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The Delopment of Critical Psychology into a Subject Science (Draft)

(Guest lecture given in the University of Kopenhagen, 22. 03. 1996)

I. Practical relevance of psychology, differenciated into technical and emancipating relevance (Habermas) as starting point.

Klaus Holzkamp who died last year was the outstanding figure in the foundation of critical psychology and in its development into subject science. Hence, if I work out my paper here along his work, I do so in order to appreciate especially *his* contributions to the general project of critical psychology.

Surely there are different possibilities, to tell the story of the developement of critical psychology, but I think, that in any way you will come back to the problem of the relation between theory and practice as one of the starting points. "Nobody is able to deny that psychological research and professional psychological practice in many areas are opposed to each other in an alienated way." This sentence opens Holzkamps paper, written 1968 and published 1970: "The problem of relevance of psychological research for professional psychological practice", a paper, he himself appreciated as one of the initiating papers of the critical new orientation in psychology (1972, 228)

It is important here that Holzkamp from the start hasn't put the problem of relevance only formally or methodically, not only as a problem of the experimental-methodically forced reduction of the complexity and variety of daily and commonplace human acticities and societal connections of meanings into some isolated variables. Rather, relating to Habermas, he made a distinction between technical and emancipating relevance. What does that mean? It means, that the methodologically problematic relationship between theory and practice gets a dimension regarding content, society and politics. The purpose of an experiment is to grasp - under the control of the researcher or experimentalist - the effects of conditions which are built by the experimentalist on the behavior and experience of the subject. The best you can register in this way is how men behave unter someone else's conditions which they are not able to influence or change. But don't you have to considerate, that an experiment, a school class, a cockpit of an aeroplane and the setting in a factory are different contexts? Surely. Hence, it is questionable, if the results or the knowledge of one context, here the context

of the experiment, are transferable to other contexts. As you know, that is the (famous problem of transfer.) However, Holzkamp first of all doesn't mean the *specifity* of the contexts, but the *structure* which the different contexts have *in common*. Technical relevance in this sense means a *structurally founded* (possible) relevance, which however in every special case is to investigate, of experimental results for non-experimental circumstances, in which it is systematically left out of considerations that men not only live under conditions but also are able to produce them. Relevance for contexts in which men are under the control of others. At that time Holzkamp said: "If on the one hand you call beings, who have history, who possibly are reflective subjects of this history, who possibly are able to produce a world according to their needs and who are able to deal with their interests by a free and symmetrical dialogue, 'men', and if on the other hand you call beings, which live in a strage, nature-like surrounding, which have no history, which only react to special stimuli by special, fixed reaction patterns, organisms, then you can say that (the experimental setting) contains restrictive characteristics, by which individuals who in the non- or extra-experimental reality possibly behave like men in the experimental setting are forced to behave like organisms." Emancipating relevance, on the contrary, is defined in a way that psychological concepts and methical settings have to correspond to the *double* characteristic of human existence – objective determindness *and* subjective determining (influence) (subjektive Bestimmtheit / subjektive Bestimmung).

II. The abstract-isolated individual or the inversion of 'concreteness' and abstractness als a problemactic psychological thought form.

If you follow these problems of psychology you will see that they are connected to a fundamental way of thinking which, according to Marx, was analysed as the inversion of the concrete and the abstract, or - literally translated - of concreteness and abstractness. I'd like to illustrate this way of thinking by the example of a pupil with a bad concentration. If you as a psychologist focuse on this pupil, you possibly neglect that the pupil with a bad concentration may be related to a terribly boring teacher, who possibly stops interesting problems and spontaneous developments in his or her lessons, because he or she feels to be forced to manage a schedule, worked out by other people who ..., etc. Hence, you probably abstract from the pupil's life

circumstances, and so his societal constrictions are misinterpreted as his subjective, individual limitations. This way of thinking is so attractive and tenacious, because the abstraction from the life circumstances comes in the disguise of firmly concreteness: It's me, who can't remember the vocabulary, it's you who does't grasp the math problem, it's he who isn't able to concentrate. On the contrary you need strong theoretical efforts, to overcome this "pseudoconreteness" of daily life, how Kosik (1967) puts it.

