even if the researcher’s intention would only be to make sure they have described the participant’s experience accurately. For instance, the participant may not have initially seen her action as grounded, even though she readily recognises the groundedness, as the FOG is presented to her. Theoretical understanding (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), that may also challenge a participant’s self-understanding, takes place when more subject-scientific concepts are taken into account in the analysis. If the analysis’ multidisciplinary task is to articulate the societal conditions and the real results of the participant’s action, it becomes probable that the produced theoretical understanding is inaccessible to participants. In subject-scientific terms it is a limitation in the created knowledge if the interpretation cannot be developed together with the participants. However, one should not conclude that research should not be done at all if all the ideals of subject-scientific research cannot be followed. Instead, recognising the limitations of the research and created knowledge is an important part of carrying out the research (see also Markard, 2009).

Suorsa (2015a) suggested that the following figure helps researchers to organise participants’ experiences in accordance with basic concepts of the subject-scientific approach. In Figure 1, the subject-scientific concepts of “grounds”, “premises”, “meanings” and “conditions” are seen in relation to the concept of “result of action” that is central in the theory of the organism-environment system (see Suorsa, 2015a).
These concepts can be used in a “qualitative text analysis” that seeks to identify central themes in participants’ talk. This can be done according to the rules of inclusion presented in Figure 2.

Figure 1. Analysis of personal participation (Suorsa, 2015a).
This figure and these rules of inclusion should not, however, be seen as an absolute requirement for placing each sequence of text into the right box; the placement of individual statements can also change as the research proceeds. The main idea is that the data is discussed in relation to the dimensions in the figure. Strictly speaking, a participant's description is always about premises, grounds, and the anticipated results of action. Acting, results, conditions and meanings require different approaches, such as participatory observation, and theoretical reconstruction in relation to sociological research. A participant’s descriptions can, however, be seen as an indication toward acting, results, conditions and meanings.

The figure can also help in organising the data in order to understand changes in participants’ participation. For instance, learning professional interpersonal skills in SOLMU-education can be approached by identifying participants’ FOGs in different phases of education. The change and its meaning can be specified by focusing, e.g., on participants’ premises (how they experience societal conditions and general possibilities for action) and on the results that their grounded actions produce. The results of educational psychological research can, then, be seen as descriptions of action and experiences before and after the intervention, and further theoretical explications of the change and its preconditions (see Nissen, 2005). “The change” can also mean a more fine-grained understanding of premises or results of action, enabled in the developing dialogue between the participants. Then, it is not so much

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**Figure 2. Rules of inclusion.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Premises</th>
<th>Participant describes her conceptions about general possibilities for action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grounds</td>
<td>Participant explains her action; she describes her thoughts, feelings and actions in relation to what she actually does or to what results she expects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipated result</td>
<td>Participant describes her needs, goals and possibilities; she describes consequences of the situation or her actions in the situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting</td>
<td>Participant describes what she actually has done in the situation (without reflecting on possible consequences, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Result of action</td>
<td>Participant describes the actual consequences of acting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditions</td>
<td>Participant describes practices, institutions, etc. where the action and/or possibilities for action take place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meanings</td>
<td>Participant describes general possibilities for action into which her premises are connected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
about a change in participants’ actions and experiences but in the development of mutual understanding between the researcher and the participant that will help the researcher in orienting toward essential dimensions of the situation.

### 3.3 About generality and particularity of personal participation

Subject-scientific conception of generalisation can be seen as a further development of Kurt Lewin’s (1890–1947) conception of human scientific research (Holzkamp, 1983). Lewin was interested in general laws of human action and experience. By law, Lewin meant that a certain kind of action occurs typically in certain kinds of situations. “The law” explicates the relationship between the conditions of action and results of action as “if-then relationships” (Chaiklin, 2011). In Lewin’s model the research focused on particular cases as they took place in everyday life and as a result of researchers’ interventions. The goal of the research was to recognise the common features of the cases, and to see the particular case as a variation of a more general type of cases.

A FOG articulates an individual’s unique and particular participation in maintaining and changing the societal conditions within the scene of their everyday living by showing the way that the general possibilities for action assemble to ground an individual’s action and experience. The individual FOGs in different scenes of everyday living can eventually be combined, taking into consideration their common aspects, and they can be seen as unique variations of a more general type of participation in a historical situation. Thus, the FOGs, as results of educational psychological research, are potentially generalisable everywhere people live and work under the same or similar conditions (see Kempf, 1994; Markard, 1993).

### 3.4 Case analysis: Psychiatry as a scientific and professional anchorage in Finnish pupil welfare work?

In the following, we take a closer look, with the concepts described in Figure 1, at one FOG that was reconstructed during a SOLMU-education. I also make theoretical claims about the participant’s psychic orientation in a way that illustrates the individual, communal, and societal character of a participant’s experience and that makes the subjective functionality of a participant’s experience and action evident. The concepts of restrictive and generalisable agency are also used in the analysis. The societal dimension of the experience is clarified in relation to a sociological analysis related to development of mental health work in Finland. The theoretical claims were produced by the researcher,
and the interpretations were presented to the participant, whereby she also gave some specifications on the situation that she described in the training session.

It should be emphasised that even though the following FOG originates from an individual school social worker’s description, its main function in the research process was to articulate general possibility structures that are accentuated differently by individual employees, in relation to their experienced needs and possibilities for action. Because the translocality and historicity of the school social worker’s grounded participation are not thoroughly articulated in this research, the research creates relatively rough-grained knowledge about the situation and individual possibilities of participating in maintaining and changing the societally produced conditions.

*FOG: When pupils don’t get psychiatric services, even if they were needed, I think that there are situations at my work that I can’t immediately change. I have, however, tried to change the situation by participating in writing a letter to the city’s policy makers, because I believe that a general or public discussion about the situation could bring about the change, and psychiatric services could be offered to those who are in need.*

This FOG was reconstructed from a counselling conversation where a school social worker explained how the city’s service system was a part of her problematic everyday work (*conditions / meanings*). According to the participant, the queues for the children’s and youth’s psychiatric services were too long, and the pupils and their families did not get the help that they needed in time (*conditions / meanings*). As a consequence, the pupils’ and their families’ situations got worse while they were waiting (*conditions / meanings*). In addition, she explained that there were too few employees in the child welfare office (*conditions / meanings*). In relation to her own work as a school social worker, she acknowledged that there were situations that one had to bear and tolerate as they are not immediately changeable (*anticipated results*). She, however, believed that a general / public discussion on the matter could bring about change (*premises, grounds*): she had participated in writing a letter to policy makers with her colleagues, in order to make their concerns visible (*acting*). She was hoping that this would lead to a situation where psychiatric services would be available to every pupil who needed it (*anticipated results*).

In terms of restrictive / generalisable agency, we can note that the social worker participated consciously in changing her working conditions, with the goal of promoting the availability of psychiatric services for pupils (*anticipated result*). It is noteworthy that both the problem and the solution are seen in the field of psychiatry. This can be seen in relation to sociological research on the
development of mental health work in Finland in general (**conditions / meanings**). Psychiatry has, according to Helén, Hämäläinen and Metteri (2011), become a scientific and professional anchorage in modern, wide-ranging and multi-professional mental health work. According to Helén et al. (2011), this has to do more generally with mental health work reacting to neoliberal policy focusing on problematic individuals who cause or may cause societal or economic damage. This way of thinking can, according to Helén et al. (2011), be seen also in many experts’ demands that the psychic malaise of children and adolescents should be alleviated by increasing psychiatric services. Helén et al. (2011) find this, however, problematic since problems in mental health are mainly about the relationship between the individual and society, as well as about social interaction. Accordingly, Helén et al. (2011) suggest that in addition to taking care of individual patients, it would be necessary to develop also social and societal practices.

The FOG is reconstructed from one limited conversation, and it has not been discussed, for example, in relation to the school social worker’s endeavours in developing the schools’ organisational cultures. Still, the FOG is a good example of the role of the psychiatric and psychological expertise in pupil welfare services (**conditions / meanings**) that is present also elsewhere in our data. There are also other kinds of discourses that can be identified in our data, but a general tendency seems to be that other solutions remain in the shadows of the idea, such that a realistic solution should be found from more active participation by mental health professionals. This can be seen also in the City of Oulu’s decision to hire psychiatric nurses at schools to promote the wellbeing of pupils (Yle Uutiset, 2013).

With concepts of interpretive and grasping thinking, which enlighten the cognitive aspects of restrictive / generalising agency (see Markard, 2009), we can make some specifications according to how the situation is handled. The concept of ‘interpretive thinking’ directs the researchers’ attention toward a question about to the extent to which the participant's description is limited to how things are at the moment, and what is realistic in these conditions. With the concept of ‘grasping thinking’ the researcher focuses on the extent to which the current context is reflected in relation to the conditions and possibilities in which the situation appears. For instance, focusing on the desirability of psychiatric services means at the same time that no other types of solutions are developed in this conversation.

Our exemplary FOG does not, of course, mean that the school social worker would not see other possibilities in contributing to pupils’ wellbeing besides promoting the availability of psychiatric services. However, the FOG shows that in the current situation, the exploration of other solutions is not always
subjectively functional. Further, the FOG can be seen in light of Helén et al.’s (2011) claim that developing preventive mental health work in Finland nowadays usually means developing a differentiated service system where each problem has its own expert. The goal of this development is to ensure that mental health services would be available in all phases of the development of mental disorders. Services ought to, accordingly, be directed to strengthening individuals’ living and coping resources, solving psychosocial problems and offering psychosocial support, identifying mental disorders as early as possible, and offering effective treatment and rehabilitation (see Helén et al., 2011). What is problematic in this focusing on the service system, is that the societal-structural mental health work remains in the shadows of the development of an extensive service system. Also, the concept of structure is seen as equal to this service system. By “societal-structural mental health work”, Helén et al. (2011) mean, instead, utilising the knowledge, that is created in mental health work, about difficulties in citizens’ lives, for developing societal practices and structures. In this sense, the school social worker’s activities in promoting psychiatric services also maintain and develop societal practices that are in contradiction with participants’ long-term interests.

Focusing on psychiatric services in this situation had to do with the fact that the young people who, according to a standard procedure, would have been offered psychiatric services, could not get these services due to a backlog (conditions / meanings). Consequently, the school social worker had to do supportive work with these pupils, which meant more meetings with them (acting). The pupils’ problems were the kind that required help, but according to the school social worker, help could not be provided based on their level of expertise (premises, anticipated results). As the school social worker was doing both supportive work and her basic work, she felt frustrated and burdened; also because her working hours were not enough to handle all the situations (anticipated result, result of action). As she later discussed with her colleagues (acting), she noticed that others had been acting similarly in a similar situation (premises). The recognition of the similarities also brought about a will to do something about it collectively (grounds). Because the acute problem in everybody’s work had to do with the backlog in psychiatric services (conditions / meanings, premises), their collective actions were also directed toward solving this acute problem (acting).

The situation is psychologically interesting because it illustrates the contradictory movement in human action and experience (see also Maiers, 1994). On the one hand, the challenging situation at work was characterised by personal feelings (frustration, burdening) and simplifying and personalising interpretations (pupils’ psychiatric problems) and consequent developmental lines: burn out and
or getting more psychiatric services. We can also talk here about interpretive thinking, according to which the observed matters are interpreted in light of the immediate life world of participants and current state of affairs in welfare work. On the other hand, as the personal and private feelings turned out to be common experiences (premises) an emotional readiness to change the conditions by collective activity was brought about (anticipated result, acting). Despite the strengthening agency and the entailed positive emotionality and motivated activity the situation remains contradictory because, from a societal perspective, the collective activity was oriented toward solving the acute problem in a way that strengthens the idea of developing psychosocial pupil welfare work as a service system (result of action, conditions). From the perspective of the school social worker, this is, however, subjectively functional because availability of psychiatric services enables her focus on basic work that also includes preventive mental health work at schools.

4. Discussion

This article has introduced a way of identifying and analysing personal participation in Finnish pupil welfare work. The methodical steps were concretised in an analysis of a school social worker’s experience of a critical incident at her work. The starting point was a FOG that was reconstructed during an in-service training programme (SOLMU-education). In the analysis, the participant’s premises and subjective grounds for action were addressed. Also, the participant’s understanding of her needs and possibilities (anticipated results) were discussed. The participant’s action was, however, in a strict sense, not addressed because we only discussed the participant’s description of her actions and experiences in the situation. Further, the actual results of the action were not, in a strict sense, addressed. Consequently, the research did not create knowledge about how the school social worker in fact participated in maintaining and changing her working conditions. Instead, the research created knowledge about a possible way of relating to a situation where a city’s service system did not function as expected.

According to a subject-scientific co-researcher principle, the individual subject functions as a mediator between theory and empirical observations. This means that people whose experiences are addressed by the research should have a final say concerning whether the theoretical claims about their experiences still address their experiences. In this research, the accuracy of interpretations has been reflected by presenting the researcher’s formulations to the participant in different phases of the analysis. Like in communicative validity (Kvale &
Brinkmann, 2009), the idea is not that the “participant knows best”. Instead, the dialogue with the participants is seen as an articulative step in describing the reality. Furthermore, the dialogue is seen as developing collaboration between researcher and practitioner. In this dialogue, the basic concepts (that have their own truth value) and participants’ subjective experiences (which are also, in a way, undisputable) are in a reciprocal relationship and may develop during the research process. In this sense, the FOGs and their further analyses are to be seen as part of a dialogue aiming to conceptualise the common reality. In subject-scientific research, the dialogue between the researcher and the participants, that relates to research’s basic concepts, is a central criterion for the objectivity, or appropriateness, of the research. In all cases, however, extensive dialogue with the participants is not possible (see also Huck, 2009). In these cases, it is reasonable to hold on to traditional criteria in qualitative research, such as careful data-driven analysis, as well as theoretical understanding, and their evaluation in a scientific community (see Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

When we think about communal strategies for carrying out and developing, say, pupil welfare services, FOGs and their further analyses can give answers to questions about “Where are we now?” by describing individual ways of relating to general possibilities for action. Furthermore, they offer a concrete starting point for thinking about “Where do we want to go?”, and “How do we get there?” (see Laitinen & Hallantie, 2011). The FOGs concretise the level between a general goal (“wellbeing of children and youth”) and general means to achieve this goal (“more psychologists in schools”) as they describe the topical matters in, for example, a school social worker’s everyday work, and articulate, based on empirical research, different ways of relating to these matters. FOGs can also function as a tool in dialogic strategy making where citizens, professionals, organisations, and other interest groups have their own role. According to a suggestion by the development manager of the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities (Pauni, 2013), the role of the communal actor should be, in dialogic strategy making, a facilitator in developing strategic goals rather than an independent definer of goals. The FOGs that belong to a concrete problem articulate participants’ perspectives of parties on different sides of a contradictory situation (for instance, in relation to psychiatric services, or psychological testing). It is clear that the FOGs as such do not answer all questions about individual professionals’ possibilities for carrying out and developing pupil welfare work. Instead, they open novel questions.

As descriptions of how the working conditions are experienced as possibilities for action, individual FOGs have a clear value:

1. for policy makers and managers; as knowledge about possible ways of acting and experiencing in relation to common structures.
2. for professionals working in a similar profession; both through articulating / enhancing consciousness about personal stances and by pointing out alternative possibilities for action.

3. for students who are preparing to work in a similar profession; as knowledge about possible work situations, as well as different ways of relating to and in these situations.

Even though individual FOGs have their value, it is important to note that in a more wide-ranging research effort, it is possible to recognise, in addition to individual ways of relating, different types of relationships to situations. These ways and types of relating can then further be specified in multidisciplinary research projects if they seem to articulate some meaningful or critical aspects at individual or societal levels. In terms of educational psychological research, this specifying means also striving to overcome specific obstacles for action, as well as promoting participants’ professional and personal growth.

References


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Empirical research on the basis of Critical Psychology: The evaluation of a social integration program as an example

Josef Held

Abstract
The Tübingen Research Group works on the basis of Berlin Critical Psychology (CP). CP supplies the basic terms, the framework and the strategies for empirical research. At the heart of the categorial approach of CPs is the concept of “agency”. Individuals desire to expend their agency and this applies in a special manner for migrants. From 2013 to 2016, we have evaluated a program with 60 integration projects. We have extended our definition of integration for this purpose: we define integration from the standpoint of the subjects. What are their needs and how do they try to expand their agency? The development and expansion of agency in the integration-process require some resources. We sorted the 60 projects in our evaluation research into four dimensions. We used Bourdieu’s forms of capital as a point of orientation and interpreted these as resources for integration. This enables us to ask what the resources are that supported by the integration projects? Our understanding is that the increase of resources promotes integration. Meanwhile we have noticed that the development of resources secures neither the level of respect and status of a person nor the automatic advancement of a person in our society. Society has distinctive criteria of what is accepted as capital. For example, mastering different languages is not automatically an advantage. Subtle mechanisms of power take care of reproducing a hierarchic structure. In addition to the development of resources, it is necessary to fight for acceptance/recognition of the resources. Projects of integration can support the user in their “fight for belonging and acceptance/recognition”.

Keywords
evaluation, integration, subject-scientific approach
The Tübingen Research Group (TFG) works on the basis of Berlin Critical Psychology (CP). CP supplies the basic terms, the framework and the strategies for our empirical research. At the center of the fundamental category approach of CP lies the concept of agency. Agency means, on the one hand, the general human ability to act, and on the other hand the empirical amount of individual agency. The individual desires to expend his or her agency and this applies in a special manner to migrants, because they are in an extraordinary restricted situation. The human ability to act and empirical agency are both part of the Subject paradigm.

The term subject emphasizes the active momentum of human action. It reaches back to the philosopher Immanuel Kant and the tradition of German idealism. The analytical quality of the term lies within its ambiguity: subject means on the one hand – especially in German – the autonomous individual, and on the other hand, because of the Latin stem of the word, it refers to the individual who is submitted to the totality of social circumstances. The English and French expression still contains this specific meaning. In CP every action and every orientation of the subject is seen as societally mediated, i.e. the societal context has to be considered.

For research methodology this means the following: If research – the same goes for practice – is a process of cooperating with individuals, then individuals should be seen as acting subjects with their own intentions, their own history and culture, living under their own societal circumstances. Their personal living conditions have to be included. This leads in terms of research methodology to case studies (Held, 2001; Riegel, 2004).

Respecting individuals as subjects isn’t the full solution yet, it is only the starting point of another kind of methodological approach. The relationship between researcher and subjects must fundamentally undergo a critical reflection process. The question is which perspective research should take, especially in the field of social integration research: the perspective of the majority or of the minority? The constellation of the relation should be reflected on critically, especially if the researcher is part of the majority (Riegel & Kaya, 2002).

In an evaluation project researchers have to choose either to follow the perspective of the majority or the perspective of the minority as the main perspective of their research. Both ways are possible but not simultaneously; and both of the perspectives have significant consequences on the outcome of the research.

The recognition of the subject-nature of the research-user cannot really prevent that the research-user gets the role of an object after all, so that the control over the research-user is reinforced. In the subject-scientific approach
there is a distinction between subject-orientation and the standpoint of the subject. A longer quote thereto:

Holzkamps (1996) critique (on qualitative research) involves the distinction between subject-orientation and “science from the standpoint of the subject”. Subject-orientation is concerned if the individual ways of thinking and courses of action are in focus from an external point of view, with the purpose of gathering knowledge about possible causes of individual action with the aim of gaining influence.¹ (Osterkamp, 2001)

This critique articulates that on one hand the individual can be taken seriously in the context of research and as a subject they can be treated with respect, but on the other hand it could simultaneously result in a subtle method of gaining a lot of information about an individual and thus of gaining a lot of influence and control. For this reason the Berlin critical psychologist Klaus Holzkamp pleads for a “Science from the standpoint of the subject” and favors another approach: “It isn’t about the assessment (Erfassung) of individuals, their way of thinking and their course of action, rather the subject-matter of the analysis are concrete living conditions in their subjective meaning” (Osterkamp, 2001).

This is similar to a simple sentence of the famous social psychologist Kurt Lewin, that the nature of the action (Handlung) of a person depends directly on his recognition of the situation. How a person perceives his or her own environment cannot be grasped from an external point of view:

Because concrete/specific living conditions in their subjective meanings can be only perceived from the person involved in the living conditions, individuals involved aren’t on the object side but on the side of the “researchers”. (Osterkamp, 2001: 8)

The subject approach in evaluation research

An evaluation from the perspective of the subject must be practiced from the standpoint of the subject. The subject is participating in the research and therefore stands on the side of the researcher and not on the object side. Everyone involved in the research is in an intersubjective mode of relation to each other. The subject-matter of the analysis are experiences from the standpoint of the subject, which are articulated and communicated in the language of subjective reasons.

¹ All translations by Josef Held.
Evaluation research as a subject-science approach is close to practice and is relevant and promising for practice. But in practice there is mistrust against evaluators (e.g., Köbberling & Lux, 2007: 77). There are fears of control, valuation and discipline and evaluators are often considered as agents of the employers and sponsors/investors. A negative evaluation can risk the progress or damage the image of the project. This negative attitude is mainly based on negative experiences with evaluations and is hard to change. The principles of loyalty and fairness of the German Association for Evaluation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Evaluation) are not making a big difference in this case. Important is to establish an *intersubjective mode of relations* between researchers and practitioners from the beginning. A substantial requirement is that practitioners should count on that concrete information about their projects is not passed on to employers and sponsors/investors. If that is not possible, then subject-science “from the standpoint of the subject” is not possible either (Holzkamp, 1991).

An *intersubjective mode of relationship* can be established if the participants, i.e. practitioners and users, are not seen as objects of the research but as *co-researchers* standing on the side of research. In this sense research turns into cooperation, contains reflection of the practice and serves the “social self-reflection” of the participants (Holzkamp, 1996: 95ff). The substance of this is a dialogical analysis of possibilities of actions and societal mediated obstructions. The goal is the “emancipatory relevance“ of research for the practice (Köbberling & Lux, 2007: 74), i.e. that the participants realize their dependence, restrictions and discriminations and take countermeasures against them. This is not only a task for practice but also for research. One research question, for example, could be: What kind of practice can encourage “empowerment”, i.e. reduce powerlessness and helplessness? (Vossebrecher & Jeschke, 2007). Accordingly, the criteria of evaluation should reflect on the participants’ extension of agency.

Researchers cannot limit their focus to support a project immanently, they also need to consider the social, institutional and societal context and the societal relevance of problems in practice. The main goal of practitioners and their clients is not only to support a good project, but to see themselves confronted with social and societal conditions which interfere with their work. If practitioners meet the challenge of the latter, then research should be able to support them.

The above-mentioned remarks on the standpoint of subject should neither result in a distinct subject-scientific method nor in a distinct evaluation concept for the evaluation research. Previous methods and approaches – after a critique of their shortcomings – should rather be reinterpreted and reconstructed in order to meet subject-scientific requirements.
This applies for instance to the approach of the responsive evaluation (Grohmann, 1996: 79 ff). The concept of the responsive evaluation “responds to the information and evaluation requests of the stakeholder. The person who evaluates has a function as a body of resonance for the program. The person acts primarily as a survey instrument” (Beywl, 2006: 103). In this case practitioners and users of a program gather around a table to exchange and discuss ideas. Hence the method of “focus group discussion” is often applied (Bohnsack, Przyborski, & Schäffer, 2006).

This approach shows that there are different subject positions to consider: on one side the practitioners, who conduct the program, and on the other side the users of the program and the researchers. One task of the evaluative researcher would be the organization of the exchange between practitioners and users, or only between practitioners or only between users. The most important point is that users of the program take the crucial subject-position. Research about users of social work is still in its beginning (Bitzan, Bolay, & Thiersch, 2006; Oelerich & Schaarschuch, 2006) and this research desideratum. This is the case of a “user-driven evaluation (Beywl, 2006: 107f). However a “Critical User Research” should be strived for. “It asks for the actual practical value for the user involved in social work.” (Hirschfeld 2012: 269).

The subject approach in social integration research

The subject approach in research and practice means that no person will be an object of evaluation. Participants are considered as actors and the aim is to strengthen their position. Practitioners and the users of the social integration programs are considered as target groups, i.e., it is about a dialogic process. The actions of both groups – social workers and users – are subjectively motivated, as well as socially mediated.

If social integration is understood as a subject-process, then it is hard to imagine how someone is capable of externally achieving objectives. It is possible to maintain the illusion of the direct implementation of goals of the individuals through staged measures at school. The goals are implemented in the curriculum and the syllabus, without asking pupils about their own goals. It is hardly the case in youth work. If a person doesn’t want to be changed, he/she can avoid or refuse it. This statement isn’t of a moral nature, it is only implying that external attempts to change an individual, even in social integration programs, don’t work. In the subject-scientific theory of learning this is called the “teaching-learning short cut” (Holzkamp, 1993: 417). The assumption of a direct connection between pedagogical action and effect is a short circuit. This is
because the subject character of a person, who is to be changed, has not been considered. The pedagogue has to realize if he/she needs intercultural competence to shape situations in a satisfactory way. As a result, the student for example has to have a motive to learn and thus has to make an effort to participate in learning programs. These reasons are called in the subject science theory of learning “expansive learning reasons”. These reasons differ essentially from the defensive reasons of learning (“defensive learning”), which are related to external pressure (cf. Holzkamp, 1993). Defensive learning reasons are unfortunately predominant in schools and also in intercultural learning arrangements. On the basis of subjective reasons, we can only decide what pedagogically has to be done.

