Klaus Holzkamps Rezeption in Nordamerika: Eine Begegnungsgeschichte

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Zusammenfassung

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   Als Herausgeber von *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, einer führenden englisch-sprachigen Zeitschrift, die dem kulturhistorischen Ansatz gewidmet ist und die dieses Engagement in ihrem Namen trägt, lese ich sehr viele Artikel und erfahre daher, wie Autoren aus allen Teilen der Welt ihre Forschungsobjekte und Forschungstätigkeiten theoretisieren. Aus diesem Blickwinkel kann ich sagen, dass nur sehr wenige Autor(In)en während des letzten Jahrzehnts auf das Werk Klaus Holzkamps zurückgegriffen oder verwiesen haben. In diesem Aufsatz stelle ich meine persönliche Begegnung mit Holzkamps Werk sowie meine Begegnungen mit denjenigen die ihn persönlich kannten oder mit ihm gearbeitet haben, dar. Ich befasse mich im Besonderen mit den Überschneidungen seines Werkes mit den Werken anderer Denker, mit denen ich mich vor meinem Aufgreifen von Holzkamps Arbeiten beschäftigt habe. Diese anderen Werke waren für mich Momente, die mein eigenes Lesen vermittelten, und daher auch meine Einschätzung der »Grundlegung der Psychologie« geprägt haben. Im Gegensatz zu anderen Autoren, die die Kritische Psychologie und das Werk und Projekt Holzkamps im Untergehen sehen, glaube ich, dass es noch sehr viel zu tun gibt um seine Gedanken und Theorien durch einen Prozess tatsächlich dialektisch-materialistischer Entwicklung voll zur Entfaltung zu bringen.

Schüsselwörter: *Dialektischer Materialismus, Praxis, Theorie, Methoden, Geschichte, Gesellschaft*

Summary

As the editor of *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, the premier English-language journal committed to the cultural-historical approach, which actually bears this commitment in its name, I come to read many articles how scholars around the world theorize their research objects and activities. Few authors in our journal, if any in recent years, have drawn on the work of Klaus Holzkamp. In this article, I provide an account of my personal encounters with the work of Holzkamp and with some of the individuals who have known him or worked in his wake. I particularly focus on the intersections that I see with the works of other scholars, which I have known before and more extensively by the time I came to read the *Grundlegung der Psychologie*. These other works constitute a mediating element in my own reading and appreciation of Holzkamp. In contrast to others who see a decline in Critical Psychology and the work and agenda of Klaus Holzkamp, I believe that there remains a considerable amount of work to be done to bring his thoughts to fruition in and through a true process of dialectical materialist development.

1. Introduction

Today I am the editor of *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, the premier English-speaking journal that bears key concepts from the Russian school of Marxist psychology in its name. My arduous and thorny trajectory in coming to understand the work of one of its key scholars, Klaus Holzkamp, in a deeper, speak dialectical way, is intertwined with my development as a scholar. Certainly in a fitting manner, I have come to appreciate the work of Holzkamp as I grabbled with developing methods and theory during a project in inner-city schools in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where 98% of students are African American and 90% of the students live in families whose combined parental income lies below the poverty-line (compared to about 12% poverty across the board and about 24% among Blacks). Together with the students, teachers, teachers in training, administrators, and university supervisors and professors, we attempted to find ways in which all the stakeholders could gain greater control over their life conditions, which, as we found out, they could get by contributing to the collective control and determi-

nation of their situations in the school. It is after we had developed certain emancipatory practices – to a great part geared toward dealing with the theory/re-search-praxis gap that teachers experience in university-school transitions and collaborations – that I happened to come across the work of Klaus Holzkamp. His writings have inspired me ever since. Now, I am not, nor have I aspired to be, a »student« of Klaus Holzkamp's. I have not come through the Psychologisches Institut at the Freie Universität (Berlin). I therefore do not claim to read his work in any authoritative way, as some of his »real« students or interpreters might do.

The purpose of this article is to revisit my encounter with the work of Holzkamp, its uses and difficulties of reception in the Anglo-Saxon literature. Among a number of problems for a proper appreciation is the fact that there are few English Holzkamp texts available so that it comes upon those reading in German to contribute to the spreading of his approach. My version of the *Grundlegung* actually is something like a »samizdat« version, which I obtained through a network of relations in and to Germany. When the publisher Campus, at the time of my request, no longer had copies in print and did not foresee the production of further copies, someone quite supportive of my work had a copy produced and bound, fittingly, in red hard cover. I continue to appreciate the book and the work of Holzkamp generally as an inspiration for further develop-ment of social psychology, and, though some may think Critical Psychology is in a decline (e.g., Teo 1998), believe that there is a lot of potential that still looks for (materialist dialectical) development.

2. Coteaching and Cogenerative Dialogue Practice: Research from the Position of the Subject

Die Philosophen haben die Welt nur verschieden *interpretiert*, es kommt drauf an, sie zu verändern. Marx & Engels 1968, 7

Even before encountering the work of Klaus Holzkamp and Critical Psycho-logy[1], I was engaged in forms of praxis that was at the heart of the person and the movement associated with his leadership; perhaps it was my extensive grounding in emancipatory praxis that Critical Psychology fell on fertile ground. As a former high school teacher in the Canadian provinces of Quebec, Newfound-land, and Ontario, transforming more so than understanding what we teachers were doing in schools was a central aspect of my self-understanding. Later, when

I became a university professor, I continued to work at the elbow of teachers to produce together with them resources that allowed them to learn teaching science and allowed their students to learn science in the process. Although I came to Holzkamp's work late, I have found it useful both to conceptualize the praxis-related work we have done with inner-city schools in the attempt to assist teachers, students, and school administrators to increase their power to act and their room to maneuver through the gaining of greater control over their life conditions by participating, among others, in cogenerative dialogues. We had developed two practices to deal with expanding the room to maneuver of the agential subjects involved: coteaching and cogenerative dialoguing.

In *cogenerative dialogues* (e.g., Figure 1), all stakeholders in a particular situation – which in classroom teaching include students (representatives), teachers, new teachers (»student teachers,« »interns«), university supervisors, department heads, (assistant) principals, and researchers – come together for the dual purpose of (a) understanding a commonly experienced situation, for example, a science lesson and (b) building strategies for action designed to improve aspects of their normal collaborative and jointly-though-differently experienced praxis. The form of joint praxis reflected upon generally is that of everyday lessons but could also be the praxis of teaching staff dealing with administrative issues, situations in which students may not be a part because they are, in this situation, not immediate stakeholders.

An important, emancipatory aspect of this work was that we threw out of the window the practice of triangulation common among researchers that use qualitative-interpretive methods for collecting and analyzing data sources. Thus, it made no longer sense to us to compare the articulated understandings of a Black high school student with those of a white 30-year veteran university professor, even though both had participated in the same lessons. The cogenerative dialogues were designed to expand the individual possibilities of different and institutionally differently located stakeholders rather than to wash out and eliminate their different experiences and accounts by distilling what was common across their perspectives. But they also constituted a way of producing new knowledge that we researchers communicated to our university-based peers.

