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Editorial

A spectre is haunting Innsbruck. Documentation of the first International Conference on Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology

Severin Hornung, Christine Unterrainer & Thomas Höge

University of Innsbruck, Department of Psychology, Innsbruck Group on Critical Research in Work and Organizational Psychology (I-CROP)

But the root of history is the working, creating human being who reshapes and overhauls the given facts. Once he has grasped himself and established what is his, without expropriation and alienation, in real democracy, there arises in the world something which shines into the childhood of all and in which no one has yet been: homeland.

Ernst Bloch (1954 / 1986, pp. 1375-1376)¹

The purpose of this special issue is twofold: First and foremost, it documents the first *International Conference on Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology*, which was held from the 11th to the 13th of July 2022 at the University of Innsbruck. As such, it features a conference report describing the event in some detail, distinguished contributions by the keynote speakers, and a vibrant bricolage of the position statements of the participants of the panel discussion convened as part of the closing session. The second and closely related purpose is to honor the person who has during his whole career worked tirelessly, determined, and courageously to eventually make such an event possible here in Innsbruck. Although his scientific and political activities are by no means ceasing but, in the contrary, vigorously ongoing, Wolfgang G. Weber has officially retired from his Professorship in Applied Psychology at the University of Innsbruck in September 2022. As the members of the Applied Psychology Unit I that he has built up and chaired over a period of more than two decades, we want to use this opportunity to express

our gratitude to Wolfgang and our admiration for him as a person and for his work, which has always been guided by strong radical humanist ethical values and principles, scientific thoroughness and attention to detail, as well as personal integrity, respect, and caring for others. In this context, reviewing some personal information and showcasing selected milestones of his academic biography and research legacy seemed called for and has been attempted in the addendum of this special issue.

Of course, the overview provided there is just a fragmentary and superficial account of Wolfgang's scientific and political activities and much more would deserve to be mentioned. However, even in light of the limited information provided, it should already become clear that the „*spectre*“ in the title of this special issue, borrowed from the famous first sentence in Marx and Engels's historical manifesto, refers to the spirit of social critique and radical humanism that Wolfgang has helped to instill here at the University of Innsbruck. Moreover, the notorious „*spectre*“ also alludes to the collective consciousness and contributions of all who have heeded our call to come to this conference – as well as to all who sympathize with our cause for a more equal, more just, more compassionate and caring, more socially inclusive and ecologically sustainable world. A particularly fitting metaphor, the „*spectre*“ of critical scholarship currently appears to be heavily haunting mainstream work and organizational psychology. This is vividly demonstrated by the „triggered“, angry and defensive knee-jerk reactions, displayed by some of its proponents in response to any insinuation that the field could, in the slightest

¹ Bloch, E. (1986). *The principle of hope, volume III* (N. Plaiice, S. Plaiice & P. Knight, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. (Original work published 1954)

degree, be influenced by neoliberal ideology and managerialist performativity. Still today, such zealous defendants of the status quo and advocates of allegedly value-neutral science try to weaponize the „branding reproach of communism“ to denounce any conception of fundamentally *Critical* scholarship that transcends their technocratic notions of „critical“ as a form of positivistic scientific rigor. Such polemic skirmishes notwithstanding, the „*spectre*“ of Critical and Radical Work and Organizational Psychology, as we understand it, albeit having strong affinities with undogmatic (neo-)Marxism, has no leanings towards or tolerance, whatsoever, for authoritarian forms of (so-called) Communism and associated totalitarian political regimes (e.g., from Soviet Russia to contemporary China). Rather, it is firmly rooted in humanist ideals of equality, community, and solidarity, as inherent in the genuine (and rarely realized) historical alternatives of Democratic Socialism and Anarcho-syndicalism. Clarifying and emphasizing this distinction between democratic and authoritarian forms of Socialism seems particularly mandated in the context of a „*Zeitgeist*“ that seeks to obscure and collapse these political antipodes in order to reinforce the ideological hegemony of neoliberal capitalism (i.e., cementing the counterfactual dogma that „there is no alternative“). Notably, highlighting the theoretical and practical distinction between democratic and authoritarian Socialism is also an especially important matter of concern to Wolfgang, who is known to passionately identify with the former and vocally speak out against the later – along with radicalized neoliberal capitalism and all other types of de-humanizing and oppressive economic and political systems.

The above digression with regard to the „*spectre of social critique*“ brings us back to the conference. Although it is not possible to fully capture all of the important and substantial presentations, engaging workshops, and insightful discussions in this special issue, we are very thankful and appreciative to all conference participants for all their contributions, which are documented in the abstract proceedings. In this special issue, we will next present the conference vision by the organizing team, which is based on a revised version of the call for participation. After that, a conference report will give an overview of the program and activities during the two and a half days of the event. The subsequent article will be based on the opening speech by Wolfgang G. Weber (Some lineages

and resources of Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology), followed in sequential order by the four keynote speeches by Rainer Funk (Productivity in face of a „pathology of normalcy“, Erich Fromm’s contribution to Critical Psychology), Thomas Theo (Subjectivity and work: Critical-theoretical reflections), Ruth Yeoman (Meaningfulness and organising for sustainable futures), and Martin Parker (Hard lessons: (Critical) Management Studies and (Critical) Work and Organizational Psychology). The final main contribution is a bricolage of position statements of the participants of the panel discussion (Laura F. Röllmann, Johanna L. Degen, Edina Dóci, P. Matthijs Bal, Severin Hornung, Gazi Islam, Thomas Kühn, and Zoe Sanderson). Our special thanks go to all these colleagues and friends who have graciously devoted their time and knowledge to make this special issue the inspiring documentation of eminent critical scholarship and engaged scholarly activism that it is. We hope that it gives the reader a helpful impression of the rich pluralistic theoretical basis and epistemological principles, uncompromising moral values, diverse applications, and multitude of voices characterizing Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology.

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Preface: Conference vision and call for participation

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A core component of our collective vision as the organizers of this conference was to propose, inspire, and convene an event that lives up to our humanistic ideals in terms of theoretical and practical relevance and importance for the future of work and organizational (W-O) psychology in democratic societies (Weber, 2019; Weber, Höge & Hornung, 2020). The backdrop of this ambitious objective was the observation that scientific mainstream¹ W-O psychology is currently characterized by remarkable contradictions and incongruities. Specifically, research has provided many practical insights into how working conditions, work activities, leadership, and organizational characteristics are related to various psychological constructs that are of interests for the effective and efficient functioning of work organizations. The latter include, for example, the „classics“ of job satisfaction, intrinsic work motivation, and task performance, organizational commitment and identification with the employer, additional extra role efforts, or so-called organizational citizenship behavior, and, its opposite, counterproductive work behavior, and also the more recent hype around proactive or self-starting work behavior and self-controlled performance – as well as more indirect concerns with psycho-social wellbeing and health and compatibility of work with family and other spheres of life. However, it is obvious that the prevailing perspective of W-O psychology, as well as of related fields of applied, social, and business psychology, primarily aims to instrumentalize and manipulate „human resources“ in order to increase productivity, optimize profits, and, occasionally, appease workers (e.g., Bal, 2020; McDonald & Bubna-Litic, 2012, 2017). The humanist ideals of personality

development through work, however, is typically regarded as unrealistic or dispensable. At best, it is seen as a means for the purposes of capital utilization, profit maximization, and cost reduction, but typically tends to be distrusted and constrained by employers to avoid its „problematic“ social side effects. Indeed, both historical studies (e.g., Baritz, 1960; Braverman, 1974; in the German context see: Groskurth & Volpert, 1975; Jäger & Staeuble, 1981) as well as more recent analyses (e.g., Bal & Dóci, 2018; Gerard, 2017; Lefkowitz, 2008, 2017) broadly support this conclusion, underscoring the need for a different approach that puts the human at the center.

Background: Problems and goals

To reiterate, promoting personal wellbeing and growth of workers not as a means to increase profitable performance and monetary gains, but as an end in itself, as devised by humanist philosophers and educators, and a few dedicated work and organizational psychologists, still leads a rather marginal „fringe“ existence, compared to the rarely questioned and predominantly instrumental „managerialistic“ agenda of mainstream W-O psychology (e.g., Islam & Sanderson, 2022). The same applies to research on established possibilities for strengthening the social and cultural common good and the democratic system by supporting employees in developing prosocial, civic, and moral competencies in their daily work, specifically, through structurally anchored organizational democracy and democratic approaches to leadership (e.g. Weber, 2019; Weber, Unterrainer &

¹ In our view, the term „mainstream w-o psychology“ does not denote a polemical buzzword, but rather certain scientific-theoretical, ethical, and substantive positions and concepts that are currently shared by a majority of scientific w-o psychologists. Not all representatives of mainstream positions agree on all of these concepts and in some cases concepts from mainstream and critical w-o psychology even overlap. Thus, this is not a dichotomous, absolute contradiction, but a polar, dimensional delineation of tendency. Some core positions (for example, methodological individualism, psychologization of societal contradictions, instrumental rationality, economism) and core concepts of the mainstream are presented and critiqued in this preface and in other contributions to this Special Issue. For those who find the term „mainstream“ too superficial, it can be replaced by terms like „traditional science“ (Horkheimer, 2002) or „scientism“ (Habermas, 1970; cf. the conceptual review by Islam & Sanderson, 2022).

Höge, 2020). Numerous social scientists as well as some alternative economists have identified current economic developments as a radical globalization of the markets for goods, services, labor and, most of all, capital (e.g., Crouch, 2004; Kotz, 2002; Wright, 2010). These neoliberal trends of „marketization“ and „financialization“ are accompanied by a shift towards an increasingly one-sided managerialistic system, predominantly oriented towards advancing the economic interests of big corporations and their main shareholders. Simultaneously, the erosion of legal regulations and social welfare systems as well as the explosive growth and dominance of the „virtual“ speculative capital of the financial industry over the actually value-creating productive capital, largely suppress attempts to experiment with alternative and more resource-conserving economic systems beyond the capitalist logic of profits and growth. Especially for employees in global supply chains and economically weak countries, extremely unhealthy and inhumane working conditions below the subsistence level are less a reminiscence, but rather a seamless continuation, if not a revival, of the anti-humanist and predatory type of „Manchester capitalism“. The political background is a progressive neoliberal transformation of economies in terms of worldwide de-regulation and erosion of labor laws, permanent employment contracts, employee rights of co-determination, healthy working conditions, social security systems, and mechanisms for environmental protection (e.g., Bettache, Chiu & Beattie, 2020; Kentikelenis & Babb 2019; Wacquant, 2009). Notably the trends towards increasing de-civilization and de-democratization are orchestrated by powerful international investors, transnational corporations, lobbying groups, and colluding political bodies and decision-makers – as well as their minions and mouthpieces in the public relations and media landscape (e.g., Bakan, 2004).

It is our firm conviction that work and organizational psychologists who are engaged in research, teaching, or practice, and who aspire to better live up to their own humanist ethical values and responsibilities, should not tolerate – and thus implicitly condone – these detrimental developments any longer. Instead, we need to stand in for and enact changes towards a socially responsible and sustainable future of the discipline – a transformation that accommodates the needs and interests of all employees and citizens, instead of serving a small minority of powerful economic elites of investors, management, and privileged „knowledge workers“. Therefore, an important impetus and objective of our conference was related to finding and discussing ways to strengthen, develop, and better integrate existing critical approaches in our own research. Exposing and critiquing ideological biases in extant

research, proposing or reviewing theoretical or empirical research from critical and radical humanist perspectives, as well as building networks and planning activities for critical research, teaching, and practice-oriented interventions, were all projected goals for the conference. Moreover, the conference aimed to establish, integrate, and advance different lines of research that are explicitly dedicated to critical and radical humanist approaches and perspectives in contemporary W-O psychology. In the following, we will try to give some brief indications with regard to the envisioned theoretical approaches to be represented at the conference.

Theoretical foundations

Critical theoretical and radical humanist approaches within W-O psychology are inspired, in particular, by contributions of the Frankfurt School of social philosophy, by Psychoanalytic Social Psychology in the tradition of Erich Fromm, by approaches of Dialectical Materialist Psychology, including Russian Activity Theory and German Critical Psychology, among others. The range of these and related approaches results in substantial theoretical and methodological pluralism without falling into eclecticism, arbitrariness, and relativism (e.g., Teo, 2013, 2015). For strengthening a humanist W-O psychology grounded in social science, these approaches have in common that they incorporate (or at least are open to) political-economic and social-philosophical criticisms of the described developments of radicalizing neoliberal capitalist economic systems that endanger the foundations of civil society, such as compassion, social cohesion, and democracy. Furthermore, critical theoretical and radical humanist work and organizational psychologists advocate that the guiding principles for economic activity and work should be human rights, human dignity, social and psychological well-being and care for all human (and non-human) beings, and the protection of the natural foundations of life on the planet (e.g., Bal, 2020; Bal & Dóci, 2018; Ergene, Banerjee & Hoffman, 2021; Kühn & Bobeth, 2022; Weber, Höge & Hornung, 2020). Notably, this means opposition and resistance to the economic exploitation and oppression, deprivation or degradation of people, other living beings, and the natural foundations of life, in the name of a self-reproducing and, eventually, self-destructive system, aimed at defending, perpetuating, and advancing the particular interests of a small wealthy minority. Additionally, critical and humanist approaches share the effort to explore human development potentials within their social and historical context and to examine forms of self-actualization at and through work and other economic contexts that do not conflict

with the legitimate interests and needs of other stakeholders and social groups. Specifically, critical theoretical and radical humanist approaches in W-O psychology endeavor to integrate social psychological, sociological, and social philosophical constructs to sketch out theoretical frameworks to better understand the closely intertwined developments of the individual psyche, the social subsystems, and the surrounding cultural-societal system, in which the individual acts and behaves (e.g., Islam, 2020; McDonald & Bubna-Litic, 2012). To extend the explanatory power of theoretical frameworks of W-O psychology, critical theoretical and radical humanist approaches strive to question the effects and implications of political-economic and organizational power structures and their related ideologies with regard to resulting psychological processes (e.g., Bal & Dóci, 2018; Hornung, Höge & Unterrainer, 2021). This requires that radical (neoliberal) capitalist structures of power, domination, competition, and inequality, and their ideological foundations, are identified, exposed, theoretically analyzed, and empirically investigated. This includes, for example, systemic divergence of interest in employment relationships and power mechanisms based on the political, economic, and organizational resources of external and internal actors (e.g., financial shareholders, political-economical agents, purchasers, entrepreneurs, top managers, labor unions). Such conceptual work is very important, yet largely neglected in mainstream W-O psychology. This is the case because opposing structures and system-justifying ideologies potentially pervade the values, interests, attitudes, work motivation, communication, social and moral competencies, and job-related behaviors of employees interacting in business organizations, as well as of researchers and practitioners of W-O psychology (e.g., Dóci & Bal, 2018).

Importantly, critical and radical humanist W-O psychology implies an emancipatory epistemological interest – according to, for instance, theorists like Horkheimer, Habermas or Holzkamp (e.g., Habermas, 1970; Horkheimer, 2002; Tolman, 2009). Specifically, this means that critically-oriented empirical studies are guided by the aim to identify theoretical deficiencies concerning typically applied criteria of humane work, as well as to critique and strive to change the actual exploitative or oppressive conditions people are facing in contemporary organizations (e.g., Klikauer, 2015, 2018). Moreover, research activities of critical and radical humanist W-O psychology researchers, possibly in cooperation with researchers from other disciplines, also endeavor to develop methods, concepts, and procedures that are useful for challenging, reducing, or removing constraining conditions of work, organization, and

management; as well as technological aspects that impede human dignity, self-actualization, solidarity, freedom, and health (e.g., Chimirri & Pedersen, 2019). This transformational research perspective requires investigating existing, albeit rare and dispersed, „fractals“ of alternative organizations and economies (e.g., Temper, Walter, Rodriguez, Kothari & Turhan, 2018; Unterrainer, Weber, Höge & Hornung, 2022; Weber, 2019). These are represented, for example, by enterprises practicing structurally anchored organizational democracy, integrated living and work communities (e. g., kibbutzim, communes, food coops), as well as alternative economic models, such as the Solidarity Economy, Economy for the Common Good, post-growth economy, and radical sustainability transformations. Such research, which is still severely neglected within W-O psychology, represents a future-oriented attempt of studying human development and interaction in socio-economic systems that transcend the instrumental rationality of the prevailing exploitative and oppressive system of work and economy.

We envisioned that at the conference contributions from a number of critical theoretical approaches and their variations and extensions would be discussed and that new ideas for their application, further elaboration and integration in research, practice and academic teaching in W-O psychology would be developed and exchanged. Naturally, we had in mind the tradition of critical psychology based on the neo-Marxist Frankfurt School of Critical Theory (e.g., Garlitz & Zompetti, 2023; Granter, 2014; Slater, 1977), including Radical Humanism and Analytical Social Psychology according to Erich Fromm (e.g., Durkin, 2014; Funk, 1982), as well as Critical Psychology from the Perspective of the Subject, based on the Holzkamp tradition and others (e.g., Schraube, 2015; Teo, 2015; Tolman, 2009). Further, we encouraged contributions from the perspective of Activity Theory and Cultural Historical Psychology (e.g., Hakkarainen, 2004) from critical traditions in Action Regulation Theory (e.g., Groskurth & Volpert, 1975) and Self-Determination Theory (e.g., Sheldon & Kasser, 2001), including criticisms of corporate capitalism (e.g., Kasser, Cohn, Kanner & Ryan, 2007), as well as from Labor Process Theory (e.g., Braverman, 1974; Klikauer, 2015, 2018) and the growing pluralistic field of Critical Management Studies more broadly (e.g., Adler, 2007; Parker & Parker, 2017; Mumby, 2019). All these are approaches, which we consider particularly important for a critical and radical humanistic reorientation and development of W-O psychology. However, this clearly is not meant as a complete list.

Of course, contributions from other perspectives that are normatively compatible with the above theoretical traditions were also expressively welcome.

The general emancipatory focus of critical approaches, however, was considered as essential because the conference was explicitly not intended as a general work and organizational psychological event. Rather, it was devised as specialized conference aiming to provide a forum to critically and (self-)reflexively examine prevailing and influential theories, research, and practices in W-O psychology (e.g., Islam & Sanderson, 2022). As indicated above, such undertakings can indeed draw on a strong and diverse basis in critical theoretical and radical humanist (and related) approaches, including empirical research that relies explicitly on critical concepts and methods. These approaches provide a contrast to other types of research, such as the allegedly „value-neutral“, relativist, economic, and scientific approaches that are typically dominating at mainstream W-O psychology conferences (e.g., Bal & Dóci, 2018; McDonald & Bubna-Litic, 2012). Some exemplary topics we expected to discuss at the conference are outlined next.

Exemplary topics

At the conference, we aimed to address fundamental and applied, classic, and current topics, theories, concepts, problems, and research results of an emerging critical theoretical and radical humanist stream in W-O psychology. The following examples illustrate the type of topics and research that we were particularly interested in.

For instance, we envisioned conceptual analyses and critiques of currently influential theories, models, concepts, or constructs in mainstream W-O psychology from a critical theoretical and radical humanist perspective. In particular, such analyses involve „de-naturalizing“ the underlying phenomena and deconstructing the „dark side“ of research that contributes to downplaying, obscuring or distracting from the fundamentally diverging interests of economic and human actors; some examples for constructs that warrant critical reflection are individualization of working conditions, employability, job crafting, flexibility at work, proactivity, autonomy, self-leadership, self-management, work engagement, organizational commitment, extra-role behavior or organizational citizenship behavior, customer satisfaction, individual health competences and behavior, etc. Moreover, we were also interested in exploring alternative humanistic conceptions of human beings and potentials for human development and meaning at work beyond the ideology of the „homo economicus“; this includes theoretical concepts of moral competence and behavior anchored in philosophical humanism beyond relativistic or

„neutral“ conceptualizations of ethical organizational culture, climate, or leadership, as well as conceptions of altruism, prosocial, and proactive behavior beyond the instrumentality of extra-role and proactive behavior and similar constructs of the individualized „self-enterprising entrepreneur“.

