

Conceiving inter-subjectivity in social work: Phenomenology and Critical Psychology¹

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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 thematization 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

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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 *colonialisation 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 2nd International Recess University of Critical Psychology (9-13.1.1984), which firmly adopted the “Objective and subjective contradictions of social work/socio pedagogy (cf. Braun & Gekeler, 1984).
- 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 colonisation 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.)⁵

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

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*⁶ 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

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 colonisation, 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

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.)⁸

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

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

cf. Graumann, 1985). At the same time, there are also new possibilities for the scientific exchange between critical psychology and life-world orientated social work (which will be discussed in more detail in sections 3 and 4).

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)¹⁰

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.¹¹

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

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.¹² 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"¹³ (whereas important interim results were introduced at the 6th 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 *psychophysical state* and the *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 *social environment* and *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.

4. Second reconstruction phase (1994/1995): conduct of everyday life as a medium of subject constitution

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)¹⁴ corresponding drafts remained as fragments (cf. Holzkamp 1995, 1996), but they provide a good impression of this new approach to critical-psychological research,¹⁵ which is of interest to life-world oriented

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.

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 cyclicity 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 cyclicity of the lifestyle. In this way, everyday recurring troubles become endurable, maybe they are even pushed to the fringes by the consciousness fullfilling 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”.

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