In the course of our research, we became suspicious of researchers who claim, from their assumed-to-be-objective positions of »fly on the wall,« to provide

Figure 1. This video offprint shows a generative dialogue situation after a lesson in chemistry and involves two students (#1, #3 from left), two teachers (#4, #5 from left), a supervisor (#2), and a researcher (#6, me).

ethnographically adequate accounts of classroom events specifically and across schooling more generally. Based on my own work as a classroom teacher and my subsequent research that I conducted by teaching together with regular classroom teachers, I had developed *coteaching*. Coteaching (e.g., Figure 2) differs from other approaches like »team teaching« in that all teaching participants – which include regular teachers, teaching interns, teacher supervisors (administrators, university-based intern supervisors), and researchers – are aware of and take part in the *collective* responsibility. The participating teachers plan lessons together, implement them together, and evaluate them together. Thus, rather than having one teacher doing »one piece of the puzzle« and another a different one for the purpose of dividing labor, all teachers take responsibility for all parts of lessons.

This practice has shown tremendous benefits for inservice and preservice teacher learning not only in our context but subsequently also in contexts around the world (e.g., Roth & Tobin, 2005). Joint responsibility also meant that rather than complaining about one thing or another not working, the teacher who notes that the current lesson can be improved does so right here and then. I then developed a theoretical perspective that attributed primacy to praxis and how practitioners perceive it.

We have made this coteaching praxis perspective the topic of reflexive conversations, which we subsequently came to call »cogenerative dialogues.« In these dialogues, the previous teaching experience became the object through various forms of objectivation. Among others, we used videotapes as a way to re-view the events, now through the perspective of the camera lens. The images provided a sort of touchstone, a common object that we could use as an objectively given anchor for our personal accounts of the experienced events. As common object, the recorded events were objectified, and with it, (aspects of) our experiences. It was not that we considered the camera images more objective. Rather, they became a tool in the objectification of the experience in and through our verbal accounts of them.

Our ultimate attempt was to bring forth and about a set of resources that would allow all participants to actively create, to a considerable extent, the conditions to which they are subject to. Although this is one of the basic assumption, a double relation (»Doppelbeziehung«), on which Holzkamp grounds his theoretical and his practical work, our own understanding of this relation came from a cultural sociological position according to which each human being both (actively, creatively) produces society anew in the very same instance that he or she reproduces aspects of this society (e.g., Sewell 1992). I had a firm desire to better come to grips theoretically with the emancipation in and from the classrooms and to theorize the relationship between shared praxis that realizes the societally mediated activity (Tätigkeit, dejatel'nost') of schooling and the shared praxis of reflecting on the former.

Some of our early collaborators extended the emancipatory work in schools. For example, Jennifer Beers, a teacher who had come to know cogenerative dialogues as a teaching intern subsequently used and developed the praxis in her own classroom (e.g., LaVan & Beers 2005). In Jennifer's approach to cogenera-

Figure 2. This video offprint composite shows three teachers coteaching (far left, far right, and center with blue shirt), myself, the fourth one, standing next to the camera. Coteachers take part in the collective responsibility for a lesson or course for the purpose of increasing student learning possibilities and for learning to teach.

tive dialogue she and her students used video vignettes selected from recordings of classroom activity to promote the emergence of cogenerated understandings and collective responsibilities for agreed upon decisions about roles and insights into possible ways to distribute power and accountability in the classroom. Various members of the student research group selected video clips on the basis of their salience to the quality of teaching and learning in the class. To assist students in becoming critical, she taught them aspects of social analysis and social theory including such constructs as agency, structure, resistance and social and cultural capital. That is, she facilitated the emergence of sociological discourse that allowed students to become critical of their own practices for the purposes of transforming them such that they increased their action possibilities. Decisions about salience were made in accordance with the student researchers' understandings of social theory and of incidents that occurred in videotape and captured the group's attention and interest.

By the time I came to read various texts that form Klaus Holzkamp's legacy, in particular at some later stage the *Grundlegung der Psychologie* (1983b) and *Lernen: Subjektwissenschaftliche Grundlegung* (1993), I had already a firm grounding in practice theory through my reading of Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Lave and in critical (Marxist) approaches to cultural phenomena that had arisen in the British context of schooling (e.g., Valerie Walkerdine, Paul Willis). While working on the attempt to better theorize my research in the schools, I came to re-read a chapter by Jean Lave, the introduction to Understanding Practice: Perspectives on Activity and Context (Chaiklin & Lave 1993). I noted the name of Klaus Holzkamp in the references; the next chapter I read was that by Ole Dreier, and again, Holzkamp was referenced repeatedly. As I did not know then about this scholar, I began to search on the Internet, and the first text I came across was »Der Mensch als Subjekt wissenschaftlicher Methodik« (Holzkamp 1983a).

3. Initial Reception

At the time I first encountered activity theory generally and Klaus Holzkamp's work more specifically I was not trained to think and research in a dialectical manner. But over the course of nearly a decade, I have learned to think dialectically in and through my encounters with Aleksei Nikolaevich Leont'ev, Klaus Holzkamp, Lev Semenovich Vygotsky, Evald Il'enkov, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Felix Mikhailov. Initially I was a naïve reader, as any non-dialectically trained Anglo-Saxon scholar, possibly reproducing readings that other Western researchers might realize when they first encounter dialectical materialism. As I understand it today, in the process of such reading the original is transformed to such an extent that it becomes unrecognizable. But, this too Holzkamp would have appreciated: How other than with our naïve readings can we begin to embark on a trajectory that leads to more mature understanding of a dialectical, critical psychology? Any historical method of studying learning has to grabble with the fact that my current understanding may and often is the antithesis of what I am to learn, for example, when students of science come to schools with ways of seeing the world that are inconsistent with the scientific canon that they are to acquire. (In technical terminology, these prior understandings are referred to as »misconceptions,« »alternative frameworks,« or »naïve understandings.«) Only a historical account of how someone comes to eventually appreciate works such as that of

A. N. Leont'ev or Holzkamp allows us to understand the (social, psychological) difficulties of self-transformation that occur when we expand from reading in commonsensical ways to reading in the ways of mature practitioners.