Conversely, we also called for critiques of corporate moral disengagement and exploitative and destructive management and leadership practices in neoliberal organizations as well as their psychological consequences (e.g., self-endangering work behavior, social and moral alienation, and corrosion). More specifically, this refers to topics related to work and precarity, organizational injustice, social inequality, disadvantaged and marginalized employee groups, and the exploitative and health-corroding working conditions in the sweat shops of globally distributed supply and production chains, including conceptual and empirical analyses and potential intervention strategies. Further, we encouraged topics related to work and mental health from a critical theoretical perspective reflecting societal structures and developments. By this we meant, for example, mental health and socially patterned psychic defects due to social character formations; corrosion of character through conditions of flexible work and employment; critical psychoanalytic approaches; effects of the working situation on the formation of psychic and psychosomatic symptoms and disorders; social alienation, and the „pathology of normalcy“ (Fromm, 1955). Another area of current interests was the digitalization of the economy between totalitarian capitalism (e.g., shareholder-value extremism in conjunction with transnationally integrated monitoring, profiling, and disciplinary technologies) and radical humanist emancipatory perspectives and potentials of these new technologies (e.g., social activism and collaboration).

Finally, and related to several of the aspects already mentioned above, we called for the exploration and elaboration of alternative theories and models of organizational behavior (including management, leadership, communication, cooperation) beyond employee instrumentalization, manipulation, and competitive exploitation. Explicitly, this includes examining the psychological potentials of alternative forms of work organization, entrepreneurial, and economic activity beyond radical capitalist (neoliberal) doctrine, e.g., Solidarity Economy, Economy for the Common Good, post-growth economy, economic and organizational democracy, social enterprises, and communitarian living and work arrangements. We believe that, taken together, these exemplary topics well reflect the breadth and heterogeneity of approaches of Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology.

Retrospective conclusion

In hindsight, our expectations were more than fulfilled. Numerous presentations based on the above-mentioned theories and topics were given and discussed at the conference. These were allocated to several themed sessions dedicated to: Radical Humanism in the Tradition of Erich Fromm; Positions, Prospects, and Problems of Critical W-O Psychology; Stratification, Marginalization, and Inequality at Work; Psychology and Ideology of the Neoliberal Workplace; Critical Perspectives on Meaning at Work; Alternative and Emancipatory Organizational Practices; Precarious Employment; and The Living Wages Movement. Additionally, keynote speeches represented the streams of Critical Theory, Critical Psychology, and Critical Management Studies. Abstracts of all presentations are included in the conference proceedings (Hornung, Unterrainer, Höge & Weber, 2022). More details can be found in the conference report and the other contributions in this special issue. Overall, our vision not only manifested but was exceeded by the number and quality of contributions to this conference. The present special issue is a testament to this accomplishment of the conference's participants.

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Conference report: Highlights and impressions from the first International Conference on Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology

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ABSTRACT

This article offers an involved account of the first International Conference on Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology, held from the 11th to the 13th of July 2022 at the University of Innsbruck. The objective of this report is to provide some background information and to give an overview of the most important conference themes, topics, and activities, as well as to briefly introduce main contributors to the conference and to provide some basic information and exemplary references regarding their academic work. After some general remarks on the conference organization and participants, the text is structured according to the main program features, specifically, pre-conference workshops, opening and keynote speeches, presentation sessions and workshops, poster exhibition, panel discussion, and farewell address. Ways to get connected with and become actively involved in the emerging movement towards „criticalizing“ work and organizational psychology are discussed.¹

Keywords

Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology – The Future of Work and Organizational Psychology (FoWOP) – academic activism – conference report

Introduction

The first International Conference on Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology was held from the 11th to the 13th of July 2022 at the Innrain Campus of University of Innsbruck. Initially planned for the 1st to the 3rd of October 2020 and, subsequently, for the 30th of September to the 2nd of October 2021, the event had to be postponed twice due to safety concerns in the context of the pandemic situation. Eventually, however, the tireless planning and networking activities of the organizers during the last few years did come to fruition. The main organizing body of the conference was the Applied Psychology Unit I at the Department of Psychology. Its members, Wolfgang G. Weber, Christine Unterrainer, Thomas

Höge, and (joining the group later) Severin Hornung, have been collaborating for many years as the research group on Organizational Democracy (ODEM; e.g., Weber, Unterrainer & Höge, 2020; Unterrainer, Weber, Höge & Hornung, 2022). Since its inception in the year 2018, they also constitute the Innsbruck Group on Critical Research in Work and Organizational Psychology (I-CROP; Weber, Höge & Hornung, 2020; Hornung, Unterrainer & Höge, 2022). Institutional cooperation partners were the Erich Fromm Study Center at the International Psychoanalytic University Berlin (IPU, Thomas Kühn and Rainer Funk) and the Critical Work and Organizational Psychology (CWOP) Division (e.g., Abrams et al., 2023; Bal & Dóci, 2018; Islam & Sanderson, 2022) of the international „Future of Work and Organizational Psychology“ (FoWOP;

¹ We thank Zoe Sanderson for a friendly reading of a previous version of this report and for the following vivid comment (personal communication, 29th of November 2022), to which we – unfortunately lacking poetic skills – can only wholeheartedly agree: „If only there was some way of capturing the feeling of the event in words! I know this is impossible to do but I am sure you share my feeling that the event was more than the sum of the parts of the programme. For example, I read your words about listening to music in the courtyard quite objectively, thinking ‘yes, this is what we did’. Then I recalled the feelings of standing there in the strong wind and the fading light with a cold beer, laughing with friends, and felt the gap between the words and the experience. But I am being wishful and wistful – of course no words can capture such things!“

e.g., Bal et al., 2019) movement network, which has evolved out of several constitutive events under the auspices of the European Association for Work and Organizational Psychology (EAWOP). Financial support for the conference was provided by the Department of Psychology, the Research Area EPOS „Economy, Politics & Society“, and the Vice Rectorate for Research of the University of Innsbruck.

Altogether, the conference lasted for three days. The first (half-)day was reserved for two pre-conference workshops dedicated to activities by the CWOP division of the FoWOP network. During the main two conference days (day 1 and day 2), the event featured one introductory opening speech by the organizers (Wolfgang G. Weber) and four distinguished guest keynote speeches. Two of the keynote speeches were delivered in-person (Rainer Funk and Ruth Yeoman), while the other two (Thomas Teo and Martin Parker) were live virtual presentations, transmitted and broadcasted to the lecture hall via videoconferencing software.

As part of the main program, altogether 58 oral presentations were given, allocated to 12 themed presentation sessions (six each on day 1 and day 2). Additionally, three workshop sessions were offered on the second day. Another noteworthy feature of the conference was an attractive poster exhibition, displayed during the whole event, comprising altogether 20 scientific posters, the majority of which were based on student research projects. In addition to regular breaks, during which coffee, tea, refreshments, fruits, and other snacks were served, at the end of day 1, participants were invited to an outdoor reception in the campus courtyard against the backdrop of the mountain scenery and a selection of nostalgic leftist music, ranging from Jefferson Airplane and Bobby McGee, to anarchist anthems from the Spanish civil war, and German-language classic like „Ton, Steine, Scherben“ and „Die Schmetterlinge“. The conference concluded with a memorable panel discussion on prospects and contestations of Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology, followed by a brief closing speech and farewell address by the organizers. These conference activities are documented in the conference program and abstract proceedings (Hornung, Unterrainer, Höge & Weber, 2022), available for download from the conference website (<https://www.uibk.ac.at/psychologie/tagung/icrop/>), and are elaborated in more detail below. Despite some ongoing travelling restrictions, occasional cancellations, and some

virtual accommodations due to the pandemic, the conference, which was convened primarily as an in-person event, was well attended. Altogether, more than 60 participants from around 40 universities and other institutions, such as companies, government agencies and professional associations, from 11 countries participated. Notably, aside from Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, speakers and attendees were welcomed from the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, France, Italy, Canada, Brazil, South Africa, and New Zealand (virtual). Thus, the conference was a truly international event – and indeed the first of its kind.

Pre-conference workshops

As mentioned above, the very first (half-)day of the event was dedicated exclusively to two pre-conference workshops related to current activities by the CWOP division of the FoWOP network. Specifically, these sessions centered around debating a „Proposal for the Handbook of Critical Work and Organizational Psychology“ (Pre-Conference Workshop 1; Organizers: Gazi Islam and Parisa Dashtipour) and „Visions and Values of Critical Work and Organizational Psychology“ (Pre-Conference Workshop 2; Organizers: Zoe Sanderson and Edina Dóci). As the second planned EAWOP FoWOP Small Group Meeting (SGM) in Brussels had to be cancelled twice (in 2020 and 2021) due to the pandemic, and as also the EAWOP Congress in Glasgow in early 2022 could not take place, this was the first in-person meeting of this group since the EAWOP Congress in Turin in 2019, which followed up on the first EAWOP FoWOP SGM in Breda in 2018 (Bal et al., 2019). Accordingly, the opportunity to reconnect with network members and welcome interested newcomers was timely and widely embraced. Among those present were core founding members of the FoWOP movement (Edina Dóci and Matthijs Bal), most of the CWOP steering group (Zoe Sanderson, Laura Röllman, Parisa Dashtipour, Franziska Kößler, Matthijs Bal, Gazi Islam, Wolfgang G. Weber, and Severin Hornung), as well as representatives of the organizing committee of the (at the time) upcoming (and also twice rescheduled) second EAWOP-sponsored FoWOP SGM in Brussels (Franziska Kößler, John Mendy, and Severin Hornung; Francesco Tommasi participated remotely)². Accordingly, both substantive and organizational as well as strategic issues of the movement could be addressed. Moreover,

² The FoWOP SGM in Brussels (Building the future of work and organizational psychology: Developing a practical toolkit) was held from the 21st to 23rd of September 2022 and was a remarkably productive and successful meeting. In many ways, it provided welcome opportunities to continue and follow-up on discussions and projects started at our conference. We also want to mention the other members of the SGM organizing committee, Theresa Leyens, Yvonne van Rossenberg, and Tim Vantilborgh, and thank them for their contributions to this memorable event.

after informed consent of participants, designated sessions of the conference were used as data gathering sites for the action research of Zoe Sanderson on the development of the CWOP movement and the evolving subjective and collective understanding of its principles and practice as well as the visions and values shared among its proponents.

This extended forum for the FoWOP movement was made possible as the other pre-conference workshops were previously held in virtual format in December 2021 and May 2022 to maintain and build connections with registered conference participants and also open up these workshops to a wider audience. The first virtual pre-conference workshop on the 3rd of December 2021, included three modules, delivered by the Innsbruck group, namely: 1) „Critical Theory – The Frankfurt School Tradition“ (Presenters: Wolfgang G. Weber and Thomas Höge); 2) „Critical Organizational Research from the Perspective of Sociological Paradigms“ (Presenter: Severin Hornung); and 3) „Present Contributions to the Dialectical Sublation (in German: *Aufhebung*) of ‘The End of Utopia’: Economic and Organizational Democracy, Solidarity Economy, Economy for the Common Good“ (Presenters: Christine Unterrainer, Wolfgang G. Weber, and Thomas Höge). The second part of the pre-conference workshops, held on the 13th of May 2022, comprised another two sections: 1) „The Potential of a Psychodynamic and Biographical Approach for Critical Work and Organizational Psychology“; and 2) „‘Organizational Lifeworld’ (in German: *„Betriebliche Lebenswelt“*) – A Field of Qualitative Social Psychological Research“. The first section was presented by Thomas Kühn, assisted by Sebastian Bobeth, from the International Psychoanalytic University (IPU) Berlin (e.g., Kühn, 2015; Kühn & Bobeth, 2022); the second module by Sünje Lorenzen from the Neubrandenburg University of Applied Sciences, who is also an external lecturer at the University of Innsbruck (e.g., Lorenzen, 2019; Lorenzen & Specht, 2021)⁵. It is worth noting that both lecturers also held thematically related in-person talks presenting their research at the conference. Materials and recordings of the pre-conference workshops were made available to registered participants and interested colleagues in the broader network of critical scholars.

Opening and keynote speeches

On the first day, the conference was opened up by a passionate welcoming message from Marc Deiser,

representing the Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB) Tyrol. In his memorable speech, he outlined in drastic terms, the difficult and precarious work situations many employees currently find themselves in, emphasizing the importance of social critique, worker solidarity, and political activism for fundamental reforms to counteract the neoliberal redistribution of risks and responsibilities in society (e.g., Doellgast, Lillie & Pulignano, 2018). Next, Wolfgang G. Weber delivered an inspiring opening speech, entitled „Some Lineages and Resources of Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology“, in which he elucidated the pluralist interdisciplinary heritage of this evolving movement, rooted in Dialectical Materialist Psychology and Activity Theory, Frankfurt School Critical Theory, Analytical Social Psychology, Critical Theory of the Subject and related schools of German Critical Psychology, Critical Management Studies, and society-critical streams of Action Regulation Theory and Self-Determination Theory (e.g., Weber, 2019, 2022). Democratic enterprises and the Economy of the Common Good were highlighted as applications of organizing work beyond domination, subjectification and social alienation.

Subsequently, Rainer Funk held the first keynote speech, entitled: „Productivity in Face of a “Pathology of Normalcy”. Erich Fromm’s Contribution to Critical Psychology“. Founder of the International Erich Fromm Society and Erich Fromm Institute Tübingen and Co-director of the Erich Fromm Study Center at the International Psychoanalytic University Berlin (e.g., Funk, 2010, 2011, 2019), psychoanalyst Rainer Funk was Erich Fromm’s last personal assistant and is sole literary executor, who has published extensively the collected writings by Fromm as well as own seminal contributions to a critical psychological theory of society, notably developing the concept of the ego-oriented social character. In his eminent speech, Funk eloquently demonstrated the continued relevance of Fromm’s thinking for contemporary approaches of critical psychology by analyzing the historical authoritarian character and the currently dominant market-oriented social character in advanced neoliberal economies and their detrimental effects on the development of genuine human productivity.

The second keynote of the first day was held virtually by Thomas Teo, a professor and core faculty of the Historical, Theoretical, and Critical Studies of Psychology Graduate Program in the Department of Psychology at York University in Toronto, Canada. Educated at the University of Vienna, Thomas Teo is a world-renown expert and prolific author with

⁵ We congratulate Sünje Lorenzen on her new role as a professor for business psychology at the BSP Business & Law School Campus Hamburg.

special interest in critically analyzing the ontological, epistemological, methodological, and ethical problems of psychology (e.g., Teo, 2018, 2020, 2021). In his impressive keynote speech, entitled „Subjectivity and Work“, he outlined a distinctively critical theory of subjectivity with applications to the workplace, the political economy, and wealth inequalities, based on which he subsequently discussed specific aspects of neoliberal subjectivity, deglobalization and antiglobalization subjectivities, and fascist subjectivity with reference to current global political events, tendencies, and trajectories.

The first keynote speech of day 2 was delivered in-person by Ruth Yeoman, authoritatively speaking on the topic of „Meaningfulness and Organising for Sustainable Futures“. A fellow of Kellogg College at the University of Oxford, her research focuses on ethics, meaningfulness and mutuality in work, organizations and systems, including the philosophy and politics of workplace democracy (e.g., Yeoman, 2014, 2019, 2021). In her comprehensive presentation, she outlined meaning as the basis of a collective human capability for ethical organizing and value-based sustainable organizations, rooted in relational modes of being, suitable to counteract widespread problems of corporate alienation and organizational misconduct.

The fourth and last keynote speech was presented in a virtual format by Martin Parker, who is professor of organisation studies at the University of Bristol and, among others, author of several recent thought-provoking books (e.g., Parker, 2018, 2020; Parker, Stoborod & Swann, 2020), he currently acts as the lead for the Bristol Inclusive Economy Initiative and notably is one of the „founding (grand-)“⁴ fathers“ of the Critical Management Studies (CMS) movement in the UK. In his highly inspirational talk, he discussed the institutionalization of CMS and critically examined its broader impact on political manifestos, practices in organizations, and public policy, thus deriving important lessons for the nascent CWOP movement, and ending with a both engaged and engaging questions-and-answers session.

Presentation sessions and workshops

Constituting the main body of the program and distributed across the two main conference days, overall, 58 oral presentations were given, allocated to altogether 12 (90 minute) topical presentation sessions (six each on day 1 and day 2). Oral presentation sessions typically featured three (exceptionally four)

presentations and were convened in two parallel tracks. Sessions were grouped around the following six topic areas: Radical Humanism in the Tradition of Erich Fromm; Positions, Prospects, and Problems of Critical Work and Organizational Psychology (I and II); Stratification, Marginalization, and Inequality at Work; Psychology and Ideology of the Neoliberal Workplace (I and II); Critical Perspectives on Meaning at Work; and Alternative and Emancipatory Organizational Practices (I, II, and III). Additionally, two themed symposia on „Precarious Employment“ (e.g., Seubert, McWha-Hermann & Seubert, 2023) and „The Living Wages Movement“ (e.g., Seubert, Hopfgartner & Glaser, 2021) were organized by colleagues from the Applied Psychology Unit II of the University of Innsbruck, Christian Seubert and Lisa Hopfgartner (married: Seubert), drawing on their professional connections with the international network for Humanitarian Work Psychology and the Global Living Organisational Wage Project.

In line with the planning of the event, the vast majority of oral presentations were held in-person, yet for inclusiveness and to accommodate for exceptional circumstances, typically arising on short-term notice and connected to the pandemic, the organizers also provided alternative options for virtual presentation, resulting in four live virtual presentations via videoconference software and two pre-recorded virtual presentations. With regular 30-minutes time slots per presentation, this congress offered more freedom to engage in debates and discussions than conventional academic conferences in the field of psychology. This feature was well made use of and apparently greatly appreciated by the participants. Moreover, day 2 included an additional parallel track in which three subsequent workshops were offered in collaboration with members of the FoWOP movement: 1) „Developing a Checklist-Tool for Criticalizing Research“ (see: Sanderson, Röhlmann, Hornung & Bal, 2019); 2) „What Can we Learn from Critical Management Studies?“; and 3) „Critical Work and Organizational Psychology – Outlook and Actions“. The second of these workshops included a hybrid question-and-answer discussion session with Martin Parker as a more interactive and informal continuation and extension of his virtual keynote speech, which was especially well-received and instructive.

Poster exhibition

The conference also featured a poster exhibition, themed: „Emerging Perspectives in Critical and

⁴ We congratulate Martin Parker on recently becoming a grandfather, which was the reason why he attended the conference remotely.

Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology“ (Organizers: Christine Unterrainer and Severin Hornung). The poster exhibition comprised altogether 20 scientific posters, the majority of which were selected from student projects in various courses on critical perspectives in Applied Psychology at both the B.Sc. and M.Sc.-level, taught at the University of Innsbruck between 2020 and 2022. Foci of posters were managerial control strategies and alternative forms of organizing, critical views on sustainability in organizations and organizational research, neoliberal ideology and social character theory, critiques of the concept of self-actualization at work, as well as methods, issues, and theories of change for critical work and organizational psychology. Posters were displayed prominently for viewing in the main reception room, where coffee, tea, refreshments, fruits, and other snacks were served and participants gathered and socialized during regular breaks across the whole event. The poster exhibition not only provided a stimulating backdrop for discussions of the past, present, and future of critical work and organizational psychology, but also an illustration of how the critical perspective is integrated into teaching activities at the University of Innsbruck and how enthusiastically this offer is adopted by students and creatively applied to both academic discourses and real-world problems.