Here Holzkamp said: "It is a characteristic of existing psychology, that without any doubt on the one hand it looks at the single individual as being the concreteness, and on the other hand looks at concepts like society as a result of generalizing abstractions, which starts with the behavior of the 'conrete' individuals, so that society seems to be something only thought, which has its sole foundation in the behavior of single individuals. In this way you can't recognize that this view of 'concrete' and 'abstract' related to men is the result of a shortcoming which itself results from the bourgeois ideology of the individual and the personality." Holzkamps argues, that the single individual, according to Marx, is not a simple concrete existence, but that "the concept of single individual is extraordinary abstract, i.e., the result of acstractions from the concrete historical-societal situatedness, an abstract-isolated human individual, as Marx puts it".

As far as this abstraction, i.e. the mixing up of concreteness and abstractness, represents a real bourgeois separation of the individual from the influence on his or her life circumstances or the contradiction between societal production and private appropriation of the products, this way of thinking doesn't result from a false thinking of the psychologists, but from the reproduction of these bourgeois conditions themselves. That is, what marxist critique of ideology – or to put it more formally – "deconstruction" says.

III. Critique of thinking the abstract-isolated individual by virtue of the marxist theory of society.

While the inversion of concreteness and abstractness isolates the idividual from influence on or control over the life conditions, it reduces the individual to an object of these conditions. But didn't Marx emphasize in his Feuerbach-theses that man was the essemble of his societal conditions and didn't he in this way support the modell of men being *determined* by their conditions – a

modell which is favoured in psychology and common sense. No, he didn't - what he actually said, was: "The human (inner) nature (essence; Wesen) isn't abstractly inherent in the single individual. Actually it is the essemble of societal conditions." The word "it" dosn't relate to the individual, but to human nature / essence. The human nature / essence doesn't crouch in the individual, on the contrary it is an extra-individual result of human history, production and societal conflicts. The theoretically interesting thing about it is, that in this way of thinking the individuals are neither simply determined by the society, neither seperated from it. In living, they are necessarily related to the societal conditons through their actions, reproducing or - if need be - changing them.

The indiviuals only can be comprehended as subjects, when they are dissolved *of* this abstract isolation described and are put in relation to the essemble of societal conditions, which is concretized in different contexts and which pervades these contexts. As far as the societal structure is theoretically dissolved *into* contexts, as far as they theoretically substitute it, the inversion of concreteness and abstractness is only carried out on a new level. Of course, the school of the pupil with a bad concentration is a specific context, but it is a context in the structure of bourgois society containing contradictional functions of support on the one hand and selection and competition on the other hand, where for example marks and levels represent the standpoint of capitalistic utilization in school. How different the standpoints of pupils, parents, teachers an psychologists may be, they are situated in this very contradiction. "Essemble of societal conditions" means that societal structures must not be dissolved in local contexts, but that these contexts have to be recognized as parts of this essemble. The concept of context is only useable as a concept of context-in-the-structure-of-bourgois-society. Everything else is pseudo-concrete and abstract - that unhistorical surrounding of the abstract-isolated individual. Societal structure is not only what the contexts have in common, but it does pervade and determine them.

It is obvious that this critique of traditional-psychological and so-called interpretative sociological ideas is formulated on the level of marxist critique of society, that means, first of all on an level of social theory.

IV: <u>Historical procedure to found the unity of the development of nature,</u>
<u>society and individual.</u>

The problem in the development of critical psychology was the following: On
this level, to be sure, it was possible to show certain limitations of existing
psychological concepts, but it was *not possible to make destinctions <u>between</u>*
these concepts or to gain criteria in order 1. to develope alternative, positive
psychological concepts and 2. to overcome the existing arbitrariness of
defining psychological concepts. Regarding this task, is, what you can know on
the foundation described, that you must not fall behind the level of critique
shown obove. That means: Concepts of psychological potency cannot be
developed focusing on the sole individual, his immediate interactions with
others or analysing his biography. But also considerating the level of the
relation of individual and society is not fully sufficent, because society itself
hasn't come out of nothing, but developed out of natural history. So, if you
want to understand human existence as a societal form of live and its
essential dimensions, you have to analyse as well the phylogenesis, especially
the line of evolution which led to manhood focusing on the origin,
development, and differenciations of the psychic.
Hence, the program was the reconstruction of the psychic as unitiy of natural,
societal and individual history. This is the program of *historical-empirical*
analysis, the results of which are represented and recapitulated in Holzkamp's
book "Grundlegung der Psychologie". The historical-empirical procedure is
meant as a concretization of Marx' logical-historical procedure. The word
"historical" refers to the fact that the origin of the psychic has been
reconstructed historically, whereas the word "empirical" means that historical
material from biology, anthroplogy, ethology, ethnology and so on has been
used. In this way, we terminologically contrast this procedure from procedures
to analyse acute processes, processes developing at present, which we call
"actual-empirical". The historical procedure is intended to work out
psychological basic concepts or, how we put it, categories. This is essential for
the following reason: Holzkamp, relating to Leontjew, stresses: "You can't
decide only phenomenologically, which aspects or dimensions of the psychic, as
we can observe it, are ... merely 'natural', 'biological' destinations, which are
general societal destinations, and which are historical-concrete destinations."
You can only reconstruct it historically.