I first read Holzkamp and the works of some of his collaborators (Morus Markard, Ole Dreier) during the summer of 2000 while working on a series of journal articles and on a book about our research on and experiences of coteaching and cogenerative dialoguing in the inner-city schools and neighborhoods of Philadelphia. (For a white person, it is imprudent to walk at night in the areas where we worked during the day; and even during the day we walked some of the areas only when we were together with others.) The following set of entries in my research journal shows how my reading of Holzkamp and my thinking about the school situation came to be intertwined:

> »*Unity of Praxis and Learning*Holzkamp (1983a) argues that the irreducible uniqueness of the individual has to be accounted for in general models. The basic question on the specific level is to realize a specific praxis in the investigative process, out of which it is simultaneously possible to capture under which conditions extension of action potential is made possible. That is, these conditions for the extension of action potential are to be understood *out* of praxis itself, under inclusion of the researcher, the inclusion of the particular researcher »me.« What is important is that each individual is not just a »me« but that it also understands that all each Other who shares the situation is also a »me« who stands in a particular relation to me. This relation, which, in fact, constitutes an intersubjective framework, must not be left out in the research process.« … Because we are involved in praxis, we experience the conditions that enable praxis. The question now is how we understand praxis, not in terms of immediate experience (understanding) but in a generalized form. This involves a dialectic of understanding and explanation, the former, experienced in praxis, but constituting the basis for the latter. But only explanation, hermeneutic and critical analysis that wrestles with the pre-constructed that surrounds us, can develop understanding beyond the immediate situation and thereby lead to an increase in the possibilities for action. (June 13 2000; file: Notes 102)

Looking back at these first notes concerning Holzkamp in my research, it is no longer clear to me whether some paragraphs are commentaries on Holzkamp or reflections on the ongoing work in the schools, where we were concerned with praxis and with changing praxis out of the praxis itself. It is clear that I read Holzkamp's (1983a) commentaries about method in a very personal way, concerned with the objectification of experiences in and through the conversations with others for whom the control over their own life conditions was the primary motive for participating – not unlike Holzkamp's account of the praxis of women affected by violence, the object of which was to gain greater independence. Throughout his paper, Holzkamp was arguing for a unity of praxis and learning, a form of exemplary praxis that leads to the evolution of knowledge precisely because it is real concrete praxis. Jean Lave (1993) later introduced this idea to English-speaking audiences, when she wrote that the nature of knowledge is problematical, not that of learning, which inevitably occurs in and through praxis. (Following Anglo-Saxon customs, she actually wrote »practice,« which, because it refers to patterned actions and therefore to an abstraction rather than the solicitude of concrete action [praxis] leads to a different appreciation of where and how learning occurs.)

During that same summer of 2000 I also read extensively the work of Yrjö Engeström; his work, too, entered the conceptualizations of the articles and book that I conceived during that period. Through both Holzkamp and Engeström I came to know about their intellectual heritage and forefather: A. N. Leont'ev. I was not, however, in a position to appreciate the differences in the work of Holzkamp and Engeström other than that the former appeared to focus on the subject of experience making conscious and grounded (»begründete«) decisions about next actions rather than being merely subject to extant conditions, whereas the latter focused on the objective *structures* of activity systems. It became clear to me only years later that if anyone it was Holzkamp who reproduced and developed the method that Leont'ev had articulated, outlined, and created in germinal form. That is, Holzkamp and his colleagues within the Berlin Critical Psychology group further developed the materialist dialectical development of method and topic that Leont'ev had seeded.

4. Relation to the Work of Others

4.1 Establishing a Critical Science

When I read my first Holzkamp texts, I did not come tabula rasa. I had already conducted research for years and, among others, had developed tremendous depth in a range of theoretical approaches, including Piagetian and neo-Piagetian theory, cognitive psychology, social constructivism, (cognitive) phenomenology, ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, and discursive psychology. Such prior experiences, as I point out above, must be thought of as the necessary ground on which my reading occurred and the resource for evolving new understandings. As I read, I immediately realized that some of the things we find in Holzkamp could also be found in the works of others, with more or less family resemblance. I am not a purist who feels that he has to hold up the canon. *Grundlegung* is not and never has been something like the Bible for orthodox Christians of all brands – the evangelical movements in the US being much more orthodox than Catholics and Russian Orthodox.

But because I do not consider myself to be a Holzkamp exegete, a »true« follower, or a »true« Critical Psychologist, I can read the works of other scholars with an open mind and understand and appreciate the similarities, for example, between Holzkamp and the Canadian (Marxist) sociologist Dorothy E. Smith or Holzkamp and the French dialectical hermeneutic philosopher Paul Ricœur. What I have always been interested in is the development of ideas so that they are helpful in reflecting on and developing praxis rather than in developing an intellectual school that is more concerned with the purity of its lineage than with doing real work, for real people, assisting them in getting a better handle on their situation and, in so doing, emancipate themselves (a bit) from rather oppressive situations. In the pursuit of the object that I construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct, I adapt the method to make it suitable to the object rather than the other way around – which would be the Procrustean way of persons treating the whole world as a nail because the only tool they have is a hammer.

For me one of the interesting aspects of Holzkamp's approach is his categorical reconstruction of psychological concepts. In his own »Erfahrungsbericht« (1983a), he writes about how he realized that what happens in psychological experiments is independent of the concepts used. These experiments do not have what it takes to test the concepts themselves; and they have even less of what it

takes to deconstruct the concepts experimentally. And then Holzkamp asks an important question that goes something like this: »Where do these concepts come from and where/when do they get their scientific pertinence?«

In this first Holzkamp text that I read, I immediately noted the parallel in this respect with the reflexive sociology of Pierre Bourdieu (1992), who notes that the *preconstructed* concepts are everywhere so that the sociologist often finds precisely what he presupposes to be the case. Thus,

> »the construction of a scientific object requires first and foremost a break with common sense, that is, with the representations shared by all, whether they be the mere commonplaces of ordinary existence or official representations, often inscribed in institutions and thus present both in the objectivity of social organizations and in the minds of participants.« (p. 235)

Bourdieu proposes the practice of radical doubt, which parallels the »suspicion of ideology« (»Ideologieverdacht«) that critical psychologists are asked to enact (Markard 1993). Already in Bourdieu, we find the assertion that if we leave our thought in a state of the unthought, as an ideology, we condemn ourselves to be nothing more than an instrument of that which we claim to think, which is, the ruling relations that Dorothy Smith writes about in all of her works. Consistent with the Holzkampian critique of traditional psychology (»Variablenpsychologie«), which never interrogates the concepts that it generally has inherited from everyday discourses, Bourdieu critiques »scientific practice that fails to question itself,« which, as he asserts, »does not, properly speaking, know what it does« (p. 236). Such a science reveals something in the object that is not really objectivated since the object consists in and of the very principles of the apprehension of the object. Such a science can only be part scholarly in that it

»*borrows its problems, its concepts, and its instruments of knowledge from the social world*, and that it often *records* as a datum, as an empirical given independent of the act of knowledge and of the science which performs it, facts, representations or institutions which are the product of a prior stage of science. In short, it records itself without recognizing itself . . . « (p. 236).