Panel discussion and farewell

Core part of the closing ceremony and the last highlight of the conference was a panel discussion with the provocatively chosen theme: „Prospects and Contestations of Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology: Are we Ready to Take Over?“. Moderated by Christine Unterrainer, eight panel members each started out with a short opening statement on the discussion topic, followed by an open discussion with the audience. Edina Dóci, associate professor in the Department of Management and Organization at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (e.g., Dóci, Knappert, Nijs & Hofmans, 2023), started off the panel with her opening statement, entitled „Deterritorializing and reterritorializing Work and Organizational Psychology“. Drawing on concepts by the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, she provided an engaged account of the personal meaning, her hopes and aspirations for the field of work and organizational psychology and its critical reorientation. Second, P. Matthijs Bal, who holds a professorship for responsible management at the University of Lincoln (e.g., Bal, 2017), raised and discussed the issue of how to move the field forward by not only criticizing, but „Criticalizing our colleagues?“. On a related note, Johanna Lisa Degen, a critical

researcher from the European University of Flensburg (e.g., Degen, 2022; Degen & Zekavat, 2022), who was participating remotely to accommodate for quarantine restrictions, chose the headline „Why a critical stance comes without didactics“ to argue against imposing any specific ontological and epistemological dogma in favor of cultivating tolerance and theoretical and methodological pluralism and multitude. Next came Thomas Kühn, who is professor of work and organizational psychology and the director of the Erich Fromm Study Center at the IPU Berlin (e.g. Kühn, 2015). In his contribution, fittingly titled „The urge for a revolution of hope in Work and Organizational Psychology“, he drew on the works of Erich Fromm to hold a passionate plea for a positive transformation of the academic field of work and organizational psychology based on humanistic values, goals, and principles of change. Next, Laura Röhlmann, a political activist and an educator and researcher at the University of Leipzig (e.g., Röhlmann, Weiss & Zacher, 2021), spoke on the topic of „Creating niches or intervening from within – How individual theories of change influence our strategies towards transforming Work and Organizational Psychology“. On a closely related topic, Severin Hornung, representing the critical group at the University of Innsbruck (e.g., Hornung, 2012), chose the headline „Or should we even aspire to? Dialectics of resistance and assimilation in times of crisis“, under which he discussed the tensions, trade-offs, and possible synthesis between more radical strategies of categorical critique, opposition, and refusal versus more moderate or subtle approaches of incremental reform and subversion. Subsequently, Gazi Islam, professor in the Department of People, Organizations and Society at Grenoble Ecole de Management (e.g., Islam, 2020; Islam & Sanderson, 2022), contributed an opening statement on „Critique of practice and critique by practice: collaborative possibilities in Critical Work and Organizational Psychology“, where he discussed the need for critical scholars to leave the „ivory tower“ to connect, collaborate, and coalesce with practitioners in various organizations and political institutions. The final opening statement was made by Zoe Sanderson, who is a main actor and organizer in the CWOP initiative and an action researcher at the University of Bristol (e.g., Sanderson, 2021), notably doing her PhD on the emergence of the CWOP movement. In her contribution, entitled „Building a house we want to live in: the importance of how we do Critical Work and Organizational Psychology“, she stressed the practical ways in which lived prosocial values and collegial collaboration, mutual support, solidarity, and caring set apart the professional social relationships in the emerging movement from conventional ways of working in the academic mainstream. Given the problematic ideologies, norms and practices of

academia in general, critical work and organizational psychology needs to be practiced and established as a counter-model not only with regard to „what“, that is, the critical content or perspective of research, but also with regard to „how“, that is, the research process and conditions of working life in academia.

After the opening statements, a number of comments or questions by the audience followed up on several of the discussed issues, notably, how to deal with academic performance demands and conventions while maintaining a critical perspective and position (e.g., Dóci & Bal, 2018); how to view and handle conflicts and tensions with and practice dissent or tolerance towards uncritical (or even unethical) mainstream positions (e.g., Weber, Höge & Hornung, 2020); and ways to get connected with and become actively involved in the emerging CWOP movement (e.g., Islam & Sanderson, 2022). For instance, exemplary activities that were discussed include connecting via social media, subscribing to the email newsletter, attending workshops, conferences, and other events, joining the steering committee or the working group on visions and values, or contributing to a publication project, such as planned special journal issues or the projected Handbook of Critical Work and Organizational Psychology mentioned above (as a starting point, contact any of the proponents mentioned above, or visit the website: www.futureofwop.com).

The conference closed with a farewell note by Wolfgang G. Weber, in which he humorously and entertainingly developed the parable of an adventurous quest of a group of mountaineers searching for Shangri-La, a mystical, utopian place, supposedly hidden somewhere in a vast mountainous area not unlike the Alps surrounding Innsbruck. The lesson of the (intentionally somewhat convoluted) story was that the mysterious promised land is not an external location or place to be found or arrived at, but rather an internal state of mind, which reflects both process and outcome of the search, according to the familiar saying that „the route is the goal“ or „the journey is the destination“. In this sense, the conference was at least an important milestone along the winding and rocky road towards a critical transformation of the field of work and organizational psychology. Moreover, participants and organizers agreed that this conference was indeed the first of its kind but certainly should not be the last. In fact, plans regarding a sequel are already taking shape – until then, we will stay connected and committed to our common cause.

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Some lineages and resources of Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology

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ABSTRACT

Critical work and organizational psychology is developing on an international scale. Against the background of this evolving scientific field, in this extended version of my opening speech at the first International Conference on Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology, held from 11th to 13th of July 2022 at the University of Innsbruck, I aim to address the following three questions: (1) What concepts may be relevant for critical work and organizational psychology in analyzing established „mainstream“ (i.e., hegemonic) conceptualizations within work and organizational psychology? (2) Cui bono, critical work and organizational psychology? – To what ethical foundations do (or can) representatives of critical work and organizational psychology refer to when they intend to criticize theory and practice in work and organizational psychology? (3) What do we know about work and organizations beyond domination, subjectification and social alienation? – About fractals of a humanist, socially sustainable economy. Preliminary answers to these questions and implications for the future of critical work and organizational psychology will be discussed.

Keywords

Critical Work and Organizational Psychology – Critical Theory – Radical Humanism – German Critical Psychology

Concepts und categories for the critique of established work and organizational psychological conceptualizations and practices

In recent years, research and teaching in *Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology* (abbreviated: critical W-O psychology) has developed increasingly on an international scale. This is evidenced by a growing number of conceptual reviews, seminal articles, special issues, and scientific conferences, including the present one (e.g., see Bal & Dóci, 2018; Dashtipour & Vidaillet, 2020; Fotaki, 2020; Gerard, 2016, 2023; Hornung, Höge & Unterrainer, 2021; Islam & Sanderson, 2022; Lefkowitz, 2012; Mumby, 2019; McDonald & Bubna-Litic, 2012; Weber, Höge & Hornung, 2020). Therefore, to provide a complete overview on concepts, criteria and tasks of critical W-O psychology is not possible within the limits of this presentation. The more detailed or

focused articles by Bal and Dóci (2018), Hornung and Höge (2022), Islam and Sanderson (2022), Quaas (2006), or McDonald and Bubna-Litic (2012), which I used – complimentary to primary literature from different critical approaches – to identify topics and characteristics of critical W-O psychology, are helpful to gain a more in-depth understanding. Here, I will mainly refer to several concepts relevant for critical W-O psychology stemming from the Frankfurt School's Critical Theory and Analytical Social Psychology, Dialectical Materialist Activity Theory, and German critical psychology, and their reception within our network (<https://www.futureofwop.com/critical-wop>). That is, I will present several approaches relevant to critical W-O psychology with an emphasis on influential streams in German-language literature. Figure 1 provides an overview of these different schools of thought in the German context (including examples of some representatives).

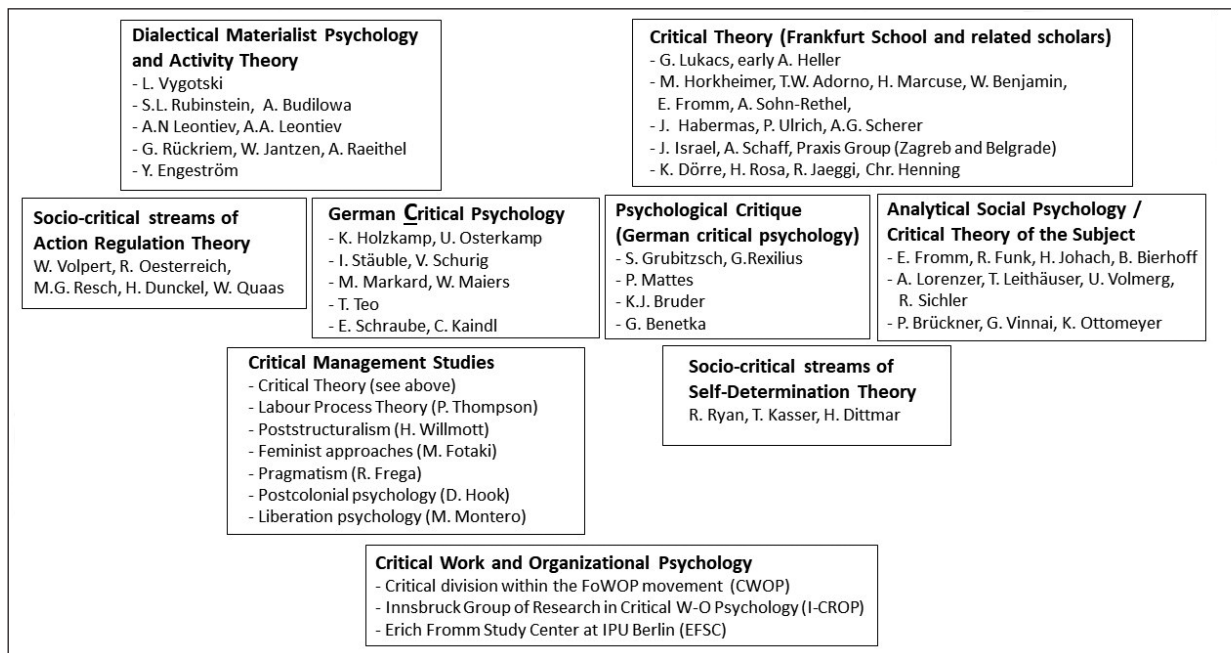


Figure 1: Some approaches of critical W-O psychology – socio-theoretical, socio-critical and pluralistic.

Starting from the *Dialectical Materialist Psychology* that emerged in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in the 1920s, *Critical Psychology* (Holzkamp tradition) and *Action Regulation Theory* were developed in the 1970s in German-speaking countries and Scandinavia. Similarly, the *Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School* influenced the development of Erich Fromm's *Analytical Social Psychology* by researchers organized in the International Erich Fromm Society and, later, the Erich Fromm Research Center at the International Psychoanalytic University in Berlin (e.g., Rainer Funk, Thomas Kühn). Based on the work of the Frankfurt School psychoanalyst Alfred Lorenzer, a *Critical Theory of the Subject* was developed by Thomas Leithäuser, Birgit Volmerg, and colleagues at the University of Bremen (outline: Leithäuser, 2010). Both approaches created analytical methods to analyze the socialization of social character and the development of occupational lifeworlds of managers, workers, and consumers in the context of organizational power structures based on capitalistic principles. Also influenced by Critical Theory, an additional critical psychology network emerged in Germany that focused on *psychology critique* (theories and institutional practice) and, in part, also referred to concepts of Rubinstein's *Dialectical Materialistic Psychology*. Thus, both main strands of development (namely *Dialectical Materialist Psychology* and *Critical Theory*) are not independent of each other. While mutual criticism dominated in the 1970s and 1980s, (limited) attempts at integration from both branches are also discernable, especially in the Anglo-American and Scandinavian realms (e.g., see Teo, 2015). Within

Self-Determination Theory, a stream of research emerged in the 1980s devoted to the conceptual and empirical problematization of American corporate capitalism (e.g., Kasser, Cohn, Kanner & Ryan, 2007). This critical branch of Self-Determination Theory draws, among others, on Erich Fromm's Analytical Social Psychology (Weber, 2019). *Critical Management Studies* (e.g., Alvesson & Willmott, 1992), representing an international network of researchers, has had an even stronger influence on critical W-O psychology. This approach, which appeared in the beginning 1990s, has a strong pluralistic and discursive orientation and attempts to integrate concepts from Critical Theory and Foucault's Poststructuralism, as well as concepts from numerous organizational theories. Further influences on the development of critical W-O psychology, which also have been taken up in Critical Management Studies, can be found, for instance, in feminist approaches (e.g., Fotaki, 2020), in capitalism-critical streams of pragmatism (e.g., Frega, Herzog & Neuhäuser, 2019), postcolonial psychology (e.g., Hook, 2005), and indigenous and liberation psychology (e.g., Montero, 2017). For a more in-depth discussion of these approaches see Teo (2015).

All approaches that are relevant for the development of critical W-O psychology seem to share at least six interrelated themes that are outlined further below. However, different approaches weight the significance of these topics differently. For example, Critical Theory, including Analytical Social Psychology and Self-Determination Theory, focus on a humanistic ethics, whereas Dialectical Materialist Psychology and, its offspring, Activity Theory (the Leontiev tradition),

but also German Critical Psychology, attribute more importance to the political-economic foundation of their concepts. Moreover, different conceptualizations may compete within the same topic. For example, while Rubinstein's tradition of Dialectical Materialist Psychology, as well as Action Regulation Theory, stress the importance of mental work demands for self-actualization of workers. Analytical Social Psychology and the Habermas tradition of Critical Theory focus more on socio-moral learning opportunities within organizations. Activity Theory, on the other hand, emphasizes the multifaceted development of motives and sensory experiences through work. Additionally, drawing on psychoanalysis, Critical Theory and Analytical Social Psychology refer to the construct of dynamic unconsciousness (forming typologies of social characters), whereas Dialectical Materialist Psychology (Rubinstein tradition) and Action Regulation Theory oppose this psychoanalytic construct. Finally, the approach of Critical Management Studies is heterogeneous by definition, representing a pluralistic framework of several (more or less compatible) theories.

The following topical overview is preliminary and without claim to completeness, but may serve as a rough guide to compare and classify the above approaches. It may also stimulate the evolving categorization of topics, theories, and concepts relevant to critical W-O psychology. For each topic, approaches that made focal contributions are indicated:

- (1) *Dialectical concept of person-activity-society interplay*: Societal, cultural and historical genesis of psychological phenomena instead of biological / neuropsychological or behavioristic determinism (including dialectical spiral of acquisition, objectification and further development of cultural-historical shaped knowledge, competences and skills). Focal contributions: Dialectical Materialist Psychology and Activity Theory, Action Regulation Theory, German Critical Psychology, German Psychological Critique, Analytical Social Psychology.
- (2) *Image of socially embedded self-determination of human beings*: Human potential of self-actualization, socially embedded activity / agency / self-determination (including intentionality, self-reflexivity), solidarity, prosociality, and humanitarian moral competence (divided into sections 2a and 2b).
 - (2a) Cognitive personality development at work through regulation requirements fostering complex mental structures and processes, for example, related to weighting, judging, planning, designing, decision making. Focal contributions: Dialectical Materialist Psychology (Rubinstein tradition), Action Regulation Theory.
 - (2b) Socio-moral and experiential personality development at work through opportunities to (further) develop and satisfy socially acceptable basic needs, higher-order human motives, and to experience emotions of self-actualization, self-transcendence, and meaning in work (e.g., different concepts of subjectivity, identity, identity work, meaning, personality, or dynamic unconsciousness). Focal contributions: Activity Theory (Leontiev tradition), German Critical Psychology, Critical Theory (Habermas tradition), Analytical Social Psychology, Self-Determination Theory, Critical Management Studies.
- (3) *Ethical foundation in humanism*: Reflexive and/or discursive humanitarianism (opposed to neoclassical utilitarianism, social Darwinism, Confucianism, or ethical relativism). Focal contributions: Critical Theory (Frankfurt School), Analytical Social Psychology, Self-Determination Theory.
- (4) *Critique of the capitalistic deformations of economic systems, organizations, and work*: Political-economic and / or ethics-based critique of capitalistic domination, power, oppression, and work and social alienation in the scientific sphere of W-O psychology and related socio-economic disciplines and in the practice spheres of production, distribution, and consumption (divided into sections 4a and 4b).
 - (4a) Ideology critique of neo- / positivist functionalism and scientism, critique of managerialism (including psychologization, decontextualization, naturalization/reification, instrumentalization, competitive individualization, consumerism, commodification). Focal contributions: Action Regulation Theory, German Critical Psychology, German Psychological Critique, Critical Theory (Frankfurt School), Analytical Social Psychology, Self-Determination Theory, Critical Management Studies.
 - (4b) Empirically-based critique of economic, organizational, and working conditions and their social and psychological effects that are constraining, degrading, or harming persons and social systems. Focal contributions: Action Regulation Theory, German Critical Psychology, Analytical Social Psychology (especially, Critical Theory of the Subject), Self-Determination Theory, Critical Management Studies.
- (5) *Emancipatory epistemological interest*: Humanistically-oriented emancipation or liberation perspective, especially (though not only) in the interest of dependent, less powerful working people (including precarious self-employment),

research interest to contribute to micro-, meso-, and/or macro-system transformation (humanization, democratization, ecological and social sustainability). Focal contributions: All critical approaches depicted in Figure 1.

- (6) *Pluralistic methodological orientation anchored in the social sciences and humanities*: Critical methodological pluralism, depending on scientific object/subject-matter and concrete epistemological interest, participative research methods (including action research), focus on subjectivity-related methods embedded in a critical sociological frame of analysis. Focal contributions: Dialectical Materialist Psychology / Activity Theory, German Critical Psychology, German Psychological Critique, Critical Theory (Frankfurt School), Analytical Social Psychology, Critical Management Studies.

Complementing the described humanistic and emancipatory programmatic topics and characteristics, contributions to critical W-O psychology examine which opposing *philosophical* (including ethical or epistemological) and *political assumptions* are inherent in the very categories and models used within the prevailing W-O psychological literature. Critical W-O psychologists ask what *socio-structural influence factors*, what *technologies* of organizational power, and what possible impacts stemming from both *collective experiences* and *individual biographies* of employees are considered or obscured within prevailing or popular W-O psychological theories, models, or concepts. Critical W-O psychologists develop *socio-psychological*, that is, *dialectical multi-level models*. Such models specify dynamic interactions between the political-economical structure and cultural practices of a given society (macro-level), organizations within the respective economic system (meso-level), and psychological and psycho-social phenomena concerning persons acting within the economic and organizational context (micro-level). Here, the *historical and societal genesis of mental structures and processes* is accentuated as well as the *changeability* of societal and organizational features through (mostly long term) collective and individual action. Critical W-O psychologists are investigating in how far concrete principles and specific features of economy, enterprises, and work systems *serve or disregard human needs*, social security, and occupational health of the majority of the working people and those for whom these workers care – including those working under precarious conditions (e.g., in global supply chains) and the unemployed. Consequentially, in scientific and practical collaboration with experts from other disciplines, critical W-O psychologists explore how economy, enterprises and work activities can

be changed to serve those involved in a better way. Criticizing hegemonic currents within W-O psychology from a critical theoretical and radical humanist point of view does not necessarily imply that the majority of researchers and practitioners do not intend to improve organizations, work conditions, and work tasks for dependent, non-managerial workers. However, I agree with the assessment of McDonald and Bubnalitic (2012, p. 850) that „[w]hile the majority of applied social psychologists are genuine in their desire to improve the workers lot, their research, theories, and practice are only as good as the philosophies and theories that underpin them.“

Cui bono, critical W-O psychology? – To what ethical foundations can critical W-O psychology refer to?

The first generation of Critical Theorists of the Frankfurt School, like Horkheimer and Adorno (1972, original: 1947), similar in this regard like orthodox Marxists, were skeptical about formulating *positive* ethical principles or even projecting features of a humanist economy beyond the dictate of commodity production and profit-maximizing shareholder value orientation (see Wiggershaus, 1995; Jeffries, 2016). Many critical psychologists and representatives of Critical Management Studies have shared this deep skepticism. One reason for this self-restraint was the fear that positive visions or values would be instrumentalized, abstracted, and diluted by „neoliberal“ capitalist actors following the logics of commodification, or by ruthless populist politicians – as it had happened in the Stalinist past. However, a closer look on characteristic concepts of Critical Theory and related approaches indicates their implicit or explicit ethical foundations.

In the works of main representatives of Critical Theory (e.g., Adorno, 1993; Horkheimer, 1992; Habermas, 1970) and its cognate, Analytical Social Psychology (e.g., Fromm, 1968, 1976), their normative criticism of phenomena inherent to capitalist economies and scientific psychology is obvious. For instance, it manifests in the critique of instrumental (instead of moral) reason, social alienation, commodification of personality, economist thinking patterns, reification, and naturalization of capitalist political-economic principles and organizational relations. Such concepts reveal clear references to the humanism of Immanuel Kant, to the radical humanism of the early Karl Marx, and also to the idea of basic human rights as guiding principle of liberal republican democracies. Effects of managing, working, consuming, and being commodified under radical capitalist, so called „neoliberal“ economic conditions are considered as harm-

ful for both societal cohesion and individual psychosocial development and health (cf. reviews by Beattie, 2019; George, 2014). Consequentially, in *The Eclipse of Reason*, published in 1947, Max Horkheimer, criticizing the ideology of ethical relativism by liberal economists, even goes so far as to advocate humanist values, such as justice, equality, tolerance, and freedom, against their capitalistic de-essentialization in form of manipulated, arbitrary individual „preferences“ (Horkheimer, 1992). Distinct from – yet also related to – preceding concepts from Critical Theory, constructs from other streams within Critical Management Studies (e.g., Labor Process Theory, parts of Poststructuralism), like managerialism, domination, subjectification, instrumentalization, naturalization, or psychologization, clearly indicate references to Marx' critique of the political economy and to Kant's second formula of the Categorical Imperative, namely, the prohibition of instrumentalizing humans for ends outside themselves.