V. Critical psychology as a marxist subject science

After these short methodological remarks, regarding *content* I would like to focuse only on one aspect, that, like Holzkamp puts it, as a result of historical empirical analysis it was possible to "unfold subjectivity or the standpoint of the subject as a specific aspect of the relation between 'me' and the whole societal conditions, the conditions seen as objective connections of meaning and acting. How was that possible? Because we didn't simply put the standpoint of the subject in its historical latest form, but we analysed how it had developed from the material societal context of living. ... The fact that I am able to consciously behave towards the total societal process is not in contrast to it's objective characteristics. On the contrary, you can recognize this ablitiy as a qualification of the individuals who are involved in this process according to the necesseties of reproduction of societal-individual living", which by critical psychology was analyzed in its historial form of bourgeois society.

This insight marks a turning point in the development of critical psychology into a subject science. This development doesn't mean to avert from marxism; on the contrary, it was possible only on its foundation.

I would like to emphazise in this conetxt 3 aspects: 1. the concept of action potency as a concept mediating societal meanings with subjective reasons for action ("Handlungsgründe", sometimes translated as 'grounds for action'); 2. the importance of the relation of immediatdedness and mediatedness or of structure and context, and 3. some methodological consequences.

1. Action potency als a mediating concept.

Action potency is the concept by which the mediation of individual and societal reproduction is supposed to be represented. Here, the side of the *world* is taken as *meanings*, toward which the individual is able to and has to behave. Meanings on the one hand don't determine human acting immediately, on the other hand acting is not arbitrary regarding the meanings to which it is related. We think that the world – given as matters and as other individuals and seen as connections of meanings – represent action possibilities. These action possibilities become action premises of an individual, if he or she has to develop action intentions in order to solve problems which he or she is confronted with. Hence, premises are not only aspects of constellations of meanings, but they are in the course of "actual genesis" actively separated out

or accentuated by the individual - founded on his or her interests. Actually, action is reasonably founded according to the interests of the individual and related to the objective meanings.

2. The relation between immedediatedness and mediatedness; restrictive and generalized action potency

It is essential that when the division of labour and the societal differenciation grow the basic concept of total societal mediatedness becomes more relevant. This is because the individual is never able to experience societal relations as a whole, but only *partially, in facets,* and with references you can't experience immediatedly. To put it in another way: From the immediate contexts and from the individual's life problems you can't see how they are mediated by total societal structures at first. Hence, the relation between immedetiate *social* life world and *societal* structures has to be worked out. I would like to make this clear by the difference between "social" and "societal". You can't understand *social* relations if you focus on the immediate context only. For example, the fact that I am talking continously and that all the other people here are listening to my talk (or pretend *as if* they were listening to) is only understandable, if you are familiar with the societal institutionalized form of talking called "university lecture". The social relations of the people here are not *absorbed* in the societal-institutional structure, but without it you are not able to understand them. You can't understand the relation between teachers and pupils neither, if you try to understand it only by analyses of the immediate classroom context. You will need rather an analysis of the function of school related to the structure of our society. Therefore subject science analyses are essentially intended to work out the relation between immediate experience and societal structures as far as these structures are relevant for the immediate experience.

This would be clearer if you realize that - given a problematic situation for the individual - action *possibilities* don't simply exist, without contradictions; on the contrary, they are given to the individual in a relation to societal mediated action *hindrances.* Here the individual has the alternative only to realize conceded possibilities or to expand them: The first choice fixes the problems with the individual is confronted with, whereas the second choice is risky, because possibly you fail solving the problems and in failing expand them or get new ones. I would like to illustrate this contradiction by an

conflict between lovers. Because they are afraid of endangering their relationship they avoid to to touch about the topic. Perhaps they reproduce a thought form according to which conflicts are a part of the "world out there", but not a part of a loving relationship, which has to be governed by harmony. But in doing so in the long run they actually destroy the basis on which they are able to deal with their problems at all. So, the probability increases that the superficial harmony collaps at all. Or remember the teacher and the pupil of weak concentration and imagine that the psychologist only tries to improve concentration ability by dealing with the pupil.