Thus, as for Holzkamp (1983a), real science begins with the testing of the ensemble of fundamental assumptions that are made in adopting particular

(theoretical) concepts. Bourdieu recommends a historical approach, which begins by retracing the history of the emergence of the problems one chooses to study, its progressive constitution in and through the ruling relations, by »the collective work, oftentimes accomplished through competition and struggle, that proved necessary to make such and such issues to be known and recognized« (p. 238).

Language is a repository of naturalized, black-boxed, and calcified preconstructions that are ignored as such and that function as unconscious instruments of construction and domination; it constitutes the medium of ideology as such (Bakhtine [Volochinov] 1977). Examples of instruments of construction and domination are bureaucratic conceptualizations, including all sorts of taxonomies. Among these taxonomies are those, as the Canadian feminist Marxist sociologist Dorothy E. Smith (e.g. 1990) points out, of the »standard North American family« or »single parent family« that have equal currency among policy makers, sociologists, school practitioners, and even those affected in the final end, the real, concrete everyday people raising kids. The way these concepts work is this: they produce articulations that bring together »objectified and universalized systems of administration and the actualities always local, always particular, always individual, and inexhaustibly various« (p. 144). As an example, Smith uses the way in which self-inflicted death (suicide) is talked about. Thus, the expression »she killed herself« does not necessarily commit us to a language that speaks from a particular position – i.e., which comes with particular prepositions, suppositions, presuppositions, dispositions, and so on and therefore defines a particular subjectivity. The expression »she committed suicide« is an institutionalized factual statement provided by and within a complex apparatus of surveying, governing, administering, and managing. By taking on and employing such concepts and discourses, those affected contribute to the reproduction of the concepts and discourses, which therefore constitute a form of ideology that any emancipatory project has to tackle through ideological critique. If a woman describes and understands herself by means of the term »single parent,« she subscribes to and reproduces this category, which may not always be a blessing for her. Similarly to the self-critical stances that Bourdieu and Smith take with respect to sociology, Holzkamp's work concerned the ideological critique within, and of, the discipline of psychology.

Consistent with Holzkamp's own intentions, Smith develops – in *Institutional Ethnography* (2005) particularly – a method that bears great family resemblance with the approach Holzkamp has advocated and developed over the years. Smith is concerned with the way the social is actually experienced, by real people, engaged, for example, in the real work of waiting in a nursing home. She is concerned with the everyday world, the lifeworld of people, and how they use any available resources in their everyday praxis of coping. But

«[t]he actualities of the everyday world don't tell you what to observe and record. In addition to its problematic, it needs theoretical specification to guide the direction of the ethnographer's gaze. I've called that theoretical specification an *ontology* because I want to emphasize that what we are aiming to discover really happens or is happening.« (p. 209, original emphasis)

This ontology »starts from Marx and Engels's ontology of a social science that sets aside concepts, speculation, and imagination in favor of engaging with actual people's actual activities« (p. 209). This »setting aside« of concepts is also at heart of Holzkamp's attempt to do a categorical analysis of the human psyche. He points out that research never can stay with a mere articulation of subjective experiences in the way he sees the phenomenological project. Rather, and consistent with Smith, he seeks to derive the concrete realization of subjective experience as mediated by societal processes, where the relationship between individual and collective is understood as one of general collective possibilities that are concretely realized (and therefore singularized) in concrete and founded behaviors. In this way, both scholars allow us to understand what we have practiced in cogenerative dialoguing, acknowledging and using the different perspectives that arose from our different institutional locations without attributing primacy to any one perspective. But rather than falling into the trap of mystifying »bourgeois« concepts as he sees them in ethnomethodology or symbolic interactionism (Holzkamp 1984), Smith advocates lifeworld analyses – sometimes in the form of conversation analytic and ethnomethodological studies – combined with the critical (Marxist) analysis of the determinations that are inaccessible to the actors themselves. Any science of the subject has to begin with the lifeworld, which provides the ground (»Grund«) and the grounds (»Begründungen«) for the action of the subject.

The interesting aspect of Smith's work is constituted by the intersections with the project engaged by Holzkamp and Critical Psychology. Thus, she promotes *institutional ethnography* as a method that has a lot in common with *Subjektwissenschaft*. These intersections arise from her concerns for both the lived realities of people – such as a mother who raises her children on her own – and the institutional discourses that they come to be caught up in that they in fact contribute to reifying. The concept of »single mom« not only is a category for the (sociological) classification of the family but also is a resource that leads to particular actions within schools, for example, special services, treatments, and considerations for the children. Smith emphasizes in particular the standpoint of women, who »are always located in particular, actual places, knowing the society only from within« (p. 33). This is precisely the position of the subject that becomes the participant in the research. Smith's institutional ethnography, which explicitly takes the standpoint of the people for whom the research is done, therefore is consistent, in my reading, with Subjektwissenschaft. At the same time, as Holzkamp points out in various places, the life conditions cannot be changed from within as long as the determinations that are imported into the lifeworld, for example in the form of discourses and concepts, remain unknown. Only a critical institutional analysis of the ruling relations, necessarily a historical analysis, will lead to an understanding of the subjects' present situation in a cultural-historical and societal context. Readers may be familiar with Holzkamp's (1983a) story of the father and son, beating up on each other when the latter drops out of school, coming to understand and change their situation only after they come to understand the source of their problem in the exploitative relation at the father's work and the objectifications of their own mutual relation. 4.2 Critical Psychology as a First Psychology/Philosophy?

The ten thousand things are born of being. Being is born of not being. 40 Tao Te Ching

How did humankind develop to the point that it could reflexively look at itself and do anything like philosophy, psychology, or sociology? How did humans come to think of Being as something that constitutes beings (»Seiendes,« »the ten thousand things«) when clearly before anthropogenesis they did not have the capacity to think such thoughts?[2] Even though Holzkamp and Holzkampians might reject phenomenology as having some shared concerns[3], there are numerous

parallels in the projects of phenomenology and Critical Psychology. Let me articulate a few. First, there is a critique of operating with concepts that have not themselves been questioned. Thus, Martin Heidegger (1977) himself articulated the possibilities and dangers that come with original and originary, praxis-based understanding and the existential pre-structure of Being. In the circle (»Zirkel« not »Kreis«) of understanding

»verbirgt sich eine positive Möglichkeit ursprünglichsten Erkennens, die freilich in echter Weise nur dann ergriffen ist, wenn die Auslegung verstanden hat, daß ihre erste, ständige und letzte Aufgabe bleibt, sich jeweils Vorhabe, Vorsicht und Vorgriff nicht durch Einfälle und Volksbegriffe vorgeben zu lassen, sondern in deren Ausarbeitung aus den Sachen selbst her das wissenschaftliche Thema zu sichern.« (p. 153)

In the same way as the philosopher, Holzkamp does not want to operate with concepts that are outside the scientific program, that come from somewhere, taken on from somewhere, or are the result of one's cogitations (»außerhalb des wissenschaftlichen Programms, die kommen irgendwo her, die hat man übernommen, sich selber ausgedacht oder so,« Holzkamp 1983a). It comes as little surprise, therefore, if radical doubt is also a theme that we find in critical hermeneutics (Ricœur 1986), which, though it may speak from a different place than the critique of ideology, raises a legitimate claim that bears family resemblance with the latter: »interest for emancipation leads back to the ninth [sic] thesis on Feuerbach: 'Philosophers interpreted the world; the point now is to change it.' An eschatology of non-violence thereby constitutes the ultimate philosophical horizon of a critique of ideology« (p. 399, my translation). For Ricœur, it is only insofar as I place myself in the other's point of view that I can come to confront myself, in and as of objectified being, with my present interpretive horizon and with my prejudices. And, in the same way as Critical Psychology, critical hermeneutics is dialectical and materialist, or so I have read and interpreted Ricœur's work.