Similar to Marx, *Radical Humanism* in the tradition of Erich Fromm (1968, 1976), who broke away from the mainstream of the Frankfurt School, criticizes the pure emphasis of humanistic idealism inside an isolated ivory tower or a children's playground that underlies some approaches of Humanistic Psychology or so-called Positive Psychology. The latter is defined by its protagonists as „the scientific study of optimal human functioning“ (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Alas, those proud and noble knights of neo-Positivism have forgotten to tell us for whose benefit does this functioning in the context of labor really serve...? Rather, Fromm defends Humanism in *Marx' Concept of Man* (1961) and his later works: Humanism as a normative guiding principle states the absolute, *unconditional value* of each human being, and insists that the freedom and dignity of all human beings worldwide shall be the *uncircumventable objective* of personal, social, economic, and political endeavors (Fromm, 1976; for further conceptualizations of humanist ethics applied to work and organizations see Bal, 2017; Lefkowitz, 2012; Quaas, 2006; Ulrich, 2008). Several basic or civic rights can be derived from the three universal standards concerning living, human dignity, and personal freedom, such as freedom of expression, freedom of movement and other freedoms, voting rights, principles of justice and equality, private property, but also the social obligation of propriety. Highly relevant for psychological tasks concerning work and organizational design is that humanism is committed to guiding ideas of personality development, including moral development, comprehensive education, and application of creative capabilities and knowledge. Principles and concepts from humanism have influenced some research areas of W-O psychology (like job analysis and design or leadership studies)

to a certain extent (see Lefkowitz, 2012). However, what is the *difference* between *conventional* humanist approaches and *radical humanist approaches* in W-O psychology?

A main difference is that the radical humanist perspective (sensu Fromm, 1968, 1976) conceptually attempts to *overcome psychological reductionism*. To extend the explanatory power of theoretical frameworks of W-O psychology, radical humanism strives for the understanding of functioning and effects of *political-economic* and *organizational power structures*, their related *ideologies*, and the pervasion of those power structures and supporting ideologies into the concerned employees and consumers' minds (for related elaborations see Dejours, Deranty, Renault & Smith, 2018; Funk, 2011, 2023; Hornung & Höge, 2022). This conceptual work is very important for W-O psychology because those *societal* structures, their economic sub-structures and ideologies potentially pervade *individual* values, attitudes, cultural practices, communication, and job-related behaviors of people interacting in work-settings. Here, the *theory of the social character* plays a central role: A socialization theory integrating political-economic and psychoanalytical concepts, established by Erich Fromm and Michael Maccoby (see Maccoby & McLaughlin, 2019) and further developed by Rainer Funk (2011) and other researchers in the International Erich Fromm Society. For further theoretical support for the „pervasion-thesis“ considering political-economic ideology and individual beliefs see, for example, Islam's (2020) multi-level model of the interactions between intra-individual, inter-individual, and the political-economic and cultural context of ethical decision-making and behaviors in business (adapted to the context of precarious employment by Seubert, McWha-Hermann & Seubert, 2023). Or, consider the content-analytically founded conceptual studies by Bal and Dóci (2018) on neoliberal ideology in organizations, by Ferraro, Pfeffer, and Sutton (2005) on economic business language, by Keenoy (2009) on HRM, or by Weber and Moldaschl (2014) on organizational citizenship behavior.

Beyond Critical Theory and Analytical Social Psychology, considering the German branch of *Critical Psychology*, founded by Klaus Holzkamp and Ute Osterkamp (for outlines see Motzkau & Schraube, 2015; Teo, 1998), I encounter further concepts very relevant for critical W-O psychology such as psychology from the standpoint of the subject, participants as co-researchers, general vs. restrictive agency, collectively planned environmental control, or collective care for subsistence. While this variant of Critical Psychology shares the deep skepticism against formulating of positive, context-isolated ethical values, at least during the first two decades of its

development, Critical Psychology used Marx' critique of the political economy as its social theoretical base. The concept of generalized agency envisioned the global transformation of capitalistic economy through long enduring endeavors of workers solidarity. In my view, a future task of critical W-O psychology could be to elaborate evidential relations and also differences between the concept of generalized agency and concepts of cognitive moral psychology and its foundation in Habermas' discourse ethics (see Ulrich, 2008). Further, the current critical psychological concept of *practice research* tries to support the participant in becoming aware of both external social conditions and subjective premises that hinder his/her personal development and his/her liberation from domination, and pain. I am tempted to see in this mutually reflexive research strategy of Critical Psychology *somewhat* a reference to aims of personality development which are also characteristic for the radical humanist approach within W-O psychology.

Finally, *criteria of humane work* developed by members of a stream within Action Regulation Theory critical to capitalistic labor utilization, represent a further approach of applying humanistic-ethical principles to W-O psychology. The focus of this German research network (e.g., Walter Volpert, Rainer Oesterreich, Wolfgang Quaas, Marianne Resch) guided the development of criteria and methods to analyze inherent qualities of work tasks and working conditions for the promotion (or impairment) of employees' cognitive and social competences and psycho-physical health. Originally starting with a Marxist analysis of the alienating structure of wage labor in 1975 and also referring to Leontiev's Activity Theory (outline: Weber & Jeppesen, 2017), Volpert and colleagues later derived three fundamental features of human activity from available cultural-anthropological studies. Resulting in an empirically grounded classification of humane work, these criteria were operationalized in a comprehensive observation and interview manual (Volpert, 1988, 1989; Dunckel & Pleiss, 2007). Accordingly, work tasks should offer the employee: *I. Purposefulness* (i.e., large scope of decisions; considerable temporal discretion / relative time independence; transparency and the possibility to influence the conditions of work; absence of (preventable) organizational or technical hindrances / objective stressors); *II. Object relatedness* (i.e., sufficient physical activity; direct contact to material and social reality; various sensory perceptions; a variety of working methods); and *III. Social relatedness* (i.e., complex communication requirements).

Reading the underlying action regulation theoretical publications, we can identify explicit references to humanistic conceptualizations of the *human condition* or *human potential*. Specifically, they

point to the first theory of alienation by Karl Marx (1961; orig.: 1844) referring to alienation from (a) the essential powers of humans; (b) from work activity; and (c) from social relationships to other humans. Consequentially, job analysis based on this action regulation theoretical classification of humane work criteria follows the idealistic guiding principle of the „all-round developed personality“ (Marx, 1961). Additionally, mostly without referring to Marx' political economy, the approach of *Socio-technical Systems Design* (see Trist & Murray, 1995) can be considered a forerunner of this critique of alienating work under the tread of radical capitalist management concepts. Moreover, within the socio-technical approach, similar criteria of humane work have been developed into methodologies for the redesign of work systems integrating psychological, technological, and economic criteria and design principles (e.g., Zink, Kötter, Longmuß & Thul, 2009).

Critical psychologists like Teo (2022) have explained that even humanist and critical theoretical conceptualizations of W-O psychology, often developed within capitalistic countries in the Western hemisphere, may be culturally biased or are at risk to be instrumentalized by a Western cultural supremacy. This can cause serious misunderstandings of other work cultures and result in biased scientific theories, methods, and results. Even worse, concepts of humane work and organization could degenerate into means of psychological repression or destroy well-functioning local cultures. Researchers conducting cultural and postcolonial studies (e. g., Hook, 2005; Salter & Haugen, 2017) have raised this well-justified objection against a normative humanistic foundation of critical W-O psychology. Therefore, the question arises whether moral or cultural relativism or a „value-free“ research orientation represents a meaningful alternative to a normative humanistic foundation of critical W-O psychology?

I do not think so, because, on the one hand, *value-free* research is not possible in an applied social science, which has to *evaluate* work and organizations with regard to human characteristics and potentials. This has been demonstrated in countless epistemological debates and work on Critical Management Studies. On the other hand, I do fully agree with critical theoretical scholars like Peter Ulrich (2008) and Thomas Teo (2022), who have demonstrated that an indispensable epistemological modesty does *not* imply relativism:

„Recognition means valuing the accomplishments of all cultures without invoking supremacy. Indeed, such recognition could mean appreciating the development of universal human rights that have a strong Western historical influence. Temporality entails that such rights can be extended or

expanded that they must be analysed as to how they have been used or misused, their cultural validity, and so on. The ongoing project of universal human rights is not in contradiction to cultural diversity but the goal of such a project would be to find agreement among cultures on human rights, and to ensure that they do not reflect the aspirations of only a select few.“ (Teo, 2022, p. 335)

Following Habermas' (1990) discourse ethics (his variant of Critical Theory) several presuppositions exist as uncircumventable, universal preconditions for tolerance, recognition, and respect for difference, also difference in values. These represent an essence of human rights. Among them are the right of life and integrity of the person. Without guaranteeing these, respect for diversity or a debate on cultural differences, is not possible. Because, by definition, respect, recognition of the other, and discourses are grounded in non-coerciveness. Difference in living styles or cultures need to be protected through only a few but *essential* human rights. If these are guaranteed, then free debates on their further development or conditioned limitation, e.g., in case of conflicts between societal objectives or in case of unforeseeable historical incidents, will become possible.

What do we know about fractals of systems of work and organization beyond domination, subjectification and social alienation? – About fractals of a humanist, socially sustainable economy

I deeply hope that critical theoretical and further critical psychological concepts will support us not *only* in criticizing and further-developing W-O psychological theory and methodology. In addition, there is need for gaining new empirical findings that help us and our collaborating professionals in education, business organizations, civil society, and politics, to contribute to humane organizational and societal change with regard to often global and pressing problems, such as (a) „self-exploitation“ under the reign of „neoliberal“ management in science and practice, for example, spurious and exploitative empowerment / employee participation, job crafting, enforced performance „excellence“, and self-endangerment; (b) digitalization, undemocratization and dehumanization, driven by big software corporations, global investment firms, and their political supporters by means of AI, robotics, and surveillance technologies; (c) development of an ecologically and socially sustainable economy, despite powerful „neoliberal“ or right-wing populist forces of inertia; (d) also as an effect of the above crises,

increasing alienation from representative democracy by citizens who experience work, market, and economy as „natural“, unalterable, technocratic dominion.

Islam and Sanderson (2022) have demonstrated in a thorough conceptual review that, after about 100 years of W-O psychological research, an emancipatory discourse that offers alternative possibilities in the field of economy and business is still underdeveloped (cf. Bal & Dóci, 2018). Like Critical Management Studies, radical-humanist research implies an emancipatory epistemological interest (Habermas, 1970; Hornung & Höge, 2022). Empirical studies are *not only* guided by objectives like identifying substantial deficiencies in work conditions and in leadership behaviors or deconstructing ideological tools of HRM. Radical-humanist research is also aimed at the development of *economic democracy*; namely, measures for reducing or removing political-economic, organizational, or technological factors that impede dignity and democracy at work (Bal, 2017; Weber, 2019). This emancipatory interest in critical interventions, embedded into a vision of *transforming* radical-capitalist economies including their work organizations, democratically and peacefully from the inside-out, is one of the main reasons for the separation between Fromm's more optimistic *Revolution of Hope* (1968, 1976) and Horkheimer and Adorno's (1972) deep cultural pessimism in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

Economic democracy embodies a heterogeneous bundle of objectives, political strategies and tactics, that can counteract processes of erosion of democratic societies in work, organizations, and overarching economic institutions. Economic democracy encompasses institutions through which influence can be exerted on the management of companies and corporate groups, oriented toward the protection and advancement of employees and further stakeholders affected by economic decisions (for a comprehensive outline see Wright, 2010). By means of a complex structure of deliberative, direct democratic, and representative democratic instruments, workers and other stakeholders are to gain a directing and controlling influence on investment, employment and labor policy.

Internationally, it has not yet been possible to develop and anchor an economic democracy alternative that is influential in the political public sphere and in political institutions (parliaments, chambers, associations). However, democratically constituted enterprises represent an important component of a potential long-term strategy for building economic democracy in democratic republican societies. This is because various forms of democratic enterprises actually exist worldwide. Practices, successes and problems of employees' collective participation in decision making and cooperation that take place in those companies can be experienced and

communicated to an interested public. Democratic enterprises are business organizations (i.e., firms, companies, corporations), in which participative structures and processes are located at the organizational level, and where employees or their elected representatives are involved in decision-making processes, particularly, concerning strategic or tactical issues. Typically, participation rights are based on employees' shareholder status as co-owners of the enterprise (Weber, Unterrainer & Höge, 2020).

Given the non-existence of an alternative, democratic economic system and the failure of dictatorial, undemocratic planned economies, the promise of such *real utopias* (Wright, 2010) should not be underestimated. Future critical psychological research on democratic enterprises can also refer to Bal and de Jong's (2017) eight ways to promote human dignity through workplace democracy. Empirical studies (for reviews see Weber, Unterrainer & Höge, 2020; Unterrainer, Weber, Höge & Hornung, 2022) suggest that democratic enterprises, especially when applying socio-moral principles of the Solidarity Economy (<https://www.ripess.org/?lang=en>) or the Economy of the Common Good (<https://www.ecogood.org/en/>), represent institutions that can counter corrosive psychological and societal phenomena. These include: authoritarianism and obedience to authority; commodification of employees as „human capital“ or „human resources“; economic thinking patterns and reification of human beings; naturalization of capitalistic economy and corporate governance; moral disengagement or impairment of universal perspective taking. Further, corrosive emergences are encompassing forms and techniques of subjectification and identity-formation that internalize „neoliberal“ principles (instrumentality, competition, individuality); as well as managerialism, power asymmetries, and structural inequality and precarity. Current theoretical conceptualizations by representatives of Critical Management Studies and Radical Humanism, that are discussed at this congress (e.g., Funk, 2023; Kühn & Bobeth, 2022; Parker, 2017; Parker, Cheney & Fournier, 2014; Tischer, Yeoman, White, Nicholls & Mitchie, 2016; Yeoman, 2021), also form indispensable foundations to research the potential of organizational democracy for an ecological and social transformation and to develop respective socio-psychologically based political interventions.

Conclusion

To conclude, we are living in times of global economic domination and financial speculation, far reaching corporate corruption, and global profit-driven environmental destruction causing humanitarian cata-

strophes. Against this backdrop, let me pose the question, whether scientific W-O psychology can really be prepared for the future, if we, as scientists and practitioners, do not have the civic courage to engage in international research, policy counselling, and practical politics regarding feasible and viable alternative economic and societal subsystems that support the urgently needed radical transformation of regional, national, and global economies?

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Productivity in face of a „pathology of normalcy“. Erich Fromm’s contribution to Critical Psychology

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ABSTRACT

This article, based on the author’s keynote speech at the first International Conference on Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology at the University of Innsbruck, draws on radical humanist theorizing on human productivity and the „pathology of normalcy“ in demonstrating the importance of the contribution of Erich Fromm as a basis for Critical Psychology¹. The sociologist and psychoanalyst Erich Fromm (1900-1980) developed a social psychological method, the special significance of which is that it explicitly captures unconscious motivations and impulses. This makes it possible to identify strivings and behaviors, as well as common values and thought patterns, which, from a humanistic perspective, represent socially patterned mental „defects“. Based on Fromm’s concept of social character, what is perceived as „normal“ and „reasonable“ in a given society can be exposed as a potential „pathology of normalcy“. After briefly outlining major concerns of the project of Critical Psychology, Erich Fromm’s social-psychoanalytical approach is introduced. The following sections are dedicated to the significance of character formation for explaining social behavior, social repression and socially patterned defects. Next, some indications will be given regarding the meaning of human productivity according to Erich Fromm. Subsequently, the pathogenic impacts of social character orientations will be illustrated based on the exemplary types of the authoritarian and the contemporary marketing social character. The article concludes with a short summary of Erich Fromm’s contribution to Critical Psychology.

Keywords

Erich Fromm – Critical Psychology – social character theory – economic vs. human productivity – authoritarian character – marketing character

What is Critical Psychology about?

What *critical* work and organizational psychologists have in common, is a clear understanding that, as psychologists, they should not be degraded to mere servants of a certain economic philosophy, mode of production, or work organization. *Critical* psychologists, therefore, aim to question mainstream interpretations, that is to say, what is considered reasonable and normal in business and society – but also in psychology itself (cf. Kühn, 2015).

The impetus for this critical questioning is motivated in different ways. At its core, however, is typically the question of whether either *economic* productivity or *human* productivity should be the predominantly guiding ethical value in the mode

of production and in the organization of work. Both the primacy of physical survival and historically established power relationships are used to argue in favor of putting human beings at the service of economic productivity. On the other hand, however, the associated effects of doing so, in terms of disease, alienation and social inequality, are so obvious, such that priority must be given to human productivity – and thus to individual and social human well-being.

Above all, it is the question of the *counterproductive human impacts* of the prevailing mode of production and organization of work, which is calling a *Critical Psychology* into action. Typically, the main focus today is no longer on physical illnesses caused by toxic substances or physical exploitation, but on psychological and psychosomatic illnesses, such as

¹ A German version of this article was published in the previous issue of this journal (Funk, 2022b).

depression and anxiety disorders as well as pain diseases and forms of self-exploitation, leading to burnout and chronic fatigue syndromes.

Critical Psychology sees beyond such pathological phenomena and identifies additional counterproductive effects on humans: It observes – compare, for instance, the Gallup index – the loss of emotional attachment to work, to leaders, to the company or the organization, a lack of motivation, resistance in the form of „working only according to instruction“, „internal resignation“, increased job turnover, and so on. The loss of certain mental and social skills has an even more serious impact on economic and human productivity: the capacity for personal (rather than technical) creativity; the ability to develop an empathy capable of caring and considering the consequences of one’s actions; or the capacity for a sociality that respects the dignity of others and, instead of establishing inequalities and dependencies, realizes democratic forms of coexistence.

Critical Psychologists try to see such counterproductive developments in a larger context: What do they have to do with the great technological, economic, and social changes of our times? And, if inequality, alienation, and pathogenic developments can indeed be linked to such structural changes, what does this mean for the question of transformational strategy – for example, in the field of work and organizational psychology? Here the word „radical“, in the title of this conference, makes sense: One has to go psychologically to the roots – radices – of the problem – and analyze the altered relational structures that have been formed by industrial and digital revolutions and neoliberal economics – and that are counterproductive from a human (and, in the end, also an economic) point of view.

An important starting point is certainly to try to change the new patterns of thinking and attitudes that have developed with the changed relational structures by means of promoting humanistic values and certain experience-based learning methods. Whether such a cognitive-behavioral approach can actually achieve the desired transformations is precisely the question that Erich Fromm and psychoanalysis have posed.

In the following, we will deal with a *Critical Psychology* that also makes the unconscious, in the form of non-conscious cognitions and emotions, the object of interest. It therefore sees the mental above all in affect- and emotion-bound strivings, which influence thinking, feeling and acting consciously and unconsciously. In the next step, I would like to illustrate, how this can be done by means of Erich Fromm’s social-psychoanalytic method and theory.

Erich Fromm’s social-psychoanalytical approach

Fromm’s decisive scientific contribution must be seen in having developed a distinctive social-psychological theory and method which explains, how society is represented in the individual through a specific psychological structure formation – the social character (Fromm, 1937 / 2010, 1941, pp. 277-299, 1962; see Funk, 2022a, 2019, pp. 54-65). This social character is the reason that a multitude of individuals displays similar patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting, and that all tend to strive for what a particular society needs for its existence and functioning. The uniform will and striving of the many, made possible by the social character formation, thus psychologically forms the cement of a given society.

The special feature of this approach is that it can also be used to explain how it comes about that the many individuals develop strivings that are counterproductive, without the people concerned being aware of this. On the contrary: The counterproductive strivings that determine thinking, feeling and acting are experienced and rationalized as healthy, reasonable, right, and normal. How did Fromm arrive at such a social-psychoanalytic approach?

Two questions occupied Fromm throughout his life: Why do people behave *irrationally*, and what makes a large number of people think, feel and act *similarly*? Why do people not actually behave as they think and intend to behave? Why do they act contrarily to their own values? Why are they plagued by groundless fears? Why do their intentions fail? Or a completely different example of irrational behavior: why do people always want to be like others, without making their *own* judgments or feeling their *own* needs? Fromm was already moved by this question in 1914, when the First World War broke out and was supported enthusiastically by a majority.