To put it more generally now: Why and when are those troublesome and uneffective problem solving strategies, which we call "restrictive" (in contrast to "generalized" strategies) functional for the individual? 1. because and when the individual feels surer in avoiding conflicts, and 2. because the conflicts are not clear at first sight, and 3. those strategies are societally suggested. It seems as if conflicts in my immedate life have arisen only there and could be solved in this frame. So, like Sisyphos, the individual again and again tries to increase life quality by dealing with himself or herself or the immediate relationship (a psychological and common sense thought form, which is professionally very useful, if you want to earn money as a therapist). Our assumption is that fundamentally spontaneous strategies of problemsolving are focused on only superficial connections and that this is the reason of the continuing problems of the individual. But if you deal with an issue *scientifically*, it is provided that you are not able to grasp it at first sight, that it isn't absorbed by what is obvious, that it is not, what is suggested by common sense. To put it with Marx ("Kapital", 1. Bd., 564): What is obvious, "reproduces itself immediately spontaneous, as common sense thought form"; but what the essence is, "has to be found out by scientific endeavour". "... Any science would be superfluous, if the obvious and the essence were the same" ("Kapital", 3. Bd., 870). In the same way it is provided in subject science frame of research and practice that in problematic situations reasons and consequences of acting are not obvious, but that they have to be worked out - opposite to the surface and opposite to deceiving oneself. A subject science analysis always intends to grasp the subjective functionality of restrictive problem solving strategies in the relation between real societal mediatedness of the individual's existence and his or her spontaneous experiences in the frame of the logic of common sense.

In his last book, published 1993, Holzkamp on this foundation phenomenologically and subjectanalytically developed theories about human learning, seen as subjective aproach to the world, beyond regimentations by institutional teaching. Under the structural aspects of teaching in schools he used Foucault's analyses of institutions. For Holzkamp himself it wasn't possible anymore to realize a planned empirical project about the contradictions of learning in schools.

3. Subject science methodics and developing theories for self-understanding of the people

Subject science means psychology from standpoint of the subject - not only metaphorically, but litterally. This fundamentally affects the status of theories. They are not developed in order to get statements about causes or conditions in order to explain of human behavior and experience; on the the contrary developing theories is intended to serve the *self understanding* of the indivuals *about their interests, motives, actions, reasons, and about the consequences of their actions in subjective important and critical life situations*. So, psychological theories don't deal with causes-effects- or, to put it in another way, with conditions-event-connections, but with premises-reasons-connections, if you remember the concepts introduced above. According to this fact the subjects are *not* the topic of research. On the contrary they are - together with professional reseachers - "on the side of research" (Holzkamp 1988). The topic of critical psychological research is not the individual subject, but the world, how he or she experiences it - emotionally, thinking, and acting. For this reason subject science statements are not statements *about* those affected, not at all classifications of people, but about experienced and probably generalizable action possibilities. So the characteristic of critical psychological methodics doesn't result from the characteristics of single methods coming into question (like interview, observation, group discussion), it doesn't result from more general methodological orientations, as you know them as quantitiative vs. qualitative. Rather, the characteristic of critical psychological methodics results from the conceptual and methodological presuppositions and framework of psychological research and practice mentioned above (cf. Markard 1991).

As it has been shown not only by critical psychologists, but also by Smedslund and Brandtstädter, nomothetically orientated mainstream

psychology very often fails regarding its own assumption, as is that experimentalists in formulating hypotheses formulate contingent, empirically scrutinizable conditions-events-relations, because under formal aspects their hypotheses are inferential. Holzkamp was able to show that in social psychology and in learning psychology the superficially contingent conditions-events-relations actually are hidden premises-reasons-relations which are not able to be scrutinized. So they are and have to be interpreted theoretically and methodologically dealt with in subject scientific way.