Second, Holzkamp defines his approach as one that develops a method for testing the scientific soundness of logical fundamental concepts (»wissenschaftliche Tragfähigkeit logischer Grundbegriffe«), which he denotes by the term »categories« (Kategorien). This method does not have an equivalent in traditional psychology, though it has equivalents in other critical sciences. I see in this attempt of grounding concepts categorically an effort similar to the one oriented toward

establishing a *first philosophy*, that is, of establishing the grounds on which anything like discoursing, culture, reflection, philosophy, and so forth could have established itself in concrete practice. Correspondingly, at issue for Holzkamp is the attempt of the scientific construction of a new set of fundamental psychological concepts on a paradigmatic level (»Versuch auf einer paradigmatischen Ebene eine neue Sorte von psychologischen Grundbegriffen wissenschaftlich abzuleiten«). We cannot do philosophy unless the very ground of philosophizing, the use of words, the experience of others and self, and the role of the primacy of praxis in human understanding have been established. We cannot do psychology or sociology critically unless we work with scientifically established categories rather than with concepts that constitute a form of reified common sense and ideology. Among the notable philosophers attempting to reconstruct philosophy on categorical grounds are Emmanuel Levinas (e.g. 1978) and Jean-Luc Nancy (e.g. 1993). Thus, prior to any conceptualization, prior to any Being or beings recognized as such, there have been the utterly practical – that is, prior to all thematization – experiences of *touch, proximity, sexuality, reciprocity,* and with that constituted the unthematized foundation of anthropomorphosis.

As for Levinas and his attempt to establish a first philosophy, the following quote captures its essence. Levinas summarizes his project as one that attempts to

»recognize in subjectivity an ex-ception that puts out of order the conjunction of *essence*, being, and 'difference'; to perceive in the substantiality of the subject, in the hard nucleus of the 'unique' within me, in my unparalleled identity, the substitution of the other; to think this abnegation, before any will, as an exposition, merciless, to the trauma of transcendence according to a susception more – and otherwise – passive than receptivity, passion, and finitude; to derive from this nonassumable susceptibility the praxis and the knowledge internal to the world.« (Levinas 1978, 10, my translation)

Levinas, as Holzkamp, does not want to begin theorizing without interrogating the concept of Being, simply presupposing it and its knowledge. He wants to begin prior to and beyond Being and essences. Similarly, only a psychology that theorizes the emergence of culture and consciousness and that has the means to theorize itself and its praxis through a reflexive turn is a real science. I see the *Grundlegung* as an attempt to show precisely how evolution brings a species to a

point that it, in a qualitative step leading to consciousness and therefore self-consciousness, becomes subject to a very different change process, one subject to the laws of culture and history. Phenomenological philosophers only begin at that point where consciousness is or has been emerging; they do so but only in general terms rather than in the terms of a dialectical materialist science. Holzkamp wants to go further back, tracking the psyche and its predecessors back to their evolutionary beginnings. Thus, whereas in first philosophy we find the nonthematized experiences of proximity, touch, the face, the undifferentiated with, all of which we can associate with the ground upon which anthropogenesis occurred, it is Holzkamp who concretizes the means and processes by which something like a primate eventually could become human. His five-step process – in which quantitative changes in the individual and environment lead to the emergence of new, qualitatively different functions and structures – is consistent with a catastrophe-theory-based, morphogenetic account of the evolution of structure and functions (e.g. Thom 1981).

Nevertheless, phenomenological philosophers do attempt to wrestle with the conditions prior to Being. In a manner that has had its springboard in materialist dialectical way of thinking, the beginning is set prior to the »you« and »me,« prior to the experience of »self« in the form of a »we« that is neither intersubjectivity nor collective subject but rather an immediate mediation of the with, a plural fold of the origin (Nancy 2000). But Jean-Luc Nancy goes further by disallowing even the dialectical as a starting point: »Being is directly and immediately mediated *by itself*; it is itself mediation; it is mediation without any instrument, and it is nondialectic: dia-lectic without dialectic It is negativity without use, the *nothing* of the with and the nothing as the with« (p. 94). »Before all representational grasp there is the experience, before consciousness and its subject, before science, and theology, and philosophy, there is that: the that of, precisely, there is« (Nancy 1993, 4)

As the phenomenological philosophers, Holzkamp engages in the reconstruction of the human psyche that begins prior to any form of consciousness and experience. His approach is characterized by the attempt to begin with an *objective* definition originary form of the psyche (»Grundform des Psychischen«) that does not *presuppose* consciousness. Drawing on and elaborating a dialectical materialist method, Holzkamp constructs a possible trajectory from some originary

»sensibility,« an idea that he has taken from Leont'ev, to the emergence of cooperation, culture, mind, activity, and consciousness. We see here the family resemblances in the attempts emerging from phenomenological philosophy in establishing a first philosophy, on the one side, and Holzkamp in his attempt to build the true foundations of any psychology, a Grundlegung der Psychologie, on the other side. Consistent with the critical (Marxist) method, the specifically human end form has to be a specific realization of the possibilities embodied in the initial, originary form.

In summary, then, in my reading of the available texts these phenomenological studies pursue precisely the same agenda that I read Holzkamp as having pursued. For example, during a discussion with others concerning the function of phenomenological analyses in psychology, Holzkamp (1985) noted:

»Gestern wurde dargestellt: Intentionalität, Situiertheit des Menschen, Reziprozität der Perspektiven, Perspektivität usw. All dies ist für mich eine Art von strukturellen Grundbestimmungen menschlicher Erfahrung, und wenn ich jetzt Psychologie mache, kann ich dahinter nicht zurück: Zwar ist das nicht alles, was ich mache, sondern ich fange jetzt mit meinen inhaltlichen Analysen erst an, aber es darf am Ende nichts rauskommen, was hinter das zurückfällt, was in diesen Bestimmungen drin ist. Wenn ich anfange mit meinen logisch-historischen Analysen und am Ende kommt irgend was raus, bei dem das Moment der Reziprozität der Perspektiven rausgefallen ist, ist meine Analyse Mist, und zwar deswegen, weil sie nicht mehr von dem spricht, von dem sie zu reden behauptet.« (pp. 149–150)

A first philosophy attempts to ground the subject matter such that none of the specifically human experiences, such as Being (»Sein,« »Être«) and beings (»Seiendes,« »étant«), can be taken as the starting point precisely because, as Holzkamp notes, the analyses cannot go further backward to interrogate these starting points.