The particular interest of a subject-science approach is the subjective view of the users of social integration projects. Social pedagogy uses the term “user research”, and there are also first the contours visible of a “social-pedagogical user research” (Oelerich & Schaarschuch, 2006). More detailed is the concept of the “critical user research” (Hirschfeld, 2012): “It asks for the actual practical value for the parties involved in social work” (Hirschfeld, 2012: 269). A distinction is made between the potential benefit and the actual benefit of the target group. The user research should at least distinguish “between the benefit of subjection and the benefit of autonomy” (Hirschfeld 2012: 272). This is why the feeling of subjective benefit has to be questioned.

**Evaluation of a social integration program as an example**

From 2013 to 2016 we evaluated a program with 60 social integration projects. We have extended our definition of social integration for this purpose. We define social integration from the standpoint of the Subjects. What are their needs how do they try to expand their agency?

The central factor for the success of a social integration project we have found is reaching the target group and this depends on the intensity and equality of the relationship to the target group. It is also a result of the political climate in the special region.

Reaching the target group means that the migrants accept the project and use it for their own purpose. This is the sign of seeing the chances to extend their own agency and it depends on the possibilities society gives or refuses. Society is the important context. In integration projects, the connection between migrants, project employees and institutions/organisations decides if migrants can use the project for their own purpose. We know that self-determination, in our society, is the exception rather than the rule.
The development and expansion of agency in the social integration process needs some resources. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu developed a theory of different forms of capital. They play a crucial role in the position of a person in the society. These forms of capital can be seen as resources. On the road to a “successful social integration”, based on the Bourdieusian theory of capital (Bourdieu, 1983), there are 4 dimensions to distinguish:

- **Structural resources** refer to the access to social goods and positions (this dimension relates to the Bourdieusian “economic capital”).
- **Cultural resources** refer to the (individual) acquisition of skills/competencies for the participation in the society.
- **Social resources** refer to the participation in private and social activities. In this dimension the respective social milieu is of particular importance.
- **Political resources** cover the fight for belonging and acceptance and thus for political participation. This dimension refers to the Bourdieusian “symbolic capital”. This includes the appreciation, acceptance and recognition which migrants experience.

These forms of capital are not independent of each other, but each of them can be converted into another. If a person, for example, has high cultural capital and thereby gains access to social goods or positions, he can increase his structural capital.

We sorted the 60 projects of our evaluation research into the abovementioned 4 dimensions. We used the Bourdieusian forms of capital as an orientation and interpreted these as resources of social integration. This categorization enables us to ask which kinds of resources these social integration projects support. Our understanding is that the increase of resources promotes social integration.

Meanwhile we have noticed that our concept of capital doesn’t consider the critical aspect of the Bourdieusian theory properly. This is because the development of resources in itself doesn’t provide either the respective situation and status of a person or the automatic advancement of a person in our society. The society has distinctive criteria of what is accepted as capital. For example, mastering different languages is not automatically an advantage. Subtle mechanisms of power take care of reproducing a hierarchic structure.

In addition to the development of resources the fight for recognition of the resources is necessary.

Projects of social integration can support the users in their “fight for belonging and recognition”. Richard Sennett proposes 3 kinds of basic conditions of recognition in our society: “The first way occurs through self-development, particularly through developing abilities and skills. […] The second way lies in care of the self. […] The third way to earn respect is to give back to others”
(Sennett, 2003: 63f). This is the basis of the fight for recognition. The dimensions of social integration do not only mark the structure of resources, but both the essential activation of resources and the joint fight for recognition of abovementioned resources.

Important for the project of our research group TFG at the evaluation of the program “Diversity likes – 60 Places of Integration” are the following work principles:

- The addressees are not objects but subjects (co-researcher principle)
- The principle of the “social self-reflection”, i.e. the reflection on the own behavior in focus
- Common interest in the improvement of the practice
- Support of the practice as principle
- Dialogue and participation
- Transparency and conclusiveness
- Subject-orientation
- Respect
- Distance and proximity

**Research design**

The first step was to determine our (critical) concept of “social integration”, on the basis of long-standing examinations of it (Sauer & Held, 2009). We developed so-called Integration Criteria of oriented on the Bourdieusian concept on forms of capital (Bourdieu, 2005). We distinguish between structural, cultural, social and political ways of integration. This categories aren’t meant from a demand-perspective but they rather are on the offer-side to increase the agency of migrants. The 60 projects have been categorized along these criteria.

As a consequence of the discussion of the available material (project proposals and reports) and relevant academic literature basic hypotheses and first theories of possibilities and sets of problems are generated. This step of the evaluation is the 1st instance of the above-mentioned framework, namely the formulation of hypotheses.

The second step was to visit all the 60 projects in their respective locations and conduct semi-structured expert interviews and ethnographic observations which helps at the self-reflection and encourages the reflection on the own activities and practice. The interviews were recorded on camera and tape. Our experience was that the practitioners welcomed this approach because they knew it wasn’t meant as a way of control and that the recordings weren’t made public. The interviews were a part of the 1st instance (formation of hypotheses) but they
have drawn elements of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} instance, namely the clarification in an open discussion between practitioners and researchers.

This dialogue is intensified with selected projects and is quintessential for the 2\textsuperscript{nd} instance. In this formative phase of evaluation researchers are staying in regular contact with the projects for a whole year. In this way hypotheses and theories can be compared and discussed with the practice. Every project has the right for a feedback about the gathered information of the very project and this feedback can be discussed with the researchers on request. This 2\textsuperscript{nd} phase focuses on the scientific support where a number of interesting projects are selected (out of the 60) for a more detailed view related to the dimension of social integration they are affiliated with. The focus isn’t on promoting “Best Practices” but on identifying opportunities and sets of problems affecting the promotion of agency.

Users of the selected projects are intensively analyzed. The method of group discussions (focus groups) is the center of the analysis. Users aren’t played off against practitioners but the collaboration between them was encouraged. Selected projects particularly were scientific supervised i.e. an intensified communication is taking place.

The 3\textsuperscript{rd} instance is not a subsequent step but a part of the formative evaluation phase, since in this phase opportunities and sets of problems of the very projects are consistently addressed and solutions searched and tested. This corresponds with “data-driven problem and solution theories” (Reimer, 2011: 28). \footnote{“...datengegründeten Problem- und Lösungstheorien“ (Reimer, 2011: 28)} This instance includes case studies and thematic analyses across cases.

The 4\textsuperscript{th} instance is about identifying the scope of results, hence the generalization. By discussing current results with practitioners, they are automatically involved in the theory construction concerning the generalization of possibilities, i.e. which possibilities apply for whom.

The aim of all of the above-mentioned instances is to improve the practice. Only in the 5\textsuperscript{th} instance, the summative evaluation in the last year of project terms is the focus on the solution theories developed in the course of the projects and if these theories were successful.

A documentary was filmed about the evaluation project on one hand for information purposes about the scientific results and on the other hand to give ideas on self-evaluation for projects not involved in the evaluation project.
The developing of resources in the social integration practice – An example of a single project

In a little city at the river Danube, in which many migrants reside, was a social integration project of a social institution taking place. A social educator (originally coming from Kazachstan) is leading a group of migrants coming from Russian-speaking regions. The group undertakes lots of social and cultural activities and they increase they own resources.

The initial problem was that different migrant groups of the city were “almost invisible in the life of the society”. The disappointment was expressed by a person: “We are here since 20 years and the natives had no interest at all!” With many cultural activities the project is making an effort to make people with a migration background visible. As the leader of the group puts it: “The project is helping us to find ourselves, it is helping to find a common path to integrate ourselves in this community, to make ourselves noticeable, and with the help of the many events our self-esteem has grown high.”

All the participants of the group were stating that “participation in the community” is what they are looking for. They called with many cultural actions and activities for attention and it was “well received”. They don’t deny their heritage, they rather emphasize it. That requires courage and major effort in the community. Important for them is making contact with people with and without a migration background.

The answers to the question, what the personal benefit of the program for them is, were “self-affirmation [and] self-confidence (…)”. This personal benefit of the program was described from a participant as follows:

“I took everything that was proposed to me. I am now a very different person as I was when I came here. I was in fear, should I ask this or that? (...) I was like a mouse, but now I am completely different and that is nice.”

The leader of the project continues: “Yes, the pleasure of creating something on our own, [...] we are recognized, integrated with [the help of] our own creations. We shouldn’t assimilate or pretend, we want to do what we love doing and therefore we get somehow accepted (nodding and consent of the participants).”

The improvement of the own resources through theatre plays, dance events and exhibitions etc. has a prerequisite, namely overcoming fear, gaining self-confidence, enjoying to achieve something on your own and being recognized. The successful “updating the mental resources” isn’t limited to cognitive learning
processes, but needs emotional support and involves structural, cultural, social and political processes as well.

“Integration” we understand as a mutual process in which the migrants, the professional supporters, the researchers and the majority their mental resources and their empathy arise. For this task all these groups are called on to participate and to create the assumption for participation. That would be a real intersubjective process in practice and in research.

Bibliography


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Producing pathways: The production of change for ethnic minority socially marginalized families

Noomi Christine Linde Matthiesen

Abstract
In an educational system, oriented towards ensuring heightened educational performativity, there is an increased focus on reducing discontinuities between home and educational contexts for ethnic minority children. This article argues, that this is done in a number of more or less standardized ways that attempt to allow for parents and children to transcend their marginalized positions. The article critiques these standardized strategies and introduces Tanggaard’s notion of “pathways” as a way of analyzing the concrete and situated ways in which professionals, parents and children wrestle with discontinuities and negotiate new ways of moving forward in the socio-material conditions afforded by the particular practices.

Keywords
pathways, marginalization, home-school partnerships, ethnic minority, discontinuities

Introduction
In an interview with a pre-school teacher, a refugee mother was described as both illiterate and unable to tell the time. Consequently, she struggled to pick up her child on time creating great frustration for mother, child and staff. Other teachers described struggles relating to getting the children to school on time (or at all), making sure they were dressed appropriately, as well as stimulating them sufficiently in order to ensure their development and learning. This article addresses how professionals work with these issues in educational settings, attempting to find solutions in everyday practice in an effort to support all children’s education and thus reduce inequality.
Research in the sociology of education has for almost half a century been focused on understanding inequality in education, with classics such as Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1977) and Willis’s (1977) work describing the reproduction of class in education at the forefront of this tradition. It has long been agreed that the major differences in school experiences for different classes and ethnicities lies to a large degree in the discontinuities between the cultural backgrounds and family practices of certain groups and the culture of schools (Ogbu, 1982). As Mørck (2007) writes,

"Expanding possibilities of learning and transcending marginalization is about making better connections, relevance, and transcending contradictions across the pupil’s action contexts." (p. 210)

This focus has led to an interest in research in the field of home-school/daycare partnerships in an attempt to counter the impact of discontinuity between home and school/daycare. However, reducing the discontinuities between cultural backgrounds and schooling and thereby enhancing ethnic minority school-performance has proved to be notoriously difficult. There seems to be two main approaches to this problem in both educational policy and research, namely a transplantation model that teaches parents skills perceived necessary to counter discontinuities, and a compensation model, that seeks to eliminate differences by assuming responsibilities traditionally thought of as parental responsibilities (Matthiesen, 2016a). This article describes these approaches and argues that the former leads to further marginalization whilst the later leads to the overburdening of professionals as well as stripping parents of their rights. These approaches are often implemented at a policy level in a top-down blanket strategy fashion (Husted, 2016) to solve problems of discontinuity. As an alternative, this article draws on the notion of “pathways” (Tanggaard, 2015, 2016) as a concept that allows for analysis of how professionals (teachers/day-care personnel), parents and children negotiate ways of wrestling with these discontinuities and creatively produce new ways of participating through the conditions afforded by the contexts.

The article first delineates the field of home-school/daycare partnerships, the problem of discontinuity and the strategies employed to deal with this problem as well as a critique of these strategies. Subsequently a timid theory of change is presented introducing the notion of pathways which is used to analyze four examples of challenges encountered by professionals, parents and children. The concept of pathways is discussed arguing that change is produced by negotiating new ways of participating through creatively meandering through the conditions afforded by particular contexts and practices.
Discontinuity between home and educational contexts

In a schooling system that increasingly values effective education that is outcome oriented focusing on “what works” (Biesta, 2007), much research has pointed to the effectiveness of parental involvement in increasing pupil attainment levels (Desforges & Abouchers, 2003). In this neo-liberal education system parents are considered both customers who are receiving a service (education for their children) and at the same time held accountable for ensuring their children’s success in education (Popkewitz, 2003). Parents are considered partners, i.e. responsible agents able to engage productively in ensuring positive schooling outcomes (Epstein, 2001). Moreover, they are considered assistants that are required to answer the call of the schools (Matthiesen, 2015; Theodorou, 2008). However, some groups of parents are not considered capable of living up to this responsibility. These parents include ethnic minority parents such as immigrant or refugee parents (Matthiesen, 2016a).

In a study of 302 immigrant parents (from diverse locations) in Basque region of Spain, Intxausti, Etxeberria & Joaristi (2013) showed, that despite high educational aspirations immigrant parents were generally not very involved in their children’s schooling. This is a pervasive tendency found throughout the research literature, and consequently, research on parental involvement of marginalized groups such as immigrant and refugee parents has focused on barriers for involvement, pointing to language barriers (Dennesen, Bakker & Gierveld, 2007; Peterson & Ladky, 2007; Vera, et. al., 2012; Rah, Choi & Nguyén, 2009; Bitew, & Ferguson, 2010; Ibrahim, Small & Grimley, 2009), and structural barriers such as lack of time and resources to come to parent-teacher conferences due to inflexible working-class jobs, assisting their children in homework and otherwise engaging in parental-involvement activities (Peterson & Ladky, 2007; Rah, Choi & Nguyén, 2009; Bitew & Ferguson, 2010; Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Wang, 2008). Bitew and Ferguson (2010) as well as Ibrahim, Small and Grimley (2009) additionally stress that teachers likewise lack structural opportunities that give them extra time and resources to work with immigrant and refugee parents. Furthermore, some researchers stress that immigrant and refugee parents lack knowledge of the educational system, of what is expected of them, and of how to go about supporting their children and ensuring their educational success (e.g. Bitew & Ferguson, 2010; Ibrahim, Small & Grimley, 2009; Ladky & Peterson, 2009; McBrien, 2011; Rah, Choi & Nguyén, 2009).

In the neo-liberal schooling systems aimed at increasing measurable school outcome these perceived parental inabilities and deficits (Matthiesen, 2016a) have resulted in an increase in interventions which strive for dissolving the
discontinuities between home and school for particular groups of children. Additionally, research on marginalization in schooling is increasingly pointing to the need for early intervention (e.g. Ringmose, 2016). In a rapport on countering marginalization through early interventions it is stated: “The small child is incredibly open to learning from the moment s/he is born. At no time later in life is the potential for learning greater than in the earliest years” (Ringmose, cited in Jørgensen & Preisler, 2016 p. 14). Additionally they write,

“All parents want what is best for their children but in a marginalized family the parents may not have the necessary competencies, and as a society we need to be much better at discovering this and reacting to it.” (Christensen, cited in Jørgensen & Preisler, 2016 p. 6)

These interventions can be categorized into two models: the transplantation model and the compensation model (Matthiesen, 2016a). In the following these two models will be described:

The compensation model builds on the notion that the teachers are the experts who can compensate for any perceived parenting deficiencies and lack of competencies. This is done by assuming responsibilities typically thought of as parental responsibilities such as homework support for instance. An example can be what has been termed whole-day schools implemented in social housing areas with a high density of ethnic minority and/or socially marginalized families. These whole-day schools are intended to compensate for perceived parental deficiencies by taking over responsibilities for socialization and ensuring sufficient academic support for students (Holm, 2011). This model is problematic because it strips the parents of responsibility, rendering them helpless and, in a significant sense, positioning them as ineffectual or even harmful with regards to their children’s education, overall development and life-success.

The transplantation model is instead intended to dissolve the discontinuity between home and school by empowering parents through transplanting the expert knowledge of the educators: “Parental interventions have the greatest impact because they are closest to the child in the first completely vital years. Make alliances with the parents, and teach them how to make good relationships preferably before the child is born.” (Ringmose, cited in Jørgensen & Preisler, 2016, p. 16). This is done through intervention programs (e.g. standardized programs such as Parent Management Training Oregon: Patterson, 2005) intended to teach parents to do parenting differently. An example is the introduction of family classes (first time in Denmark in 2003) that are designed to help parents of ‘troublemaking’ children to develop the necessary skills to support their child’s educational work (Knudsen, 2009). An example that explicitly strives to ensure a better parent-teacher communication can be found in
Robin (2008), who conducted an intervention study on the basis of this perceived lack of know-how, where parents in an English-as-second-language class where taught parental involvement skills including dialogue skills. This intervention culminated in a meeting with a school principal.

These approaches have been thoroughly critiqued particularly from a poststructuralist perspective. When discussing the discontinuity between home and school, Mehan (1992) writes

One conclusion that could be drawn from this analysis [based on the work of Bourdieu] would be this: Change the cultural capital of the low-income family. Increase bedtime reading, the density of known-information questions at home, and so forth. This would be the wrong inference, however, because it is based on the tacit assumption that the prevailing language use and socialization practices of linguistic and ethnic minority children are deficient. (Mehan, 1992, p. 7)

He thus points out the problematic assumption that difference is equal to deficient (Guo, 2012). Others have pointed out that working class or ethnic minority parents participate in their children’s schooling in other ways than those valorized by the school (Crozier, 2005; Dannesboe et al., 2012; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2007; Palludan, 2012), resulting in unequal opportunities for participation and support. This critical approach notes that policy makers, intervention designers and schools tend to draw on a rather narrow understanding of how to support one’s child. For instance, Lightfoot (2004) writes:

... middle-class parents are seen as overflowing containers, whose involvement in schools is to be valued...contrasted with low-income, urban parents who speak English as a second language and who are portrayed as empty containers, which need to be filled before they can give anything of value to the schools or their own offspring. (p. 93)

Consequently, this narrow normative understanding of what constitutes ‘good parenting’ found in schools and that form the foundation of the before mentioned intervention programs risk resulting in enhancing and further manifesting the marginalization of both parents and children.

This critique has in turn been criticized for what has been termed a romanticized egalitarian focus that insists on demanding that parents want equal opportunities for participation and influence in a busy life where perhaps at times this ideal is not coherent with the lives parents lead. The critique posits the claim, that, due to busy work life and other pressure, parents perhaps at times appreciate compensatory strategies, where they are relieved from responsibilities and can
rest assured that others will take care of their child (Crozier & Reay, 2005). Others have likewise pointed out that the demands placed on parents from a policy and school-centric perspective is accelerating and difficult for many working parents to honor (Dannesboe et al., 2012). Furthermore, it has been noted that the problem with this poststructuralist approach is that it is a theory of reproduction that adequately analyses power dynamics, the production of identity and (im)possibilities of action, but does not point to ways in which persons can transcend marginalization (Mørck, 2007; Matthiesen, in press). It does not point out ways in which change can be produced and how persons can transcend marginalization. In order to understand how the problems of discontinuity between home and educational contexts are addressed in practices allowing for transcending marginalization, we need to understand how social practices are not only reproduced, but also how they may open up for possibilities of change. In the following section, a socio-ontological theory of learning is introduced where subjects are understood as radically social and mutually independent. The concept of pathways is furthermore introduced in order to analyze examples of how professionals, parents and children negotiate the experienced discontinuities in educational practices.

**A timid theory of change**

According to Kvale (1976; 1977) conventional learning theories have had huge impacts on how we conceptualize human change. In order to understand change, and the ability to transcend marginalization, theories of learning are of central importance. By drawing on Jean Laves situated learning theory and Axel Honneths theory of recognition, Nielsen (2016) develops a critique of traditional theories of learning. He writes, “…it can be claimed that mainstream theories of learning lead us to misrecognize where the potential for real change lies” (p.156). This misrecognition of where the potential for change lies is due to an overly individualized understanding of agency. He argues that mainstream learning theories conceptualize human beings as rational, individualistic and utilitarian, where action is directed in a means-end rationale towards predetermined goals. The freedom of the agent is central, stressing the ability to choose. Change thus becomes an individual matter, centered around the rational choices of the subject. This is the logic that drives the transplantation interventions (such as parenting classes) described above, where marginalized parents are taught to change their parenting strategies. They are empowered with the knowledge that enables them to act differently. Learning, and consequently the ability to create change and transcend marginalization, is thus understood in technological means-end terms –
the knowledge of the experts is transmitted to the parents who then can thereby rationally choose to act differently.

Instead, Nielsen (2016) argues, that subjects must be understood as radically social and interdependent pointing out that problems must be analyzed as “constituted by social practices and lack of mutual recognition” (p. 156). According to Lave and Packer (2008), “we are always already ‘thrown’ into a concrete situation, in a way we cannot get out of or behind, or get completely under our control” (p. 31) and at the same time persons are active participants purposefully engaged in interactions. As Dreier (2008) points out, human beings live their lives across different contexts that have a variety of purposes and are organized structurally and materially in different ways. They are constituted as practices that are (re)produced and changed through the concrete participation of persons actively engaging in interaction. Each individual is positioned in the practice both structurally and socially with an array of possibilities for participation bound to each position, i.e. a teacher has the right as well as the duty to participate differently in a parent-teacher conference than the parent who must participate in a way that is appropriate for parents in this particular practice (Matthiesen, 2016b). Furthermore, each participant has different concerns, goals and orientations. The participation of each individual is thus constituted by the structure of the practice as well as the participation of the other participants, and simultaneously the participation of the individual is constitutive of the practice. The being of subjects is thus complexly interwoven with the other. Existence is dynamically coproduced.

In this perspective, change is thus connected to learning, but learning is considered something fundamentally different than the Cartesian dualistic approach where knowledge is understood as the acquisition of information, beliefs and processual skills (Lave, 1997). Instead learning is understood as an expansion of individual possibilities of participation in changing social practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991). It is thus a radically social process that does not adhere to logics of changing the individual through rational technological means-end strategies, but rather of changing practices thereby allowing for change in human being. Change, and the possibility of transcending marginalization, is thus inherently social and complex. Change is therefore not straightforward and frictionless. It is produced in the dynamic interplay of difference (Holland & Lave, 2001), through negotiations and struggle. Although Nielsen (2008) argues that learning and change are possible in social practices, he stresses that “change and transformation does take place, but slowly and incrementally” (Nielsen, 2008, p. 187). This is thus a timid theory of social change, ideologically ambitious, yet respectful of power dynamics and the complexity of the intertwining of human lives in socio-materi ally produced practices.
So, rather than looking at abstract technological solutions such as parenting classes, it is important to look at what practitioners and parents are actually doing in practice to solve the problems they face in their everyday lives. When attempting to understand change in this socio-ontological approach, it can be helpful to draw on Tanggaard’s (2015; 2016) concept of *pathways*. Pathways are defined as “concrete movements and ways of making in everyday life” (Tanggaard, 2016, p. 97). Creative pathways can be considered new ways of moving, new ways of participating, new ways of being, that are already present and afforded by the practice, yet not necessarily realized or imagined beforehand. They are produced through co-creation, coordination, sharing and connecting of subjects and objects in practices that afford the possibility of certain actions rather than others (Tanggaard, 2015). Pathways are thus new ways of being that are co-produced through concrete participation drawing on the socio-materially afforded conditions of the practice. It recognizes the radical social nature of human being by stressing that new ways of being are intricately woven into the conditions of the practice, i.e. socio-materiality as well as the participation of others.

The concept of pathways is a descriptive analytical concept that may be used to describe how particular problems are solved in practice creating change. The concept is thus not normatively imbued with particular universal ideas of what constitutes ‘good’ processes of change. However, the concept does allow for, perhaps even insists on, these normative discussions. This call for normative discussions is rooted in the socio-ontological approach that stresses the inherent radically interconnected nature of human being. This interconnectedness calls for approaches to change in educational contexts that recognize the co-production, shared, and negotiated way in which participation in practice is produced and consequently how it may be changed. In the following, I will describe four different examples of pathways. Three of these examples may be characterized as successful, whilst the last example was a failed attempt at creating change. The examples are drawn from a study of a social housing project intended to teach ethnic minority parents how to engage differently in parenting in order to reduce discontinuities between home and educational context, but also teachers/day-care personnel and principals how to work with and handle these problems. Firstly, the study will be briefly described followed by a description of the four examples which will subsequently be discussed.
The study

In January 2016, an intervention program named Parent Academy was started in a social housing area in a larger city in Denmark. As many other intervention programs, this program was designed to empower socially marginalized parents by providing them with knowledge of the educational system and of ‘good’ parenting practices. Parents were invited to evening classes where topics such as ‘conflict management’ and ‘the psychology of a child’ were taught. Parallel to the classes for the parents, a series of classes were offered to teachers and daycare personnel who worked in the area’s schools and daycare institutions. These classes centered on topics such as “understanding of culture” and “the importance of community.” Participant observations of these classes were conducted. Subsequently both parents and teachers/daycare personnel were interviewed. Additionally, two days of observation were conducted in one of the areas pre-schools.