VI. Psychology from the standpoint of the subject in relation to "qualitative" approaches

I hope that the considerations delivered in the last three points have shown that we don't think of psychology from the standpoint of the subject as a special kind of *subjectivism*, but on the contrary it is intended, according to the genuine marxist approach, to combine the ideas of subjectivity and historical potency. As far as described, the standpoint of the subject could have been historical-empirically worked out as an aspect of material societal life conditions, subjectivity is not opposite to the objective characteristics of the societal processes. 'My' subjective point of view, Holzkamp emphazises (1983, 538f.), "is, to be sure, the starting point of my experience of the world and my own self, but not the very last end of analysis. ... The 'standpoint of the subject' doesn't exclude considering objective conditions, but has to include them. My subjective experience doesn't stand like a wall between me and the objective reality, but I can analyze my subjectivity as an aspect of the continuing material societal process. It follows from this fact that I'm able to know more about my experience than I could know only by its description."

Hence, in our opinion, the basic problem of psychology isn't a methodical one, but a categorial one. The methodological basic problem of psychology doesn't consist of the relation of quantitative and qualitative methods, but of the contrast between subject vs. control science, between psychology from the standpoint of the subject vs. psychology from a standpoint outside, between a discurs in terms of determination vs. reasoned action, between subjects as topic of research or their qualification als co-researchers. This point of view differs from many qualitative critiques of mainstream psychology. The essential

problem of existing foundations of qualitative methods is, that they are not intended to solve the methical problems of analysing the *relation of objective determiniation and subjective influence* in a process of developing self understandig of the people. In one of the last German surveys about qualitative methodes Flick (1995) states: "Qualitative research gains special topicality in the research of social relations, because the pluralization of life worlds in modern societies – in the sense of the new tangled complexity, ... the growing indivdualization of life situations, biographic patterns, .. or the dissolving of old social inequities into the variety of milieus, subcultures, life stiles, and ways of life (or, to put it in my way, the nice coloured way of the real generalization of capitalism, of new poverty, and of the so called 2/3-society, M.M., or in the words of John Lennon's "working class hero": "Keep you down with religion and sex and TV / and you think you're so clever and classless and free / but you're fucking dependent as far as I can see".) needs a new sensibility for empirically investigated issues. When the representatives of the postemodern theories explain, that the time of the big tales is over, then rather local, in time and situation confined, tales are up-to-date." (9f.) Maybe those foundations of qualitative methods are up-to-date, but they miss the crucial point. The famous unemployment study in Marienthal took place half a century before postmodern theorizing, and the dispute about causes vs. reasons has been lasting for a century. The problem of locality is simply that of the field of application and validity. As you see, in this methical contexts postmodern thinking functions as elimination of societal critique of real existing capitalism, which – unfortunately – is not a big tale, but a worldwide generalizing reality.

> By the way, foundations of qualitative methods which focus on the *complexity* of the psychological topic, miss the crucial point too. As if the psychological topic were more complex than building an A-bomb, than developing a world's climate model or than forecasting the weather! Complexity is a concept which is totally abstract facing subjectivity. The actual question is, if the abstraction, which is connected with the reduction of complexity, is *appropriate*. The problem of not appropriate abstraction from subjectivity isn't first of all the reduction of complexity at all, but the abstractions from the aspect of subjective societal influence

related to objective determindness. It is that kind of *not* approriate
abstraction, which this foundation of qualitative methods can take part in.

Generally spoken: The crucial point is: To make individual subjects to the
topic of psychological research means to reduce them to objects. If you don't
want to reduce them to objects, they have to be on the same side as
researchers, on the side of research. As I said, this means: subject science
research serves the selfunderstanding of the subjects about their problematic
experiences, situated in the contradictory relation of immediate context and
societally mediating structure, and so it is intended to develop and expand
practical action possibility, in the tradition of action research.

Considering the relation between conditions and acting, the "way of gaining
knowledge is not to concretize general societal and institutional conditions in
direction of the respective problem, but, on the contrary, the way is from
unsolved aspects of the problem in direction of conditions which could be
meaningful in regard to analysing and solving the problem" in the immediate
context (Markard, 1988, 69f.). This does not mean, to collect the points of view
of the individuals and then, according to some methodical rules, to interpret
them over their heads. Even more: *The difference between traditional*
quantitative and usual qualitative research is not, if they interprete over the
heads of those affected, *but only how they do it* (cf. Dreier's [1993] analysis of
therapeutical interpretations).