5. Reading Holzkamp

Reading Holzkamp is difficult, even, as I found out from my colleagues, for many Germans and German colleagues next to impossible. Reading Holzkamp and, more so, understanding him and his thought becomes near impossible in the few translations that I have found and read (e.g., Holzkamp 1991a, 1991b).

Now Holzkamp himself knew about the difficulties that his *Grundlegung* posed, for in this preface in the first publication he notes »Man wird mir sagen, es mache große Mühe, dieses Buch zu lesen. Ich halte dem entgegen, daß es auch Mühe gemacht hat, es zu schreiben. Ich würde diese Arbeit nicht der Öffentlichkeit vorlegen, wenn ich nicht der Überzeugung wäre, daß sich deren Lektüre lohnt« (p. 21). There is quite a bit of hubris here, one that may be characteristic of the German academic context that is very different than my North American one. In fact, most research journals in psychology, education, sociology, and other disciplines will return manuscripts for major revisions or outright reject them because they use »arcane« language and »jargon« as soon as the reading levels (e.g., Flesch Kincade) go beyond grade 12.

Here, too, there are parallels between Holzkamp and Heidegger: the language of both is considered to be arcane, both in their originals and in those cases where other scholars adopt the language of either for their own purposes (to borrow an expression by Mikhail Bakhtin). I have repeatedly had this experience when attempting to theorize what I was doing in the terms of phenomenology or Critical Psychology. I do not agree with the reviewer practice of avoiding engagement by drawing on the »arcane language« and »jargon« weapons (i.e., rejecting an article because it uses or develops unfamiliar terms); but I do believe that our scholarly discourses need to be suitable to efficiently communicate. All disciplines develop their discourses and it does not make sense to charge psychologists, sociologists, or educators for using language in the same way that it does not make sense to accuse car mechanics or electricians to use jargon. From a dialectical materialist perspective, the word addresses itself to an interlocutor and is a function of the person of the interlocutor. There word therefore changes depending on the societal, hierarchical, institutional positions and relations of the author and audience (Bakhtine [Volochinov] 1977). From the very perspective he adopts, Holzkamp therefore is required to take into account the generalized other, who will »countersign« his texts in and through reading.

Holzkamp therefore bears responsibility for and to his audience, and the responsibility to communicate in ways that his ideas can be reproduced at a much larger scale than it does. This is particularly the case with the translations of some of his terms into English, which make little sense and are impossible to understand and adopt. One example is the rendering of »Handlungsfähigkeit« as *action potence*.

The term »potence« is elaborated in dictionaries by the terms power, ability, and strength. Whereas it is correct to render »Fähigkeit« by the term »ability,« and therefore »potence,« the term ordinarily is used to refer to sexual prowess. Likewise, the term is awkward, old-fashioned, and may be experienced even as revulsive. When I talked with Charles Tolman about the choice of the term, who both wrote a book about Critical Psychology (Tolman 1994) and co-edited, with Wolfgang Maiers a volume on the topic (Tolman & Maiers 1991), he told me »Klaus wanted it like that« and that Holzkamp did not give in to suggestions for another term.

Just to develop this point a little further. There is precedence for other, equivalent but less cumbersome terms, such as the French »pouvoir d'agir« (Ricœur 1990), which is generally translated into English as »power to act.« Not only have we used this term in our work, and feel it constitutes a suitable rendering of »Handlungsfähigkeit,« but also the term resonates with the term power, which is crucial in understanding Foucault cited in *Lernen*, and em*power*ment. Expanding one's power to act appears to me precisely the expansive learning (»expansives Lernen«) that is at the heart of Holzkamp's own agenda in his critique of traditional conceptions of theories of learning and teaching. Expansive learning increases a person's room to maneuver, Spielraum, a term that we found useful in the theorization of learning to teach (e.g. Roth et al. 2001).

Having done a lot of research and published many research articles and books over the past 20 years, I have come to realize that it is not just about »communicating my ideas.« Publishing is about writing *for* the audience about something of interest *to* the audience using a language that has come from the other and, through my writing, returns to the other. If all I have is something of singular relevance to me, why should it be of interest to others? »How can I,« Holzkamp should have perhaps asked, »assist readers to read my discourse if they are fluent only in a very different language?« Communication between people who speak different languages means that the participants in the conversation find and build some third language – Sabir, as I repeatedly called it borrowing the name normally used to denote the hybrid language of Mediterranean merchants – that allows intelligible expression and mutual understanding. Therefore, as any reading and writing theorist knows, communication cannot be thought from the perspective of one actor but only from the perspective of the dialectical

author–reader pair. In the postmodern literature, this thematic has been elaborated most importantly by the exchange that John Searle had with Jacques Derrida (1988) who, in his Limited Inc, clearly shows that every signed text has to be countersigned by the reader. Without the countersignature, it makes little sense to speak of the written oeuvres at all.

Given the possible inflexibility with which Holzkamp approached writing and communication with his audiences, I am therefore not surprised by the reactions of my collaborators and colleagues who do not and cannot appreciate even the grosser (coarser) points that Holzkamp makes. All of this, of course, is made even more difficult by his dialectical approach, which is not even understood as such. Again, the misappropriation and lack of appreciation of dialectical writing is not a surprise to me, as I can see in the way most North American scholars read Lev Semenovich Vygotsky and his successor Aleksei Nikolayevich Leont'ev. Other useful authors that would allow a better appreciation of Holzkamp's work and the one of Leont'ev on which he built would be that of the Russian philosopher Evald Il'enkov, who marvelously explicates the dialectical materialist method that underlies Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* and the development of the human psyche in *Grundlegung*.

6. Aleksei N. Leont'ev and Holzkamp

Leont'ev's work has come to be known to a larger number of Western scholars concerned with activity theory through the publications of Yrjö Engeström, mostly through a WORD manuscript version of his dissertation *Learning by Expanding* (1987). Although this original starting point still bears all the marks of the Marxist heritage of Leont'ev's work, subsequent chapters and articles hardly at all make reference to this Marxist origin, which, to me, has to do with the relationship of U.S. culture and Marxism. Other scholars, such as Jean Lave, have told me about the difficulties they have had with the culture; and Jean's preference is to spend months at a time in Denmark, where she finds the intellectual climate much more productive than in her home country. Also, Engeström is mostly reproduced in and through a triangular representation that he had chosen for depicting the mediational relation within the unit of human activity. This triangle is structural and the dynamic dimensions have gotten lost in most research that references Engeström.