The four examples I will present are drawn from conversations held as part of the classes offered for teachers, from the interviews with teachers and daycare personnel and from the observation at the pre-school. The material was saturated with conversations about difficult problems, struggles and frustrations as much of the talk in both the classes and the interviews revolved around the problems the teachers and daycare personnel experienced. Although this indicates that the practice is imbued with difficulties and the teachers and pedagogues are longing for solutions, this pervasive sense of frustration may also stem from the focus of the meetings and the interviews, where the parent academy program was designed as a place to discuss difficulties. Occasionally, however, narratives of how these problems were solved also emerged, and in the pre-school observation the pre-school teachers were constantly solving problems. As we shall see, these ways of solving the problems that they were confronted with (which shall be termed pathways) both reproduced marginalized positions but also allowed for the possibility of change and transcending marginalization. Many more examples could have been presented, but these four are chosen because of their exemplary and illustrative characteristics.

Example 1: Situated dynamic pathway

This first example is from the observations at a pre-school where a pre-school teacher explained that one of their mothers was illiterate and could not tell the time. This meant that she struggled to pick up her child on time before the pre-school closed. This was solved simply by calling her on her phone at 16.00 pm, so that she knew that it was time to pick up her child. This pathway was created
by drawing on the conditions available in the practice, allowing for the mother to pick up her child on time. This pathway did not transplant knowledge (this would require teaching the mother how to read the time). This may in other cases be a viable solution, but in the particular case, the mother’s dyscalculia made this impossible. But is not a compensation pathway either, as it does not entirely compensate (this would require the teachers taking the child home) but allows the mother to act differently. It could be termed a situated dynamic pathway.

**Example 2: Situated compensational pathway**

In an interview a daycare leader, Mary, described some of the day to day struggles they have with particular families. When I asked how they solve these problems, she told me a story of a single mother, a refugee from Somalia, who had six children. The daycare center had made the demand that the children should be escorted to the daycare center by 10.00 am at the latest, but this particular mother often struggled to meet this demand for various reasons. This meant that the mother often kept her youngest child at home. The daycare wanted the child to attend regularly as this was in their opinion the best way to ensure a sense of trust and security for the child when she attended daycare. At the time, the daycare center had received an appropriation that allowed them to hire an assistant who created a certain flexibility in manpower for the daycare center as it was one more person than they were used to. It was arranged with the mother, that, when necessary, the assistant could walk over to the family’s apartment and pick up the youngest child.

This solution was thus another pathway that allowed for the child to attend daycare more regularly and thereby thrive better in the center. Once again certain socio-material conditions made this pathway possible including the extra manpower. This approach drew on a compensation strategy, and could be termed a situated compensational pathway, as the strategy compensated for the difficulties the mother was experiencing. By taking into account the situated conditions of the mother, the approach refrains from implying that the mother was inadequate or in some way deficient, not wanting to meet the demands of the daycare center or incapable of doing so in an essentialized permanent manner. Instead the daycare leader, Mary, recognized that certain conditions at that particular time made it difficult for this mother to live up to this specific requirement a negotiated a pathway that met the needs of both mother, child and daycare center in a way that was temporary and transformable. It is precisely both the negotiated and the situated nature of pathway that differentiates this approach from the standardized compensation models described above.
Another example of a situated compensational pathway is in the pre-school where they have a box of extra raincoats, mittens and hats for the children whose parents either cannot afford these items or who have perhaps forgotten to bring them to the pre-school. Once again this is not necessarily a permanent solution for this problem, but allows for equal participation (playing outside with the others despite bad weather) for these children from marginalized families.

**Example 3: Situated transplantational pathway**

This third example, like the two above, also relates to time-schedules. In a class-session a young teacher (Muhammed) argued that it was important to “go the extra mile” when working with marginalized families. He told a story of a family (comprised of a father and two children) that were refugees from Syria. The father suffered from PTSD and struggled to live up to day to day demands. The children, attending a local school, often did not come to school and when they did they typically arrived late. When realizing that the father, apparently due to his PTSD, struggled to live up to the demand of getting his children to school, Muhammed decided to spend a week teaching the children to take the bus to school. He got up early in the morning and went to the family’s apartment and helped them take the bus. He likewise helped them home after work. After a week, the children were capable of taking the bus on their own.

Muhammed thus created a pathway together with the children that enabled them to meet the demand of coming to school. The socio-material conditions were already in place, i.e. a bus-route nearby, a school schedule that they are required to adhere to etc. In order to produce change, Muhammed, together with the children, created a pathway using these conditions. This could be termed a situated transplantation pathway as Muhammed successfully enabled the children to learn to attend school on time, empowering them to live up to the requirement of the school, i.e. arriving on time. This particular example does not include the father, creating a pathway that did not require his participation. Whether or not this was good is difficult to judge, as the father was not interviewed. This point of the contingent nature of the normative value of the pathways will be discussed further below.

Nonetheless, the examples thus far have overall been presented as positive pathways that have enabled change, not by changing parents or children in a technological way but by creating new ways of participating for both parents, children and teachers. However, pathways are not necessarily positive constructions that are neatly and frictionlessly produced. They are created in social practices that are produced and organized through particular power
structures. In the following I will present an example of a pre-school teacher’s attempt to create a pathway that was resisted by the child.

**Example 4: Resisting a proposed pathway**

In the pre-school, a small ethnic minority girl (Huda) does not speak very much. The pre-school teachers are worried because they are concerned that she will not develop her language skills sufficiently before starting school. In their opinion, it is their responsibility to ensure that she has adequate language skills before starting school as her parent’s do not speak Danish well (i.e. a compensatory logic). At lunch time, a group of children are gathered around a table where a pre-school teacher, Simon, is seated. He has their lunchboxes and raises each one in turn. The children say their name when their lunchbox is raised. When Huda’s lunchbox is raised, she remains silent. Simon places the lunchbox on the table and continues with the next one. Eventually Huda’s lunchbox is the only one that has not been handed out. When Simon raises it again, Huda climbs under the table.

Simon tries to create a pathway that motivates Huda to speak by coaxing her to at least utter her name. But she resists this pathway, negotiates it, and instead creates her own by climbing under the table. In this way, she physically places herself outside of the social circle where she was demanded to speak and negotiates another kind of participation. This new pathway, moving under the table, was not considered ‘good’ by Simon. The example points to the necessary condition of joint production, where all parties are concerned about and oriented towards the same agenda. This may often create tensions, contradictions and struggles which risk reproducing social inequality rather than producing change and the possibility to transcend marginalization.

**Discussion**

In each of the described examples the teacher or day care leader/pedagogue together with the children and/or parents created a new way of moving forward that allowed for new possibilities for participating, i.e. new ways of being. In each case the pathways created were already afforded by the practice, both materially and socially, but were assembled in a new way allowing for a different connection, a different movement, a different path. As Tanggaard and Beghetto (2015) point out, ideas develop in interactions within sociocultural and materially structured spaces. The kind of pathways described in this article are all purposeful and reflectively thought through. However, it would be meaningful to
study how pathways are produced spontaneously as bodily pre-reflectorily coordinated interactions in the socio-material practice, i.e. how pathways are produced in an improvisational here-and-now.

With the exception of the fourth example, each pathway that is produced meets the actual situated needs of the involved persons. It is not necessarily a permanent solution. Furthermore, due to the situated and particular nature of the pathways produced in a specific socio-material context, it is not a standardizable tool that is applicable in other situations and contexts. There is an increased tendency in education for to-down municipality implemented strategies to counter discontinuities between home and school/daycare with either a transplantation or a compensation rationale. However, these strategies are connected to at least two problems. Firstly, these top-down one-size fits all solutions risk dismantling professional reflection, judgement and engagement reducing teachers/daycare personnel to mere technicians executing predetermined methods towards predefined goals (Husted, 2016). Secondly, these standardizable solutions build on an ontological assumption that situations fall into certain categories and types, so “evidence” and best-practice descriptions from other contexts may be applicable to new settings as they follow the same situational rules (Dohn, 2011). But situations are always concrete and socio-material as well as bound to persons who are uniquely oriented towards the world. Something never works in an abstract sense – always in relation to concrete and particular conditions with acting and thinking persons with specific concerns and orientations. It is a pathway, not a highway. It is produced tentatively and dynamically, with the possibility of moving in a different direction and allowing the path to be erased when it is no longer applicable in the particular case (being either quickly covered by downfallen leaves or slowly overgrown by shrubbery).

Importantly, in each example it is clear that no pathway was created without the co-operation and co-ordination of all involved participants. As we saw in the last example, Simon attempted to create a pathway where it was meaningful, even necessary, for Huda to speak, but she resisted and negotiated this pathway, insisting on another way of participating, creating, through her bodily negotiation, a new pathway that was not in accordance with the concerns of Simon. Two points about the notion of pathways become clear through this example: Firstly, pathways are negotiated and require co-ordination and co-operation by all involved participants. Secondly, the notion of pathways may be seductive, stressing buzz words such as ‘creation’, ‘change’ and ‘co-operation’, but pathways are not inherently good as change is not inherently good and learning is not in itself valuable. As Biesta (2015) stresses, it is important to consider what learning is for, i.e. the purpose of learning and the purpose of the
change created in the pathway. This means that the normative question of what constitutes a ‘good’ pathway is crucial. Furthermore, the change produced ought to be meaningful for the participants rather than forced change (Matthiesen, in press).

This leads us back to Nielsen’s (2016) socio-ontological approach to learning presented in the section entitled “A timid theory of change.” Nielsen (2016), drawing on Honneth’s theory of recognition, argues that social conflicts and social domination are not to be considered conflicts of interest but rather as struggles to achieve recognition (p. 152). Recognition is closely tied to its counterparts; social contempt and disrespect. Recognition is thus, according to Honneth, about recognizing the individual as an autonomous and agentic individual. However, as Nielsen (2016) stresses, this individuation is not to be considered separation but rather an understanding of the individual intertwined and co-produced in a socio-material context. Recognition of the individual as autonomous and agentic thereby requires creating spaces that allow for the individual to respond as an agentic subject. Standardized one-size-fits-all attempts to find ways through which parents and children can transcend marginalization, often do not allow for negotiation thereby shutting down the opportunity for the struggle for recognition. Consequently, the possibility for recognition is asphyxiated. The production of situated pathways, on the other hand, do hold the potential for recognition – the recognition of particular needs, of certain strengths and abilities, of desires, longings and concerns held by unique agentic individuals who can respond to the participation of the other.

In addition to this strong development towards standardized models and solutions in education, Biesta (2015) points to the rise of the culture of accountability. He distinguishes between bureaucratic and democratic accountability. Accountability is about giving an account of what has been done and why, which of course is in itself important and helps raise the standards of everyday work. However, whilst bureaucratic accountability entails providing data that shows how the professional meets certain pre-defined standards, democratic accountability focus’ on what makes education good. It holds a strong normative element. Democratic accountability has to do with professionalism and judgement and allowing for the teacher/day-care personnel to wrestle with the normative questions of what is the best way forward in this particular case. Democratic accountability thus allows for the creative production of unique pathways. Bureaucratic accountability, on the other hand, has to do with technical scientific “evidence” and risks becoming a mechanical measure of control, rather than enabling opportunities for ensuring the quality of the work done (Biesta, 2015).
I wish to further distinguish between accountability and responsibility. Accountability has to do with being held accountable by others, whereas responsibility has to do with responding to the other – it has to do with the obligation to respond to the need of the other in an ethical sense (see Løgstrup, 1957). The notion of pathways, with its socio-material focus on co-operation and negotiation, insists on, is even contingent on, the ability to respond, i.e. response-ability for every social actor involved. This means that both the professional (teacher/pedagogue etc.) and the parent/child must be able to respond to the other as they co-produce ways of participating through negotiations of their afforded conditions in the practice. It is this response-ability that allows for the struggle of recognition and the possibility of transcending marginalization.

Conclusion

The notion of pathways is a helpful concept in order to analyze how social actors (in this case professionals, parents and children) go about creating change. A person’s being is constituted by but also simultaneously constitutive of the practices in which they participate and live their lives. “Pathways” is a concept that allows us to examine how professionals, parents and children negotiate and wrestle with the challenges posed to them by the discontinuities between home and educational contexts. Pathways are produced in and through socio-material settings, enabling subjects to participate in new ways through new ensembles of afforded conditions. Although the concept is descriptive it rests on the socio-ontology of human being as radically interconnected. This means that in order to create ‘good’ change one must acknowledge the necessity of negotiation and resistance and the possibility for each actor to respond to the other. It requires creating space for professional judgement, rather than striving for standardized solutions to uniquely constituted struggles.

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References


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A critical social psychological contribution to (global) citizenship education: Seeing oneself through the eyes of the ‘other’

Eri Park, Stavroula Tsirogianii and Marcin Sklad

Abstract
Taylor (2004) argues that the Western moral order is characterised by three key forms—the market economy, public sphere, and self-governance. These forms entail contradictory tendencies for the concept of selfhood and our relations with each other. We do endorse an autonomous and free self, who should pursue her goals, but is also expected to act ethically towards others through mutuality, equality, and collectivity. However, we are concerned with being authentic, i.e. being true to ‘ourselves’, as well as with recognising the needs and differences of the ‘other’. This moral order is based on notions of political equality, democracy, freedom, human rights, and privatised economic prosperity. Moving ‘with Holzkamp beyond Holzkamp’ (Teo, 2016), in this paper, we present a method to foster the skill to step out from one’s moral matrix, the invisible normalised moral order, and view oneself through the eyes of the ‘other’. Focusing on food practices, we developed a method for social self-clarification (Holzkamp, 1995). The skill to see oneself through the eyes of the ‘other’ is necessary in realising one’s entanglement in a global institutional order that foreseeably and avoidably produces severe inequalities.

Keywords
global citizenship education, morality, values, moral reasoning, perspective taking, discourse
The Global Institutional Order and Western Moral Order

In the new epoch of globalisation, we are witnessing unprecedented movements of people, money, food, and information across boundaries. This global interdependence extends across various scales (local, regional, national, and global) and is marked by an unparalleled increase in the speed as well as spread and density of networks. Globalisation entails serious contradictions. On the one hand, we witness processes of global economic and civil integration through supranational networks (e.g., the World Trade Organisation, World Bank, and United Nations) and the emergence of transnational social movements. On the other hand, an increase in political, ethnic, and religious divisions is evident (Ramonet, 1997). While processes of economic integration and standardisation generate more opportunities for global resistance and cross-cultural encounters (Slater, 1998), globalisation reinforces deep inequalities within and across nations. As global connections unfold around the centre of Western powers, i.e. the Global North\(^1\), a hegemonic order is constituted and reproduced through discourses that create an invisible normality. On the one hand, dominant discourses are reified through an asymmetrical institutional order, for example, through the implementation of laws and institutions, and, on the other hand, through a symbolic order such as the moral and value systems shaping the collective consciousness (Foster & Tillner, 1998). At the level of everyday actions, individuals draw on this moral order to organise societies, interpret the world, give meaning to their lives, and interact with the ‘other’.

Taylor (2004) argues that the Western moral order is characterised by three key forms—the market economy, public sphere, and self-governance. These forms entail contradictory tendencies for the concept of selfhood and our relations with each other. We do endorse an autonomous and free self, who should pursue her goals, but is also expected to act ethically towards others through mutuality, equality, and collectivity. However, we are concerned with being authentic, i.e. being true to ‘ourselves’, as well as with recognising the needs and differences of the ‘other’. This moral order is based on notions of political equality, democracy, freedom, human rights, and privatised economic prosperity.

\(^1\)We do not define ‘the West’ or ‘the global North/South’ strictly in geographic terms. Our aim is not to treat them as essentialised singular categories. We rely on the definitions of the terms by Mohanty (2003) and other post-colonial thinkers (e.g., Dirlik, 1996) to draw attention to a series of systematic effects resulting from the assumption of ‘the West’ with its complexities and contradictions as the norm in the symbolic order. We also highlight the pathways of global capital. Correspondingly, we use the term ‘global South’ to refer to communities of people who are economically and politically marginalised in the context of global labour markets.
The discourses of capitalism, enlightened rationalism, Judeo-Christianism, and psychoanalysis contributed to the idea of self-governing people capable of freeing themselves from internal or external normalising forces without recourse to transcendent principles. Introspection is the practice through which the ‘free’ self can be understood and achieved (Foucault, 1988, 1997). In these discursive constructions of selfhood, individual thoughts are considered the vehicle that enables us to be authentic, reveal the ‘truth’ about ourselves, and repair ourselves from deficiencies and shortcomings. This view constructs a fixed self that we can master at will. Human self-determination is essentialised and viewed as the accomplishment of inner humanity. However, this type of self-creation creates a group of isolated individuals (Arendt, 1963), who strive for the impossible, namely to be authentic moral agents. The act of any ethical activity is located in the solitary mind and one’s own will, and holds the individual responsible. Furthermore, it reduces opportunities to problematise one’s perspectives, experiences, and actions through engaging in a dialogue with concrete others.

The recognition of uniqueness and differences, as rooted in Judeo-Christian moral principles, provides the foundations for discourses (e.g., human rights, development discourses) that appeal to common humanity and universalism. Such imaginaries are problematic, as they rest on essentialist assumptions about commonalities and differences. They support the idea of a universal model for relating to one another, which defines oneself and the ‘other’ before entering the realm of social relations (Infinito, 2003). These practices of self are not dialogical and prevent us from understanding the link between our perspectives and wider historical and social arrangements, as well as the power structures that subjugate us. In the context of a global institutional order that reproduces uneven power relations and disparities between the global North and South and ultimately undermines everyone’s ability to make choices regarding their lives, the following challenges emerge. a) How can we² broaden our understanding of subjectivity and borders in unique but communal terms that challenge hegemonic discourses? b) How can we expand our understanding of agency not as an innate potential, but as shaped by the contingent circumstances of our existence that requires the presence of others and is attentive to mutuality, co-responsibility, and co-implication? This understanding can contribute to more specific but expansive visions of solidarity.

² We refer to those who grew up in Western contexts and continue to enjoy affluent living standards.
Our aims

Moving ‘with Holzkamp beyond Holzkamp’ (Teo, 2016), in this paper, we present a method to foster the skill to step out from one’s moral matrix, the invisible normalised moral order, and view oneself through the eyes of the ‘other’. Focusing on food practices, we developed a method for social self-clarification (Holzkamp, 1995). The method was piloted with undergraduate students in the UK and the Netherlands and is generally suited for Western subjects. The skill to see oneself through the eyes of the ‘other’ is necessary in realising one’s entanglement in a global institutional order that foreseeably and avoidably produces severe poverty and inequalities. According to conservative estimates, 46% of humankind live under the poverty line (World Bank, 2016). However, the calculations of critical scholars indicate that the actual amount is higher if one does not use a poverty line “which is neither meaningful” or reliable nor “adequately anchored in any specification of the real requirements of human being” (Pogge & Reddy, 2007, p. 1).

We selected food practices as the theme of a perspective-taking exercise, because hegemony is here internalised, reproduced, and resisted at the level of common sense. In addition, food production and consumption represent grounds for ethical and aesthetic self-constitution (Taylor, 2004), which is linked to an unequal global institutional order. We draw inspiration from moral intuitionism (Haidt, 2001, 2012, 2013) to acknowledge the importance of intuition in moral reasoning and moral judgements. On an individual level, most would be hard-pressed at any moment to articulate moral principles; however, we constantly act on implicit moral evaluations, hunches, intuition, and sentiments. On a collective level, the concept of intuition represents the invisible forms of specific moral orders. Our goal is to disrupt these invisible moral orders by providing counter-narratives grounded in a dialogue with the ‘other’. Our exercise aims to elicit conflicting moral intuitions through an exchange of moral judgements between oneself and the ‘other’ to clarify the social and historical conditions that shape the moral matrix and judgements about the ‘other’. The aim is to reveal that one’s moral matrix is not the only exclusive and valid one. We claim that seeing oneself through the eyes of the ‘other’ includes positioning oneself as a historical subject, which involves viewing oneself through the concepts of geography, territory, and time. We believe this is an important requirement to a) liberate us from being trapped in a single perspective and open new forms of dialogue with oneself and the other; b) help the subject understand how certain perspectives perpetuate the oppression of oneself and the exploitation of the ‘other’; and c)

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3 We do not consider intuition as the primary source of moral reasoning as Haidt (2001) argues and return to this issue later in the paper.
forge bonds of political solidarity. In other words, this enables us to realise our action potential in a global world.

**The Legacy of Holzkamp**

German Critical Psychology emerged in a particular context. It emerged (1) in Berlin, a city on which the general political zeitgeist of the Cold War had left a strong imprint; (2) at the Free University, an institution founded by students, scholars, and scientists with the support of US-Americans after World War II; and (3) amidst scientific battles and student movements that took place before the reunification of Germany. In this context, Holzkamp highlighted the shortcomings of mainstream psychology and advocated a new emancipatory psychology that started with people’s everyday conduct, experiences, and agency. For him, psychology from the standpoint of the subject must analyse how psychological concepts justify and stabilise power constellations in a socio-economic historical context—the bourgeois society—and help individuals understand their Handlungsmöglichkeiten, their action potential in bourgeois life conditions (Holzkamp, 1985).

The individual’s relationship to the world is mediated by societal meaning structures. As a result, humans’ relationship with their societal world is never direct and immediate. For Holzkamp (1985), meaning from an evolutionary perspective is a ‘determinant of activity’ for humans, while on a psychosocial level, it is a *possibility* for activity or action potential. In our everyday lives, we make moral judgments, wherein we routinely define ourselves in terms of the things that matter to us and our communities. These judgments are linked to the question of the meanings we draw on and subscribe to that make our lives worth living. As such, our understanding of ourselves and the world is tied to systems of moral beliefs, which—despite being individually expressed—are social and historical in nature (Taylor, 1989). Based on this premise, we have an inherent need to feel connected to what we think is and ‘ought’ to be ‘good’ for us and our communities. Furthermore, we construct our identities in relation to our positioning towards this sense of ‘good’. A vision of the ‘good’ becomes available in any society and is expressed through symbolic systems (Taylor, 1989). As these visions bring us closer to what we think is ‘good’, they obtain further power and potency to form an invisible moral matrix. However, while dominant narratives, immediate situations, and pressing social demands bind our perspectives and actions, we have the ability to distance ourselves from dominant narratives (Vygotsky & Luria, 1930/1994; Gillespie, 2012; Valsiner, 2000). Here, human agency becomes a form of psychological distancing from
immediate perspectives to reconfigure the meanings we attribute to ourselves and others.

The concept of meaning-making as ‘a possibility for action’ is central in Holzkamp’s conceptualisation of the psyche and psychology. It reflects the following three features of meanings. “First, meanings are relational; they are the psychological aspect of our relationship to the world. Second, they are societal and historical; they do not exist outside of culture and its symbolic systems; rather, meaning constructions are the very essence of human culture. [...] Third, meanings are not deterministic triggers of action; they are not physical, chemical, or biological stimuli or constraints, but rather they indicate or signal a range of possibilities for action” (Brockmeier, 2009). In Grundlegung der Psychologie (1985), Holzkamp invites us to rethink the issue of meaning-making from a historical and evolutionary viewpoint. A perspective on meaning highlights the human abilities of action as integral to the human condition. These abilities are linked to the concepts of agency and subjectivity (Brockmeier, 2005a, 2005b, 2009). The ‘action potential’ opens for subjects the opportunity for an epistemic distance between themselves and their moral matrices. It creates a distance that enables them to step back and explore the historical, geographical, and societal specificity of their perspectives, relations, and consequences on the ‘other’.

‘With Holzkamp beyond Holzkamp’

Holzkamp’s demands must be understood in the context of the contemporary global institutional order. Many political and economic changes across nations and groups of people have occurred over the past three decades, producing major scaling effects and creating new challenges for people in the Global North and South. The economic and political self-governance of poor nations has weakened, while the roles of supranational institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organization (WTO), governing bodies such as the European Union, and non-profit corporations have intensified. In 2015, 69 corporations—not countries—scored among the world’s top 100 strongest economies (Green, 2016).

During the past 20 years, the wealth of the top 1% globally has increased by 60% (Alvaredo, Chancel, Piketty, Saez, & Zucman, 2018). The poorest people in high-income nations are richer on average than the richest quintile in low-income nations (Milanovic, 2016). Income inequalities within countries and in traditionally low-inequality countries from the Global North such as Germany, Finland, and Sweden have also been rising (Sassen, 2014). Over the past two decades, the number of displaced people, mostly in the Global South, has
increased. These people are moving to urban slums, destroyed villages, and smallholder farms, and losing access to fertile land (UNHCR, 2016). The increasing confluence of interests between governments and private industry, which use surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to social, economic, and political problems is fuelled by the creation of a threatening ‘other’ such as the ‘immigrant’, ‘criminal’, and ‘terrorist’. This is accompanied by an increase of the world prison population by approximately 10% since 2004, even though the crime rate has dropped. Women and girls are over-represented in these trends with a 50% increase in their imprisonment between 2000 and 2017 (Huber, Rope, & Sheahan, 2017). The United States leads in the number of incarcerations with a 500% increase in prison population over the last 40 years. Today, more than 60% of those in American prisons are people of colour (The Sentencing Project, 2016). These developments pose profound contradictions and challenges for the lives of everyone worldwide, especially those from economically marginalised backgrounds.

