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[1]

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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

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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 cyclicality 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 action options are selected. The basis for these is the 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.

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[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 18th-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 18th 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 *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 *homo oeconomicus*, been of interest mainly in the sense of being a trading partner, the American theorists now pursued '*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 *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 *disciplinary mechanism* which emerges in institutions such as prisons, schools and psychiatric facilities over the course of the 18th and 19th 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*'.

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