In my reading, Holzkamp much more so than Engeström reproduces and extends the agenda that Leont'ev originally outlined. In fact, Holzkamp explicitly grounds his starting point in Leont'ev, to whom he has dedicated the *Grundlegung*: »Da wir uns hinsichtlich der Bestimmung der Grundform des Psychischen auf A.N. Leontjew beziehen, brauchen wir die genannte Ausgangsabstraktion hier nicht selbst zu realisieren, sondern können das Resultat seiner Abstraktionsvollzüge übernehmen« (p. 67). That is, Holzkamp does not entirely go back to the drawing board in his reconstruction of the human psyche, but takes Leont'ev's accomplishments as his starting point. But he also highlights the fact that although he takes the definitions of the fundamental determinations of the psyche, he does not take on board with it the empirical-historical analyses concerning the origin and differentiation of the psyche.

This extension of Leont'ev's program also occurs at the level of method. Thus, the transition between qualitatively different levels and the dependence on earlier quantitative changes at the lower level is explicitly foreshadowed when Leont'ev (1978) conceptualizes interlevel relations, »which consists of the fact that the available *higher level always becomes dominant, but it cannot be realized except with the help of the lower-lying levels and is thus dependent on them*« (p. 142, original emphasis). The real object of studying interlevel relations are the »multifaceted forms of these realizations due to which the processes of the higher level are not only concretized but also individualized« (p. 142). Studying interlevel relations becomes central in and to the *Grundlegung*: »Der qualitative Übergang zur »psychischen« Stufe war nur dadurch (im Rahmen des Möglichen) empirisch zu rekonstruieren, daß dabei verschiedene Zwischenstufen, in denen der Übergang sich vollzog, begrifflich herausgehoben wurden« (p. 78). Holzkamp takes this as his starting point to develop a general, dialectical method to articulate the emergence of new qualities in the phylogeny of the psyche. There are five steps that need to be articulated and explicated, which together embody the program outlined in Leont'ev: (a) the real-historical dimensions of the earlier level; (b) the objective environmental changes that bring about an inner contradiction; (c) the first qualitative changes of function in the relevant dimensions on the to (a) corresponding side of the organism; (d) the second qualitative changes of dominance between the previously major function and the new major function; and (e) the restructuring of the developmental trajectory of the entire system after the quali-

tatively specific form has become the dominant one. Here, though (and because) »dialectically negated,« the earlier functions constitute – as Leont'ev predicted – the very conditions of the qualitative change in functions. In emphasizing the organism pole in the third step, I understand Holzkamp to realize Leont'ev's requirement for method to show how processes are both concretized and ultimately individualized.

Interestingly, Holzkamp provides us with a way of understanding the problems many Westerners have in understanding the evolution of species, which »suddenly« appear to take on new properties that are said, in Darwinian fashion, to provide answers to changes and pressures in the environment. In Holzkamp, these answers exist already as possibilities in search of problems; they become dominant precisely when changes in conditions occur. This then leads to the fact that species are not only adapted to the present but that they already have the potential to be adapted to new challenges, and the relevant functions come to express themselves in an as-needed and just-in-time fashion.

7. Personal Encounters

Over the years, I had found Holzkamp's work salient to my own and I have acquired all the texts accessible from afar. In addition to the books that I brought back from Germany, I was able to find online those texts from his work that were published through the critical psychology website. During these years I also met and newly encountered a number of individuals who had worked with Holzkamp or used his work to direct their own. I already had known Jean Lave, but she never really talked about her encounters with Holzkamp. I understood later that the two have had considerable mutual influence on each other's work, which, for Holzkamp, can be seen in the references to her in *Learning* and in his critique of schooling. In Jean's work, the references to the people she has read and encountered frequently are more muted, as I know from the way in which she has transformed her obvious knowledge and understanding of Pierre Bourdieu.

Shortly after coming to know about Critical Psychology, I found out that the author of *Psychology, Society, and Subjectivity*, Charles Tolman, had been a faculty member in the psychology department at my university. He was already retired but held a visiting professor emeritus position in the *Centre for Studies of Religion and Society*. I emailed him and we agreed to meet. During this meeting

he talked a lot about how he had gone to Germany in the 1970s and, while there, how he met »Klaus«; he then talked about their long-standing relationship that lasted until the untimely death of Holzkamp. Charles also agreed to give a talk in one of my seminars, which turned out to be »On Doing Psychological Research from the Standpoint of the Subject.« Interestingly enough, the paper he presented, here as in other iterations at my university, did not make reference to Holzkamp at all but provided a historical analysis of the subject as the subject matter of psychology. Fully consistent with Holzkamp, he argued for a psychology that takes the standpoint of the subject – which, as I found out later, Dorothy Smith (who also had taught at my university in the 1970s and now teaches again as professor emerita) has made the central aspect of her research – rather than the standpoint of the researcher.

One day in March of 2002, I came to meet Thomas Teo – who had spent a postdoctoral period at the Freie Universität – during the meeting of the peer committees that make decisions about the funding of Canadian research. We were on different committees, he on the one in psychology, where he represented qualitative and historical psychology; I was chairing the committee for educational psychology and learning in the disciplines. I had received and read my copies of *Grundlegung* and *Lernen* and was both an avid reader of the work and eager to talk to others about it. When I met Thomas, I thought there was a good opportunity to talk about Critical Psychology, because there are few if any individuals in my immediate working context who know the writings of Holzkamp. But as far as I recollect, Thomas Teo had a more muted attitude and did not appear to foresee much of a future for the movement. Only much later did I come to read his analysis »Klaus Holzkamp and the Rise and Decline of German Critical Psychology« (Teo 1998), where he recognized several periods, a critical emancipatory period from 1968 to 1972, a critical conceptual period that lasted to the year in which the Grundlegung appeared, a subject scientific period until his death in 1995. Thomas attributed the decline of critical psychology to social developments and limitations in the foundational framework, and to the rise of other critical approaches.