Non-standard and precarious forms of employment have become the norm in poor countries and are increasing in rich nations. This form of flexible capitalism leads to lower wages, fewer rights, and less access to social protection. It requires that workers know how to conduct themselves to be of value to the economy, and adversely affects mental health, especially that of those lacking economic family support (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005; Carrieri., Di Novi, Jacobs & Robone, 2014). Young people, women, and low-skilled migrant workers are more likely to be employed in these types of jobs (Organisation, 2007). In addition, more women are migrating for work from the Global South, constituting half the world’s legal and illegal migrant workers, who provide labour as sex workers, domestic workers, nurses, and nannies (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003). The uneven flow and distribution of information, capital, and labour across borders and between nations is not just an economic process. Religious fundamentalism and conservative nationalism that draw on racial, ethnic, and gendered ideologies are also increasing. At the same time, the increased economic, racial, ethnic, and religious divides of the global capitalist hegemony have created more opportunities for the international resistance and transnational movements to become more prominent in the 21st century (Sassen, 2014).

These processes and conditions are often accompanied by self-serving and exclusionary understandings of selfhood versus the ‘other’. Narratives about undesirable ‘others’ reinforce their demonisation and marginalisation, or focus on the lives and struggles of people from the Global South, constructing them as homogeneous ‘powerless victims’. These narratives mobilise essentialist categories of class, capital, race, and nation, reinforcing monolithic Western
conceptualisations of power, autonomy, and self-determination. Such discourses reinforce the distinctions between us and them. They clarify the difference between the local (defined as self, nation, and Western) and global (defined as other, non-Western, and transnational), and circumscribe ideas about experience, agency, and resistance. Finally, they fail to understand the particular in relation to the universal. The normalisation of a global capitalist order ultimately influences the ability to make choices about the daily lives of economically marginalised and economically privileged communities globally. We consider the global institutional order a series of ‘conjunctions and connected and entangled histories’ between nations and communities, rather than a Western process (Bhambra, 2007). This view destabilises the West as the centre and enables the exploration of differences in their historical contexts, including their mutualities, complications, and contradictions. Contextual knowledge of oneself and the ‘other’ is essential to demystify and make visible the various and overlapping forms of subjugation in people’s everyday lives and their link to the macro-politics of the global institutional order. It also creates a space for more expansive but specific forms of solidarity and visions of global justice.

Common struggle for the historical subject

Paramount in German Critical Psychology is the questions: ‘How do the general limitations of our own thinking and action affect others and our relationships with them? Consequently, can we jointly overcome the conditions disempowering us all?’ (Osterkamp, 2016, p. 171). Helping people overcome restrictions in their lives is not about advising them on the best way to live their lives. The aim is to expose the different ways in which we defend our perspective as the only right and valid one, while rejecting others. In this context, agency emphasises the development of an understanding of how distant conditions determine our views and actions beyond the narrowness of everyday life situations (Osterkamp, 2016)). Agency is not understood solely as an individual’s responsibility, but as Osterkamp argues, also ‘includes … the societal conditions and the possibilities open to others to overcome the restrictions in their lives’ (Osterkamp, 2016, p. 170).

To challenge the constricting condition, we must openly address the tensions that emerge from our involvement in them, rather than seeing ourselves through binaries, as victims of oppression or fighters against it. Second, we must openly deal with our active entanglement in suppressive structures (including how we may benefit from inequality producing structures both personally and financially), and not consider this entanglement a ‘personal failure’. Third, this involvement should not be considered a personal failure, but a common struggle, a universal problem that can only be tackled through
concerted action. The skill to see yourself through the eyes of another is a necessary requirement in realising your entanglement in a global institutional order that foreseeably and unavoidably produces inequality, exploitation, and severe poverty (Pogge, 2008), from which many living in industrialised/formerly colonising countries benefit personally and financially.

**Disrupting the moral matrix through an exchange of moral judgements**

We developed a method to overcome these limitations. Our method is dialogical and involves a discussion of seven questions on transgressions of moral standards regarding food practices. Before elaborating on the content of these questions, we provide the rationale thereof.

Perspective-taking is defined as ‘intuiting, as accurately as possible, another person’s thoughts, feelings, attitudes, interests or concerns in a particular situation’ (Epley, Caruso, & Bazerman, 2006, p. 873). Since the ‘other’ exists in our imagination, perspective-taking is inherently inter-subjective and emphasises our natural capacity to put ourselves into another’s mental, emotional, and psychological state to recreate their mind, motives, and intentions. However, perspective-taking is not necessarily dialectic, meaning that we are not necessarily willing or able to accommodate multiple perspectives (Gillespie, 2012; Tsirogianni & Sammut, 2014). We claim that the ability to accommodate multiple perspectives is linked to the ability to distance ourselves from our intuitive, readily available perspectives. Morality is an integral part of social imaginaries, which involve perspectives about how we envision our existence and relate and fit with others in carrying out common practices (Taylor, 2004). Such ideas are both descriptive (i.e. how things are) and normative (i.e. how things ought to be). Thus, social imaginaries entail images of moral orders that delineate visions about ourselves and our becoming (i.e. what kind of people do we want to be and what is the status of our society and world?). Furthermore, what kind of society do we want to live in? We often exclude or reject others who draw on moral frameworks that are different from ours (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; Middleton & Edwards, 1990; Lakoff, 1996). As moral frameworks underpin our concepts of the ‘good life’, they imbue our everyday life practices such as our food, dress, and how we flirt with meaning and legitimacy. In this sense, moralities are not abstract standpoints outside the world, but have real effects and can therefore be considered social facts (Pogge, 2002) towards which people have to position themselves. While moral beliefs are subjectively expressed, they are inter-subjectively constructed, socially selected and transmitted, and form cultural traditions (Luckman, 2002).
At particular times in history, each culture constructs its own discourses about moral orders, which validate particular perspectives about oneself, others, and visions about the world. These moral values are embedded in a shared social consciousness and become part of common sense, forming an intuitive matrix that often remains unproblematic. However, the matrix can be disrupted and potentially dismantled when confronted by an alternative that challenges and violates its structuring principles and norms. Ruptures to one’s moral matrix provide the opportunity to reflect on and reconstruct one’s perspective. Hannah Arendt notes that through the breakdown of judgment, we come to examine its nature (Vetlesen, 1994). We see these ruptures as inevitable features of human existence and human societies, which have the potential to become creative forces that force us to distance ourselves from our immediate perspectives and reflect on alternative views (Valsiner, 2003) that do not deny the subjectivity of the ‘other’.

A method to imagine oneself through the eyes of the ‘other’

The aim of moral transgressions, which are accompanied by extensive (self) reflective and group discussions, is not to encourage participants to only engage in intra-personal dialogue, imagine another person’s world, and imagine themselves in the shoes of the ‘other’. Rather, by adding another layer of complexity, we aim to inspire participants to engage in intra-inter-personal dialogue to develop the skill to see themselves through the eyes of the ‘other’. To see oneself through the eyes of the ‘other’ first requires putting oneself in the shoes of the ‘other’, i.e. to imagine another person’s intentions and perspective. This must be performed to, second, turn the gaze onto oneself through the eyes of the ‘other’. In other words, we use the imaginary moral judgement of the ‘other’ and project it onto ourselves to obtain a potentially new perspective. Even though this is not the same as experiencing the social situation of another person through an exchange of social positions (Gillespie, 2012), the process prompts a moral perspective exchange, which differs from merely imagining the perspective of the ‘other’.

This new perspective aims to dialectically disrupt powerful binary categories and moral principles, on which the subjects often draws without conscious awareness, to think about herself and construct the ‘other’. We selected food, as all people can relate to this everyday and universal topic with symbolic significance. As such, we encouraged participants to view themselves through the concepts of geography, territory, and time, and learn to see
themselves as historical subjects embedded in a particular moral matrix. Analytically, we aimed for the following two realisations among our participants:

A) To make them realise how social norms that underpin a specific moral matrix are socially constructed, not set in stone, and that in a different context, these could have been constructed differently.

B) We wanted them to realise the power of the moral matrix, how it has been instilled in them, how what they consider universal and objective moral principles or conventions are a socially constructed aspect of the matrix, and how they can re-imagine and re-establish alternative relations with them.

We developed the seven questions to create a story that prompts participants incrementally to see themselves as historical subjects, see their own entanglement in a hegemonic order, and how this order has influenced their moral and emotional worlds. Second, it prompted them to see how their intuitive moral judgements about the ‘other’ are reproduced and help sustain an oppressive order in which they enjoy a privileged position. The reflection process throughout the exercise elicited strong emotional reactions, which are integral for moving towards realising points A and B above. The reflection on emotions accompanying the realisation of A and B is important, as participants are supposed to learn for the future how to examine, rather than distrust, their moral intuition. These intuitions are powerful forces often based on principles, which are part of the moral matrix that concurrently helps to sustain a hegemonic order from which they benefit and others suffer. Our method aimed to disrupt participants’ moral matrix and the notion of a hegemonic, universal, singular, and ahistorical identity. We focus on this individual positioning, in other words, on how people construct their social identity in a web of conflicting, opposing, antagonistic, or mutually reinforcing codes in the 21st century (Näcke & Park, 2001). The answer to the question ‘Who am I?’ (identity) refers to fragile and heterogeneous stakes in the political and cultural struggle surrounding hegemony and is key in the debate on the political capacity to act.

**Moral intuition and moral reasoning**

Traditionally, moral psychologists assumed that moral judgment involved a deliberate process of reasoning and reflection. According to this rationalist approach, emotional reactions associated with moral judgments are caused by moral reasoning and can be changed by altering one’s reasoning (Piaget, 1932/1999). Adherents of the intuition-based model advocate something different. Haidt (2001) posits that most judgments and behaviours are formed automatically and with little intention, awareness, or effort (for reviews of the
debate see (Bargh, 1994); (Greenwald, 1995) (Wegener & Bargh, 1998). Furthermore, conscious reasoning is the consequence of these unconscious behaviours and judgments, not the cause thereof. Epley and Caruso (2004) add that ‘people reason in ways consistent with what they want or expect to see’ (Epley, 2004:179). A growing body of research highlights the complex interplay between automatic/affective and explicit/cognitive mechanisms in moral reasoning, which is contingent on various factors such as consciousness of accountability (Lerner, 1998), motivation to be accurate or unbiased (Kunda & Spencer, 2003), inducement of harm through direct action or omission (Cushman, 2006), and focus on intentions or consequences (Greene, 2017). An on-going debate among psychologists and philosophers, which we do not cover here, is on whether emotions trigger or cause moral judgements. However, we agree with the research that affect and emotions do matter for moral judgements (Chapman, 2013; Damasio, 1994; Horberg, 2011; Prinz, 2007; Tangney, 2007).

Reflection on emotional states or intuition is important, as they are a form of information processing (Lazarus, 1991; Damasio, 1994) that involves a complex synthesis of schemas, memory, sensations, and retrieval of conceptual knowledge. We do not have to view emotions as fully explicit beliefs or clear processes of reasoning to appreciate their cognitive role (Mohanty, 2000). Emotions are what ‘we see the world in “terms of” and they encourage specific interpretations or evaluations of the world’ (De Sousa, 2001). We maintain that intuition cannot be dismissed as clouding reasoning. Intuitive responses are experienced as ‘gut feelings’ or a ‘sense’, for example, something strikes as right or wrong, or it ‘feels’ like a good time to do something. Given the amount of sensory information we encounter in everyday life, it would be impossible to consciously deliberate everything. Moral intuition includes an affective valence (good-bad, like-dislike) that arises effortlessly and has an authority we cannot ignore even when unable to articulate or reason their origins (Haidt, 2001; Railton, 2014). These reactions are based on an assessment of what is good and bad, right or wrong from one’s perspective. These automatic egocentric evaluations are then considered valid representations of reality, while opposing viewpoints are considered self-interested distortion (Epley & Caruso, 2004: 178).

The most basic and important decision one can make is deciding whether to approach or avoid a stimulus. Especially in the presence of a personal threat, the functional benefits of rapid responses are obvious (Fazio, 1989). Therefore, the human neural system, which quickly and efficiently evaluates virtually every stimulus encountered, was fashioned through evolution. For example, fear, a basic evaluative response, can occur before neural activation in the centres of higher-order cognition via a direct neural pathway through the amygdala. Epley and Caruso (2004) claim, ‘The mere process of perceiving a stimulus entails an
evaluation of that stimulus’ (p. 176). This strong link between emotions and moral action explains why people’s affective reactions linger, even after their thoughts have changed substantially. Thus, moral judgements comprise two elements of cognition: intuition and reasoning. Moral intuition is powerful, but often so rapid and effortless that it becomes subtle and difficult to identify and understand. However, if accompanied by strong emotional reactions, intuition can surface consciously. At this time, we can weigh, re-interpret, and re-evaluate varying intuitions in relation to our situation, which could re-define our perspectives.

In his description of the phylogenetic and socio-genetic reconstruction of psychic development, Holzkamp examines the relationship between human subjects and the world, and studies the process of meaning-making through an analysis of evolution, history, and culture (Holzkamp, 1983). Similarly, drawing on evolutionary theory and anthropological evidence, Haidt and Joseph (2004) developed the ‘universal first draft of human nature’, which comprises five universal moral principles found in all cultures. However, different groups and cultures, at different points in history, draw on different principles to define their notions of good. The five moral principles have evolved to address five universal problems of the human condition and evoke different emotional reactions.

1. The care/harm principle has evolved to respond to the challenge of taking care of vulnerable people. It makes us sensitive to seeing children and others in distress or suffering and relates to norms about care. We condemn violence and cruelty.

2. The fairness/cheating foundation has evolved to address the need to maximise the benefits of a relationship with non-kin without being exploited. We are keen to find the best partner who conforms to the norm of reciprocity. We dislike and want to punish people who cheat and exploit others.

3. The loyalty/betrayal foundation developed from the need to form and maintain group relationships and coalitions. It makes us identify with our group; trust and praise our in-group members; and hurt, exclude, or kill those who betray us.

4. The authority/subversion principle evolved to address the issue of forming relationships that would advance us up social hierarchies and grant us more privileges. We become sensitive about hierarchies, ranks, status, and symbols that showcase one’s position in society.

Rather than assuming a singular and universal correspondence between an emotional reaction and moral principle, we consider the above taxonomy useful, as it provides the basic elements to explore the moral concerns and emotions activated in certain circumstances when reasoning about different situations.
The sanctity/degradation principle developed to help omnivores survive in a world of pathogens and parasites that could spread in physical proximity. It involves the immune system, which also makes us sensitive to different sights, smells, or other sensory reactions that signal the presence of a dangerous pathogenic subject or object. It extends to symbolic threatening objects or subjects such as immigrants, refugees, and homeless people. This foundation prompts us to protect our kin and ourselves from parasites and pathogens as well as threatening subjects.

We feel disgusted with people who threaten important group values. Intuition has evolved from these five adaptive challenges. We react through intuition when any of these principles are violated. In other words, ‘we are born to be righteous’ (Haidt, 2012). The challenge is how to understand one’s righteous nature, as one’s moral principles are not necessarily right and notions of right or wrong, moral or immoral vary across geographies and histories.

Eating and food practices: Sanctity and disgust

We structured our exercise around food practices for two reasons. First, today, food is a real and symbolic battleground linked to the global institutional order. The global food and agricultural system raises many ethical issues regarding the status of consumers, producers, animals, and the environment. Physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets dietary needs has worsened in parts of sub-Saharan Africa and South-eastern and Western Asia. In total, 80% of the world’s chronically malnourished people are from low-income countries, live in rural areas, and cultivate at least 70% of the world’s food (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, & WHO, 2017). The lives of rural farmers in the Global South are undermined by international aid, free trade, restructuring programs, and large-scale land acquisitions.

Second, from birth eating is one of the first activities we engage in. From that moment, the way we interact with people and objects shape our relationship with food. Our family, schoolmates, neighbours, religion, and culture become sites of acculturation into norms and expectations about food preferences and practices. Food is a source of energy that fuels our bodies and minds and satisfies our hunger as well as a source of pleasure. Food and eating are central to our sense of self and subjectivity. Furthermore, different rules and conventions in a socio-cultural system imbue eating practices with meaning and legitimacy. According to Levi-Strauss (Levi-Strauss, 1970), food encapsulates the binary of nature/culture, raw/cooked, food/non-food, and clean/dirty. Food is the transformation of the raw, natural, and pure, and is always dirty in preparation, at
which time it is only hours or days from rotting, (for example, spoiled meat, mouldy bread, and rotten vegetables), threatening to harm our bodies. As such, food is like human flesh, sacred and susceptible to decay (Lupton, 1996). By eating, we transform our bodies and ourselves, engaging in techniques of caring for the self (Foucault, 1985). Food choices and practices are inherent in social groups and tied to cultural identities. Food production, cooking, distribution, and eating are moral processes of the ethical self.

Disgust is linked with food and is a central component of the moral matrix of many cultures (Haidt, 1992). All cultures have food taboos, for example, cannibalism or eating fish or pork, which are among the strongest moral restrictions. In addition, the emotion of disgust acts as a guardian of the soul’s purity, protecting sacred values and objects (Rozin, 1990). The sanctity foundation makes it natural for us to consider some things as ‘untouchable’: in a bad way, because they are dirty and polluted, and in a good way, because they are sacred, which means that we want to protect them from sacrilege. Moral disgust is a major force that triggers strong emotional and behavioural reactions. It can be used to form, maintain, and regulate social cohesion in societies or abused to discriminate, exclude, stigmatise, and hurt outgroups (Curtis, 2011).

In reviewing empirical evidence on the nature and moral significance of disgust, Kelly (2011; Kelly & Morar, 2014), similar to Haidt, claims that it has two functions: health and social. Disgust is a complex emotional response that evolved to protect us from parasites and pathogens, and works through two mechanisms: pathogen avoidance and taste aversion (entanglement thesis). Pathogen avoidance is associated with experiencing nausea and accompanied by physiological responses, facial expressions, immediate retreat, and moving away from the source. Taste aversion is called ‘core disgust’, and is a cognitive and behavioural approach that involves distancing oneself from the source of contamination and its potential to contaminate.

In addition to the health function, disgust has evolved to also fulfill societal functions. It regulates social interactions and roles related to social norms and group membership. Both individual experiences and social learning influence what people find disgusting, and this flexibility gives rise to the diversity in what different individuals, groups of people, and cultures reject and find disgusting. As a moral intuition, disgust motivates us to comply with social norms that protect sacred values and objects. If we transgress, we feel guilt and shame. If others transgress, we become angry and punish or ostracise them. Violators are perceived as polluted. Our disgust is then directed at the cuisine and invisible markers of potential contamination as well as at the people who embrace these conventions. The violation of these conventions elicits the moral emotions of disgust, anger, and guilt. Disgust plays a major role in political controversies.
including abortion, homosexuality, homelessness, and burning flags (Haidt, 2012). In a world in which we are increasingly exposed to different food cultures and movements, food becomes a site of moral restriction.

**Seven questions on moral transgressions**

In this exercise, we adopted a Socratic approach in our conversations with students to discuss the seven questions on moral transgressions. Through dialogical moves, we used enquiry as a tool for introspection to highlight assumptions underpinning their perspectives without pointing them out. Enquiry opens the dialogue and prompts an evaluation and examination of one’s judgements in light of others available. To activate participants’ moralities, we asked them seven questions structured around dilemmas and moral judgements, which incrementally built a story. Some were inspired by Jonathan Haidt’s research and others constructed by us. In consecutive steps, the questions guided participants from an intra-personal dialogue to an intra-inter-personal dialogue with an ‘other’, enabling them to see themselves *through* the eyes of the ‘other’.

The questions were as follows:

1. Would you eat your pet dog if it were randomly killed in a car accident?
2. Is it more ethically justifiable to order a hamburger at McDonalds or a bucket of chicken wings from KFC?
3. Would you eat maggots, rats, or guinea pigs?
4. How do you think Muslims feel about you eating pork?
5. How do you think Hindus feel about you eating beef?
6. How do you think vegans feel about you wearing leather shoes?
7. Imagine the following scenario. An 11-year-old Tibetan girl only recently learnt that some people in other parts of the world wear leather shoes and eat meat. Since then, she cries and prays every night that people one day realise that animals also have souls, as do humans. She decided to go on a pilgrimage to make her prayers heard. How do you think she feels about you?

In questions 1 to 3, the active subject is oneself, i.e. the subject judging, and participants are engaging in an intra-personal dialogue. In questions 4, 5, and 6, the focus changes, and the participant becomes ‘passive’, becoming the one judged by an ‘other’. Thus, an intra-inter-personal dialogue is engaged in. Here, the questions aim to prompt participants to reflect on how others perceive them. Finally, question 7 projects the judgement of the ‘other’ and prompts participants to reflect on how they feel about the judgement of the ‘other’. The challenge is to judge one’s ethical self through the eyes of an ‘other’.
Method

We carried out the exercise with our students in the UK and the Netherlands as part of our courses on social psychology in two countries. The group in the UK consisted of 35 students and in the Netherlands, 17. Students were all in their final year of their B.Sc. in Psychology. The mean age was 20.34 (SD=3.32). Of the 52 students, 17% (n=9) were male and 83% female (n=43). Regarding ethnic identity, 92% (n=48) identified as white, while the remaining 5 students identified as Chinese (n=1), Caribbean (n=2), Afghani (n=1), and Native American (n=1). The majority of students were born (77% n= 40) and/or raised (71%, n=37) in the UK and the Netherlands.

The procedure consisted of three stages. First, we split the class into small groups of three to four people and then posed one question at a time to them to discuss in their groups. We allowed two to four minutes’ discussion for each question. In the second stage, after the groups had discussed all the questions, we discussed each question with them, so that they could justify their answers. As a result, a dialogue took place between the students. As the discussion unfolded, we provided them with information on how the meanings they attach to different food practices have been impacted by geography, territory, and historical conditions. Insofar as the aim of this paper is to present our method and the rationale thereof, we do not provide a rigorous analysis of our findings or assess the impact of our method. Next is a short explanation of the aim of each question, and a discursive summary of students’ key justifications for their moral judgements and the historical information we provided in our discussions with them.
### Aims: Moral Principles and Dialogical Level

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<tr>
<th>Oneself as active: Doing the judging</th>
<th>Moral Principles</th>
<th>Dialogical level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Pet dog</td>
<td>Sanctity</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Burger/KFC Chicken</td>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Maggots, rats, guinea pigs</td>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Intra-personal</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Authority</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Changing the focus: Oneself as passive, i.e. imagining being judged</th>
<th>Moral Principles</th>
<th>Dialogical level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. Muslims</td>
<td>Social convention violations from a different perspective</td>
<td>Intra-personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Hindus</td>
<td></td>
<td>Inter-personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Vegans</td>
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<tr>
<th>Ethical Self: Judging one’s own actions through the eyes of the other</th>
<th>Moral Principles</th>
<th>Dialogical level</th>
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<tr>
<td>7. Tibetan girl</td>
<td></td>
<td>Intra-personal</td>
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<td>Inter-personal</td>
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### Aim I: To trigger the emotion of disgust and create moral outrage via a ‘harmless’ taboo violation

Q1: Would you eat your pet dog if it were randomly killed in a car accident?
The aim of the first question was to trigger the emotion of disgust and cause moral outrage about what seems to be a social convention. An event is judged as a social convention, rather than a moral obligation, when it does not intrinsically harm others (Turiel, 1983). Eating an already dead animal does not cause intrinsic harm. However, from a Western perspective, participants judged it as morally outrageous and disrespectful to eat a pet, even if it was dead. Most constructed the pet dog as a ‘family member’, ascribing it a human status, rather than perceiving it as an animal. It is ‘someone not something you love’. Thus, the idea of eating the dog violates the principles of sanctity and authority (Haidt, 2013), and triggers the strong emotional reactions of disrespect and disgust. Only entertaining the idea of eating one’s pet dog was reported as ‘repugnant’ and ‘repulsive’.

**Aim II: Contextualisation of the same object to realise that objects may be ascribed different meanings in different contexts**

Q2: Would it be more ethically justifiable to order a hamburger at McDonalds or a bucket of chicken wings from KFC?

Here, the authority principle is activated and a social hierarchy formed. While the pet dog is construed as a family member, laying the foundation for the application of the sanctity principle, most students objectify animals they regularly eat. As cows and pigs get ‘reduced’ to beef or pork, eating and ignoring their ‘murder’ becomes a social convention rather than violation of the sanctity principle. Students argue that this is ‘something most do, as you do not know the cow personally’. In other words, contextualisation of the same ‘object’, a breathing mammal, means it can be ascribed a different moral status (e.g., moral inferiority), allowing oneself to engage in acts of omissions that would be outrageous and morally condemned in a different context.\(^5\) However, in this context, eating meat is constructed as a social convention.

**Aim III: To make tangible the arbitrariness of the social construction and contextualisation of the same object**

Q3: Would you eat maggots, rats, or guinea pigs?