Fromm answered this first question, what makes people think, feel and act irrationally and dysfunctionally, with the insights of Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis into the unconscious and repressed (Fromm, 1962, pp. 88-132). When certain affects (such as fear), feelings (such as aggression), ideas (such as grandiosity), and desires (such as erotic longing) are taboo for personal or social reasons or lead to conflicts, people can repress these so that they are no longer aware of them. And yet, what was repressed controls the person’s thinking, feeling and acting in a concealed way (aggression is projected, for example, so that not myself but the other is experienced as aggressive). The repressed has the effect that people behave irrationally, because they are not aware of certain affects, desires, etc.

The second question that preoccupied Fromm throughout his life is: What makes many people think, feel and act *similarly*? This is about group behavior and about the question of which inner strivings lead to a similarity of behavior, so that the result is cohesion instead of confusion and social anomie. What inner drives result in similar thinking, feeling and acting of the many – even if this is irrational or hostile?

It was precisely this question that led Fromm to combine the psychoanalytic findings on repression with the sociological question of what inwardly causes people to behave in a uniform manner. Whenever an individual behaves in an enduringly consistent way, a psychological structure formation occurs. Psychoanalysis calls such a structural formation *character*, whereby Fromm had the ingenious idea to start from two types of character formation, which differ with respect to their origin and function: the individual character and the social character.

In contrast to Sigmund Freud and Karl Abraham, character formation according to Fromm does not follow an intrinsic drive-dynamic oriented toward erogenous zones of the body (oral, anal, phallic, genital). Rather, the character-related striving and behavior result from the influence of repeated experiences of relatedness on the cognitive and emotional impulses. According to Fromm, two different character formations can be distinguished: The individual character and the social character (Fromm, 1962, pp. 71-88). The *individual* character develops on the basis of repeatedly made and therefore internalized experiences of relatedness that are specific to this individual: with early attachment figures, on the basis of personal circumstances, sibling experiences, turns of fate, etc. The *social* character results from the adaptation and internalization of the economic circumstances, the cultural and technical conditions, and the social coexistence. It arises from the innate need for a sense of social identity. The social character explains why many people think, feel and act similarly. Moreover, the social character can be more or less irrational and counterproductive or – as Fromm says – non-productive for the achievement of successful coexistence.

The crucial point of Fromm's social character theory is to be seen in the fact that in each individual human being, society with its economic and cultural possibilities and requirements of living together, are also represented. The social character makes the individual think, feel and act in a way necessary for a certain social coexistence. At this point, let's inquire a little deeper specifically into the importance of the capacity for character formation to explain social behavior.

The significance of character formation for explaining social behavior

The *one* distinctive feature of character formation is that it shapes behavior in a constant and consistent way (see Fromm, 1947, pp. 54-61). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume an underlying character formation when it comes to similarities in the thinking, feeling and acting of many people. With the concept of a social character formation affecting the many individuals of a social group, the phenomenon of social identity can be explained psychoanalytically.

The *other* distinctive feature of character formation is that character-conditioned behavior is experienced as *ego-syntonic*, which means as natural, normal, reasonable, and healthy, even when character formation is in the service of repression and, therefore, results in counterproductive effects. A simple example of this is a compulsive character who locks his car with the central locking system, but nevertheless checks every single door to make sure they are really closed – and does not let himself be dissuaded from doing so, because his behavior appears reasonable to him.

The ego-syntonic quality of a character formation has the great advantage that a person can experience himself identically with his behaviors, even when counterproductive behavior is concerned. The ego-syntonic quality then ensures that the behavior does not generate any level of suffering. To illustrate this once again with the example of a compulsive person: Instead of a compulsive *character*, he could also just develop compulsive *symptoms* and suffer endlessly from the fact that he has to get up again at least five times before falling asleep, in order to make sure that there really is no candle burning or that the apartment door is locked.

Counterproductive inner strivings due to repressions can thus articulate themselves in very different ways. Character formations in the service of repression show the great *subjective* advantage that the counterproductive defect is experienced ego-syntonically and without significant suffering. For this reason alone, what is experienced as healthy and normal cannot be a sufficient criterion for psychic productiveness.

What has been illustrated here in the case of an individual compulsive person also applies to social character formations that are in the service of social repressions. The ego-syntonic quality of character formation leads the many to experience certain counterproductive strivings as normal and reasonable. Even in their counterproductive strivings, they experience a sense of belonging and their social identity.

Social character, social repression and socially patterned defects

How can we understand social repression and social unconsciousness? Let's take, for example, an economic system organized according to the principles of neoliberalism and controlled by globalized „cut-throat“ competition. Such a system needs people who have a desire to compete, to eliminate rivals and to win at all costs. Such a model of coexistence is just as counterproductive for social and workplace coexistence as it is for family relationships; above all, however, it contradicts the innate growth-tendency of every human being towards developing abilities of prosociality, solidarity and empathy.

In order to nevertheless have people competing and wanting to win for the job market, „social filters“ (Fromm, 1962, pp. 115-124) are created in the public consciousness, which promote those mental abilities that distinguish „winners“ and that help to repress those abilities that are solidary, compassionate, and not success-oriented. According to Fromm, in this case, those „social filters“ have the function to portray the desire to compete and to win as the most normal thing in the world and to let it become a basic aspiration, which characterizes our thinking, feeling and acting.

Not only in organizations and companies, but also in private and public life, it's all about winning and victories, bestseller lists, the number of points achieved, the ranking, how often one is cited, how many followers you have, how many „likes“ you get, how high your audience rating is, etc. In leisure time, too, it's all about winning and competition: Especially in sports and in the reporting of sporting competitions, in quiz shows, in bargain hunting – and clever marketing strategists even combine an invitation to visit a museum with a lottery. At every turn, we learn that life is a competition and that it's all about being victorious.

With the help of such social filters, humanly counterproductive social-character strivings are made to appear as natural, normal, healthy and reasonable, and, at the same time, productive human capacities are de-activated and repressed. The ego-syntonic quality of character formation ensures that those affected do not suffer from their increasing inability to feel empathy for the weak, the „losers“, and the poor.

The absence of suffering in counterproductive strivings led Erich Fromm to speak of a „pathology of normalcy“ and to distinguish between a neurosis and a „socially patterned defect“ (Fromm, 1944, 1955, pp. 12-21). Neuroses are always accompanied by symptom formation and generate a sense of suffering; therefore, it does not make sense to speak with Freud of a „social neurosis“ („Gemeinschaftsneurose“, Fromm 1955, p. 19), but of a defect: „For most of them,

the culture provides patterns which enable them *to live with a defect without becoming ill*“ (Fromm 1955, p. 17).

The unconscious suffering from a socially patterned defect does not remain without consequences. On the one hand – to stay with the example of competing and wanting to win – this character striving acts like an opiate: „If the opiate against the socially patterned defect were withdrawn, the manifest illness would make its appearance“ (Fromm 1955, p. 17). In fact, severe psychic suffering occurs frequently when winning is suddenly no longer possible – for example, due to the loss of a job, an accident or a serious physical illness, or the breakup of a meaningful personal relationship.

According to Fromm, however, the counterproductive quality of a socially patterned defect also manifests itself in the fact that it can lead to strong psychological *reactions*: When feelings of solidarity and compassion for losers and the weak are no longer practiced, or when empathy for moments of failure, breakdown and loss is no longer felt, this often leads to sudden internal reactions, such as aggressive states of restlessness, a paralyzing apathy and listlessness, strong fears of loss and panic attacks, or a depressive inability to sense one's own feelings. Such decompensations, often diagnosed as burnout and fatigue syndrome, can very well be understood as reactions to socially patterned defects (which, by the way, is also reflected in the psychotherapeutic treatment for such illnesses).

Despite these clear indications of the counterproductive effect of socially patterned defects, it remains to be noted that social character formations are usually symptom-free psychological adaptations to an economically and socially required life practice. This may also involve the internalization of counterproductive mental strivings, so that in the case of social character formations, the type and extent of the „pathology of normalcy“ must be examined in greater detail.

What does human productivity mean according to Erich Fromm?

Next, I now want to address, by providing at least some indications, what defines Fromm's understanding of human productivity and how he goes about to establish a humanistic social psychology (cf. in more detail Fromm, 1947, pp. 82-107; Funk, 2003, 2019, pp. 72-84). The starting point for what Fromm calls (human) „productivity“ is, on the one hand, the special biological situation of man: to be determined less and less by instinctive-genetic specifications, and being able to create new forms of relatedness through

the means of self-consciousness and imagination. On the other hand, man shares with all forms of life an intrinsic tendency for growth, which creates an aspiration to allow the growth potential for this form of life to be realized.

The productive growth potentials possible for man result, above all, from his neuronal abilities: self-reflexive cognitive abilities (that may result in → rational thinking), imagination-directed affect control (loving feelings) and imaginative reality generation (→ creative fantasy). Whether cognitive, emotional and imaginative abilities are productively growing can be assessed and measured with indicators of optimal psychosocial development. Some of these shall be mentioned here:

- The ability to connect imagination and affect and thus to be able to control oneself independently of caregivers (→ ability for autonomy);
- the ability to distinguish between positive and negative aspects of reality, other people and one's own self (→ ability for ambiguity);
- the ability to tolerate ambiguous perceptions and feelings („both this and that“) in others and in oneself (instead of projecting and splitting) (→ ability for ambivalence);
- the ability to distinguish between the „I“ and affect or feelings (→ affect control);
- the ability to distinguish between the „I“ and desire, fantasy, fiction or virtuality (→ reality control, sense of reality, „objectivity“);
- the ability to distinguish between socially prescribed and one's own value concepts (→ individualized social self-esteem).

If the productive development is *hindered* by counterproductive ways of being related, these abilities develop only to a limited extent and will be lost again in stressful situations. If the development is *thwarted*, a destructive tendency of decay occurs instead of a creative growth tendency. Fromm's core thesis is therefore that a humanly productive life, economy and coexistence has the practice of the optimally differentiated cognitive, emotional and imaginative abilities of the person as its prerequisite and goal.

Erich Fromm's critical social psychology is characterized by the fact that it also includes in the critique of those socially patterned psychological defects that are inherent in social character formations. The more dominant a humanly non-productive social character orientation is, the less it is recognized as pathogenic. Rather, those affected as well as the public, perceive it as normal, healthy, and rational. Finally, it will now be shown by way of example, looking at two specific social character orientations, what the defects regarding human productivity consist of in each case.

Social character orientations and their pathogenic impacts

In the course of his life, Fromm described in detail a number of social character formations and examined their pathogenic impacts. Fromm did this most extensively for the authoritarian social character and for the marketing social character. Therefore, these two types will be used to show which counterproductive skills are demanded and promoted, and which productive abilities are repressed. Other orientations include the hoarding, the necrophilic and the narcissistic social character, as well as the ego-oriented social character identified by myself using Fromm's method (see Funk, 2019, pp. 95-143, as well as the videos on the Erich Fromm Study Center YouTube channel: <https://efsc.ipu-berlin.de/en/media-center>).

The authoritarian social character

Fromm speaks of an *authoritarian orientation*, when the state of being related to others, to oneself, to nature, to work, etc., is a result of the *active* (sadistic) exercise of dominance and the *passive* (masochistic) exercise of submissiveness, whereby the dominant and the submissive are *symbiotically* related to each other (see Fromm, 1941, pp. 141-179).

The active (*sadistic*) domination-exercising aspects of this character aim to make and keep *others* submissive and dependent, to patronize, exploit or torture them. If this tendency is directed *against oneself*, then authoritarians display a high degree of self-control, self-discipline, and feelings of guilt. They then show signs of a rigid 'Super-ego', which forbids everything pleasurable and frivolous.

Typical for the passive (*masochistic*) aspect of the authoritarian character are submissiveness under and blind obedience to authority and idealization of authority. All good things are expected to come from the authority. In *dealing with oneself*, the masochistic striving expresses itself in a renunciation of everything that is self-willed, self-confident, of one's own rights and wishes – and of all expressions of autonomy. The 'selfless' is the ideal of the passive authoritarian.

Further, a central feature of Fromm's understanding of authoritarianism is that the person exercising authority and the submissive person are *symbiotically* dependent on and emotionally bound to each other. This symbiosis denotes the *psychodynamics* of the authoritarian character: The submissive person, under pressure from the ruler, *projects his own autonomous powers* onto the authority, so that the latter has them at his disposal. However, since the submissive person is symbiotically connected with the authority, he can *secondarily participate* in his own powers projected onto the authority. In this way,

the person exercising dominance and the submissive person are existentially related to each other and a *strong emotional bond* is created.

Let's ask first: Which counterproductive character strivings are strengthened in the authoritarian social character?

- The crucial characteristic is that one *submits* to the given circumstances, without asking for their purpose and justification.
- *Loyalty* plays a very important role in all relationships and is often only attainable by fatalistically submitting to the conditions.
- *Obedience* is a central value in all relationships, particularly in authoritarian education, and is learned through castigation; disobedience is the worst sin.
- Any kind of *willfulness* must also be banished at an early stage in order to become a loyal and devoted employee or civil servant.
- A last 'must' of the authoritarian character, which should be mentioned here, is the *feeling of dependence and gratefulness* on the part of the submissive person and of *arbitrary freedom and patronizing* on the part of the person exercising dominance.

Let us now ask which productive human strivings have to be *repressed* in the case of an authoritarian social character orientation:

- Repressed, if possible, must be all *autonomous impulses* that express something independent and of one's *own* in thinking, feeling and acting, and hence signal potential independence.
- First and foremost, all of one's *own powers* that could be in competition with authority must be mentioned here: *one's own thoughts, convictions and ideas*, especially if they question the authority's claim to dominance (in business, politics, religion, culture, society and state...).
- All ways of *self-determination* are dangerous: regardless of whether this refers to family or professional role attributions or religious rituals, the question of gender or sexual preferences, political freedom of expression or artistic freedoms. Self-determination is understood as *rebellion* against the grace, wisdom, care and superiority of the authority, which always knows better what is good for those dependent on it.

For many, the emotional situation of the authoritarian character outlined here is more an issue of the past than the present. When it is no longer observable, however, this is mainly due to the fact, that contemporary forms of economic production and socialization no longer need the repression of one's own autonomous powers,

and, instead, a new social character orientation has become dominant. In the 1940s, Fromm already recognized and described such an orientation as the 'marketing character'.

The marketing social character

The background for the formation of the marketing character (Fromm, 1947, pp. 67-107, 1976, pp. 147-154) is *industrial mass production* and modern-day *globalized cut-throat competition*. These, above all, are the reasons why in the market for goods and services, it is no longer the 'use value' but the 'exchange value' that determines the market, so that the question of marketing – the *sales strategy* – has become increasingly important. This requirement of successful economic management is reproduced in the basic strivings of the marketing social character, whereby humans likewise understand themselves as a *commodity* that must be sold successfully.

To put it in Fromm's words: „The character orientation which is rooted in the experience of oneself as a commodity and of one's value as exchange value I call the *marketing orientation*“ (Fromm, 1947, p. 68).

The requirement of successful marketing also determines the associated *psychodynamics*: The marketing-oriented person *acquires* 'marketable' personality attributes, competencies, forms of communication – independently of his actual being – and, if possible, *represses* those cognitive, emotional and imaginative powers, which do not promise success, because they are critical, difficult or negative.

This leads to an increasing *loss of experiencing oneself identically* on the basis of one's own mental powers, and of being *self-effective*. The marketing character is so alienated from himself that the authentic self-experience threatens to be lost. His self depends on the „echo“ and on success on the „market“ and is accompanied by *competition*, a permanent *increase in performance* and an intensified *training of acquired powers*.

The threatening loss of self is felt more unconsciously than consciously, as *losing*, as *inner emptiness* and as *listlessness* and *boredom*. In order not to become aware of this, above all, consuming and wanting to win become existentially important. As long as one is occupied with consuming and with competition and winning, one considers oneself to be safe from becoming a loser.

Let us ask more precisely which strivings and values are socially demanded and promoted, and which productive powers are to be repressed where possible.

- The most important thing of all and the highest value in the marketing orientation is certainly the

striving for success, which requires a great deal of ambition and willingness to work hard.

- The flexibilization of all production processes, but also the willingness to be highly *adaptable and flexible*, are central guiding values of a marketing-oriented economy and society.
- Even though everything revolves around how you present yourself and not who you are, success can only be ensured through *hard work*, which all too often leads to self-exploitation – and also to burnout.
- A competitive society knows only *winners and losers*. Winning is the motivational drive in every economic and sporting activity, but also in gaming and quiz shows.
- The decisive factor is how a person, a company, or an organization can present itself. The people concerned do not have to be *authentic* themselves, but their performance must be.
- Only *positive thinking, feeling and acting* are allowed if one wants to sell oneself or the organization well. Smiling is the order of the day everywhere.
- *Praise and appreciation* of the customer are the most successful marketing methods. They trigger a positive *echo* even if one feels the exact opposite.

Let us now ask which productive human strivings have to be *repressed* in the case of a dominant marketing social character:

- Those who are able to live from their own cognitive, emotional and imaginative forces experience themselves as powerful and largely independent of being appreciated by others. It is precisely this *authentic self-experience* that is at stake in the marketing orientation, especially with regard to sensing one's own *authentic feelings*.
- Of course, even marketing-oriented people still have an idea of who they are and what their weaknesses are; and yet, there is an increasing *identification with a salesman role*, in which *nothing negative may be perceived or expressed publicly* (and anger and hatred are then discharged in secrecy).
- The same holds true with regard to *negative self-perceptions*, such as fear, self-doubt, depressive moods or feelings of shame. Together with critical and *negative feelings about others*, they must be blocked out, so that a kind of rose-colored illusory world is created with each other that is less and less grounded in reality.
- The marketing-oriented person likes to decorate him- or herself with values and ideals in order to be attractive as a salesperson, company or organization. Their own convictions and the *values and ideals they actually live* no longer play

a role, because they would only lead to conflicts; however, this leads to a *loss of one's own sense of values*, which is then compensated for by „selling“ values to others.

The counterproductive consequences of repression and the socially patterned defects are also obvious in the case of the marketing character. However, they are not fully perceived as such, because the marketing character currently still dominates private and public life.

Conclusion: Erich Fromm's contribution to Critical Psychology

Erich Fromm's social character theory allows for the identification of socially patterned defects of human productivity, which are not perceived as counterproductive and pathogenic by those concerned and in the public awareness. These pathogenic impacts differ from social character to social character, so that a Critical Psychology has to identify the alienating and pathogenic impacts of each socially relevant character orientation separately in order to develop counter-strategies for the recovery of genuine human productivity.

Even if the marketing character presently still dominates in our parts of the world, it cannot be overlooked that the narcissistic social character described by Fromm as group narcissism (Fromm, 1964, pp. 78-94) is increasingly gaining importance. This is also true for the „Ego-oriented“ social character, as described by myself using Fromm's method, which wants to create everything anew and differently in a self-determined way without regard to natural and social constraints (Funk, 2005, 2011, 2019, pp. 129-145). The selective focus on the authoritarian and marketing character above was primarily intended to illustrate how differently their non-productive effects manifest.

With the authoritarian social character, we have an idea that the omnipresent logic of exercising dominance and being submissive was something natural, normal and reasonable for people at that time (and, to some extent, this is still the case for people in authoritarian systems today). The historical distance enables us to see clearly the pathogenic nature of this social character. Just think of the extent of violence used in education or by the state and its institutions of authority – or think of the domination exercised by men due to the combination of authoritarianism and patriarchy. Or think of the feelings of guilt that plagued those in the submissive role, and which were systematically reproduced by the dominators to keep people in dependency.

Due to the historical distance, there are also fewer problems in recognizing counter-strategies for the rediscovery of productive human character strivings and in generating the necessary acceptance for their implementation. Demystification of irrational authorities and disobeying them are strategies for recovering human productivity, as are the programmatic notions of „self-fulfillment“ or „empowerment“ in the personal sphere, or those of flat hierarchies and teamwork at the organizational level.

To implement these objectives of a Critical Psychology for the marketing character is much more difficult. The problem already begins with the awareness of the pathogenic effects, since competing, success striving and the need of the marketing character to win at all costs are regarded as completely normal and indispensable if one wants to be economically successful. The same holds true with regard to consumer behavior: After all, it would be stupid not to take advantage of a „special offer“. (That it is possible to do this differently has been demonstrated by the drugstore chain „dm“, which is widespread in Europe and which does not offer special discounts.)