Intersubjective selfunderstanding about reasons and consequences of action
also is a program opposed to an approach, to explain individual ways of
behaving referring to attributions of traits oder personality characteristics
and, hence, to break off the analysis of concrete premises and reasons of
action.

VII. Reserach example

VII. a. Framework

At the and of my lecture I would like to illustrate my remarks about research
by a practice reserach project in Berlin, which is linked to a training-project
of students, some of them are here.

The *theoretical* starting point of the project was the problem of relevance and
the gap between theory and practice I refered to at the begin of my lecture.
The *practical* starting point was the fact that some practioners had

experienced their situation as problematic. We think that the reason why they feel this way is among other things that they are confronted and forced with the expectation to eliminate subjective disturbances or troubles without regarding, let alone changing, the societal life circumstances of those affected - what would mean that psychology was a kind of magic and miracle, and so its representatives had gotten special expert means and qualities.

We would like to realize an approach, which doesn't shorten the problem of relevance of psychology into the personal competence of psychologists by personalizing and abstracting from *institutional* and *theoretical* work conditions. On the contrary we formulate the task that researchers and practitioners together develop and change those conditions.

> Fundamentally similar is the approach of a project about rassism and discrimination which is coordinated by Ute Osterkamp. In this project, the relations between inhabitants, social workers, administration, and management in refugees' homes of the German Red Cross are analysed. The aim is to theorize the machanisms by which people - well reasoned - *prevent* themselves and each other from living in solidarity.

Our central form of work is group discussion, in which we attempt to work out, if possible with reference to a concrete practical problem from the interviewed practitioner, on a case by case basis, the institutional and practice-structuring elements of the respective field of professional practice and to relate them to the experiences of the other project participants from other fields of professional practice. The transcribed minutes of the group discussions represent further material for the theoretical evaluation of the discussion and to suggestions for changes in practice.

Preparing the group discussions we use single interviews in the case when the institution of the respective practitioner is not well known by the other practitioners. Depending on the respective practitioner's area of professional psychological practice, we formulate a specified interview guide from the dimensions of the "Practice Portrait" (Markard & Holzkamp 1989), a theoretically founded and commented collection of dimensions of psychological practice. On the basis of this we perform an approximately two hour long interview with the practitioner. We then transcribe the interview and review it adding remarks, noting problems and additional questions according to general

research questions of the project. The practitioner interviewed is then given a copy of the transcript which he or she can revise. They then have, so to say, the last word in order to make sure that their opinions are clearly represented in the text. The version of the interview authorized by the interviewee is then given to other practitioners in the project as the basis of the a, on the average, monthly group discussion.

We don't limitate the topics of the discussions or the background of the participants necessarily to a certain area of the discipline (like therapy, school psychology, or drug counseling) but rather feel, that an interdisciplinary mix of practitioners is quite desirable. Because if (1) areas of psychological activity contain numerous facets of psychological work, then this implies that the area "school psychology" deals with the following: diagnostic, teacher counseling, pupil counseling, drug-abuse prevention, etc. then (2) theoretical statements regarding professional psychological practice can only be gained from concrete professional activity. This however does not mean that their validity is only restricted to that one specific area of psychology. Their range of validity is more dependent on the dimensions of the topic. Thus, for example, those aspects of professional psychological activity characterized by the "burn out phenomenon" affect all areas of professional psychological practice. As far as (3) psychology with the problems described here is one of the reference points for professional psychological practice research, then the different types of professional psychological practice can be related to one another as psychological.

In the course of the research process hypotheses develop which are related to the described problems of practice. Which problem of which practioner is focused on, should be mediated with this development. But the real development of issues doesn't only result from this research logic, but also from actual needs of the practioners. Here we again and again come to questions of institutional impediments and theoretical problems.

Up to now, specific moments of *premises-reason-connections and action possibilities of a critical emancipatory psychology situated in the real existing capitalism* have been seen in the forground. Some examples:

- life problems and their transformation into psychological problems.
- traditional diagnostics and diagnostics relating to the life world of the respective people
- common sense ideas (of order) in the guise of psychological theory

- the relation of actual genesis and biography or socialisation
- the relation of self-help and professional practice
- the therapeutization of psychosocial benefit
- the function of supervision for de-concretizing and psychologizing of peoples' problems.

VII.b. Research example: Life problems and their transformation into psychological problems.