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\(^5\) Most answers to this question begin with an omission and an unspoken disclaimer: ‘The crucial difference is that you do not know these cows and pigs’. This form of discursive manoeuvring allows them to point out the difference without naming the elephant in the room. The way in which they explain the differences implicitly confirms similarity and maintains a state of denial (Cohen, 2001).
Initially, students find the idea of eating maggots and rats ‘disgusting’, as they associate them with ‘corpses’ and ‘death’, and rats with ‘diseases’ and as ‘carriers of germs’. However, guinea pigs are referred to as ‘cute pets’. Students reject the idea of eating guinea pigs on the basis that they would barely provide any meat, meaning their slaughter cannot be reasonably justified: ‘It would not even be a decent portion’. Here, the authority principle is activated. Using different arguments, students rejected the idea of eating these animals based on hierarchy. Rats are ascribed an inferior moral status on the hierarchy of species and viewed as sources of contamination and disease. However, guinea pigs are considered pets and constructed as superior to the rats. After their initial reactions to these questions, we provided information that in terms of protein levels and texture, maggots are not that different from seafood, prawns, oysters, lobster, or shells. Actually, many cultures consider them as delicacies. Rats, which did carry germs in Europe during the Black Death, are not necessarily ‘deadly’. In certain African countries, where rats are a rare delicacy, they are hunted in the countryside through concerted, high-energy group action, as they are difficult to trap. In certain Latin American countries such as Peru, guinea pigs are delicacies and eaten in the same manner as quails in Europe. By providing this information, we prompted participants to reflect on the following three elements. 1) Their initial emotion of disgust is due to their construal of these animals, which are bound to their matrix of cultural norms and customs, and there is no true essence to the animals. 2) While certain social conventions fulfilled a particular function at a particular point in history, today, they are arbitrary. We demonstrated to the participants that we do not question these conventions and cling to them. 3) Their initial moral intuition might be diverting them.

**Intra-interpersonal dialogue: Shifting the gaze and seeing one’s ethical self through the eyes of an ‘other’**

**Aim IV: To make tangible the historical and functional elements of the social construction and contextualisation of the same object**

Q4: How do you think Muslims feel about you eating pork?
Q5: How do you think Hindus feel about you eating beef?
Q6: How do you think vegans feel about you wearing leather shoes?

In these questions, we switch the focus and prompt students to reflect on how the ‘other’ would judge them on issues constructed as social conventions from their perspective (Questions 2 and 3). We wanted them to realise that in different historical times or different circumstances, different principles or social
conventions serve different purposes. This pertained to the empowering realisation that the world might have been constructed differently. For many students, questions 4 and 5 were difficult to answer, as they had never considered these topics before. They were astonished to learn that Muslims may consider their action ‘disgusting’ or that Hindus might find it ‘awful’, as they consider cows holy. However, the majority of students assumed that Hindus and Muslims would not hold strong views about these issues. After their initial reactions to questions 4 and 5, we provided historical information about the prohibition of pork in the Middle East and in Islam. We explained that initially, the ecological argument held. Although pigs were domesticated, they were not suited to dry environments. As the climate changed and became drier, it became too expensive to feed, grow, and sustain pigs, as they ate the same grains as humans. Other animals like sheep, camels, chickens, and cattle ate grass. Thus, ecologically and economically, it made sense to ban pigs. The ban was introduced by Judaism and adopted in Islam. For those Christians in the Middle East who continued the tradition of eating pork, this became an ‘identity issue’ used to distinguish themselves from other religious groups (Winzeler, 2008). Regarding the prohibition of beef in Hinduism, we also provided information on how practical reasons led people to treat beef as sacred and eating it as a taboo. Cattle are considered sacred in many religions including Hinduism. The ban of beef goes back to milk and other dairy products, which were precious resources. People used dried cow dung as a fuel and fertiliser. For practical reasons, cows were constructed as caretakers, and given a maternal and divine status. People referred to milk cows as *aghnya*, which translates into ‘that which may not be slaughtered’. This pastoral emotion towards cows led to their sacredness.

Regarding question 6, participants realised that what may represent a social convention for them (i.e. wearing leather shoes), violates a moral principle for another person if the animal is constructed as having a soul and is killed to produce leather shoes. During the discussions, students acknowledged that 1) they engage in a behaviour that could be condemned outright if one applies different moral principles and does not objectify animals, and 2) they unintentionally violated principles important to others. In imagining the

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6 Students engaged in an ‘ethics of intention’ rather than applying ‘ethics of responsibility’ (Weber, 1919). Ethics that focus on individuals’ intention upholds the self-image of an ethical self, as it can defend every single action in all circumstances. During the Nuremberg trial, the Nazis defended sending Jews to the gas chambers with reference to themselves as not having had bad intentions. However, an ethics of responsibilities requires the evaluation and judgement of one’s own actions by their consequences and effects on others. Essentially, the act is not judged from what came at the beginning (intentions), but by its outcome (consequences).
perspective of vegans, students constructed them as people who refuse to wear leather products based on ethical motivations. From this point of view, the act of wearing leather shoes can only be condemned. However, most students speculated that while vegans have strong ethics, they are not judgemental and therefore do not have strong views against them.

Overall, through arguing about others’ judgements of themselves, students acknowledged the different perspectives, but were not willing to accommodate them. As a result, their ethical self did not feel challenged.

Aim VI: To probe one’s ethical self regarding a severe violation of a moral principle and link the emotions triggered in Q1 and Q7.

Q7: Think of a 12-year-old Tibetan girl who cries while praying every day for people in the West after hearing that some eat meat almost daily, hoping they realise that animals have souls too. How do you think she feels about you?

Most students did not know how to answer this question, which triggered much silence. Only one or two students could clearly articulate their thoughts: ‘From her perspective, it is as if we are eating our pet dogs’. A pet dog was earlier constructed as a ‘family member’, as someone ‘loved’ and ‘identified’ with, who had a soul, and to whom the sanctity principle could be applied. Many participants were shocked by the scenario in the question of the young girl, who views them as engaging in unethical behaviour, eliciting her tears and moving her to pray for them. This is a new perspective for them, as the strong emotional reaction of disgust they felt through the pet dog question still lingered. Bearing in mind their outrage regarding the initial idea of ‘eating a family member’, we hope that they integrate this emotional experience into their deliberations on the differences between their own and the Tibetan girl’s moral matrix and into their reasoning about why the girl morally condemns them.

Discussion

We argued that perspective-taking should not only be understood in terms of imagining the intentions and world of the other, which ultimately silences and suppresses differences. We must also understand how the other evaluates our moral principles and judges our actions, and the implications thereof for our concept of the ethical self. Using a circular approach, we lead the final discussion with participants so that they would ideally realise that seeing themselves

The effect that a ‘focus on intentions’ has is as a self-immunised discursive move that no-one could challenge.
through the eyes of the other means that they violate severe moral principles they constructed as universal and natural. Drawing on theories that emphasise the importance of our intuition in moral judgements, the first question aimed to trigger a strong emotional reaction including moral outrage and disgust, which they would remember when the last question was posed. Viewing themselves through the eyes of the other, from whose perspective they may not hold an ‘ethical self’, and realising that they unknowingly and unintentionally sickened others ‘down to their stomach’, was a new experience for the majority of students. We used this to disrupt their moral matrix, make it visible, and hopefully trigger new intuitions they could draw on in the future to question the purity of the meanings of right and wrong they ascribe to different ‘objects’, events, and behaviours.

The ‘other’ is a source of confusion regarding everyday practices. In a global society, we are increasingly exposed to differences; thus, everyday interactions result in interactional breakdowns and meanings are negotiated and experienced on the ground. The goal is not to avoid breakdowns in human relations or overcome our intuition. For us, it is important to learn the skill to handle these breakdowns more intentionally by learning how to suspend and question the automatic intuition we use to understand and judge ourselves and the ‘other’. In other words, we must realise how our identities and moral intuitive judgments are embedded in a hegemonic matrix that helps maintain an oppressive order, which ultimately oppresses us. As different groups with different interests and structures worldwide claim their own visions of liberation and contest the dictate of homogenisation that marginalises their subjectivities and sustains an unequal status quo, self-understanding requires the decentralization of one’s perspective. This decentralisation is meaningful as a critique of essentialism and an unsettling of universal visions of emancipation that aggregate and reduce plurality to homogeneous identities structured around binaries (left versus right, east versus west, religious versus secular, etc.).

Our exercise aimed to empower participants to enact their ‘action potential’ through learning how to drop moralism, or their sense of moral superiority, and disrupt the power of the dominant categories that inform their identities and shape an invisible normality. We wanted to show them how this normality is historically, geographically, and socially constructed, and how it encroaches on their everyday lives and practices including food choices. Through this process, the task is to investigate and uncover how their understandings about their identities and everyday morality are interwoven in contradictions of the official societal discourse, so that they can be understood as a specific phenomenon of fundamental societal constellations (Holzkamp, 1994). Our method is a tool that creates pathways to empower subjects to experience their identities as contingent,
coincidental, and changeable. Ultimately, it probes their ‘action possibilities’. The skill to step back and explore one’s entanglement with one’s own perspectives through the concepts of history, geography, and territory can open new forms of dialogue with oneself and the other and develop new forms of solidarity. This solidarity views universality as ‘an opening to radical contingency’ (Žižek, 2015), grounded in common struggles against the global institutional order.

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Political learning in civic initiatives

Jana Trumann

Abstract
This paper discusses the results of an empirical study on political participation and awareness-building processes within local citizens’ initiatives in Germany. The rationale for researching this topic was that politicians often dismiss political participation outside established forms (elections, etc.), and that the political learning processes that take place informally in these settings receive little recognition as acquired expertise. To close the identified gap in learning theory, the analysis drew on the subject-scientific deliberations of Klaus Holzkamp (1995). As a result, a wide variety of learning actions were developed and placed in a learning action space.

Keywords
political participation, political learning, informal learning, adult education, subject-scientific

This paper discusses the results of an empirical study on political participation and awareness-building processes within local citizens’ initiatives in Germany. The rationale for researching this topic was that politicians often dismiss political participation outside established forms (elections, etc.), and that the political learning processes that take place informally in these settings receive little recognition as acquired expertise. To close the identified gap in learning theory, the analysis drew on the subject-scientific deliberations of Klaus Holzkamp (1995). As a result, a wide variety of learning actions were developed and placed in a learning action space.

Many people are engaging in civic initiatives these days, with a view to questioning the status quo and introducing their own perspectives into the public discourse. The “reduction of democratic life to [the] management of local consequences resulting from global economic necessities” (Rancière 2003, p. 114) no longer seems to be a credible line of argument to a majority of people. One prominent example of people’s ‘revolt’ against political decisions are the
Occupy protests that have taken place in numerous countries. In many cases, coverage of these events revived the debate on the meaning and nature of political participation. These at times quite controversial debates centred not only on whatever had caused the ‘outrage’, but also on the fundamental question of entitlement and active participation in shaping the world. The momentum of this ‘outrage’ (Hessel 2011) doesn’t always engender love in the established political system – as shown among other things by the frequent and massive police operations against protesters. What is behind this dissent?

To put it simply, two opposing viewpoints compete with each other in the discourse on political participation: One side assumes there are numerous opportunities for participation in the form of elections or cooperation in political parties, which, however, are not always very popular (e.g. low turnout, resignation from parties). This side quickly concludes that the problem is ‘disenchantment with politics’, and the reason behind it the citizens’ lack of political knowledge and awareness. Meanwhile, others dismiss the possibilities provided as unappealing, and feel that participating in clubs, other initiatives, or activities such as flash mobs are more appropriate and effective. In their view, people are fed up with the rules of the established political terrain and their representatives, rather than being ‘disenchanted with politics’ in general.

These opposing viewpoints indicate a difference in basic theoretical perspectives: an ‘instrumental’ understanding of participation versus a ‘normative’ understanding that aims at the participation of all citizens in as many areas as possible (cf. Hoecker 2006). This extensive participation of citizens is where opinions differ. Some feel the system would be jeopardized by an extensive participation of citizens (cf. e.g. Massing 2009, Patzelt 2009). Only those who possess the required knowledge – which is meant to be conveyed in institutional educational settings by means of curricula – should be allowed to participate. There is no room for informal political participation and educational processes in this view. Even if the conveyance of self-learning skills in schools and universities is becoming significantly more important, any autonomous acquisition of knowledge is rejected, often with the implication that there is a risk of learning the ‘wrong’ thing and thus endangering the system.

However, this assumes a very narrow definition of education, which focuses on the conveyance of pre-defined expert knowledge with the objective of having citizens conform to the system, and hardly considers a socio-critical perspective. This begs the question of what is ‘wrong’ or ‘right’ and who determines this? Representatives of the other position regard this self-guided, autonomous learning by individuals as a ‘ politicization’ of political education and see democracy as an open project that needs to keep being renegotiated rather than being written in stone. Here, citizens are initially seen as politically
competent, and their active participation in political decision-making processes as extending their own political powers of judgement (cf. e.g. Bremer 2008; Lösch/Thimmel 2010).

Clearly, the question of legitimate political participation and education is highly controversial. Why is this so? The difficulty of the established political field – Bourdieu (2001) described this very well – is that it relies on the citizens’ choices even for its legitimisation. And from the perspective of the established field, they should of course choose whatever does threaten its existence. Entitlement for participation is then engineered as a ‘never-ending’ story with a ‘sophisticated/well thought-out’ system of competences, step-by-step systems and associated roles for citizens – all within the framework of institutional educational settings.

This paper discusses the results of an empirical study that I conducted, which questioned these mechanisms of entitlement in their apparent immutability, through the example of municipal civic initiatives. The study took a closer look at the frequently frowned-upon political learning and action as practiced by individuals in informal settings (Trumann 2013).

Civic initiatives provide individuals with a place where they can participate in shaping society while bringing their own views to the table. They widen the field of possible forms of participation in the spirit of a participatory democracy and provide an opportunity to contemplate alternatives while experiencing the effectiveness of one’s actions together with others. This makes possible a new definition of the established political field – one that does not distinguish between politics and pre-politics, experts and laypersons, right and wrong, etc. beforehand, but instead emerges from people’s daily political practices (such as engaging in initiatives). With respect to the local level, urban development processes would then not be carried out exclusively from a top-down perspective by so-called experts, but rather from the perspective of the people living and acting in their respective social environment/community. As part of this engagement in initiatives, thematic knowledge (e.g. about air pollution, traffic management, emissions) is jointly gathered, generated and discussed. The initiative becomes a setting for learning, and “realizations about one’s own living opportunities in the space – the city, countryside, suburb, district are generated. And the primary question becomes understanding the role of the local or regional contexts in the development of one’s own biography through learning opportunities” (Faulstich 2015, p. 217).

In the following, the learning-theory starting points introduced here are explored, and the cornerstones of a subject-scientific perspective on learning in connection with the study’s topic are discussed, in order to then take a closer
look at civic initiatives and their potential as a setting for learning and action, using empirical examples.

**Learning theory considerations**

The few existing studies about political education for adults (e.g. Fritz/Maier/Böhnisch 2006; Ahlheim/Heger 2006) focus on institutionalised educational work, its topics, formats, and settings, and discuss informal political educational processes only as a topic on which they would like to see more research. These studies often lack a distinct learning-theoretical discussion or a detailed consideration of how individuals go through political learning processes. My own study has dedicated itself to this research gap and researched practices of political learning and action in local civic initiatives (Trumann 2013). By abandoning the external perspective on learning and taking a subject-oriented view, “it studies learners as responsible individuals and subjects integrated/embedded in their living environment, who develop their own perspectives and interests, against the backdrop of their subjective horizons of meaning and to which pedagogical action should be aligned” (Weis 2005, p. 13).

The concept of subject-scientific learning by Klaus Holzkamp (1995) presented a suitable foundation for analysing these, as it centres on expansivity, i.e. the expansion of one’s own possible actions, and of learning processes. According to Holzkamp (2004, p. 29), learning takes place “when the subject has encountered obstacles or resistance to his normal course of action, and finds himself facing an ‘action problem’ that he cannot overcome with the presently available means or abilities but only through […] the detour of adding a ‘learning loop’.” In the concept of subject-oriented learning, this subjectively experienced conflict between ‘wanting to’ and ‘being able to’ is the cause of a given individual’s decision to overcome an action problem with learning. In the moment the learning loop described by Holzkamp is triggered, the original ‘action problem’ becomes a ‘learning problem’. Expansive learning aims at enhancing the individual’s capacity for action regarding shaping the ‘world’ – and hence political participation.

Three aspects of Holzkamp’s learning-theoretical considerations appear especially interesting for the perspective taken here, and the field of study ‘civic initiative’. For one, Holzkamp’s (1995, p. 227) thoughts concerning the possibility of ‘qualitative leaps in learning’. These serve as an expression for an increasing differentiation of learning actions, “a progression from (relative) shallowness to increasing depth of understanding of the subject” (ibid., p. 221). The thematic and operational differentiation of the learning topic are seen as interwoven (cf. ibid., p. 250).
Because they give the individual a more differentiated understanding of the subject, expansive learning actions enable a more independent position. “You say this and you say that, but I myself have learned that things might possibly be like this or that” (ibid., p. 523). Qualitative leaps in learning do not follow any step logic, and are therefore not generalisable, but become clear only during individual reflection – by experiencing myself that I can learn much more about a certain object. The political knowledge of the individual generated in informal settings – such as citizens’ initiatives – becomes less quantifiable compared to formally planned learning - such as in schools through curricula, and the lack of recognition by the established political field mentioned earlier becomes perhaps more explicable (cf. ibid., p. 517).

For an analysis of learning in citizens’ initiatives, it is interesting to note that Holzkamp’s deliberations concentrated not only on individual learning actions, but also included, though not at their core, learning actions in cooperative learning arrangements – which are based on a commonly shared ‘learning problem’. During the cooperative learning process, a shared topic is worked on in a division of labour drawing on the various available means, and “overlapping zones of knowledge/skill” (ibid., p. 511) are produced. Cooperative learning actions can thus favour qualitative leaps in learning, since the confluence of divergent perspectives contributes to a more differentiated view of one’s own position.

Finally, Holzkamp uses the aspect of “daily lifestyle” (1996) to emphasise the embeddedness of actions into an individual’s daily contexts. The ‘radius of action’ an individual possesses here varies from person to person. For the analysis of learning in citizens’ initiatives, it is very helpful that Klaus Holzkamp emphasises not only the determinacy of actions, but in particular the individual’s scope of action. In analysing ‘unforeseen’ actions, or actions that are not considered appropriate by third parties – as is often the case in the context of citizens’ initiatives – individual options for political action can thus be identified. So, from a subject-scientific perspective, lifestyle is not just a response to the given circumstances, but also an active contributor to them. Individual world order is put into the context of shared world order. The following is thus an examination of what exactly constitutes learning actions in the context of civic initiatives.

**Political learning and action in citizens’ initiatives**

Briefly about the research design: The study is based on a participatory observation carried out over a period of two years in five initiatives in the fields
of nature and environmental conservancy as well as traffic planning and urban design. This made it possible to highlight the learning actions and activities, which often took place indirectly and were not designated as learning by the individuals (cf. Grell 2006; Girtler 2001), and to jointly reflect on them during group discussions. The research question was what action problems the members of the initiative encounter in their work and how they respond to them. In the end, very different forms of learning actions were articulated and situated in a space of learning and action characterized by the dimensions of ‘cooperative and individual’, ‘actional and reflective’, and ‘absorbing and transferring’ (Trumann 2013).

![Learning-action-space civic initiative](image)

**cooperative – individual**

The empirical material shows that the members of observed initiatives either rely on the existing knowledge of various members or, where this isn’t possible, transfer the ‘action problem’ into a ‘learning problem’ and execute a learning loop. The organisation of these learning loops mainly results from the interplay of individual and cooperative learning actions. This means that learning problems are met collaboratively with the structure of “overlapping zones of knowledge and skill” as described by Holzkamp (1995).

This in itself is hardly surprising, but the following is interesting to note: This collaboration and interplay of individual and cooperative learning actions can be seen not only at the level of a given initiative, but also across initiatives. Two different ‘cooperation partners’ come into view here: other initiatives, and
‘third parties’ such as associations and federations. The respective problems are placed in relation to each other, and one’s own as well as joint possibilities of action are discussed. In the research under study, this process was ultimately intensified by the establishment of a network of initiatives and the founding of a voter initiative.

For the success of the cooperative learning actions, Klaus Holzkamp assumed the existence of a shared ‘action problem’ or ‘learning problem’. How can this be described for the initiatives under study here? A given individual initiative is already constituted on the basis of commonly shared problem. While it is certainly possible that there are conflicting interests within this framework, this was not the case for the field under observation here.

The shared learning problem and the resulting ‘subproblems’, which are individually segregated according to their subjective significance, are in a dialogical relationship and do not contradict each other. On the one hand, cooperative learning actions between various initiatives are generated through the overlapping of individual aspects of their respective ‘action problems’ and, on the other hand, through a meta-’action problem’, which is transverse to the respective subject areas, but serves as a constitutively connecting element. This meta-’action problem’ picks up the question of the operating principle of the established political field and the possibilities for political action by citizens it contains – which makes it the pivotal issue of the people’s ‘protest’ mentioned earlier.

This operative differentiation of cooperative learning actions can now be classified using Holzkamp’s construct of qualitative leaps in learning. The processing of a given initiative’s own subject from the different perspectives that become possible through cooperative learning actions helps in considering the respective subject in a more differentiated manner. This is likewise true for the meta-’action problem’ described above, that is: over the course of the initiative’s work, the way the established political field works becomes evident in its various facets. The ‘actional – reflective’ dimension is a good way to show what this looks like in detail for the members of initiatives.

**actional – reflective**

Actional learning actions focus mainly on two aspects: one, building awareness for a given issue and two, inviting others to participate in one’s own augmentation of the world order. The spectrum of public activities carried out by the initiatives is very broad. On the one hand, they build awareness about their respective issues through various information events (information desks, lectures in district centres, bike tours, theatre plays etc.). Meanwhile, other types of
activities, such as hosting a series of lectures for the public about the subject of ‘inland dunes’, focus more on the technical exploration of a given subject area. The following excerpt from a group discussion with members of a civic initiative illustrates their intention:

Female dialogue partner (DP): …and we noticed at that moment that too few citizens even know about the dune, they don’t even know what it is. Everyone thought dunes are by the sea and we lie in the sun on them. […] And then I said to myself, I say, the main thing for me that I built my house here 35 years ago, and over time I kept getting letters from the city’s environmental office, every once in a while, that I live near a dune formed during the Ice Age dune, and it needs to be protected because it is a relic of the distant past, a very important one. And that’s what fascinated me, and I thought to myself, what does dune even mean? And what I’ve learned since then about all this, well, bluntly put, no one knows about it.

Male DP: H-hm.

Female DP: So I said, well we’ll just have to explain it to the people.

So actional learning actions involve passing along one’s ‘acquired learning’, while also making it possible for others to participate in the process of one’s own generation of knowledge – such as the series of lectures in this example.

Actional learning actions may also cause the initiative’s issues to become issues for the municipal public. Extrapolating on Holzkamp’s deliberations about cooperative learning actions, this makes possible cooperative learning actions that go beyond the initiatives themselves and may become accessible to each and every inhabitant of the city or the district. This illustrates a further component of the differentiation of cooperative learning actions described above, which, unlike the established political field, does not pursue strategies of exclusivity in knowledge generation, but instead is interested in the broadest possible dialogue. Actional learning actions become a place to meet and discuss alternative perspectives for a wide group of people. Non-binding and more informal events, such as the organisation of park festivals and bike tours, are chosen for this purpose. By providing a pleasant setting, processes of political education are not immediately blocked by negative associations, but guided back into the subjectively significant context of one’s own life through a ‘combination of awareness-building and fun’ – as one of the study participants put it – making such processes possible in the first place. The accelerated opening of participation opportunities can be seen as a strategy to deal with the meta-’action problem’ described above. At the same time, it further extends the context of qualitative leaps in learning, by providing a forum for bringing together the perspectives of very heterogeneous groups of people.
Reflective learning actions, meanwhile, centre on the aforementioned shared meta-‘action problem’, the way the established political field works, and each individual’s options for participation. Essentially, this is about the low level of recognition that is giving to unconventional forms of participation, and the resulting ‘struggle’/‘clash’ between the established political field and citizens, which is characterized by myriad prejudices and diverse mechanisms of exclusion. As demonstrated earlier, these relate to the agreement on participation requiring entitlement, and the imputation that ordinary citizens lack political competence. In this connection, Bourdieu (2001) spoke of ‘entitlement’ and ‘ability’. The following excerpt from a conversation exemplifies the lack of ‘entitlement’ encountered:

Male DP 2: There’s always that great example with Mr. L. There was that thing at some time, one I always like to tell people about, when I was at some meeting somewhere and he said Mr. DP 2, you live there, so this concerns you, so really you’re not even allowed to say anything about street A. And about a year later, we were at some other thing, was it about street L? I don’t know, anyway, he was there, too, and then he said, what are you doing here, you have nothing to do with this. (laughing) I just found that so typical and somehow that stuck with me. (laughing)

Me: That almost sounds like a good place to end.