How difficult humanly productive initiatives in the realm of economic activity and work organization are, can be observed, for example, in the struggle for survival of many cooperatively organized projects or, for example, in the implementation of an unconditional basic income. Nevertheless, initiatives such as the „Economy for the Common Good“ indicate that there is a growing awareness of the pathogenic effects of the marketing orientation and that human productivity must have priority over economic productivity.

If we take Erich Fromm's concept of social character seriously, then it is necessary to recognize the socially patterned defects and the pathology of what is considered to be normal in the current ways of economic activity, of working and of dealing with oneself and others. The humanistic concern of a Critical Psychology then is to confront these findings with the requirements of a truly human productivity and to find ways for its realization.

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Subjectivity and work: Critical-theoretical reflections

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ABSTRACT

Because psychology lacks a comprehensive theory of subjectivity that accounts for the entanglement of the social, cultural, historical, interpersonal, and personal, relevant elements for a theory of subjectivity are identified and presented. An important dimension for a theory of subjectivity is the reality of living everyday life, which includes working, relating, as well as self-processes. However, traditional psychology, including philosophical psychology, has neglected the role of work in mental life. It is argued that it is insufficient to address interaction and relationality or internal processes in the development of a theory subjectivity. Using Hannah Arendt's and Nancy Fraser's distinctions, it is argued that political-philosophical reflections on work remain important for understanding subjectivity. Consequences for an approach that includes work in a theory of subjectivity are discussed.

Keywords

Subjectivity – mental life – philosophical psychology – political economy – labor phobia

Arguments that psychology needs a theory of subjectivity have been expressed increasingly inside and outside the discipline (e.g., Rey, Martinez & Goulart, 2019). The ongoing subdivision of mental life into minute parts, hollow concepts and quantifiable variables and the lack of theoretical integration have shown that the natural-scientific approach remains insufficient to solve significant foundational problems in the field of mental life (Teo, 2018a). It has become historically and conceptually evident that the *psychological sciences* are not able to address the problem of subjectivity and that the *psychological humanities* are needed (Teo, 2017). Arguably, ignoring a theory of subjectivity will leave the theory and practice of psychology impoverished. Yet, it should be apparent that any proposed theory of subjectivity will remain preliminary due to temporality and contextuality of psychological phenomena and that it may be more appropriate to reflect on the conditions for the possibility of such a theory.

From the perspective of the psychological humanities, subjectivity refers to the *wholeness of first-person somato-psychological life*. This means not to isolate and privilege one dimension of mental life (e.g., cognition, the unconscious, behavior, affects) and that *physis* and the body need to be included in a theory of subjectivity, whereby they refer not only to natural but also socially constituted entities (e.g., gendered body).

The focus on first-person mental *life* includes the idea that psychologists need to understand subjectivity in the actual *conduct of everyday life* (see also Holzkamp, 2016), which is embedded in history, culture, society, lifeworlds, communities, relationships, and the personal. A theory of subjectivity neither neglects the socio-historical dimensions of subjectivity nor the intricacies of inner life. I submit that a theory of subjectivity that accounts for knowledge cannot be gained by reinterpreting ideas of grand thinkers but must be gained from the „objects“ themselves, which include current empirical (quantitative or qualitative) research on mental life.

Theorizing subjectivity

They are several *elements* in a theory of subjectivity, but for the purpose of this argument the most important principle is the *entanglement of socio-subjectivity; inter-subjectivity and intra-subjectivity*. From a critical-theoretical tradition, this entanglement refers to an overarching principle, from which all psychological contents and functions must be understood (it does not mean that this principle always plays out in the same way). Socio-subjectivity should account for the historical, cultural, and societal dimensions of

subjectivity. It refers to those parts of an individual subjectivity that incorporate and transform societal forms of subjectivity (socio-historical mentalities). From that perspective, societal conditions neither determine mental life nor are they autonomously chosen, but subjects suture themselves into those conditions, on the background of intersubjective (e.g., relational) and intrasubjective (thinking, feeling, willing, desiring, etc.) processes and contents. *Entanglement* means that socio-subjectivity, inter-subjectivity, and intra-subjectivity are always connected to the point that they cannot be disentangled in an adult person.

Societal conditions are more than *premises* of actions (Holzkamp, 1983) because they are entangled and embodied in human subjectivity. From the perspective of entanglements, neither external nor internal realities alone (when conceptually separated) account for subjectivity. Thus, psychological topics such as suicide, sexuality, language, power, and so on, must be understood in the nexus of socio-historical, interpersonal and personal processes and contents. The same applies to more recent concepts such as *responsibilization* and *psychologization*. In short, every psychological function, expression or experience needs to be understood and analyzed based on the entanglement of those dimensions. Although this point appears trivial, the trivial needs to be given voice, and, strangely, is not incorporated into psychological research or practice.

Subjectivity cannot be understood sufficiently if psychologists focus only on internal dynamics without discussing societal, historical and cultural realities. Perhaps in *unicultural* societies it was convenient to ignore something that was crucial but appeared self-evident. On the other hand, critical approaches need to include the personal when theorizing subjectivity. From this perspective, subjectivities are captured sufficiently neither in mainstream psychology, nor in psychoanalysis, phenomenology, or cultural-historical psychologies. For instance, thinking about entanglements allows one to include topics such as privilege (as a psychological topic), where society, history, culture, interpersonal and personal discourses and materialities are entangled (see also Teo, 2016). One might not be aware of one's privileges, but they are still part of one's subjectivity.

Certainly, the entanglement can lead to unique constellations in different individuals. This means that subjectivity is *unique and irreplaceable*, which is another philosophical element in a theory of subjectivity. Other elements include that subjectivity is embedded in *concrete everyday life, its temporality and contextuality* (including class, gender, race), that subjectivity is *constituted and/or mediated through materialities and discourses* (including technologies), *that subjectivity comprises both actuality and*

potentiality (what happens and what is possible in subjectivity), and that *subjectivity exists in concrete forms of subjectivity* (e.g., fascist subjectivity). Here is not the place to discuss these principles, but to emphasize that subjectivity needs to be understood and analyzed from how people live their everyday lives. Indeed, human beings live their lives engaged in work (or play), in family and community, and in self-practices. For many adults, a significant amount of time is given not only to interacting with other persons and relating to themselves, but also to *working* (temporal changes take place over a lifetime). It is epistemologically peculiar that not more effort has been invested in psychology in understanding subjectivity on the background of work.

Labor, interaction, self

Indeed, it was Marx and Engels (1958) who suggested the constitution of the human species through *labor*. Whereas particular material conditions, eating, drinking, and procreating are pre-conditions for human existence, humans become different from animals when they start to produce. For Marx, as Arendt (1958 / 1998) argued, labor and not God created humans, and labor and not reason distinguished humans from other animals. Marx did not exclude *interaction* in the concept of productive relations, but primacy was given to labor, and language was understood as necessitated by work. As feminist theorists have pointed out, Marxism promoted a gender-biased understanding of work because its focus on production neglected and dismissed the importance of care or service work, historically often accomplished by women (e.g., Mies, 1994). With a male focus on productive wage-labor, the many forms of unpaid labor have been overlooked and undertheorized.

In the Marxist tradition, labor meant an instrumental relationship that transforms nature. The idea of tool making and language as a tool remained even in Vygotsky's (1978) theorizing, who spent much time reflecting on language. To a certain degree it is also reflected in Holzkamp's (1983) critical psychology when in the transition from human-animal to human-societal life, language is understood as secondary. However, the linguistic turn in philosophy also meant a re-focusing in critical traditions on interaction. Assuming that labor was insufficient as a core category in social thought, the second-generation German critical theorist Habermas (1968) included *interaction* as a category, emphasizing the duality of human existence, expressed in his reconstruction of Hegel's Jena lectures. Habermas developed sophisticated analyses of communicative action but as a result neglected labor. In the next generation of German

critical theory (e.g., Honneth, 1992), labor has been orphaned or subsumed under recognition.

Arguably mainstream psychology neglects both models (labor and interaction) and in philosophical psychology the primacy of interaction is cemented, advanced as *dialogue*, *conversation* and as part of a *relational ontology* (e.g., Gergen 2009). Forgotten is that most current humans spend significant amounts of time working, often in wage-labor or in precarious labor. An *interaction-only-model* of human beings would not be able to explain how humans conduct their lives in real societies. It is fair to argue, that mainstream psychology and significant parts of philosophical psychology have constructed a homunculus that engages with the self, narrates, is in dialogue, and converses with others – an entity that may even be constituted by history and society – but does not work. Labor and associated categories such as wealth, money, debt, income inequality, dispossession, economic privilege, and production hardly appear in psychological reflections on subjectivity.

Philosophies of work

It is suggested that both labor and interaction are important for understanding subjectivity. Following the arguments of the psychological humanities, psychology needs to engage with social and political theory for a deeper understanding of work. It seems obvious that a theory of work developed more than 150 years ago will probably be insufficient. For psychology the philosophical question on how human beings constitute themselves is less significant than describing how actual humans live their lives, which includes not only interacting, self-relating (relaxing, self-regulating, exercising, making selfies, etc.) but also working. Psychologists may not need to suggest criteria on how humans and animals are different, but must understand that humans live their lives differently. Two examples of how psychologists can think about subjectivity in the context of work are discussed here. I suggest looking at Hannah Arendt's (1906-1975) ideas from the 1950s, which provides a system for understanding work and human doing, and at the contemporary scholarship of Nancy Fraser (born 1947) who developed a multi-dimensional relational concept of work.

Arendt (1958 / 1998) points out that Western thought has had a contempt for labor from Aristotle who considered laborers as necessary but not part of the state to Aquinas's Christian philosophy that gave primacy to *vita contemplative*. The *laborphobia* in traditional philosophy is replicated in psychology where *work* is a research object but neither part of an ontology nor part of subjectivity. In philosophical

psychology, for instance in the *Wiley Handbook of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology* (Martin, Sugarman & Slaney, 2015) which includes critical research, neither a chapter nor an index term for work or labor are included. The neglect of theorizing work is not only a self-model (academics seem to be interacting and reflecting) but also represents an elitist mindset. This does not deny that useful distinctions have been provided in the extant literature that distinguishes manual and intellectual labor, manufacturing and service, and skilled or unskilled work, and that the term has been extended to sex work, creative work, scientific work, critical work and to psychological grief work. In „our“ neoliberal realities, activities that have not been part of work, have become work, including *technologies of the self* (see also Foucault, Martin, Gutman & Hutton, 1988).

Arendt (1958 / 1998) challenges classical Marxist ideas about (productive) work and expands them to the understanding of the human condition: „What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing“ (p. 5). She provides an important distinction between *labor*, *work*, and *action*. *Labor*, accomplished historically by slaves, but also by domestic servants, deals with the necessities of life, involves the whole body („animal laborans“), produces futile products, not commodities, but life itself; work that Adam Smith and Karl Marx understood as unproductive. Arendt rejects that assumption, without employing a feminist argument, and points out that all activities possess a „productivity“ and that every laboring activity „requires a certain amount of skill, the activity of cleaning and cooking no less than the writing of a book or the building of a house“ (p. 90).

Work on the other hand is understood as work by hands („manufacturing“) leading to the durability of products (for a certain time) and their materiality. *Homo faber* instrumentalizes, makes things into means, but also develops relationships with other people, by exchanging products, and the public realm becomes a market for work. Although art is the result of work, the instrumental characteristic of work, its utility and consumption do not apply, and art can attain permanence throughout the ages. Finally, Arendt discusses *action*, which is unique for each individual, and involves speech. This *inter-action* corresponds to the plurality of distinct individuals, based on human relationships. For Arendt the „world is guaranteed by the presence of others“ (p. 199).

Certainly, psychologists need to understand subjectivity in the context of *inter-action* but work and labor should not be neglected. These dimensions occur in different proportions for concrete individuals. When theorizing subjectivity, even within advanced liberal democracies, „we“ encounter persons who labor (e.g., temporary farm workers), people who

spend their time serving others (e.g., long-term care staff) and plenty are still working in manufacturing. A theory of subjectivity needs to account for action, work and labor (and their overlap) and how these modes of doing appear in concrete societies. The contents of agency, thinking, feeling and wanting must be understood on the background not only of relations but as contributing to an economy (paid or unpaid). Even for an individual, who spends most of the time interacting, one can find dimensions of work and labor (gardening, cleaning, cooking, repairing, etc., which have not disappeared and are not simply peripheral activities). Yet, the meaning of labor and work in a concrete subjectivity cannot be answered *a priori* but needs to be studied on the background of a theory of subjectivity.

Moving to the 21st century, Fraser (2022) has developed insightful ideas on how to conceptualize a *relational concept of labor* that includes feminist and postcolonial critiques of traditional concepts of work without giving up the socialist tradition. Fraser keeps to the idea of exploited labor (class) that she expands with the concepts of expropriated labor (race) and care or domestic work (gender). She combines the core categories of class, race, and gender in order to understand the workings of society. Psychologists interested in subjectivity need to ask what exploited work (e.g., wage labor engaged in commodity production) does to the mental life of persons, or which *forms of subjectivity* (socio-historical mentalities) have been developed in a given culture to account for the reality of exploitation. What happens in subjectivity when one is exploited, whether one knows it or not? Does exploited work still involve an alienated subjectivity; are persons still alienated from the things they make, from their working activities, from other people and from themselves?

Fraser argues that capitalism is entangled not only with exploitation but also with racial oppression and the expropriation of unfree, dependent, and unwaged labor, where human activities are confiscated. What does this social reality do not only to the subjectivity of the expropriated and their children, to the subjectivity of the expropriators, but also to the exploited (class) who are different from the expropriated in not being the *Other*? Concepts such as privilege as part of subjectivity can be developed here. Psychologists need to address issues of wealth and the degree to which a fascist subjectivity (Teo, 2021) is embedded in economic issues about who deserves and who can be excluded from wealth. The expropriation of the racialized *Other* needs to be accounted for in a theory of subjectivity (see also Fanon, 1952 / 1967). Fraser (2022) also includes the feminist critique in her reflections and the reality that „without this work of social reproduction ... there could be no production

or profit or capital“ (p. 53). Care-work is essential in society but not recognized as such and even denigrated. Gendered subjectivities should be understood on the background of such realities, for instance, on how women conduct their lives and are held responsible.

Subjectivity is not determined by external realities but is entangled with meanings and materialities that exist in this culture as well as with how humans are able to live their lives as women or men, workers or laborers, exploited or expropriated, productive or caring, etc. Everyday human activities that contribute to maintaining a political-economic reality need to be included when understanding subjectivity. Subjectivity is neither revealed in the laboratory of the experimental psychologist nor on the couch of the therapist, but in the way, people live their lives (which *may include* the lab and the couch). Human subjectivity needs to be understood as embedded not only in recognition but also in labor, work, action, exploitation, expropriation and in social reproduction. A theory of subjectivity needs to account for the multi-dimensionality of everyday life that challenges academic and therapeutic self-models, where language, narration, conversation and interaction become the standard from which subjectivity is understood. This also means to include studies on what work means under neoliberal capitalism (Silva, 2013), which may include bullshit jobs (Graeber, 2018).

Conclusion

If one begins with the assumption that everyday activities that constitute, maintain and advances the social and societal system, whether one knows it or not (which includes productive and reproductive work, paid and unpaid labor, labor and interaction) are important parts of life, then they cannot be neglected in a theory of subjectivity. Work is a central but not the only category that is relevant to a discussion of subjectivity. Work allows psychologists to connect subjectivity to wealth and political economy on a societal level, to neoliberal capitalism, and to the options that humans have, given their location, position, and reality. Work in its broad meaning also allows one to theorize on how to resist neoliberal capitalism.

For instance, one can understand anti-globalizing and de-globalizing mentalities as forms of resistance. While the former rejects the dominant political-economic status-quo, the latter accepts it and attributes the problems to the undeserving, racialized, or *subhumanized Other* (Teo, 2020 and in press). This means that academics should not assume that deglobalizing subjectivities, and their most extreme forms, fascist subjectivities, should be reduced to internal psychological proclivities. Based on the

assumption of an entanglement of socio-, inter-, and intrasubjectivity, the internal is connected to external discourses and materialities, to interpersonal realities, and to the way people live their everyday lives. A fascist subjectivity must be understood through such entanglements (it is important to make a distinction between fascist politics and fascist subjectivity). Otherwise, it would be difficult to understand how something internal can re-emerge as dominant.

A critical theory of subjectivity needs to address neoliberal subjectivity (Teo, 2018 b) not from the perspective of the entrepreneur, but from the perspective of the exploited and expropriated. Psychology needs to advance these perspectives, and philosophical psychology needs to abandon its phobia of labor. Industrial and organizational (I/O) psychology can understand work not only as an empirical research topic, but also as an ontology that is entangled with subjectivity. A full understanding of subjectivity accounts for people working, connecting, and relating to each other and themselves, on the background of culture, history, and society; class, gender and race and other social characteristics, and their intersectionality; the social and biological body; as well as discourses and materialities, including various technologies. I submit that theoretical reflection remains relevant, particularly in the psychological humanities, should psychologists wish to understand complex problems such as work, which remains an indelible element in any non-reductionist theory of subjectivity.

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Meaningfulness and organising for sustainable futures

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ABSTRACT

To maintain complex civilisation within planetary boundaries, we must secure a whole ‘system of systems’ transformation of our activities. In this article, based on the lecture notes for my keynote speech at the International Conference on Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology, I explore the ethical dimensions of making organisations that can help us improve our collective decision-making and at the same time become persons whose acting and being is consistent with the sustainability imperative. I outline a human capability for ethical organising which is directed towards making organisations that generate life-value, or those resources by which we cultivate the relational and material conditions for stewarding and sustaining all living beings and things. The „value of meaningfulness“ and „mutuality as an organising principle“ afford conversion factors for translating our general „will to form“ into a human capability for ethically desirable organising. Meaningful work provides action contexts for people to discover, protect and develop values that matter to them. The moral value of meaningfulness is also productive for breaking into vicious cycles of corporate alienation that prevent the emergence of organisations as collective moral agents, characterised by integrity and empathy. I conclude that we need a fresh democratic dispensation – one that covers our associational life across all fields of endeavour.

Keywords

Meaningful work – sustainability – alienation – organisational psychology

Our efforts to maintain global temperature rise below 1.5 degrees of pre-industrial levels are faltering due to economic fractures, corporate vested interests, and authoritarian state forces resisting change. I explore the relevance of meaningfulness to the organisations we need to motivate sustainability transitions. I extend this to our vision for what kinds of persons we have to become if we are to make possible future ecological civilisations, enabled by humanised modes of production. Given the scale of potential catastrophe, this is not easy. In witnessing events, we can become silent, unable to find the words to express what we see, shackling our sense of agency. Günther Anders expressed nuclear threat as the „unspeakable“ where we are „mute towards the apocalypse“ (Anders, 2019, p. 135; trans. Müller). But muteness does not have to be a totally negative experience. Staying with silence can be potent with reflection, struggle, and new beginnings. A withholding of comment so as to really attend to how matters stand for other beings and things. Consequently, muteness has something to offer a theory of transition and change. Muteness derives

from the Latin verb *mutare* – to change or change oneself into. From this verb, we also get *mutual*, or having something in common and shared, as well as *mutant*, or something that is changing, shifting, and transforming. There is a link between the two. Risky changes-in-being are prolific with unexpected novelties, some monstrous, some generative of new ways of living together. To distinguish between desirable and undesirable changes, we need tools of ethical evaluation, combined with a suitable organising principle that will help us to augment potentially productive transformations. I bring forward two neglected sources for ethical evaluation in associational life: mutuality and meaningfulness. Mutuality operates as an organising principle which, via a release of voice, unlocks the moral value of meaningfulness as a standpoint for judgement. Organisations adopting meaningfulness and mutuality acquire the capacity to institute inclusive meaning-making that is hospitable to reflections emerging from silence. Participating in collective meaning-making processes enables organisational members to

excavate novel or neglected meanings and enrich their understanding of how change impacts the beings and things that give meaning to their lives (Yeoman, 2020).