I would like to outline a little the first example (cf. Fahl & Markard 1993): In the interviews and discussions of the project the question always arose how does it come about that (1) a given situation or constellation is defined as a problem, that (2) it is decided that this problem is suited to be "processed" psychologically and (3) which fate befalls the views of the problem in the course of the institutional "treatment" of the original problem. We characterize this aspect of practice as the "transformation problem". Very informative here was the fact that related questions and the answers are dependent on perspective and theoretical position. This obviously leads to the question: who defines whose problem and how. In other words, for example, the characterization by third parties of persons' life situation as (psychologically) problematic can, of course, be called into question. It is also questionable whether, or to what degree, the problems seen as psychological or entrusted to psychologists as psychological and thus as amenable to or curable with psychological means, are at all psychological problems in a narrow sense. The fact that individual life situations are viewed as psychological or as psychologically treatable problems is, of course, to be expected from psychological practice. However, this also means a (professional) specific interpretation which simultaneously limits other possibilities of acting or understanding. This is a situation which must be explained and thus possibly criticized.

Here the question of who gives jobs and work to whom, plays an important role. Therefore, in our opinion, the determination of the relationship of the task to the psychologist, the type of reformulation of the task in a psychological reference system and the thus remaining problem references are all significant aspects of the discussions. In this context, further questions must be asked, e.g., how can (in individual cases) one provide a theoretical foundation for what is (here) comprehended with psychological theory? What can be achieved at all in psychological practice? How can activities in the

interest of those affected be delineated from simple pacification and legitimation strategies. Where are non-psychological factors (size of the apartment and family relations, organizational questions in the ambulant care of the physically handicapped and the relations between helpers and handicapped) simply reduced to psychological problems between people. And finally, how can, with clear reference to psychological conceptions and thus, in this sense, clearly identified as psychological, those problem constellations be determined where "a change of levels" from psychological practice to, for example, administrative or political practice becomes necessary and which new problems could be created by that? Do the tasks turned over to psychological practice just use the psychologist as an alibi for the failures of the employer or institutional provider in order to minimize the importance of the real obstacles by excluding and leaving out (the ability to change) problematic life circumstances? Do people affected approach the psychologist in the hope of "delegating" their own life conduct within increasingly problematic situations to "specialists"?

The differentiation of psychological and non-psychological problems cannot be done in a general manner but has to be undertaken in an approach depending on respective theory, in our case including the theoretical tradition of the (functional) critique of psychology, mentioned here very briefly. The research questions are thus fundamentally based on the consideration of the problem of the reinterpretation of societal restrictions into subjective limitations, the ignoring of material living relations and conditions and relations of dependency and power and in general of the interests of the person or institution providing the psychological care. The attempt to overcome the individual-centric limitations of psychological practice and thus the attempt to take into account traditionally ignored contexts and connections will not only be able to lead to the expansion of possibilities for psychological activities, but also make their *limits, which also must be defined more exactly*, clearer. The clarification of practically relevant criteria for the differentiation of psychological from non-psychological problems is thus related to the determination of the relationship of the expansion and limitation of possibilities for psychological action. The dynamic of this type of discussion is, among other things, based on the fact that the research question itself prevents that discussions about psychological practice naturally end in a

demand for the absolute quantitative expansion of psychology so convenient for professional politicians.

VIII. Generalizing

Referring to the kind of knowledge the project can develop, you have to consider as a consequence of what I said above: *Subjects exist in the plural, but they don't exist in an average.* You are able to relate single cases to each other, but you must not pass them to account. *The single cases aren't deviating exceptions, but the idea of exception deviates from the idea of subjectivity.* Generalizing doesn't mean central tendencies, but developing the possibility of individual subsumtion under the experienced realization of generalized meanings, i.e. action possibilities (cf. Markard 1991. It ist very essential, that in generalizing we don't loose the single case or the subject as the analytic unity founding meaning.

In this way we would like to work against the tendency, observed by Filsinger & Kleiber (1985, 22) that the "seeking for the societal relevance of the own scientific branch, which began in the sixties, 15 years later is substituted by seeking a personal sense and usefullness of studying." To come to an end: This separation of societal and subjective relevanve, which represents a typical psychological way of thinking, only would fix personalizing solutions of the problem of relevance which are structurally in vain. Hence, the analysis of practice would be thrown back to a status, which had been critized by Holzkamp's relevance paper, mentioned at the beginning of my lecture.

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