Male DP 2 (laughing): Yeah, well no, [...]. As Mr. B. here said, about this matter at City Hall, where the environment committee and the council meeting and somehow everything came together. When Mr. C. [member of initiative 2 ‘city highway’ J.T.] asked the questions, Mr. B. said, what are they all doing here anyway? Then he actually said that amazing sentence, this rabble, they shouldn’t even have been let in. (chuckles) That made me laugh. And then someone said, what do you mean – we’re citizens. (chuckles)

During reflective learning actions, the members of the initiative become aware of the paradox of the political field’s line of argument for their supposedly justified exclusion. The exclusivity of the political authority to act demonstrated here particularly expresses itself in the second part of the excerpted conversation, when citizens attending the council meeting are degraded to “rabble” who “shouldn’t even have been let in”. This linguistic degradation from ‘citizens’ to ‘rabble’ indicates very clearly to the “limit of legitimate political articulation” described by Bremer and Kleemann-Göhring (2010, p. 21), as seen from the perspective of the established political field.

This lack of ‘entitlement’ is then often justified with a missing ‘ability’ – which the members of the initiatives observed here, however, reject roundly:

Female DP: [...] So ultimately, this initiative is better informed than any politician. Really, DP.
Male DP: Of course.
Female DP: We’ve realised that by now. When you’re standing right there and you tell them certain facts, their jaw drops. Frankly, they all don’t even know that; they have tunnel vision, they’re just given certain things to vote on, and they’re not really that informed – indeed, they can’t possibly be…Mr. B. once told me that, he says Ms. DP, I can’t do that, I’d have to have a head this size, how am I supposed to read all that. Yes, but in the end they pretend they know everything – that’s a mistake, in fact that’s the failing of politics in general. I’d love to see a politician say, I’m not familiar with that, I don’t know that, err…I’m err…stumped, or whatever.

During the course of their work, the members of the initiative experienced being able to go on the offense with their status as experts and are sometimes even confirmed in this by representatives of the established political field. And so, as far as the members of the initiative are concerned, the accusation of lack of competence made against the citizens is reversed - the political experts are outed as amateurs, while the laypersons emerge as political experts.

“absorbing – transferring”

In the above description of actional and reflective learning actions, it already became clear that members of initiatives don’t just draw on external knowledge in myriad ways in their processing of the respective topics, but that the transferral of the acquired knowledge to others is of great importance.

In the acquisition of external knowledge, a *differentiation in terms of topics and actions* is especially noticeable: Initially, administrative documents and similar documents relating to the given case are processed, but in the further course of learning, technical literature or expert reports that appear relevant are also consulted, and aspects that are clearly distinct from the given case are addressed, e.g. by referencing a study on how navigation devices work, or the World Climate Report. The following female dialogue partner, for instance, states that she “[became] very well versed in a lot of specialist topics”:

Female DP: Even though some of us only have basic training or prior education, but just because we’re interested and through years of reading and research, we’ve acquired, even compared to some “experts” at City Hall, solid specialist knowledge. That became very clear during the hearings and so on, that our way of arguing – really the question is how you define an expert. What are experts anyway?

Another way to acquire external knowledge is through *cooperation with other initiatives, clubs and associations*, such as the BUND (*Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland* – Germany’s Federation for Nature Conservation
and the Environment) or VCD (Verkehrsclub Deutschland, a non-profit environmental association). Members of other initiatives are included especially when it comes to acquiring practical knowledge, such as how to proceed when lodging objections against planned projects, or how to successfully address political representatives. Drawing on the technical expertise of associations or federations, e.g. by organising lectures or participating in symposia, serves to deepen one’s knowledge of interdisciplinary topics, such as the health effects of noise.

Thus, an increasing preoccupation with one’s own subject leads to a deepening understanding of the subject. This means that one’s own subject area is successively expanded, placed in a larger thematic context, and one is no longer only discussing and working on the initial underlying action problem. Using the topic of ‘noise’ as an example, the autonomously initiated thematic differentiation process went as follows: first the noise pollution in the urban district was of interest, then different definitions of noise were researched, later the general effects of noise on health were discussed, and finally the noise pollution of the entire city was examined and ‘possible solutions’ for a city-wide concept were sought.

Besides the acquisition of external knowledge, another special feature of learning activities in citizens’ initiatives was observed: an intensive transferral of the autonomously acquired knowledge. The central feature here is the transfer of knowledge between individual initiatives; in particular, longer-standing initiatives function as contact persons or experts for the members of ‘new’ citizens’ initiatives, and accordingly provide advice and support. With the founding of a network of initiatives and a voter community, this advisory role is then transferred to another, quasi-institutional form of organisation as well. The choice of such cross-initiatives and object-independent forms of organisation was interpreted by the initiative members as an expanded and non-regulated space for participation where a critical examination of topic areas and a discussion of the resulting alternative perspectives become possible.

By making the members of the initiatives available to the district’s citizens as experts on specific issues concerning the district, the expertise leaves the ‘inner circle’ of the initiatives. The series of lectures on “inland dunes” referred to above can serve as an example here as well. During the course of their own technical examination of their subject area, the members of the initiative realise that the people of the city or district know just as little about the local existence of inland dunes and their significance and characteristics as they themselves did. This prompted the members to plan a series of public lectures that was very well received. The initiative members estimate that 30-50 people participated in each of the lectures. So, on the one hand the initiated expert lectures contributed to
creating publicity and awareness for the object at hand, the ‘dune’, among the people of the neighbourhood or the city, and on the other hand, it served to deepen the initiative members’ own understanding of the object at hand. In this example, the simultaneous acquisition and dissemination of knowledge illustrates the intertwining of one’s own learning as a search for ways to help shape society/the community, with the transferral of what has been learned as an invitation to others to help shape society. Hence, the cooperative teaching-learning arrangement can be understood here, with reference to Holzkamp (1995a), as a constructive ‘dialogical process’ in which each individual is simultaneously both ‘expert’ and ‘layman’, depending on the object at hand. The constructed division between supposed political experts and laypersons is temporarily suspended here due to the fluid alternation between expert and lay status.

**Relevance of autonomously generated knowledge**

The empirical example of citizens’ initiatives as a space/setting for learning and action shows how unfounded an across-the-board scepticism towards the knowledge generated in everyday contexts is. For the citizens’ initiatives under study, the widespread prejudice of a one-sided, simplistic discussion of topics can be countered with the high degree of thematic and organisational differentiation in their self-initiated learning. The analysis showed that cooperative learning actions in particular, through their contribution to a differentiated understanding of the subject, are an essential component of these qualitative leaps in learning. The constitutively connecting element here is the shared meta-action problem – the question of ‘authority or entitlement’ to shape society. In particular this problem is countered, in reflexive learning actions, by exposing the exclusion mechanisms inherent in the political field, and in actional learning actions, by generating one’s own spaces for learning and action. These are very diverse and in essence aimed at expanding Holzkamp’s ‘personal radius of action’ of as large a circle of people as possible, with a view to having a larger impact on the world order / increasing one’s own world order.

In his deliberations on Citizen Science, Peter Finke observes an essential difference in the acquisition of knowledge by experts and laypersons in the different “settings in which knowledge is generated and applied” (Finke 2014, p. 62). The knowledge generated within the framework of citizens’ initiatives is strongly tied to the respective everyday context and the problems found therein, and yet it goes beyond these. Meanwhile, the professionals’ knowledge comes from “the traditions of the various disciplines, which always follow special perspectives” (ibid.). This means that a given subject matter is viewed from a
disciplinary logic, which can lead to aspects that run counter to it not being taken into account. “Among laypersons, there is no obligation to work on certain abstract topics just because a given scientific system or the current competitive situation requires it” (ibid., p. 65). The study provides empirical confirmation of this, as the members of the citizens’ initiatives generate their learning topics, places and paths very autonomously and self-confidently. Their learning actions are not based on any previously defined and measurable output, but on a process whose result is initially open. By organising park festivals or bicycle tours, for example, citizens’ initiatives deliberately choose non-binding, low-threshold, and less ‘formal’ arrangements. Compared to established teaching-and-learning settings, they pursue a completely different practice of knowledge acquisition: They attach particular importance to “broad access to knowledge and the active participation of many people in its acquisition” (ibid., p. 7f.) and are interested in the broadest possible dialogue. Because of this approach, a given side is no longer the sole owner or constructor of knowledge, and instead the boundaries between experts and laypeople become blurred. The acquisition of knowledge in the context of the initiatives is strongly linked to the transfer of knowledge, which thus ties in with the idea of ‘knowledge commons’, or the collective use of knowledge bases. Power and domination structures start to be broken up here, permitting a democratisation and collaborative development of knowledge (ibid.; Terkissides 2015).

The results of the research show that the citizens’ initiatives under study, in contrast to the exclusion strategies practiced by the established political field, are concerned with the political participation of as many people as possible. The aim is not to adopt established practices, but to counter them by generating one’s own presumably effective practices. Choosing alternative practices makes it possible to break free from the continuous loop of ‘authorisation and qualification’. The identification of the exclusion mechanisms is followed by a self-inclusion in a newly defined political field – one that is characterised by mutual recognition among heterogeneous actors and the experience of resonance. Going back to the dissent on political participation and education described in the introduction, ‘revolt’ or ‘outrage’ are then an important initiator for individual political learning and action practices that don’t remain at the level of the oft-imputed mere ‘prevention’, but that contain important potential for social transformation.

**Outlook – What comes next?**

An ongoing research project focuses on the aforementioned transformation potential of civic initiatives. It takes a look at concepts for the future of life and
learning being developed in community projects such as community gardens, repair cafés, and barter exchanges. (Arens/Möllmann/Trumann 2018; Trumann 2016a; 2016b). Community projects are considered as an alternative space for learning and action that offers individuals a way to develop, in a collective setting, alternative perspectives based on a criticism of the status quo and to put them into action. The study asks how these active people imagine their lives – i.e. what their idea of a ‘new’ society is – why they engage in their chosen space for learning and action, and what implications this has for their own actions and learning. The study aims to identify ways in which social transformation processes can be initiated by people’s own activities. The ‘revolt’ mentioned in the introduction thus becomes more tangible in its nature and potential, through a gradually emerging picture of social futures seen from the perspective of the people taking action.

Bibliography


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Critical Psychology - ‘Kritische Psychologie’: Challenging environmental behaviour change strategies

Nora Räthzel and David Uzzell

“If we don’t liberate ourselves, freedom for us will remain without consequences.” (Weiss & Neugroschel, 2005: 226)

Abstract
Our aim in this paper is to critically discuss a dominant conceptualisation of the individual that informs much of Psychology where it is being applied to behaviour change strategies. Theories and concepts such as the selfish gene, or the tragedy of the commons, we argue, have underpinned much of this research. The underlying assumption of these particular theories is that individuals are independent monads, cut off from societal relations and act in their egocentric interest. We also discuss some of the most influential contributions of Critical Psychology and Environmental Sociology, which criticize such individualistic approaches, arguing that they do not go far enough in rethinking the concept of the individual as a sum of its social relations. The German version of Critical Psychology, Kritische Psychologie, we suggest, provides an alternative view of human beings, their actions and capabilities, which can serve as a starting point for thinking and acting differently to create transformative pro-environmental practices.

Keywords
environmental psychology, behaviour change, selfish individuals, tragedy of the commons, privatised individuals, cooperation, critical psychology, Kritische Psychologie, societal human nature, collective societal control
Introduction

As most researchers agree, attempts to change environmentally damaging behaviours into environmentally sound ones have not been overwhelmingly successful - at least not nearly as successful as they need to be if they are to halt the way in which human activity is destroying the natural bases of human life through climate change, environmental pollution, resource depletion and the reduction of biodiversity. Behaviour change strategies have traditionally taken various forms summarised by the title of one think-tank report ‘Carrots, Sticks and Sermons’ (Collins, Thomas, Willis, & Wilsdon, 2003), but in recent years psychological models have become more sophisticated, focussing on issues of psychological processes such as identity (Murtagh, Gatersleben, & Uzzell, 2014; Whitmarsh & O’Neill, 2010), and social norms (Nigbur, Lyons, & Uzzell, 2010).

However, the focus on the individual has never been far away (see for example, Clayton et al., 2015; Swim et al., 2009). Gifford has argued that there are seven classes of barriers to behaviour change: ‘limited cognition about the problem, ideological worldviews that tend to preclude pro-environmental attitudes and behaviour, comparisons with key other people, sunk costs and behavioural momentum, discredence toward experts and authorities, perceived risks of change, and positive but inadequate behaviour change’ (Gifford, 2011). One should not minimise the impact of some behaviour change strategies, but it might be argued that behaviour change strategies have largely been successful when they have focussed on what Stern (Stern, 2000) calls environmentally ‘convenient’ rather than environmentally ‘significant’ behaviours. These might include issues such as recycling where, providing facilities are available, it does not require much effort or sacrifice by the consumer, and provides instant feedback and thus satisfaction (i.e., reward in the form of giving the impression that the individual is ‘doing their bit’). Such behaviours do not, however, address the root problem of consumption and arguably has little impact on GHG emissions and thus climate change. If one focusses on environmentally significant behaviours, the changes can be marked. For instance, Dietz, Gardner, Gilligan, Stern, & Vandbergh ( 2009) suggest that scaling up the most effective non-regulatory interventions could reduce carbon emissions from household direct energy use by 20% in 10 years.

But the focus of this paper, and where we take issue with much of the work in environmental psychology on behaviour change, is the theoretical bases on which empirical findings and behaviour change policies rely. We would like to challenge some key assumptions and suggest an alternative theoretical framework for future research and policies derived from Kritische Psychologie (KP). We use the German term to mark the difference between the Anglophone Critical Psychology (CP) and
Kritische Psychologie, which was developed initially in Berlin at the Department for Psychology (which does not exist anymore) but also in Austria and Scandinavia (Dreier, 2007; Egger & Hackl, 2010). While both approaches share some ideas and methods, they are also significantly different. Differences and commonalities will become clear through the argumentation in this paper. Our aim is to critically analyse the problematic ways in which the concept of the individual, developed, for instance, in the theories of the selfish gene (Dawkins, 2006) and the tragedy of the commons (Hardin, 1968), underpin behaviour change research in Environmental Psychology. We argue that the conceptualisation of the individual developed in KP provides an alternative view of human beings, their actions and capabilities, which can serve as a starting point for thinking and acting differently to encourage pro-environmental practices.

Theoretical assumption: the selfish individual and the tragedy of the commons

There is much research which seeks to measure the values of individuals who are reluctant to engage in pro-environmental behaviours. They are seen to hold egocentric and materialist rather than altruistic or biospheric values (De Groot & Steg, 2008). One of the underlying assumptions of such value constructions is that humans are by genetic disposition selfish (Dawkins, 2006). Thus, in order to counter this – to work against the grain - they must be either seduced into social behaviours through incentives that satisfy their selfishness, or coerced into what is deemed appropriate behaviour by fines or regulations which hurt their self-interest and thus make it worthwhile for them to act in socially responsible ways.

While not always articulated, the underlying rationale which has given oxygen to such an approach has been a theory that has become popular since the end of the sixties through an article by Garrett Hardin entitled, ‘The Tragedy of the Commons’ (1968). In this text he argues that only private ownership can save common resources from overuse. Hardin saw the ‘tragedy of the commons’ as a rebuttal to the writings of Adam Smith and the workings of the ‘invisible hand’ in population control. Hardin drew on a pamphlet published in 1833 by the mathematician William Forster Lloyd, and interpreted the term ‘tragedy’ to mean ‘inevitability’ (after the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, 2011). In Hardin’s

1 The debate behaviour vs. practices will be discussed in the section on Praxis Theory.
2 According to Google Scholar, his article has been cited over 34 000 times and 259 versions of it are available. A search for research connecting the concepts of behaviour change and tragedy of the commons produces over 600 results in Google Scholar.
interpretation disaster is inevitable when the individual is locked into a system that compels him/her to seek limitless individual gain in a world of limits.

The concept was introduced in the context of the worldwide ‘sixties movement’ a portmanteau term for a group of movements (e.g., civil rights, students, anti-Vietnam War, feminist movement, gay rights, and environmental movements) which sought to challenge the assumptions and practices of the dominant order. Common to many of these movements was an underlying conviction that there was an alternative to the capitalist form of society, in which people would be able to live in more communal ways, care more for each other, organise their living and working collectively and transcend the egocentric, career oriented and war-producing national entities that Western societies had become. One could read Hardin’s article as an answer to these world-wide movements, regardless of whether he intended it to be that or not. In this historical context, it was saying: the world is not in such a bad state because of specific historical developments and the specific make-up of our societies, but because humans are by nature disposed to selfishness and greed.

The notion of a ‘selfish gene’ and the idea of the tragedy of the commons, which constructs a dilemma between selfish behaviour and the necessity of acting according to the interest of the commons are related. Both draw on Darwin’s theory of natural selection, which claims that species develop through a competition that leads to the ‘survival of the fittest’ (Darwin & Davidson, 2014). In their landmark book, *Environmental Problems and Human Behaviour* Gardner and Stern illustrate this point, writing, ‘Imagine an individual animal, living long ago, that did not repeat behaviours that led to favourable immediate consequences for itself.’ (Gardner & Stern, 2002).

There are several problems with this image. First of all, it is problematic to deduce human behaviour from animal behaviour. Humans are part of nature and in this respect, also animals. However, as we will argue in greater detail in the section on *Kritische Psychologie*, since humans have built a ‘second nature’, human development differs from the development of its co-species. Moreover, newer ethological studies have shown that cooperation, not egoism is the basis of the survival of animals (Dugatkin, 2002) Finally, the argument that individual animals can illustrate human behaviour is circular. It projects individualistic human behaviours observed today into the animal world (while animals hardly live individually) and then uses this projection as a point of departure to naturalise something that is a specific, socially learned, present behaviour.

The primatologist Frans de Waal (2009) makes a similar point, when he criticises the notion of selfish behaviour:

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3 The term derives from Herbert Spencer but was regarded positively by Darwin, who included it into the fifth edition of his book, *On the Origin of the Species.*
Don’t believe anyone who says that since nature is based on a struggle for life, we need to live like this as well. Many animals survive not by eliminating each other or by keeping everything for themselves, but by cooperating and sharing. This applies most definitely to pack hunters, such as wolves or killer whales, but also to our closest relatives, the primates. (…) If man is wolf to man, he is so in every sense, not just the negative one. We would not be where we are today had our ancestors been socially aloof. (…) What we need is a complete overhaul of assumptions about human nature. Too many economists and politicians model human society on the perpetual struggle they believe exists in nature, but which is a mere projection. Like magicians, they first throw their ideological prejudices into the hat of nature, then pull them out by their very ears to show how much nature agrees with them. It’s a trick for which we have fallen for too long. Obviously, competition is part of the picture, but humans can’t live by competition alone. (Waal, 2009: 6)

We do not propose to engage further in these discussions within biology and ethology since our concern is the way in which the notion of the selfish gene and its implication - the ‘tragedy of the commons’ - is guiding research in environmental psychology. As a first step, we undertake a critical analysis of the way in which the so-called commons dilemma is researched in some of the most influential texts in the area of environmental psychology (Gardner & Stern, 2002) Gifford and Hine, 1997a). While these are not the latest publications by the authors, their more recent, equally influential, work is based on the same theoretical framework (i.e. (Dietz et al., 2009; Carrico, A. R., Vandenbergh, M. P., Stern, P. C., & Gardner, G. T., 2011; Gifford, 2011). In a more recent review of the usefulness of environmental psychology, Robert Gifford (2014), arguably one of the most important scholars of environmental psychology, has acknowledged the necessity to

‘widen and deepen the field’s consideration of how society works in terms of the production and consumption of goods and services and how broader social and political influences contribute to the formation of values, attitudes, and behavior’

and to recognise

‘that the wider political and social context must be considered when interpreting the meaning of attitudes in places with different dominant political ideologies’. (Gifford 2014: 544)

While we consider this an important step towards an environmental psychology that recognises the societal relationships within which individuals develop their personalities, this acknowledgement has not led to a transformative reformulation
of the theoretical framework used in previous works. For instance, in the same year, Gifford and Nilsson (2014) published an article reviewing the ‘personal and social factors that influence environmental behavior’. While ‘social factors’ like class and gender are discussed as influential for environmental awareness, their review does not discuss the wider societal formation (namely a society based on profit-oriented production), which does not only play an important (though not exclusive) part in shaping personalities, but also limits the goals and reach of individual behaviors and actions. Thus, the burden of environmental behavior is still placed on the shoulders of individuals. It is this dominant theoretical framework of environmental psychology that we want to critically discuss in what follows.

Concentrating our discussion on several key texts allows us to analyse their theoretical assumptions in more detail. In a second step, we discuss research in environmental psychology, which has criticised individualistic approaches to behaviour change, including criticisms developed by ‘practice theory’ in sociology. We chose to discuss the latter because they have been taken up by new and critical work in environmental psychology, which departs from an analysis that centres only on the individual.

Our discussion of the theoretical approaches is based on a historical concept of the individual as developed in KP, which we will present in a third step. In a fourth step, we suggest some ideas of how the KP concept of the individual/the subject could be used for an alternative approach to the creation of environmentally sound practices.

The tragedy of the commons is the tragedy of privatised individuals. Or: how specific conditions become universalised as ‘natural’ human conditions.

In their influential paper, Robert Gifford and Donald W. Hine set out to investigate ‘... the existence, direction, and generality of tendencies that may occur in harvesters' thinking about (...) the harvest choices that they and others have made, and in their beliefs about the causes of and responsibilities for harvest choices in the commons.’ (Gifford and Hine, 1997: 285). They draw on and test five known cognitive tendencies in their experiment. The discussion here, however, will be restricted to the assumptions that guided the design of the experiment.

The problem: In commons dilemmas, individuals harvest valued resources from a shared, replenishable pool. Their own wealth is one concern;
however, when the scenario is framed in environmental terms, the fate of the resource also becomes a concern. The dilemma is whether to harvest heavily, which enriches the self but endangers the resource, or to harvest lightly, which helps preserve the resource but may lead to relative poverty and does not guarantee that other harvesters will not exhaust the resource. In general, light harvesting in the context of the commons dilemma is a form of cooperation; heavy harvesting represents a lack of cooperation sometimes called defection. (ibid.: 257, emphasis added)

In this definition, the authors describe a dilemma between a selfish interest on the one hand and an interest for the commons on the other. It is this idea that individual interests and the interests of the commons are necessarily opposed to each other that we want to challenge.

What we find in the quote above as a formulation of a general problem describes a very specific set of conditions. There are several individuals who are harvesting from the same source but do not know each other and do not know what the others are doing. What is called the commons is not something that they know as a common resource, but something outside of their control. The only thing they control is their own action. Although the authors state that light harvesting would be a form of cooperation, while heavy harvesting would represent a lack of cooperation, it is hard to see how individuals could cooperate when they do not know of each other. The way the experiment is set up reinforces the privatisation of the individuals:

Procedure. Each group of five or six subjects was met by the experimenter, who seated them in adjacent chairs that all faced the same way; participants were visually screened from one another by partitions. The partitions eliminated nonverbal interaction and the experimenter instructed the participants not to communicate with each other during the session. (ibid: 259)

Participants where then told that there were two objects to the exercise: to obtain for yourself as many points (representing trees [from the rainforest] or fish) as possible from the shared resource pool, and to avoid draining the resource pool to 0. (ibid: 259)

Maybe many people do not consider this arrangement as questionable because it is modelled on the capitalist market, the system in which we live. They therefore regard these structures as natural and take them for granted. It is a system in which producers do not know each other, but harvest from the same source and serve the same market, knowing only in retrospect whether they have produced a socially useful (and/or profitable) product (i.e., one that is needed and thus
acquired by others). However ‘natural’ this situation may seem to us, if we take a step back and look at the arrangement with a fresh eye, we might be compelled to ask the following questions: How can people cooperate if they cannot communicate? How can people negotiate the way in which they want to use the resource to ensure that everybody can use it without destroying it, if they neither know about the effects of their own actions nor of those of others? How can people take care of a resource they do not control and about which they know little? For instance, they do not know how much time it needs for rainforest trees to grow, or for fish to reproduce themselves. How can people take care of a resource under conditions where they do not know and cannot learn how to share?

In the experimental design the authors have set up, the participants (just as the actors in a capitalist market society) cannot learn anything about how they are using the resource, since their own acts do not provide them the necessary feedback. This kind of information comes only from the person leading the experiment, who – as the authors describe – pretends to be taking notes and then presents the results ‘on an official-looking scoring form’ (ibid.: 260). In other words, power relations are also part of the arrangement. What is supposed to be ‘common’ is in fact controlled by a leader, who is ‘in the game’ but ‘not of the game’, who puts people into a specific position or relationship but cannot be controlled e.g. voted out by the participants. The experimental arrangement is a situation where neither cooperation nor democratic participation is possible.

What the experimental situation constructs, is therefore neither a ‘tragedy of the commons’ nor a conflict between individual interests and common interests, but, rather, the tragedy of privatised individuals having to survive on a common resource without being able to act as a community. In this sense, the term ‘tragedy of the commons’ is a misnomer, since there are no commons. Resources may be used by all, but they are not held in common.