Organising for a change of the human heart

Relentless planetary temperature rise demands a whole ‘system of systems’ transformation of our activities. One that will have to be achieved through our many public, private and civic organisations. At the same time, we must make *ourselves* into the kinds of people who can live well together *through* these transitions, and into future ecological societies. In „To Have or To Be“, Erich Fromm (1976, p. 8) says that „for the first time in history the physical survival of the human race depends on a radical change of the human heart“. This seems impossibly difficult to achieve, yet also impossible not to try. To support such a change, we must make use of everything we know about how social structures shape human psychology. This includes making organisations so they manifest a collective psychology that facilitates our becoming persons whose acting and being is consistent with sustainable earth-human relations. However, the cultural psychologist Jerome Bruner (1990) in „Acts of Meaning“ worries that our ways of making organisations are not addressing the challenges we face. He says: „For all our power to construct symbolic cultures and to set in place the institutional forms needed for their execution, we do not seem very adept at steering our creations towards ends we profess to desire“ (Bruner, 1990, p. 25). In other words, we are failing to consistently produce organisations which can help us improve our collective decision-making. Organisations with better procedures for collective decision-making depend upon their members forming what Fromm calls „the social character orientation“ – an orientation which helps us to become fully alert to how our activities impact the lives of other persons, beings, and natural ecosystems. Organisations that are normatively ordered by the meanings, values and narratives of a relevant collective psychology can help us choose to act towards other beings and things „*as if*“ social character rooted in moral attentiveness is already widespread.

The human capability for ethical organising

With the possibility of behaving „*as if*“ in mind, I outline here a human capability for ethical organising, or a human capability for collectively creating organisations with the characteristics for mediating improved decision-making and grounded in an eco-sensitive cultural psychology. This capability is

directed towards making organisations that generate life-value, or those material, social, and cultural resources by which we cultivate the conditions for stewarding and sustaining all living beings and things. Organizational theorist Gibson Burrell (2015) says human beings possess a general capacity to form, or a „will to form“ which is expressed through a continual process of „constant organizing of organizations“ that seeks to „order the world into meaning“ (Burrell, 2015, p. xxi and p. xix). With Nussbaum and Sen’s (1993) human capability theory in mind, the „value of meaningfulness“ and „mutuality as an organising principle“ afford conversion factors for translating this „general capacity to form“ into a „human capability for ethically desirable organising“ (see Yeoman, 2020). This cashes out into various entitlements, such as the intrinsic goods of meaningful work – autonomy, freedom and dignity – as well a requirement for worker democracy (Yeoman, 2014a, 2014b). Mutuality, when enacted through institutionally rooted democratic voice, stimulates meaning flows around the values that people want to satisfy through associational life, providing resources for them to engage in practical reasoning, build up common knowledge, make collective decisions, and coordinate joint endeavour.

A human capability for ethical organising enables us to act „*as if*“ the new social character orientation was already shaping our collective decision-making. In other words, to establish organisations where we can cultivate a new kind of social cognition, or our perceptions, information, and knowledge about others. The anthropologist Mary Douglas (1986) in „How Institutions Think“ describes organisations as embodying „thought worlds“, or organisational frameworks for social cognition which shape our thinking, feeling, and acting. She outlines a process of institution building, where: „the people are tempted out of their niches by new possibilities of exercising or evading control. Then they make new kinds of institutions, and the institutions make new labels, and the labels make new kinds of people“ (Douglas, 1986, p. 108). Practical reasoning, or „what we ought to do“ to navigate sustainability transitions, depends upon organisational thought worlds with the normative power to shape our thinking and feeling, directing us towards taking care of worthy objects, or those beings and things of independent value and moral significance that are impacted by climate change and sustainability efforts.

Ethically-oriented social cognition and principled meaning-making

The humanised mind stimulates active moral attentiveness to the condition of other beings and

things. Social cognition of this kind is formed through participation in what Bruner (1990) calls „principled“ meaning-making or having a share of „a larger public process in which public meanings are negotiated“ (Bruner, 1990, p. 13). Meaning-making forms culture and narratives, organises our thinking and feeling, filters information, builds up knowledge and understanding, and shapes our collective intentions and actions. For Bruner, principled meaning-making additionally requires a „moral stance“ and a „rhetorical posture“ (Bruner, 1990, p. 61). In my formulation of meaningful work, I use an ethic of care as a standpoint or moral stance for evaluating and justifying public meaning claims (Yeoman, 2014a, 2014b). Organisational members are afforded a rhetorical posture by being presented as moral „agents of construction“ (O’Neill, 1996): Recognised as capable and equal co-authorities in meaning-making, and authorised to join with others in the gathering and ordering of ethical materials to achieve morally viable ends.

Overview of meaningfulness

I outline how meaningfulness can apply to sustainability transitions (Figure 1). Drawing from the philosophy of life meaning, I use the hybrid value of meaningfulness, which integrates the objective/ethical-moral and subjective / cognitive-emotional dimensions of meaning (Wolf, 2010). The moral value of meaningfulness combines objective moral value, or having good reasons for acting towards independently valuable objects, with subjective experience, or cultivating an ethically viable emotional

engagement with those objects. This enables us to justify the reasons we have to act. People want to have something meaningful, worthwhile or significant to do as members of purposeful organisations that are worthy of their contributions. This drive for meaning is extremely difficult to eliminate. Indeed, people will use whatever materials are to hand, including poor quality and precarious work, to craft meaningfulness. For example, hospital cleaners see themselves as part of the care team looking after patients, and refuse collectors as stewarding the environment for future generations.

Organisations can institutionalise the value of meaningfulness through the governance of strategic meaning-systems and participatory ground up meaning-making that integrates processual elements of status and capabilities, means and ends, meaning sources and meaning systems, and social limits to publicly justifiable meanings. These elements establish the conditions for principled meaning-making, and afford the basis of a theory of change which can be applied to sustainability transitions (Yeoman, 2021). To be successful in our meaning-making efforts, we need to see ourselves as equal co-authorities in meaning-making, invested with the relevant status and capabilities. Together, status and capabilities equip us to participate in the evaluation and justification of meaning claims. Including all potential meaning-makers in principled meaning-making has consequential public impacts. When meanings emerge in public discourse, they become available for people to generate narratives that convey knowledge and facilitate coordination of the means and ends of collective action. Narratives are also carriers of

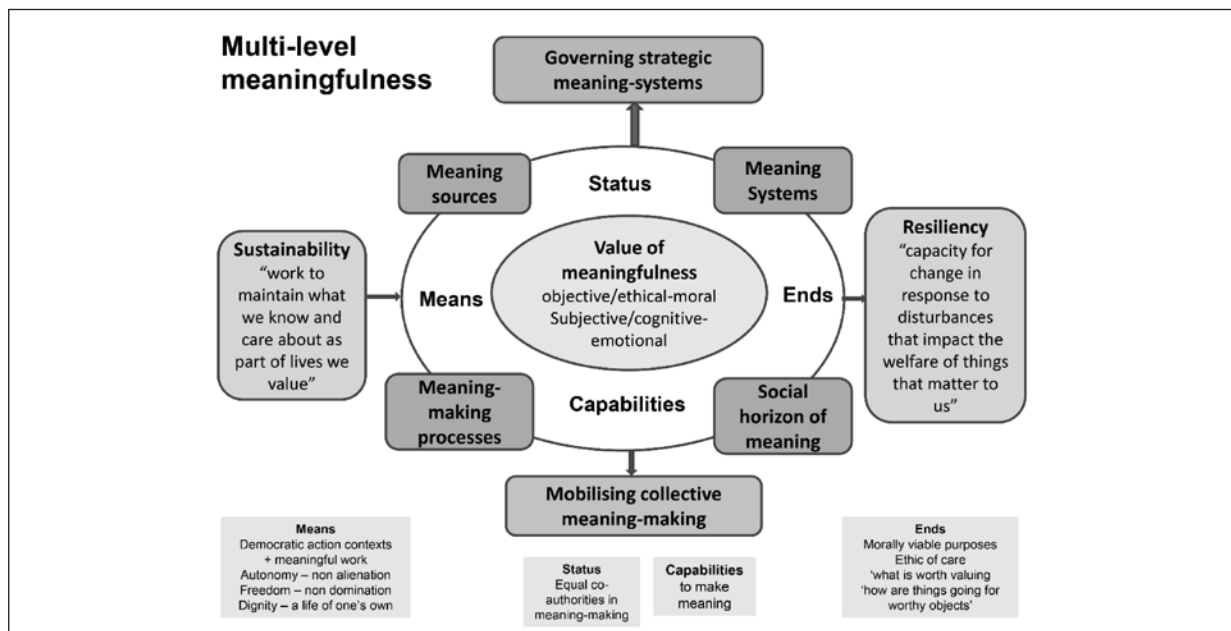


Figure 1: Multi-level meaningfulness (source: Yeoman, 2021).

values such as justice, fairness, and care. They provide ethical resources for ensuring that means and ends are ethically viable, justifiable in the public realm, and suitable for taking up into normatively desirable collective action. This extends to paid and unpaid work. In sum, work is meaningful when activities are structured by intrinsically valuable goods of autonomy, freedom, and dignity; are directed towards taking care of beings and things that have independent value and moral significance; and are experienced as emotionally engaging and worthwhile. Democratically arranged action contexts are important for ensuring that organisational members are afforded inclusive opportunities for connecting personal meaning to organisational meaning.

People draw upon varieties of meaning sources to create meaning-systems at multiple levels of organising. This can be a contentious and conflictual process as people negotiate interpretive differences and conciliate diverse meaning sources into at least temporarily stable meaning-systems. In examining the various sources and domains of meaning, Tatjana Schnell (2011) identifies generativity as one of the most important meaning sources. One that enables a person to integrate different kinds of meanings into a positive self-identity. She draws upon the psychologist Erik Erikson who described generativity as „a concern for guiding, nurturing, and establishing the next generation through an act of care“ (Schnell, 2011, p. 671). When we incorporate morally valuable persons or other valuable beings and things, into the meaningfulness of our lives, this does not mean we can do anything we like to them. Meaningfulness involves have a concern for how well things are going for those valuable objects, and how we can promote their flourishing. By participating in principled meaning-making, we can learn to evaluate how well we are doing to care, to steward, to maintain and repair. As part of principled meaning-making, an ethic of care helps us to describe a social horizon of legitimate meaning (Note, 2010). Fromm says that in the mode of being people find their self-identity in love as productive activity. In his words, love „implies caring for, knowing, responding, affirming, enjoying; the person, the tree, the painting, the idea. It means bringing to life.... It is a process, self-renewing and self-increasing“ (Fromm, 1976, p. 37).

Such a framing understands meaningfulness to be fundamentally relational and processual. In Robert Nozick's (1981) theory of value and meaning, meaningfulness illuminates our relational and interconnected reality. Nozick observes that the process of meaning-making is of intrinsic value, generative of personal distinctiveness, and collective

patterns of living: „This process is valuable because, in addition to containing valuable unities as its stages, it itself constitutes a pattern which unifies the widest diversity of human activity. Into this patterned process fall our hopes and activities, our desires to attain and to transcend, our search for value and meaning.“ (Nozick, 1981, p. 616). In work and other action contexts such as, for example, citizen's urban place-making, meanings are immanent potentials, which remain pre-political until activated by public processes of deliberation and difference. Being able to justify meanings, and put them to use in collective practical reasoning, is therefore linked to belonging to organisations that integrate the governance of strategic meaning-systems with mobilising collective meaning-making at every level of the organisation. For this to operate, democratically arranged organisations are to be preferred, giving organisational members influence over the normative governance of strategic meaning-systems, so that they can subject these meaning-systems to public evaluation using democratic procedures rooted in principled meaning-making.

Sustainability and resiliency

When applied at different scales of organising in sustainability transitions the above framework illuminates the contradictions and paradoxes in collective action. For instance, transitions are shaped by a fundamental tension between sustainability and resiliency. The anthropologist Joseph Tainter (2006) comments that „people sustain what they value, which can only derive from what they know“ (Tainter, 2006, p. 92). Sustainability is a form of work by which we maintain what we know and care about as part of the lives we value. Resiliency is the capacity for change in response to disturbances that impact the welfare of things that matter to us. But sustainability and resiliency are in tension; we want to preserve and sustain those things that matter to us, but these things cannot remain unchanged under climate pressures. This can produce alienation – a feeling of not being in control, leading to frustrations, anxieties, and dread. However, this sense of alienation also makes the sustainability/resiliency tension a key site for potentially productive public meaning-making. Within a framework of multi-level meaningfulness, we can collectively explore diverse meanings thrown up the sustainability/resiliency tension, deepening our knowledge of other beings and things that matter to us – and how we can care for them as they are caught up in change.

A materialist ethic of care

Change which uses principled meaning-making in the collective action problems thrown up by sustainability/resiliency tensions needs an eco-sensitive ethic. One that can foster moral attentiveness, inform principled meaning-making, and help people act „as if“ the new society is already upon them. As agents of construction, people can be sensitised to sustainability concerns when organisations introduce life-value concepts, devices, habits and procedures. For example, giving rivers legal status as persons, or understanding animals to have capabilities for flourishing, as well as culture and meaning of their own. And even extending care ethics to socialising artificial intelligences of our own creation. For example, in his concept of life-value, Jeff Noonan (2012) draws upon John McMurtry's work to describe life-value as entailing those facilities we need to „maintain and develop life and its sentient, cognitive, imaginative, and creative-practical capacities“ (Noonan, 2012, p. 8). When instilled with an eco-sensitive ethic, arenas of life-value creation are potentially radical for organising. But organising is assumed to be a task for managerial and technocratic elites – even though powerful elites have misused their privileged access to organising to breach planetary limits. We need a new imaginary of all people as makers of organisations, who are equipped with a human capability for ethical organising.

Eco-sensitive meaning systems recognise *more-than-human development* in how our flourishing is implicated in the flourishing of other living beings and natural ecosystems. They foster an orientation of care whereby we become willing to be the means through which these other beings and things flourish, thereby generating new sources of life and work meaning that can be taken up into public meaning-making and cultivate the shift to a social character orientation rooted in moral attention. Applying Fromm's (1976) distinction between the „mode of being“ and the „mode of having“: In the mode of being, we come to see ourselves as responsible for cultivating connections that enfold other living beings and natural ecosystems into radically inclusive social worlds. In service of planetary preservation. Puig de la Bellacasa (2017, p. 20) describes a materialist ethics of care in terms of a „force distributed across a multiplicity of agencies and materials and supports our world as a thick mesh of relational obligation“. To act with care means to act responsibly using meaning-making as information that generates understanding and knowledge of worthy objects. For example, carbon mapping in supply chains involves detailed technical information of many material objects, combined with relational conditions of trust and fairness between differently situated stakeholders. This entails a new imaginary of

work – the place it has in our lives and the meanings we derive from our activities. Donna Haraway's (2015) vision of the Chthulucene, for example, evokes the possibility of kin-making and co-labouring in solidarity with other beings and things. She says:

„Maybe, but only maybe, and only with intense commitment and collaborative work and play with other terrans, flourishing for rich multispecies assemblages that include people will be possible“
(Haraway, 2015, p. 160).

I find a materialist ethics of care to be very suggestive for how meaningfulness in future sustainable societies might be expressed in positive organisational meaning-systems. When combined with mutuality as an organising principle, meaningful work derived from such meaning sources provides people with the resources for resisting the imposition of meaning interpretations and appropriation of meaning-systems by the powerful. Meaningful work also institutes principled meaning-making, guarding against breakdowns in positive organisational and societal meaning-systems. This matters, because breakdowns can lead to distortions in ethically-oriented social cognition, resulting in poor decision-making, including: corruption of meanings, hijacking of meaning-making, failures in practical reasoning and decision making, and experiences of alienation. The pathologies and cognitive biases arising from this are well documented – wilful blindness, cognitive dissonance, group think, and much more.

The protective function of meaningful work

The protective function of meaningfulness in maintaining positive organisational meaning-systems and processes of principled meaning-making highlights underexplored aspects of meaningfulness, including truth-telling, courage, hope, and resilience. *Truth telling* is critical in collective evaluations of facts, values and meanings; *courage* helps people face up to alienation gaps, or the breaks between ideals and reality that generate dismay, anxiety and withdrawal; *hope* counters the harms arising from the potential collapse of meaning-systems; and *resilience* is a vital public good which prepares individuals, communities, and whole societies for the disruptions of adaptation, or for even more radical change when adaptation is insufficient.

Practical reasoning relies upon truth-telling, and commitment to truth-telling. In circumstances of complex change, such as sustainability transitions, principled meaning-making – when enriched by diverse

sources of meanings and governed by a life sensitive ethos – facilitates the articulation and communication of truthful perspectives in coordinative narratives. But when crises are transformative, truth-telling can break down as we struggle to express what is happening to us. In „Language and End Time“, Günther Anders (2019) said of the nuclear age: „Ordinary human language was (...) not ‘made’ for what is *enormous*“ (Anders, 2019, p. 134, trans. Müller). He asked whether it is possible for us to create a language that will help us to become fully alert to our shared predicament. To extend our attentiveness to what is essential in the crises we face, we need truth-telling narratives that will re-frame human to non-human relationships. Philosopher George Kateb (2011) argues for a concept of species dignity where human dignity is tied to earth stewardship. He says that because of our impact upon the planet, human beings have a certain kind of status, or position, whereby they have „a tremendous duty towards nature-namely, to become ever more devotedly the steward of nature“ (Kateb, 2011, p. x). A new dispensation for human dignity as species dignity would tie us collectively to responsibilities of care for the earth. Responsibilities that also involve care for ourselves as valuable beings with lives of our own to lead. But the lives available for us to lead are in danger of being drastically changed by climate heating. We know this, and our sense of threat is producing negative experiences of alienation in many social and political worlds. In *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt (1966) describes the alienated as „those for whom powerlessness has become the major experience of their lives“ (Arendt, 1966, p. vii, preface), and so who can no longer make sense of the human world. She says that comprehension means „(...) examining and bearing consciously the burden which our century has placed on us – neither denying its existence nor submitting meekly to its weight. Comprehension, in short, means the unpremeditated, attentive facing up to, and resisting of, reality – whatever it may be“ (Arendt, 1966, p. viii). This makes comprehending the world an act of courage: A willingness to face up to muteness, to the lack of words, and to press on with inquiring into events no matter how confusing and painful doing so may be.

As Fromm (1976) makes clear, alienation does not inevitably produce negative responses. Indeed, we can turn alienation into a tool for comprehension. Meaningful work equips us to actively seek out alienation by using principled meaning-making to interrogate our shared predicament. Such attempts at comprehension require truth-telling and courage to explore the gap between reality and ideals, to face up to the anguish of change, and find good reasons to act. Decision-making that produces good reasons depends upon hope, as a kind of faith that our actions,

and the lives they produce, can be shown to make sense. But we face the potential erasure of many ways of life, the work that reproduces such ways of life, and the meaning-systems associated with them. In writing of the confinement of the native American Crow people to reservations, Jonathan Lear (2008) highlights how practical reasoning for the Crow come to an end with the collapse of their way of life. He quotes Two Leggings, who said about the loss of the buffalo: „Nothing happened after that. We just lived“ (Lear, 2008, p. 5). Lear captures a „peculiar form of human vulnerability“, of no more events because, with the disintegration of the meaning-systems scaffolding a particular way of life, people could no longer make their actions intelligible. Such losses are critical for anxiety and resentment that can spill over into divisive populist politics. Fromm (1976, p. 141) says that those who hope are „hardheaded realists“ who „shed all illusions“ and „fully appreciate the difficulties“ of making the new society. At the same time, they require, he says, „the energizing attraction of a new vision“ (Fromm, 1976, p. 163). So as meaning-systems disintegrate, we need radical hope – to hope even though old sources of meaning have dried up. To make resisting despair a form of collective resilience, a type of social-psychological public good that shapes organisational psychology and acts as a resource for making sense of our acting and being together. Becoming attentive to peril is painful and risky because doing so may set in train vicious cycles of negative alienation. But we can protect ourselves from negative alienation by cultivating a wealth of positive meaning-sources derived from sustainable earth-human relations. These support collective resilience as a public good, and therefore the possibility of life meaning. Repp (2018, p. 404) argues that „a meaningful life is one that is rich in perceived sign meaning“. In harnessing meanings for practical reasoning, we also harness them for meaningful lives. In the end, sustainable transitions will depend upon enough of us being willing to craft self-identities consistent with the responsibilities of earth stewardship, by connecting our personal growth to multi-level systems change. This increases the demand for organisations that embody ethically-oriented social cognition.