The one person I really came to work with on and around the ideas of Holzkamp was Ines Langemeyer, who had done her doctoral dissertation on contradictions in expansive learning. I came to know her initially when she inter-

viewed for a postdoctoral position in a research center for which I had received funding. Then we met in person at the 2005 meeting of the *International Society for Cultural and Activity Research*, where she attended a session in which I was a participant. Having re-read extensively the foundations of activity theory, I had realized that there were many places in which Engeström's writing and public talks exhibited logical rather than inner contradictions. For example, on the website of the *Center for Activity and Work Research* in Helsinki, Finland, activity was suggested to be the minimal unit of analysis; and then on the same site, various moments of the activity system – subject, tools, object, division of labor, rules, and community – were denoted by the term »element.« Now, already Vygotsky (1986) had suggested moving from an analysis in terms of elements to an analysis in terms of units that retain the phenomenon as a whole; Leont'ev continued this approach and postulated collective activity (Tätigkeit) as this unit. Attempting to analyze activity in terms of subjects, objects, and tools as its elements appeared to me quite contradictory. After the session, Ines came to see me asking whether I had read some paper of hers, that my critique of the way in which Engeström presented cultural-historical activity theory was precisely what she had been working on. So we decided to co-author a piece that would take a critical, Holzkampian perspective on Engeström (Langemeyer & Roth 2006). Our main concern were the logical contradictions that came to be perpetuated by other Western scholars who completely neglect the fundamental commitment of Leont'ev (as that of Holzkamp) to a Marx, Engels, and Lenin. Holzkamp himself had pointed out this misrepresentation in his introduction to Tätigkeit, Bewußtsein, Persönlichkeit (Leontjew 1982):

> „. . . wird in dem vorliegenden Buch noch deutlicher als in der früheren Arbeit, daß die marxistische Fundierung von Leontjews psychologischer Konzeption nicht – wie von bürgerlicher Seite immer wieder unterstellt – lediglich ein äußerliches Lippenbekenntnis und ideologisches Beiwerk ist, das ohne Veränderung der Substanz auch weggelassen werden kann, sondern den theoretischen und methodischen Kern ausmacht, aus dem heraus die Eigenart und Bedeutung der Einzelausführungen allein verständlich werden.« (p. 5)

Ines and my collaboration was productive, but also produced some controversy. Michael Cole, who somehow had obtained a copy of the manuscript while it was under peer review at the journal *OUTLINES*, wanted us to withdraw it, because, so he felt, it was destructive to the community of scholars pursuing cultural-historical and sociocultural studies of mind. In contrast, I felt that Ines and I were central to the community and that we would be acting against the spirit of dialectical materialist theory if we did not contribute to iron out the logical contradictions that plague our field on the inside. This constant reworking of theory to make it suitable to describe and understand praxis, including our own, is at the very heart of Marx's method (e.g., Il'enkov 1982). In all of this, the work with Ines has been fruitful, as she is far from applying Holzkamp's ideas in a routine, rote, and uncritical fashion. Rather, she is at times openly critical, such as when she challenged his analytical categories of learning when the data she had collected did not support the idea of conflicts that arise from power relations in repressive institutions (Langemeyer & Nissen 2005).

8. Coda

I have found and continue to find the *Grundlegung* to be an important piece of work, not in the least because of two of its features: (a) building a social science that can account for its own emergence after anthropogenesis and culture have released the species from its direct determinations by the environment and (b) a rigorous method for constructing categories and concepts in a bottom-up manner rather taking them from the everyday world and reifying them scientifically. I take the position that only a critical psychology, as a critical (reflexive) sociology, can be a science, because a science that does not deal with the origins of its concepts and categories literally does not know what it is doing. I do not advocate elevating the *Grundlegung* to the status of a religious text surrounded by a circle of high priests that pretends to have better insights than anyone else to reading and appropriating Holzkamp. More so, as a true Marxist, Holzkamp could not have wanted to impede with those who pick out the logically weak spots in his work and to transform it consistently with a rigorous (not rigid) materialist dialectical method. This methods demands that »far from fearing contradictions in the theoretical definition of the object, [that] one must search for these contradictions in a goal-directed manner and record them precisely – to find their ratio-

nal resolution, of course, not to pile up maintains of antinomies and paradoxes in theoretical definitions of the thing« (Il'enkov 1982, 244). The problems are rationally resolved in »the movement of objective reality, the movement and development of the world of things 'in themselves'« (p. 244). It is precisely in the concerns with and for the practical reality that surrounds us that Klaus Holzkamp has given us an impetus and method for further development.

I do not want to end without some reflexive comment. First, I understand my reading and reception of Holzkamp and Critical Psychology as a concrete realization of the possibilities that come with the publications of these texts. This reading is grounded in my subjectivity (inherently a concrete realization of inter-subjective possibilities), in and as of singular reading, but it is also an objective achievement, which has left concrete traces wherever I have drawn on and referenced Holzkamp's work. It is necessarily a positioned reception, which has to be understood cultural-historically in the context of the suppositions, presuppositions, dispositions, and predispositions that come with any position that a material human being cannot but *receive* and *must* take.

A second reflexive comment concerns my choice of writing in English. Although I read German quite well – having lived in the country for a quarter century, a little less than half of my life – I have never learned to write (well) in this language, especially not concerning the topics that I approach here. More so, at issue is not a simple translation from one code into another; the real issue is that the genres of writing and thinking in German and English differ radically. I know this from my extended experience as editor, where I can pick out an article written by a German scholar just from the way in which it and its argument are constructed. Readers should and must understand that on cultural-historical grounds I cannot think/write but in and out of my (North American) context. Therefore, as English is my main language and a hybridized immigrant culture *is* my culture, this language and this culture are also the ones in and with which my thinking normally develops as I write. (There is an implicit head nod to Vygotsky [1986] and his work on the relation of thinking and speaking/writing.) Even though many may consider me fluent in German (and French), the fluency required for academic, written discourse is very different from that required in oral communication even if this is at professional conferences. For better or worse, my essay therefore also is a concrete realization of the possibly naïve reception that the

work of Klaus Holzkamp may and does receive in North America. This, too, is a phenomenon we must understand from the subject position that had been at the heart of Holzkamp's concerns, the concrete realizations of general (cross-) cultural possibilities in and by the subjects that constitutively produce and reproduce society as a whole.

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Endnotes

1   I follow the convention to denote critical forms of psychology with small letters (critical psychology) and use the capital letter form Critical Psychology to denote the Berlin group and realization of critical psychology.

2   Again, the English has greater difficulties than other language to discriminate: Where French and German have Être/Sein and étant/Seiendes, the English

only has "being." In scholarly writing, the term is adapted so that Being/beings are used to produce equivalent distinctions.

3   From afar, it sometimes appears to me that there are "high priests" among Critical Psychologists and followers of Holzkamp, who, despite their democratic and critical discourses – perhaps precisely because of them – act as if they know more than anyone else on the topic.

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Wolff-Michael Roth ist Inhaber eines Stiftungslehrstuhles der Angewandten Kognitionswissenschaften an der University of Victoria, British Columbia. Nach Studien der Physik in Würzburg und nach einer Promotion über die Entwicklung des proportionalen Denkens bei Erwachsenen unterrichtete er zuerst Physik an einer Privatschule bevor er einen Lehrstuhl für quantitative Forschungsmethoden erhielt. Während der letzten zwei Jahrzehnte arbeitete er hauptsächlich mit qualitativen und interdisziplinären Forschungsmethoden um Probleme des Lehrens und Lernens der Mathematik und der Naturwissenschaften sowohl in der Schule als auch am Arbeitsplatz und im Alltagsleben zu untersuchen.

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