We introduce the term ‘privatised individuals’ as opposed to merely talking about individuals, because we do not want to confuse a historically specific form of individuals and individual behaviour with individuals as such. This will be discussed more in detail in the section on Kritische Psychologie. The term privatised individuals refers to the original meaning of the word private, coming from the Latin ‘privare’, to take away or to remove. This meaning is still present in the English word ‘deprived’. Privatised individuals are individuals deprived of

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A globalized capitalist economy functions in a much more complex way with market research trying to know beforehand what customers will want and/or try to instill a desire in people for the goods they are producing.
their social relations\textsuperscript{5}. They are deprived in the dual sense of being unable to develop horizontal relations between one another and deprived of the possibility to influence or remove the vertical power relations in which they are situated. But they are also deprived in a third sense, namely deprived of the ability to collectively control what they have to share, which is in essence the socio-natural conditions of their survival.

What the experimental design of Gifford and Hine (1997) reproduces and reinforces is an ideology of privatisation. What it shows, therefore, is only the way in which privatised individuals can act under such specific conditions, conditions which seem ‘natural’ to the reader and to the authors because they reproduce the dominant societal conditions under which individuals are ‘pushed and pulled’ into acting selfishly. In other words, the scenario presented is a familiar one to the reader as much as it is to the participants of the experiment. Under such conditions, one cannot realistically expect people to do anything but to seek to improve their own wealth, since this presents itself as the obvious and natural option. Surprisingly, and despite conditions that militate against socially responsible behaviour, the majority of participants in this experiment were, as the authors call it, ‘light harvesters’; they tried not to use the resource in excess.

Yet, interestingly, harvesters generally underestimate the number of others who intend to preserve the resource. The modal view is: "I intend to cooperate to preserve the commons, but I don't think you do" (hence the article's title). However, the actual harvest request patterns in this study reveal this to be an inaccurate view of others, at least in the present context. (ibid.: 263)

Given the assumption of the tragedy of the commons, namely that individuals care predominantly for themselves, it is surprising that, even when they are set in an experiment where it is hard to do anything else, most individuals still acted in an unselfish way. Interestingly, this does not lead the authors to question their assumptions. They do not try to understand why their participants did not act in line with the precepts of the \textit{tragedy of the commons}. That the participants thought others would act selfishly reflects how the assumption of a ‘selfish gene’ is part of our common sense. This is not surprising, given that the rules of competition in our societies encourage selfish behaviour and mistrust of the other. However, it does not explain why the participants in the experiment acted responsibly, even when they thought resources were in danger of being drained.

\textsuperscript{5} In the Athenian Democracy, such people were called ‘idiots’ (\textit{idiotēs}). They were people lacking professional skills, self-centred, concerned only with their private as opposed to public affairs. In short, people, who had not been civilised. (Parker, Walter C, 2005)
by the irresponsibility of others. If people were innately selfish, their assumptions about selfish others should have motivated them to harvest as much as possible before the others could empty the resources.

We have discussed the design of this experiment in detail because it exemplifies the model of human behaviour, and of human beings in general, which lies at the heart of behaviour change strategies. The methods they invent fail to acknowledge that people act the way they do because they live in societal relations where it is difficult to act in anything but self-centred ways. Living in a society where everybody has to compete against everybody else to be successful, there are few opportunities to develop cooperative skills. As in the experiment, people are often both prevented from cooperating horizontally and deprived of the ability to control the vertical power relations within which common resources are placed and utilised. In the everyday world, the source is not common, but privately owned and therefore out of the control of individuals and their communities.

People may use too much energy and drive cars too often, but they are hardly in a position to decide how energy is produced, whether public transport is available, and where schools, workplaces, shopping centres, and places of leisure are situated in relation to their homes. Neither are they in a position to know how much others consume, so they cannot make a comparative judgement about their own consumption levels in the context of equity. They cannot evaluate the implications of their consumption for ‘others’ especially those who will be the victims of the harmful consequences of climate change (especially in the global south). Finally, they cannot strategize how to act in a more just and communal way. The rational consumer in possession of complete information on which to make rational decisions may exist in economic textbooks, but not on the streets of London, New York or Beijing.

We want to give one more recent example of behaviour change research and strategies to exemplify our critique.

The following example comes from a review of what one might term ‘mainstream behaviour change theories’. They are presented in a UK government report for social science researchers and politicians in government. The aim of the report is stated in the introduction: ‘In signposting readers through the theoretical and empirical literature, the Practical Guide provides a framework for developing interventions based on behavioural models. It also provides detailed support for research analysts and policy-makers in the task of selecting appropriate models’ (Darnton, 2008).

Darnton summarises the theoretical basis of the behaviour change theories he will present:
‘Models relating to the behaviour of individuals are predominantly drawn from psychology and sociology, the disciplines which are most concerned with understanding the factors influencing human behaviour. These models build upon standard economic theory which uses the working assumption that individuals tend to behave rationally, with the aim of maximising the benefit to themselves (in psychological terms, such models are ‘expected utility’ models).

Equating rationality and the maximization of benefits to oneself is reminiscent of the ‘selfish gene’ theory. It is presented as a given basis for different kinds of behaviour models. Darnton proceeds to list a set of individual behaviour models based on attitudes, norms, agency, habit and emotions (the latter being used less frequently in behaviour models), including contextual factors. These are followed by models on a ‘higher level’, ... called ‘societal models’. ‘These models are important to those developing policy since it is often necessary to work on the contextual factors that limit behavioural options directly; simply changing a person’s perceptions of these material factors (eg. cost) will not be sufficient to enable change’ (ibid.: 14). These behaviour change guidelines do take context and societal factors into account (the examples given are technology and the economy). The problem is the way in which these factors are conceptualised. They are grafted unproblematically onto a concept of the individual that is separate from society. Society is merely the container of a selfish individual, looking after her/his needs, not a process in which individuals are shaped by and shape societal structures.

In one influential model cited by Darnton (Vlek et. al.’s Needs Opportunities Abilities (NOA) Model,1997) the needs of individuals are defined as: ‘Relations, development, comfort, pleasure, work, health, privacy, money, status, safety, nature, freedom, leisure time, justice’ (ibid: 15). We can imagine this list being extended further, since it lacks a theory that understands individual needs from the point of view of a societal individual. Even though social relations are included into the model, the assumption remains that these are only needed for the private satisfaction of an individual. The idea that individuals create their world and that this can only happen in cooperation with others, is absent from such models. The specific power relations within which individuals have to act disappear as well. Communities, friends and neighbours come into the picture, but only as a ‘factor’ influencing individual behaviour. For instance, in her guide on behaviour change for climate change, Jane Genovese writes: ‘…many of us adopt environmentally responsible behaviours due to friends, family or colleagues introducing us to these behaviours. This process is called social diffusion’ (Jackson, 2005). As much as such models and theories of individual behaviour are elaborated and made more complex, we are left with an
image of a selfish individual at the centre to which ever-increasing numbers of influential ‘factors’ are added. This conceptualisation is not coincidental, since the aim of these theories and models is to find strategies to change the ways in which individuals behave. Consequently, the attention focuses on potential levers to the correction of individuals’ errant behaviour by scientists and politicians who believe to have a clear knowledge of how individuals should behave. Their only problem is how to find the adequate instruments to change individuals who behave wrongly into individuals who behave correctly.

While the focus of behaviour change policies is on individuals and their supposedly selfish, irrational or wasteful actions, there is deafening silence with respect to the relationship between societal structures and the ways in which these shape the psychological fabric of individuals. While a number of factors are named that may influence individual behaviour, the supposed characteristics of the individual remain unquestioned and are constructed as ‘natural’, instead of being analysed as the result of specific, historically developed, characteristics of present-day societies.

The self-contradictory character of individualistic behaviour change strategies

If a specific kind of society encourages individuals to act selfishly in order to be successful and to survive within it, and if this is the kind of society we live in today, does it then not follow that strategies for behaviour change have to target this kind of individualistic selfish individuals? Surely, an experimental design that reproduces existing societal characteristics is entirely appropriate, since it aims to reproduce real world conditions? This may seem logical and even necessary, but there is a problem: behaviour strategies that draw on privatised individuals, who prioritise their immediate enrichment, perpetuate and reinforce these tendencies. They teach people – once again – that one should act only if one receives an incentive or under the pressure of coercion, or to fit into a community, or according to the instructions of someone in power. They reinforce the idea that people’s interests and needs do not matter, that it is legitimate for a government to mould, if not coerce, behaviour change through regulations, incentives and nudging (or what is now sometimes pretentiously referred to as neuromarketing, or behavioural insight (Dolan, Hallsworth, Halpern, King, & Vlaev, 2010) – all in the name of ‘the common good’ – as defined by politicians.

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6 One might ask what kind of behaviour change strategies it would require to change this top-down behaviour of scientists and politicians.
Because such strategies reproduce the privatisation of individuals and build on what our society already rewards, behaviour change approaches may work to a certain degree. Some people may respond to the incentives provided, but many remain impervious to such entreaties because they have more pressing issues to which to attend (i.e., keeping their jobs, caring for their families, staying healthy, finding suitable housing). In other cases people may resist coercion through rules and regulations, either passively or directly through voting political parties out of office if they advocate policies they see as impinging on their freedom, such as by imposing green taxes, or regulating waste disposal (Uzzell & Räthzel, 2009).

Paradoxically, behaviour change strategies which reinforce selfish behaviours, are especially self-defeating when they are efficient. They are a barrier to the kind of sea change that is required, namely for societies to learn living with as opposed to against nature.

But there is another reason not to base research and policies on traits that are the product of specific, socially deprived forms of living and working. If existing societal characteristics produce selfish behaviours, then it is those societal characteristics that must be addressed, not the individuals who are subject to societal forces and who need to act in certain ways in order to survive in given societies. In other words, we need social and psychological theories that do not take specific societal structures for granted and thereby ‘naturalise’ and operationalise them in such a way that the theoretical assumptions of the experiment (i.e., structures of privatisation) remain unchallenged. This only leads to a circularity in which an output becomes the privatised behaviour that has been the input. Trying to change something while at the same time preserving/reifying it, is indeed the ‘uphill struggle’ Gardner and Stern describe (2002).

Perhaps the most important argument against the idea of a dilemma between selfishness and the common interest is that, as we have seen in the experiment undertaken by Gifford and Hine (1997a), selfishness is not the whole story of human behaviour. The world, and even behaviour change research, is full of examples of people acting in socially responsible ways, as much as it is full of the opposite. If caring for the common good and responsible behaviours occur even under adverse conditions, they must have a basis somewhere in the societal fabric and in the fabric of the individual psyche. The opposite of selfish behaviour would be cooperative behaviour. In the next section, we look at the way in which cooperation has been conceptualised within environmental psychology.
On the enigma of cooperation

‘This book is an inquiry into one of the great puzzles in the human sciences: the evolution of cooperation and altruism in the human species’ (Henrich and Henrich, 2007: 3).

The notion of cooperation plays an important role in the work of Gardner and Stern (Gardner & Stern, 2002). In spite of their use of the ‘individual animal’ as the archetypical example of the behaviour of humans, cooperation is presented as a central universal feature of human life:

There is little doubt, for instance, that human beings in all cultures are intensely social animals. Group living, cooperation with other group members, and division of labour appear to be culturally universal features of human life, not only across cultures, but also across history dating back to the Stone Age. … Note also that a division of labour (...) permits individuals to specialize in a subset of the tasks on which survival depends, gaining further advantages for groups. Finally, group living and cooperation greatly increase the ability of our species to survive, because group living made possible all the benefits of cultural evolution: the development of language, and the transmission from person to person and across generations of survival-enhancing information (culture).” (ibid.: 196)

All the elements necessary to develop a theory of human existence that is based on cooperation and group life are assembled here, yet they do not lead the authors to conclude that it is cooperation, the ensemble of social relations on which human development is based, not selfishness that governs development. Instead they ask, ‘How is it possible to square the evidence of apparent altruism with the fact that natural selection favors individuals whose characteristics promote their own survival?’ (ibid: 196).

If the ethological studies cited above are correct, there is no circle to square. Cooperating is not an altruistic activity in the sense in which Gardner and Stern define it, namely as an act ‘that helps another individual survive and/or reproduce and that is performed at some cost to the helper’s ability to survive and/or reproduce’ (Gardner and Stern 2002: 196). The authors’ definition begins from the point of view of a lonely individual helping another individual; that is, it conceptualises society as an agglomeration of private individuals. One private individual meets another private individual, which s/he can only help by sacrificing part of her/his own ability to survive. Ultimately this implies that survival is best achieved when it is attempted as a practice of ‘me against the rest of the world’. The conceptual apparatus Gardner and Stern adopt does not allow
them to jump out of the box in which individuals are seen as Leibniz’ monads acting against the rest of the world comprising other monads.

If we accept this argument, Robinson Crusoe, before he met his servant, should have had the best chance of survival, since he is not dependent on any other individual for the satisfaction of his needs. For the rest of humanity, cooperation is a must, since every individual depends upon other individuals to meet their needs. In this sense, cooperation is not an act of altruism where one individual helps another. Rather, even the most selfish of individuals can only constitute themselves and survive as individuals in relation to others and in acting together with others. It is not against, but in every individuals’ existential interest to cooperate. This is the case even in the animal world. In her meticulous study of Atlantic Puffins, Roughgarden (Roughgarden, 2009) argues that cooperation is the acceptance of a team goal and working together to achieve that goal. In other words, cooperating does not mean to give up a goal but to attain it. Similarly, in their analysis of the ‘prisoner’s dilemma’, Worden and Levin state, ‘The widespread conflation of cooperation and altruism in the study of behavior reinforces a widely shared view of the world in which cooperation is a mysterious anomaly whose existence is difficult to explain because of the universal temptation to defect’ (Worden & Levin, 2007). They go on to show that individuals learn that cooperation is in their best interest and, through this process, are able to overcome and nullify the prisoner’s dilemma. In spite of these insights from ethology and evolutionary biology, environmental psychologists continue to define the ‘factors’ that allegedly influence human behaviours by opposing altruistic with egocentric values (De Groot & Steg, 2008; Bamberg, Rees, & Seebauer, 2015).

There are numerous studies that explore cooperative behaviours in experiments and through surveys. We do not discuss them here in further detail because they all share the same underpinning model of the individual as a monadic unit, as a personality who can cooperate either under certain conditions or because of certain ‘personality traits’. In an overview of research on cooperation in social dilemmas, Biel and Thørgensen describe such experiments and surveys succinctly and approvingly: ‘Finally, the behaviour of others is unknown to the participants. Hence, the intention to cooperate can, loosely speaking, be attributed to individual characteristics’ (Biel & Thøgersen, 2007: 95). Our problem with such studies is not their specific methods nor their specific results, which will all be valuable within the context of their theoretical model of the individual. Our issue is with the theoretical model itself. What we

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7 For other examples of such research on cooperation see, (Arnocky, Stroink, & DeCicco, 2007; Fowler & Christakis, 2010; Zelenski, Dopko, & Capaldi, 2015; Balliet, Parks, & Joireman, 2009; Nordlund & Garvill, 2003)
problematize is the way in which individuals are constructed as monads, sealed off from other individuals and only acting as a reflex to certain conditions or an effect of their personality traits. To formulate this with Holzkamp: ‘The personality hypostases within psychological experiments only allow personality-related theoretical interpretations where the individuals are not conceivable as the origin of subjective-active contributions to determining the conditions of their lives, but merely as vehicles of some invariant personal “ontological determinations” allegedly allowing the “prediction” of their further behaviour from an external control standpoint’ (Holzkamp 2013: 84).

In the next section, we discuss literature that has aimed to overcome this view of disconnected individuals.

**Beyond the privatised individual**

With few exceptions (Martin & Czellar, 2017), the growing literature on ‘values’ and the ways in which they do or do not influence environmental behaviour rarely asks where these values come from. When it is acknowledged that human beings are fundamentally social, the social is perceived on a micro-level of daily encounters, friendships, peers and influential people:

> We are fundamentally social creatures. We learn by example and model our behaviours on those we see around us. We learn most effectively from those who are attractive to us or influential for us, or from people who are simply 'like us'. Sometimes we learn by counter example. And we learn not to trust people who tell us one thing and do another. (Jackson, 2005: 5)

What is bracketed out of such accounts is the question about the kind of society we live in, what kind of values are produced through the way in which social relations are organised and shaped through relations of power, the economic structure of society, and the dominant ideologies and forms of politics that reproduce specific kinds of social relations and individual behaviours.

This is, in essence, the basis of a relational model of the person, as initially put forward by George Herbert Mead. Mead wrote: ‘a self can arise only where there is a social process within which this self has its initiation. It arises within that process’ (Mead, 1956). Within this model, Stringer writes: ‘Man is not seen as a bundle of traits, or an individual simply responding to rewards and punishments, but as his social relations. Man is the sum of his social interactions through constant interactions with others, the self is constantly changing; interaction is fully reciprocal as neither the individual nor social processes are
given priority.’ (Stringer, 1982). In terms of attitude formation, too, it is accepted that an individual’s attitude towards some aspect of the environment is not formed in isolation, solely and uniquely within the head of the individual, but is a product of the interaction between their own cognitions and affect and their appraisal of the cognitions and affect they believe others to hold. As Nigbur et al. describes, when our view of the world confronts another’s, there are three options: we may accommodate the other’s views and incorporate them into ours, we may completely reject them, or they may completely replace our own. More recently Nigbur et al., (2010) have shown how social norms can be an important factor in driving environmental change.

Thus, one might argue that we are knocking on open doors with our critique of the concept of privatised individuals because Critical Psychology (i.e., the Anglophone tradition) has long denounced the notion of the individual as a monad and acknowledged the profoundly social character of individuals. There are also environmental psychologists who draw on critical psychology (Adams, 2016; Batel & Adams, 2016; Uzzell & Räthzel, 2009). In addition, some environmental sociologists such as Elizabeth Shove have challenged what they see as individual reductionism in environmental psychology, and argued for going beyond what she terms the ABC (Attitudes, Behaviour, Choice) strategy of behaviour change (Shove, 2010). In this strategy, responsibility for climate change is thought to lie with individuals who are able to make choices, which, in turn, will make a difference. ABC is not simply a value-free way of collecting data. Such approaches have a framing effect in that theories of change inform and impact upon modes of governance. As Shove writes: ‘ABC is a political and not just a theoretical position in that it obscures the extent to which governments sustain unsustainable economic institutions and ways of life, and the extent to which they have a hand in structuring options and possibilities’ (ibid, 1274). Shove goes on to ask: “Could it be that the ABC is generated and sustained not by psychologists and economists but by the policy makers they serve, and could it be that this vocabulary is required in order to keep a very particular understanding of governance in place? (ibid.: 1283). It is clear from a reading of the research literature cited how a critical environmental psychology approach has been influenced by environmental sociology and, in particular, practice theory.

**Practice theory**

To understand how people act and how social orders are produced, researchers under the broad label of the ‘practice turn’ in the social sciences suggest the
notion of practice. It goes beyond the idea of the lone individual engaging in specific behaviours, as well as remaining below macro-level explanations that see external and economic forces at work. Practices are seen as an ‘active integration of elements, including meanings, competences and materials’. (Shove & Spurling, 2012): 4) Practice theories have thus equipped the individual with a body (Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, & Savigny, 2001) and with the ability to create meanings, have skills and the materials needed to realise their actions. Instead of selfish individuals endangering the commons, we have individuals involved in bundles of practices, or as Shove and others put it, individuals as ‘carriers of practices.’ However, in this conceptualisation, we seem to lose individuals and their needs altogether. We can assume that, since the ‘goal is one of reconfiguring the practices that people reproduce’ (Shove, 2014), individuals are seen as determined by those configurations of practices (for similar critiques see also (Sayer, 2012) and Adams (2014)). At the end of the day, the goal of the practice approach does not differ so much from the goal of the behaviour change approach, namely to change what people do and how they do it, in order to create sustainable societies. What is different is that practice theory does not address the individual consumer, but asks politicians and industry (whom they address as the agents of change) to alter the configurations of practices, in order for new, sustainable ones to be developed by individuals. Of course, it is sensible for instance to change the infrastructures such that people can choose public transport, or to build cities in a way that enables people to walk instead of driving their car for several miles to do their shopping, etc. It becomes more problematic when governments are supposed to change the meanings of practices. How is that then different from trying to raise environmental awareness? In some respects, it could be argued that in the hands of governments, changing practices is not much different from changing behaviours. It has some of the same manipulative qualities of ‘nudge’ (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008) that lie within a philosophy of libertarian paternalism which argues that people should be encouraged to engage in behaviours that enable them to live longer, healthier and better through the provision of choice architectures. There is a danger that practice theory (against its intentions) could be seen to be an instrumental device such as ‘nudge’. An instrument that is supposed to change the way in which people act without the latter noticing it (Behavioural Insights Team, 2011).

The problem we see is that the practice approaches do not have an explicit model of how and why human beings act and how they become the way they are, how they are shaped and shape the societies they live in.

In Sustainable Practices, Social Theory and Climate Change, the editors (Shove and Spurling 2012) have collected works by a range of practice theorists in addition to some that are critical of its concepts. Sayer’s critique points to the
absence of the concept of power and the absence of business practices in the accounts of practice theorists (ibid., 173). We agree with this and suggest that the main reason why practice theories remain entangled in everyday practices of consumption without engaging in everyday practices of work and production, is that the questions they ask, such as ‘what is energy for?’ (Shove & Walker, 2014) are, while important, incompletely formulated and mainly framed around the consumer. Expanding the question what is energy for to what is energy for for whom? would allow us to see that energy is not only used for consumption practices (showering, watering the plants, watching TV, etc.) but that it is also used, namely produced, for making profits. If profit were not the driver, and if things were produced in order to satisfy people’s needs within the concept of socially useful products (Cooley, 1987; N. Räthzel, Uzzell, & Elliott, 2010), we would not have climate change that threatens human existence.

Thus, while we agree with practice theories in terms of the emphasis on practices and their elements, namely meanings, skills, and materials, in Kritische Psychologie these elements are arranged and conceptualised differently, as we will show below.

Societal/social context

In his insightful plea for a critical social psychology to take on the issue of human – non-human relationships, Adams argues:

The potential of critical social psychology here is to critically engage with perspectives outside of mainstream psychology (…) particularly in terms of the role of human activities in ecological degradation, that reflects its commitment to address the role of social context and interaction in shaping individual experience, behaviour and the collective production of reality. (Adams, 2014)

Later in the text, Adams suggests that Critical Social Psychology is well equipped to demand ‘… an emphasis on the social context in which individual experience and behaviour occurs, and to attendant forms of power, inequality, injustice and oppression that are central to that context (ibid. 259), but less well positioned to ‘address the broader context of the human–nonhuman interrelationship, as it has historically steered clear of ascribing any extra discursive qualities to ‘nature’ that we, human and nonhuman alike are mutually grounded in, shaped by, or responsible to’ (ibid.: 259).

As much as we agree with Adams here, we want to reflect, through the lens of Kritische Psychologie, in more detail on the notion of context and the idea that
individuals develop ‘in’ those contexts. In order to illustrate our reflections, we draw on the empirical research undertaken by Barr and Prillwitz (Barr & Prillwitz, 2014) on environmentally sustainable mobility. This can be taken as a representative example because the authors criticise the individualistic approach of behaviour change strategies and refer simultaneously to practice theory and the notion of individuals being embedded in ‘social contexts’ (ibid.: 13) as a solution to its limitations:

In this way, social practices are more broadly conceived than habits in that they place current individual routinised behaviours into both a social and a historical context, thus recognising how apparently individual choices are framed by contemporary trends and the development of such trends over time and space. Using such an approach, we argue for an engagement with research (…) that has applied a practices approach … (ibid.: 7)

Consequently, in their analysis of the focus group conversations they undertook with residents of five electoral wards around Exeter, the authors discuss how their respondents describe the contexts within which they make their travel decisions, i.e., the needs created by the specificity of their jobs and their everyday tasks, the physical layout of the landscape (shopping malls that can only be reached by car), the contradictory policies of the UK government, but also the changing social relations (individualisation) and the dominance of corporations:

When we were not such an insulated society, for example, people who worked at Dagenham, (…) they ran car clubs, because they all worked at the same place and they all started at the same time, (…) the cars were then loaded with guys—‘it’s your turn to drive’, that doesn’t work. More people today live alone. Now young people your age who have their own house are not part of anything like that, they have their own transport, they do everything on the Internet. So there’s no society as it was like that. No nuclear family, or in large family people don’t work like that anymore. That’s the big change” (Thomas, Cullompton). - Far more individualism isn’t there, yes (Tim, Cullompton). - There is too much individualism (Thomas, Cullompton). - If you just look at the way it’s going, we are governed by basically fossil fuels, and if we could find another source of energy it would make things easier (Thomas, Cullompton). - I was going to say … that the petrol companies will never let you do it [develop a compressed air engine] (Keith, Cullompton). (ibid.: 11/12, emphasis added)

Barr and Prillwitz interpret these statements as descriptions of ‘changes in mobility practices’ which, in their view, respondents ‘considered part of a wider
physical and political-economic structure that had engendered an individualistic approach towards everyday living and brought about changes in both the need for travel and shifts in mobility practices.’ (ibid.: 11).

From our perspective, there are two stories in these quotes. One is picked up by the authors, namely the societal changes which have, as the respondents see it, destroyed the possibility for cooperative practices and engendered individualism. However, there is a second story here: the critique of the overwhelming power exercised by fossil fuel and petrol companies deciding about what is produced and how. The authors interpret this as ‘political apathy’ and ‘political fatalism’. One can see it that way, but one can also understand this critique as representing the reality of economic power relations overriding political power. Moreover, identifying economic power relations and the loss of more collective forms of life as hindrances for societal and individual change can also be understood as a way for respondents to articulate their desire for collective control of their lives and living conditions. It is a separate question why the respondents do not act to create new forms of cooperation, challenge or undermine the power of petrol companies, but contend themselves with a critique. One can call this political apathy. But by judging and labelling people in this way, we are again putting the blame solely on individuals without analysing in more depth why they are not taking action to overcome their powerlessness.

By emphasising social context and employing a concept of practices, in which individuals are shaped by this context and solely the carriers of practices, Barr and Prillwitz do not only discard the privatised individual of the behaviour change paradigm, but the individual altogether. This is why they do not perceive the desire for collective control that comes through in the statements of their respondents, but dismiss them as an example of fatalism. The authors heard the social contexts described in the statements of the respondents, but they dismissed their interpretations of these contexts, the ways they feel and think about them. Thus, while hearing their respondents, they have not listened to them. One can argue with Holzkamp that this is an example where ‘… subjects are merely one-sidedly considered as living under conditions but not as creators and shapers of the societal conditions of their lives … ’ (Holzkamp 2013, 84f).

Granted, it is difficult to consider individuals as creators and shapers of societal conditions, when all one hears from them are their complaints about why they are not able to be creators and shapers. However, this is where the challenge for a critical environmental psychology lies: to listen more closely (Back, 2007), to find, in the way in which people frame their personal troubles, the desires and needs that they articulate for another society and to take those seriously.

The conclusions Barr and Prillwitz draw from their analyses, namely that looking ‘beyond the individual as a frame of reference to consider the (more
radical) options policy could adopt for making substantial changes to travel practices and indeed other forms of environmentally related practices’ (ibid.: 14) are reasonable enough. However, by going ‘beyond the individual’, we suggest they have thrown the baby out with the bathwater and left individuals as social actors behind. Consequently, they then have nobody else to turn to for ‘radical options’ but policy makers. Asking policy makers to adopt radical options to ‘tackle the underlying social and economic contexts for current practices’ (ibid.: 15) is a bit like asking an oil company to dissolve itself and turn into a worker-owned cooperative producing renewable energy. True, Barr and Prillwitz suggest asking for new ways of ‘conceptualising the role of citizens and the state’ (ibid.:16), but they end up with the ‘policy community’ as the agent of social change. Neither equipping individuals with a body, meanings, and materials, nor situating them in social contexts as carriers of practices seems to liberate individuals from the perceived need to be changed by the acts of others, by politicians and/or companies, and ultimately by social scientists like us. We then only need to convince politicians that we can show them how they can influence individuals to consume whatever others decide to produce in a sustainable way. This immediately begs the question why politicians and social scientists should be in any way different from those individuals out there, whom they want to change?

In our view, what is needed in order to transform the top-down approaches of policy makers (and social scientists), in which individuals become the recipients of political interventions rather than their architects, is not just to situate the individual of behaviour change strategies in a context of practices and societal conditions, but to develop a different understanding of the individual altogether. It is to this task that we now turn, by putting forward a concept of the human being as it has been developed by Kritische Psychologie.

‘Collective control’ and ‘societal action competence’ – a historical approach to a theory of the characteristics of human beings

To many it may come as a surprise that a psychological approach, which defines itself as Marxist would describe itself as a ‘psychology from the point of view of the subject’ (Holzkamp, 2013). However, in their Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels envisioned a society without class contradictions as one in which ‘the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all’ (Communist Manifesto, p. 27). Similarly, Kritische Psychologie aims to develop concepts in which the individual, the subject, constitutes the point of departure for the formulation of a psychological theory.
KP stresses the need to develop a psychological theory based on a historical investigation of the development of the human species. This is not specifically new as, for instance, (Gardner & Stern, 2002) present a host of theories which base their account of human selfishness on historical approaches to human nature. We have argued above that their argumentation is problematic because they project, in a circular way, present day behaviour into the past in order to then use this projection to explain and legitimate, through naturalising them, present behaviours. Practice theorists also stress the need for an historical approach: ‘Taking a slightly broader view the total range of practices that constitute social life has also changed: what is normal today has not always been so and, as such, there is no reason to suppose that currently familiar arrangements will stay the same for very long. It is reasonable to expect transitions in the array of practices that constitute social life and the resources they require.’ (Shove/Spurling, 2012: 2). An historical approach is necessary to broaden our perspectives and to understand that what we experience as normal practices or characteristics of individuals today are not human practices or human nature per se, but specific results of specific historical developments. Moreover, we need a historical approach to understand how the behaviours we see today came into being. This helps us to understand, which kind of societal relations have led to which kinds of practices and human characteristics and therefore, which are the societal relations we need to change. Finally, a historical perspective also helps us understand how humans emerged as a specific species and thus, what constitutes – through the historical changes - the specificity of humans as opposed to other animals.

Like other theories that try to understand the specificity of humans, KP goes back to the ‘Tier-Mensch-Übergangsfeld’ (Holzkamp, 2013; Osterkamp, 1982), to the ‘transitional space’ within which certain animals became a different species of animals, namely humans. What they define as the decisive step of transition is the ability of humans, to make tools not just in order to produce their means of living, but to make tools for a ‘generalised purpose’, for an activity that lies in the future, that may not be conceivable yet, but is expected to be necessary at some point. Animals make tools, too. Apes may prepare a branch to get bananas from high up in the trees, but they usually do this for an immediate action. Sometimes they carry this stick with them for a while. However, humans go a step further: they make tools to make tools in order to produce their means of living.

For instance, if we know that cooperation has been essential for developing the world and human capabilities, and how individualism came into being through the destruction of the common good and common ownership, we can discuss how we need to develop new ways of common ownership - because we cannot just go back to how it was - and new ways of cooperative, communal working together in order to overcome the present form of privatised individualism.
of survival. Second, in producing tools that can produce tools, which are ultimately used to produce the means of survival, there must be a conscious division of work, where tool makers must be sure that they will have access to food, shelter and clothing, even if they do not produce these means of survival themselves. This means that the foundation for the human way of producing and reproducing is a societal context, where each individual knows how his/her work will contribute to the general survival of the group and can therefore be sure that he/she will get her/his fair share of what the group collectively produces. A simple example is described by Holzkamp in the act of hunting. In the hunting process, there are those who kill the animal and those who chase the animal into the direction where the hunters are. The latter, although they need the food, have to chase the carrier of the food away from themselves, that is, they need to act contrary to their immediate needs. In order to do so, they need to be sure that they will get their share of the food, which they helped to catch. One might argue that the same is true for a hunting pack of, say, wolves. However, as far as we know, wolves do not sit together after the hunt and decide how much of the meat should be distributed to whom, including those who have not been part of the hunt themselves, but have produced the weapons used for hunting or have been responsible for bringing up the hunters.

*Kritische Psychologie* argues that, deriving from the historical study of the emergence of humans and the role of cooperative collective production in their development, we can reconstruct several characteristics that define a specifically human way of living and producing:

- First, it is characterised by foresight and a constant learning process. Tools are produced for an opportunity yet to come, not simply for the immediate moment. They are saved, maintained, and improved as a result of the generalised knowledge that results from the experience of using them in specific conditions.

- Second, human existence is necessarily socially mediated. Humans cannot exist as lone individuals in nature (this they have in common with animals). The social character of humans has been emphasised by many researchers. However, there is something specific about the social character of human life, as opposed to the social life of animals: in principal, the ever-increasing complexity of the division of labour makes it necessary for humans to know and take part in controlling the societal living conditions at large, since they constitute the condition of their own individual life. Where this collective control is not possible, humans need to create imaginary forms of control to overcome the anxiety that comes with the impossibility of controlling the conditions of their lives collectively. These can take the form of controlling others, of withdrawing
into individualistic, privatised lives with the consequences discussed above, or of ‘political apathy’. Between the human needing food and the food itself lies a very complex set of societal relations, a complicated division of labour that involves the production and distribution of food - along with a myriad of cultural attitudes and practices (Tolman & Maiers, 1991). Feminists have pointed out that, opposed to other animals, humans also need support when giving birth. Thus, not only the production of the means of life, but also the reproduction of the species is based and depends on cooperation and social mediation.

- Third, due to the specific human way of re-production (production of the means of life and of life itself), which includes tool making in ever-more sophisticated and mediated ways, the basis of human development changes fundamentally: it is no longer dependent on genetic make-up alone (instincts for instance), but rather on the accumulated knowledge that is materialised in technical artefacts, the technological basis of human existence at any given time and space, together with the accumulated knowledge materialised in cultural artefacts. Tolman and Maiers argue:

Individuals produce for themselves by participating in the social arrangements we call society. It is in fact society that mediates each individual’s relationship to the material world, which is no longer ‘natural’ in the strict sense of the word. Furthermore, our effectiveness in dealing with the world is no longer governed by natural, biologically determined abilities. It is governed rather by the stage of our society’s development and the effectiveness with which we have individually and collectively appropriated the skills necessary for participation in societal existence. ... Categories of psychology like learning, emotion, motivation, and cognition cannot fail to be significantly altered by the fact of our existence’s societal mediatedness (Tolman and Maiers 1991: 14).

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9 The fact that the human way of life is always mediated is salient for understanding what the needs for individuals today are, who want to lead an environmentally sound life. Ideally, what one would need to know is where every element of the products used comes from and how and by whom they have been produced through the whole global value chain. To be sure that one’s contribution to the well-functioning of the earth’s production has the desired effect, individuals would also need to collectively control the production and distribution processes. Though much more complex and complicated than before, the way in which the living conditions of each individual depend on the living conditions of individuals across the globe has never been as knowable. The living conditions of every individual depend on the ways in which societies across the world live and impact on the environment. It is less realistic than ever to survive by just tending one’s own garden. The whole world is everybody’s garden and there is a need to tend it collectively.
In other words, the ‘essence’ of what is human does not lie ‘within’ humans, neither in our genes nor in our inward feelings and cognitions; it lies ‘outside’, in the societal relations and the accumulated societal artefacts that represent the level of human knowledge (and ignorance) at a specific point in time and space. In other words, as humans we continuously re-produce nature and with it our second nature.\textsuperscript{10}

If we understand human development as based not on the Darwinist model of the ‘survival of the fittest model’ and thus on genetic changes, but as based on our societal relations and accumulated knowledge, we can define ‘human nature’ in a significantly different way than it is normally understood. While it is usually conceptualised as something static, which has to be dealt with as a given (i.e. a selfish gene, (Dawkins, 2006), we can now understand ‘human nature’ as something that is simultaneously consistent and consistently changing as society and our social relations change. The need for cooperation, by means of participating in the societal control of our living conditions, the mediation of human activity through material and social relations and the logic of development based on a socially produced second nature (accumulated artefacts and knowledge) are constants that define the specificity of human existence. However, the character of these constants consists in their continuous change and thus differ for different people across time and space. In other words, the nature of human nature is a \textit{societal nature}. Thus, constructing individuals as carriers of practices, as acting within specific societal contexts, tells us only part of the story. Such constructions do not account for the profound way in which each individual’s existence is mediated through social relations. Practices and contexts do not only change constantly, but also who individuals are, what they experience as necessary, what they value, how they deal with power relations, to whom they subordinate themselves and if, when, and how they resist. Thus, what needs to be overcome is not just an individualistic reductionism of psychological concepts, concepts in which individuals are reduced to privatised monads, but also concepts in which they disappear in social relations and material practices. What KP aims to overcome is the dualism between the individual and society.

The concept of a societal human nature, defined through the need of individuals to collectively control their living conditions, is not a descriptive concept. It does not describe the way in which individuals act at any given moment. It is a heuristic concept which helps to understand, for instance, why people feel powerless and anxious, when they can only change their immediate practices but do not see how this can change the environmental crisis in general (Barr & Prillwitz, 2014; Kenis & Mathijs, 2012). It enables an analysis of the problems, conflicts and contradictions that people experience within today’s

\textsuperscript{10}For the development of this term see also (Smith, 2008) and (Castree & Braun, 2001)
societal relations, when the needs of cooperation and collective control are not realised. The perspective it offers is to find ways to develop what it calls *societal action competence*, that is the capability to collectively change the conditions of one’s existence and thereby change oneself and develop individual capabilities to act cooperatively.

Analysing the harvesting example at the beginning of our paper, KP would define the conditions under which people were required to act as conditions in which cooperation and a collective control of these conditions did not exist and thus, the tensions defined in the ‘tragedy of the commons’ were inevitable because people were not able to know and negotiate each other’s contribution. The fact that most people acted in a socially responsible way and that the idea of selfishness was reduced to people thinking the other participants in the experiment would act selfishly, could be explained in terms of the specifically human capability of perceiving one’s own contribution as part and parcel of a broader process, even under advert conditions. In other words, collective and cooperative capabilities exist and are developed even under conditions of competition because without them, people could not survive. Under specific conditions these capabilities may be subordinated to egoistic behaviours, but that does not mean that they disappear completely. If they did, social life and human survival would be impossible.

What the behaviour change paradigm sees as individual’s selfishness overriding socially responsible behaviour can be understood through KP as a behaviour that reflects the impossibility of individuals to collectively control their living conditions because they do not live in socially meaningful relations and are subordinated under relations of power not of their making. The personal considerations and traits can, through the lens of KP, be analysed as a result of such societal relations, not as general personality characteristics. For instance, what Barr and Prillwitz (2014) define as political apathy and behaviour change theorists as a lack of a sense of efficacy, or perceived behavioural control would be analysed as a realistic insight into the dominant power relations, which hamper the ability of individuals to collectively become the owners of their fate and participants in its possibilities. Furthermore, practices that aim predominantly at self-enrichment can be analysed as the way in which the behaviour of individuals is mediated through the goals that are dominant within Western capitalist societies. While individual enrichment is rewarded, socially responsible behaviour can become dangerous for the individual as it endangers their ability to be successful at work and brings them in conflict with authorities at the workplace and in society at large.

KP also challenges the validity and reliability of psychological studies that, in assuming that selfishness and self-interest is an innate human trait (i.e.,
essentialist and universalist), undertake cross-cultural research (employing, for example, the theories and methodologies developed in Western/US-European psychology) in cultures where social relations are different. Concepts studying the behaviour and practices of individuals need to be derived from specific societal relations within which people are acting. These specificities can only be understood if the historical processes through which they evolved are analysed. The human capabilities to flourish and to develop societal action competences are universal, but the ways in which they are restricted or enabled are specific to time and space.

**Collective societal control of socially owned resources**

Gardner and Stern (2002) describe several instances in which ‘community control’ of natural resources has survived over centuries and has allowed people not only to preserve their resources, but also to prosper as individuals and as a community. Thus, as they conclude, ‘community control’ is the best method to ensure that a community will not deplete its resources, even when this means reducing their consumption of these resources. What the authors also show is that under conditions where a community is in control of their own resources, the oppositions of individual interests and group interests, or of cooperation and egoism, do not hold. However, Gardner and Stern (2002) do not explain their results in this way. Instead, they explain that the success of commonly owned and controlled resources is due to people having learned that in the long run self-sacrifice benefits all. But if individuals and their resources thrive, where do the authors see the sacrifice? The sacrifice is, they argue, that nobody transformed their ‘assets’ (e.g., sheep, cows,) into capital, that is into a means to produce not just a commodity (i.e., milk, meat), but to produce profit. This definition of sacrifice shows how an unhistorical view of society naturalises the specific historical characteristic in which scientific analyses take place. Producing for profit is a very recent way of producing, not a natural human need. Only if producing for profit is naturalised can a community, which enjoys well-being and prosperity, be described as a community of self-sacrificing individuals because they are not producing profit. If we assume instead that *production for consumption* is the ‘normality’, and that production for profit is the exception (since production for profit is only possible for a small minority of producers), then there is nothing altruistic or self-sacrificing about these communities. They are only an example of the fact that there are pockets in our capitalist world where the principle of infinite self-enrichment has not conquered the hearts and minds of individuals. We can thus interpret the findings of Gardner and Stern
(Gardner & Stern, 2002) and of Ostrom (1990), on whom they draw, differently. They show that production that is not oriented towards making profit, but towards satisfying needs, can do both, i.e., secure the resources upon which production depends and promote the well-being of the individuals that constitute the community. As Maslow and Honigmann report, drawing on a comparative investigation of different societies by Ruth Benedict, ‘the conclusion that arises is that societies where non-aggression is conspicuous have social orders in which the individual by the same act and at the same time serves his own advantage and that of the group’ (Maslow, Honigmann, & Mead, 1970).

Conclusions

What can the KP model of the human being, the concept of a societal human nature, which sees individuals as cooperative beings in need of collectively controlling their living conditions, contribute to an understanding of environmental behaviour and thus to strategies for behaviour change? Gardner and Stern (2002), having argued that community management depends on the control by close-knit communities of a local resource, suggest: ‘What may be desirable is becoming less and less possible, and it may be that in the present era, making community management into a useful strategy for the world’s great environmental problems would require nothing short of a social revolution.’ (ibid.: 150) As long as we do not think of a social revolution as the storming of the Winter Palace, but as a profound, cultural, political, and economic transformation which can develop and strengthen the collective forces and cooperative capabilities of individuals, the authors are correct. We do need a social revolution. One of the many places where it can start is at the intersection of the social fabric and the societal formation that constantly re-produces environmentally damaging behaviours.

Discussing the role of psychology in alleviating the impacts of climate change, Robert Gifford argues:

Each person on the planet, whether as an individual or as part of an organisation, curates a stream of natural resources that are converted into products; the conversion process often creates greenhouse gases. Thus, as psychologists have long recognised, the fundamental unit of analysis for the human-caused portion of climate change is the person (...). Thus, ultimately, amelioration of that part of environmental problems such as climate change over which we have some potential control occurs at the individual level (...). (Gifford, 2008)
We would agree with Gifford that the unit of analysis for environmental psychologists is the person. But what is a person? From a KP perspective, we understand the person as the totality of his/her social relations. Thus, to tackle climate change at the individual level without addressing the totality of the social, economic, political, and cultural relations that encourage specific kinds of (egoistic) behaviours and discourage other kinds of (cooperative) behaviours, change strategies will not be successful. Individuals cannot change without changing the totality of their social relations. This is where, in our view, practice theories do not go far enough because they do not address the totality of those relations. Theories investigating the contexts of practices at times lose sight of the individuals, who shape these contexts. In order to be able to tackle those social relations it is necessary to understand how they have come into existence and how they shape individual behaviours, values, and practices, and are shaped by the practices of individuals. It is not sufficient to simply shift the focus from one side of the equation (the person, the individual) to the other (social relations).

The sentence that people are the totality of their social relations includes the necessity for individuals to change as well:

The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and of education forgets that circumstances are changed by people and that it is essential to educate the educators. (...) The simultaneity of changing the circumstances and of the human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice. (Marx & Engels, 2010)

The decisive word here is *simultaneity*. Changing the circumstances and changing the self is one and the same process. In other words, for a ‘social revolution’ to develop, persuading people to change by means of awareness-raising, and attitude and behaviour change programmes (e.g., using incentives, coercion or even subtle nudges), or by restructuring their practices and changing contexts may be a desirable and necessary pre-condition, but it is not sufficient. The character of these top-down methods only serve to reinforce the social relations which encourage selfish behaviours and leave individuals powerless to transform their societal relations and themselves. ‘Yes, but we have evidence that they work’, behaviour change scientists might claim. There may be one-off and discrete occasions where some individuals do change their ‘behaviour’ some of the time, but psychologists rarely examine (ironically) how sustainable that change is. For example, is it maintained over time? Is it generalised to other behaviours?\(^{11}\) Are their new practices taken up by other people because they can

\(^{11}\) There is work in this area that comes under the heading of spillover, but the evidence
see the transformation benefits in terms of their social relations and environmental conditions? Do people feel empowered by the ways they have changed and have they created new social relations and new societal conditions that sustain changed behaviours? Neither is it sufficient to change the circumstances within which people act, since this again, reinforces structures of passivity, where people themselves are not in control of these situations and settings. If one wants to change the unsustainable way in which we live today it is necessary to enable and support people to change the conditions that sustain and encourage environmentally (and socially) damaging behaviours, in a way that initiates processes in which people can also change themselves.

The role of a Critical Environmental Psychology could be to provide people with concepts that enable them to participate in such processes of change and self-change. First, the concept of agency as *collective control of societal conditions* could help people to understand their frustrations and their lack of effectiveness in managing and having some influence and/or control over the commons. They could then see that this is not the result of some kind of inadequacy on their part but a result of the conditions in which they live, which deny them the possibility of cooperation and collective control of those commons. For instance, *maybe* change would have been initiated if Barr and Prillwitz had taken the complaints of their respondents about the overpowering domination of governments and companies seriously and had discussed with them the possibilities to confront such powers collectively – what are the barriers to change, what resources do they need?

Second, an historical perspective which deconstructs the present as a naturally given necessity and instead points to its human-made and therefore changeable ‘nature’, can encourage people to search for alternatives that break through the limitations of their present living conditions.

Third, the idea that societal human nature is defined by openness and the ability and/or necessity to learn and to change in cooperation with others avoids reifying behaviour. It can open up the horizon of possibilities in a direction towards which people’s capacity to act can be broadened.

Fourth, instead of telling people how to solve the environmental crisis, psychology should develop concepts that enable people to find and realise their own solutions. Psychology, after all, should be well-positioned to encourage strategies that have enabled individuals, communities, and societies not just to endure, but to lead flourishing and environmentally sustainable lives (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). One might argue that this is idealistic as the clock is ticking and what is ‘desirable becomes less and less possible’ (Gardner and Stern...
Gardner and Stern see the conditions for community management vanishing with increasing globalisation, decreasing control over local resources and increasing (climate-induced) migration. This implies that fewer groups have the knowledge to manage such resources (ibid.: 150) and control is in the hands of a relatively small group of people who are more and more remote from the environments about which decisions are being made. But if it is true that the main condition for community management is not only close-knit communities managing a resource that is close to the place where they live, but the control people in general need to have over resource use, production, and consumption, then more possibilities for ‘community management’ or collective control are opened up. We need not think of communities as only being spatial.

For example, workers in a transnational corporation are in an occupational, if not spatial, community. If, together with other social movements, they demand control of the ways in which resources are used by the corporation which employs them this could have a major impact on the corporation’ practices. Since TNC’s operate across the global north and the global south, they provide a space in which workers from the two political hemispheres could work together.

The International Trade Union Confederation has strengthened their commitment to environmental issues and sustainability over the past years (Räthzel & Uzzell, 2013; Rossman, 2013). Unions all over the world are asking for democratic control of energy (http://unionsforenergydemocracy.org). This opens up exciting possibilities for collective and cooperative action. However, change is not straightforward. Workers and trade unions often show more loyalty to their company than to the environment, since they tend to see the former, and not the latter, as the condition for their survival (Räthzel & Uzzell, 2009; Uzzell & Räthzel, 2013; Barca, 2014; Snell & Fairbrother, 2010; Stevis & Felli, 2015). Nevertheless, there is potential and even a necessity here, because without workers, combating climate change will be impossible. Psychologists could align themselves with environmentally conscious workers’ movements and support them in developing the necessary concepts and practices that facilitate collective action. Worldwide solidarity is a chance and possibility for community influence, if not control, that would exceed the control local communities can exercise over their immediate resources.

Finally, instead of devising behaviour change strategies from above, it would be useful to identify already existing practices in which people are changing their circumstances and themselves, in order to support, broaden and generalise them. We are obviously not the first people to argue that change can only happen as a process from below in which people take control over their living conditions and thereby begin a process of changing their circumstances and changing themselves. What we suggest is a different theory of the individual,
in which it is neither conceptualised as a monad, a privatised individual, nor disappears in practices and societal contexts. We think that Kritische Psychologie and its theory of a societal human nature, of the need and capacity for collective control of living conditions can be a point of departure to develop new concepts and device different kinds of strategies that might be more difficult to realise, but probably more successful than what we have seen so far. As Holzkamp (2013) argues, ‘This (…) amounts to elaborating (for each question at stake) the real possibility of jointly creating (however slowly) conditions where there is no need for conducting a life at the expense of others – with the comprehensive historical perspective of social relations “where the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all”’ (ibid.: 85/86). To avoid misunderstandings, we are not arguing that the perspective of Kritische Psychologie is a safe and guaranteed road to societal and individual transformation. Our argument is only that without recognizing and engaging the capacities of individuals for cooperation and a collective control of their living conditions a socially and environmentally sustainable world will not be possible.

To connect Kritische Psychologie with other strands of Psychology, it is appropriate to end with the words of an eminent psychologist, George Miller, whose suggestions point in a similar direction:

Our responsibility is less to assume the role of experts and try to apply psychology ourselves than to give it away to the people who really need it— and that includes everyone. The practice of valid psychology by non-psychologists will inevitably change people's conception of themselves and what they can do. When we have accomplished that, we will really have caused a psychological revolution. (Miller, 1969)

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References


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