Making organisations

As discussed, our will to form represents a general capacity to organise which can be used for good or for ill. My proposal is that we bend social cognition towards ethically viable organising when we use the moral value of meaningfulness in practical reasoning, facilitated by mutuality as an organising principle. Mary Douglas (1986) shows how we organise in

order to overcome the limits of human rationality. Organisations function as extensions of our cognition, of our thinking and feeling. Their thought worlds shape our perceptions: „Squeezing each other’s ideas into a common shape“ (Douglas, 1986, p. 91). From this common shape of ideas, we derive responsibilities that we put upon each other. Douglas says people make organisations to stabilise wavering commitment to collective action. „Wavering“ because our desire for the benefits of joint endeavour is in tension with our desire for control and autonomy. She describes how people start and maintain organisations through interactive cycles of institution building. People get organisations going by using founding analogies to systematise knowledge and coordinate participation. These analogies are rooted in fundamental oppositions, such as man / nature; male / female. They ground conventions and habits, naturalised into legitimating principles that provide reasons for action. In this way, organisations become living machines for social cognition and decision-making. They proliferate labels and categories derived from their founding analogies. They are also well-springs of meanings, a resourceful if ambivalent inheritance for making organisations. In the process, categories make us into certain kinds of people. Douglas says that we delegate our most important decisions to the organisations we have made. But if this decision-making is not to become fossilised, ill-fitting for new challenges and crises, we must repeatedly break through the fixed patterns – the labels and categories – of our organisations, which forms their selective memory and stunted experience, or what Douglas calls their „narcissistic self-contemplation“ (Douglas, 1986, p. 92). We must resist their classifying pressures. Indeed, we have always had to do so since there is no period of „unquestioned legitimacy“, and „human history is studded all the way from the beginning with nails driven into local coffins of authority“ (Douglas, 1986, p. 94 and p. 95).

In organisational life, our shared cognitive and emotional framings are shot through with oppositions and tensions that are hardwired into every organisation because of their reliance upon founding analogies. Douglas says: „At the one point near to the top of any organisation, the structure is based ultimately on balanced opposition, as at the summit of national or international systems. But if there are no coordinating institutions or other more complex orderings, a stalemate of hostile forces will be the most significant collective achievement at that level“ (Douglas, 1986, p. 57). Oppositional dead ends, such as those arising from sustainability / resiliency tensions, can produce vicious cycles of corporate alienation, visited upon one generation of members after another. But positive responses can be encouraged if we use the tools of meaningfulness to

break into these vicious cycles. Not looking away from experiences of alienation, but forming organisational procedures that track the hidden oppositions by which any particular organisation is held together. Principled meaning-making helps members map founding analogies, question legitimizing principles and reformulate „cognitive devices“ (Douglas, 1986, p. 55) in the organisation’s thought world. Founding analogies scatter meanings, both positive and negative, throughout the structures and culture of every organisation. Douglas describes these as: „Like so much bric-a-brac, these proto-theoretical pieces lie around, ready to be pressed into service, to promote the thinker’s deepest social concerns“ (Douglas, 1986, p. 66). They provide ethical resources for people to initiate new cycles of institution building. But some of the materials lurking in the recesses of every organisation are undesirable such as: „Belief in a malign and unjust cosmos with evil humans in their midst“ (Douglas, 1986, p. 41). These are immanent potentials of anti-life. Multi-level meaningfulness provides critical tools for countering anti-life, alerting members when divisive remnants of foundation emerge in public meaning-making, and presenting meaning-makers with a method of exploratory inquiry for unearthing positive meaning sources.

Corporate alienation

Corporate alienation is a particularly powerful signal of an organisation that has become separated from its potential for life-value creation. Such alienation is not just a psychological rupture, it is a distortion of social structures and relationships. By de-sensitising organisational members to how their activities impact the well-being and flourishing of valuable beings and things, corporate alienation renders people vulnerable to attempts by the powerful to subvert and appropriate meaning-making processes. It can derive from what Stephen White (2017) describes as an interior malignancy, which is „systematically invasive, not directly willed by anyone, and may be lethal to its host“ (White, 2017, p. 132). As a type of corrupted organisational logic, systemic malignancy is maintained by failures in ethically-oriented social cognition. The result is a disintegration of meaningfulness, a sense of dearth or „brute insufficiency of meaning“ (White, 2017, p. 94) that corrupts principled meaning-making and poisons meaning-sources, rendering organisational members voiceless and mute, and resulting in severe threats to their collective and personal identities.

The opposite of interior malignancy is corporate commitment to life-value creation. This entails being open to changes in our collective motivational

structures, as well as facing up to dilemmas regarding what must change and what must stay the same. The experience of change can be profoundly alienating: the objects we value, with which we are materially and emotionally intertwined, may become unrecognisable to us. Too monstrously transformed for us to be able to appropriate them to the meaning content of our lives. We can force objects (beings and things) which matter to us to change so that we ourselves might remain unchanged. Or we reject them, if they change to preserve their own being in ways we find unacceptable. Rather than fitting valuable objects to our needs, Fromm (1976, p. 71) suggest that we should make ourselves available to them in a „process of mutual alive relatedness“. A process where we become willing to change ourselves for their sake.

To navigate sustainability transitions, we need to cultivate in ourselves and each other a readiness towards mutual change that enriches both parties. This is difficult when social cognition remains dominated by the „mode of having“, resulting in vicious cycles of alienation at multiple levels of organising from communities to institutions, cities, and nations. In a recent paper examining diverse manifestations of alienation, Silver (2019) brings together Marx’s integration/separation with Simmel’s growth/ossification, or „alienation as separation and disintegration with alienation as the loss of vitality and creativity“ (Silver, 2019, p. 7). For Simmel, alienation is an unavoidable aspect of the human condition – as we reach out to objects in striving for growth, or „more life“, we can experience those objects as closed off (cf. Silver, 2019). When objects resist our efforts to relate, we can feel cast adrift, unmoored, and rootless. Hartmut Rosa describes a non-alienated form of life as one that is „rich in multi-dimensional experiences of ‘resonance’“ (Rosa, 2010, p. 101). Resonance is a type of knowing and attending to another through encounters that engenders a feeling of being „called upon by something different that transforms me“ (Lijster & Celikates, 2019, p. 74). Such transformative encounters have „the power to break with given institutional or interpretive frames“ (Rosa, 2020, p. 597). We can respond positively to such calls, especially when they take place in action contexts structured by the moral value of meaningfulness, and therefore protected by truth-telling, hope, courage, and collective resilience. When we become willing to be influenced by the other, we allow their presence to shape our cognition and provide purposes for our collective action, thereby turning moments of negative alienation into positive experiences of inquiry. This implies a readiness to stay with the discomfort of alienation, together with a willingness to make ourselves into the means for life-value creation.

The features of collective moral agency

What kinds of organisations might break into vicious cycles of alienation and be productive of ethically-oriented social cognition? In their book on group agency, List and Pettit (2011) argue that organisations must be made fit to be held responsible, and that this requires organisations to become collective *moral* agents. Organisations which are collective moral agents design procedures enabling their members to face up to vicious cycles of corporate alienation by providing them with opportunities to „interact with it, criticize it, and make demands on it, in a manner not possible with a non-agential system“ (List & Pettit, 2011, p. 5). This sets up a social bond between members of the organisation who care about its integrity and moral status in society. Such a view retrieves the organisation as an ethical entity, as itself a potentially worthy object, that matters, and towards which members have responsibilities as moral agents of construction. This runs counter to recent theorising of the organisation in which the organisation as an entity disappears (Besio, Du Gay & Serrano Velarde, 2020) into networks, platforms, or other ephemeral types of organising. I suggest that organisational entities which are worthy of our contributions possess two identifying features of collective moral agency: Integrity and empathy. The first, *organisational integrity*, is the organisation’s independent moral presence in society. Integrity is manifested when the organisation refuses to allow people and assets to be used for morally objectionable purposes. The second feature is *organisational empathy*, where organisations develop the capability to cultivate empathetic orientations and feelings in their members, equipping them to judge whether organisational responses are „morally worthy organisational emotions“ (Collins, 2018, p. 827).

In the end, to make organisations that support the shift to a social character orientation rooted in moral attention, we need a system of democracy covering our associational life across all fields of endeavour. Fromm (1976) says our future as a species will depend upon „how many brilliant, learned, disciplined, and caring men and women are attracted by the new challenge to the human mind, and by the fact that this time *the goal is not control over nature, but control over technique and over irrational social forces and institutions that threaten the survival of Western society; if not the human race*“ (Fromm, 1976, p. 142-145). This seems about right, except that this time we need, not the brilliance of a cadre of philosopher Kings and Queens, but the capabilities of all persons, and even other living beings and things, to create meanings for practical reasoning. This demands a fresh democratic dispensation. A radical inclusion of life into more-than-life, into democracy as a way of life, and a platform for

societal progress and people-making. Democracy as a total learning system that releases new life and work meanings out of our relatedness to other beings and doings, producing meaning-systems to underpin the social and cultural psychology needed for establishing a planetary web of ecological civilisations.

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Hard lessons: (Critical) Management Studies and (Critical) Work and Organizational Psychology

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ABSTRACT

This short paper explores what lessons Critical Work and Organizational Psychology (CWOP) might learn from the rise of Critical Management Studies (CMS) thirty years ago. I begin by exploring the conditions of possibility for CMS, before providing a history of how it grew and institutionalized. Despite its ‘success’, I describe how partial, parochial and positional it was, and open a gap between its achievements within some Business Schools and its relative invisibility outside them. I conclude with some challenges for CWOP, in the spirit of learning from CMS.

Keywords

Critical Management Studies – institutionalization – business schools – critique – impact – incorporation

Positioning

I have been interested in the rise and fall of critical movements in academic disciplines for quite a few years. I suppose this is because of my experience of being part of ‘Critical Management Studies’ (CMS) since its inception in the early 1990s. It struck me then that CMS seemed to be rather behind the wave, since my background in sociology had suggested that the apex of ‘critical’ social science had passed some time previously. From the 1960s onwards, currents of Marxism, feminism and, later, poststructuralism, queer theory and postcolonialism had reshaped parts of sociology, anthropology, education studies, geography, history and even given birth to a new critical discipline – cultural studies (Fay, 1987). The word ‘critical’ was often attached to social sciences, arts and humanities disciplines as a shouty prefix, naming and demanding a new form of thought and (implicitly) describing such thought as itself a form of political action. The claim was that these disciplines had been dominated by old conservatives, inattentive to gender, ethnicity, class and so on, and that younger radicals needed to inaugurate a more political epistemology. The white hetero fathers, and some mothers, needed to be elbowed out of the way in order to make a new world. At the time, I loved that stuff, and happily participated in the toppling of statues.

In this paper I want to move beyond this Oedipal drama, and think a bit harder about what CMS has

achieved and not achieved in its thirty years, hopefully in order to stimulate a bit of thought about how ‘critical moments’ might do something more than merely providing labels for academics. I hope that people who are interested in Critical Work and Organizational Psychology (CWOP) might learn something from these reflections, though if they are also invested in the toppling of statues, I might be part of the problem too. After all, as soon as someone proposes that I should learn lessons from my elders I begin to bristle.

This is a short paper, so I intend to move rapidly. I’ll spend a few pages outlining the conditions of possibility for CMS, before a short history of how it grew and institutionalized. The point of this is to note how partial, parochial and positional it was, and to open a gap between its success within some parts of the academy and its invisibility outside it. I conclude with some challenges for CWOP, in the spirit of learning from what CMS did and didn’t do.

Before I begin, the usual caveats about my history and location. I have spent my career in the UK, and consequently think I know most about the history of CMS in that small wet island. I am also a heterosexual cis man who has just become 60, so my view is of the last thirty years or so, and a fairly smug view at that, since I have been a professor for many years now. In other words, there are places to read CMS from, other locations and identities, other stories to be told. As I said, you should always be suspicious when old white men start to speak.

Past

Beginnings, as many people have remarked, are rarely neat. Though CMS is usually dated to the publication of Mats Alvesson and Hugh Willmott's (1992) edited collection, with its importation of Habermasian critical theory into English speaking schools of business and management, it's not as if there was no 'critical' work on management and organization prior to 1992. Marxist and feminist sociologists had written much about capitalism and patriarchy at work, industrial relations academics had long been exploring the inequalities of the wage-effort bargain, and political economy documented the hegemonic effects of corporations on labour markets and the state. CMS pulled some of these threads together, particularly with reference to the popularity of Frankfurt School Critical Theory across the social sciences, but it did not signal a radical departure, a historical break with what had come before. This is important to remember, because it provides us with an account that embeds CMS in history, in a longer story, and allows us to think about its pre-history as well as its legacy.

Outside North America, where business schools had been well-established for decades, the growth of the business school in the global north really takes place from the 1980s onwards. In the UK, where I work, there was a huge expansion of students and staff, with almost every university establishing a school of business or management by the 21st century (Parker, 2018). This was driven by the expansion of UK Higher Education, but also the search for income in a context of dwindling state support. It meant that students from China, Nigeria, India and so on were tasked with paying the bills for new buildings and new professors, usually by paying large fees for English language postgraduate courses. The fact that English had become a global language was a result of US influence, which in turn reflected the history of British imperialism and its establishment of colonies in North America from the beginning of the 17th century onwards. The growth of the Northern European Business School was the precondition for the growth of CMS, and the precondition for the growth of the Northern European Business School was Northern European imperialism.

This is a genealogy that indicates the conditions of possibility of CMS, but it also reminds us about the torrent of money that flooded into Business Schools, particularly in the UK. Just as the new buildings were going up on the edge of campus, so were careers being made, journals founded, chairs appointed and so on. Departments of philosophy, sociology and language were shrinking, starved of students and staff, but the Business Schools were going up like circus tents, ringing with the glistening sound of money and

carnival barkers selling tickets. With all this noise going on, it was easy enough for CMS to sneak in and find a place within the big top.

The institutionalization of CMS happened pretty quickly and easily throughout the 1990s, and despite protestations to the contrary, certain schools, superstar professors, journals, conferences, textbooks and so on made what once seemed 'outsider' into something rather insider. The inaugural 1992 volume was followed by a second version a decade later, there was a reader, a handbook, a companion, a key concepts book, a four volume set of readings and even a (rather premature) 'classics' collection (Alvesson & Willmott, 2005; Grey & Willmott, 2005; Alvesson, Bridgman & Willmott, 2009; Tadajewski, Maclaran, Parsons & Parker, 2011; Alvesson & Willmott 2011; Alvesson, 2011; Prasad, Prasad, Mills & Mills, 2016). In addition there were an increasing number of textbooks with the word 'critical' in their titles, a CMS division of the US Academy of Management, a bi-annual conference and even a 'CMS around the world' edited volume (Grey, Huault, Perret & Taskin, 2016).

It might have looked like CMS had become a fixture, an established part of any self-respecting business school, and perhaps its very existence was proof of a certain sort of tolerance and pluralism. The fact that CMS professors were 'out', publishing in high quality journals and selling books, supervising CMS PhDs, and that certain schools were identified with CMS seemed to indicate that the Northern European Business School was developing into a hospitable location for dissent. A place for academics with a diverse range of espoused radical commitments to launch their critiques of capitalism, patriarchy, heteronormativity, hegemonic whiteness, imperialism, identity thinking, positivism, hierarchy and authority. What bliss it was in that dawn to be alive.

Present

It seems to me that there are two problems with any version of the 'success' of CMS. The first is that it fixes 'critique' (whatever its target, and however understood) as something that could be finished with once the message had been sent. The second is that the institutionalization of CMS over thirty years may have been rapid and spectacular, but it was also very patchy, endlessly contested and very often co-opted.

First, CMS was never adopted evenly. Its heartlands were in English speaking business schools in North Western Europe – the UK, Netherlands and Scandinavia in particular – and Australasia. Though there are notable exceptions, there were never a substantial number of self-identified CMS scholars in North America, Germany, France, Central Europe,

Africa, Asia, South America and so on. It might have seemed like a significant movement to the 500 or so people who turned up to the bi-annual conferences – almost all held in the UK – but it was really quite a small group. It was also a group that tended, like most social groups, to be connected via specific workplaces, PhD supervisions and examinations, editorial boards, publishing in edited collections and so on. In other words, it tended to be a group of people that knew each other already, or were connected through social networks that allowed them to bond over shared acquaintances and experiences.

Further, the adoption of CMS was even patchy within the Business Schools. Most of the people turning up to the conferences worked within the ‘organization studies’ departments. Though again there are exceptions, there were far fewer people from strategy, marketing and international business, and almost none from operations and project management, or occupational psychology. Accounting and finance did have critical work, but it tended to occur separately from CMS, with different journals (such as *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*) and conferences (such as Critical Finance Studies). This was also true of industrial relations, which for many years had a tense relationship with CMS, particularly in terms of different orientations to Marxism and poststructuralism (Parker, 2016). Particular parts of Business Schools were influenced by CMS, but most sub-disciplines were fairly untouched. This disciplinary concentration of course intensified the bonding elements of the social network, largely because it provided a shared context for discussing authors and issues from sociology and social theory.

Finally, CMS was most intensely associated with certain business schools, with those places becoming identified (at least for a time) as having a distinctive focus on supporting critical teaching and research. In the UK, these have included (at different periods of time) City, Essex, Cardiff, Keele, Leicester, Manchester, Queen Mary, York and Warwick, and elsewhere, Copenhagen, Lund, Massachusetts, Radboud, St Mary’s Halifax, UT Sydney. As we will see shortly, the CMS arc of some of these schools was a short one, but the fact remains that the vast majority of Business Schools in the UK and the rest of the world were never hospitable contexts for CMS academics. There may have been a few people, but concentrations were rare.

Now it follows from all those observations, about geography, discipline and employer, that the CMS social network was actually rather an inward looking one. This was acutely skewered by Jones, Sharifi and Conway in 2006 when they accused UK CMS of being an ‘invisible college’ of back scratching, a exclusionary network of people who worked at the same institutions and published in each other’s journals. The implication

was that what might be optimistically described as a supportive network of colleagues collectively pushing a critical agenda was actually a self-congratulatory clique engaged in nepotism. Whatever the accuracy of such a characterization, it was certainly the case that the shakers and movers in CMS were mostly white men of a similar age and education. This meant that women, queer people, people of colour, people educated outside north western Europe, were not as well represented in the journals and conferences. Though all the actors concerned would have been defensively horrified to think that they were engaged in producing a homophilic network, that is what was happening, and as with all social networks, it can be exclusionary in personal and epistemological terms (Ashcraft, 2016; Vijay, 2021). The narcissistic reproduction of organization was happening in CMS, just as it was in the patriarchal, imperialist and capitalist companies it was criticizing.

I suppose a generous reader might forgive CMS for its partiality and insularity if it could be claimed that it had clearly demonstrated its effectiveness in changing management research, education and practice. Perhaps the ends justified the means? However, there is precious little evidence of the ‘impact’ of CMS because it appears to have been largely ignored or co-opted by business schools. There are very few examples of Business Schools which explicitly advertised a critical mission, and those that did usually reserved that message for research, not in their marketing for recruiting students. If anything, CMS was simply absorbed into the publication machinery of the schools. As long as an article was published in what was deemed to be a highly ranked journal it didn’t really matter what it said, because the impact factor of the journal, or citations of the article, were enough to feed into the ranking algorithms which pushed schools up league tables and helped to recruit students.

CMS was a practice which was almost entirely internal to the Business Schools, in which well-paid professors wrote articles for each other in densely professional language and published them in places which were inaccessible to those on the other side of the paywall. Most were very effective at doing this, and they followed scholarly rules assiduously, celebrating and critiquing key thinkers and concepts, constructing literatures which required reviewing, and insisting that future research needed to address this, that or The Other. In career terms, this was also a lucrative activity, one that was supported by a very active labour market with expanding schools, many jobs and promotions, and salaries which were higher than other social science and humanities subjects. Despite its constant criticism of the Business School, CMS was very rarely engaged in practices which questioned the logic of

academic labour which underpinned it, as if writing a ‘critique’ of something, adorned with high theory, was the same as engaging in political action to address a particular state of affairs or social problem. One might almost say that it was an identity claim, rather than a statement about a different relation to practice.

In some ways it was quite odd that such a compliant, though complaining, group of academics didn’t simply thrive. They did not appear to be challenging much about the organization of scholarly practice, academic labour or the management of business schools. Yet, over a period of 20 years or so, there were a series of purges by university managers which were attempts to reconfigure schools which were deemed (by local managers) to have become too critical. In the UK, starting at Keele in 2001, then Queen Mary, Warwick, Manchester and most notably Leicester in 2021, Business Schools which had a substantial number of CMS identified academics were ‘mainstreamed’. This involved a variety of strategies, but all resulting in the replacement of CMS staff with the Business School orthodoxy. The most remarkable example was Leicester, possibly the place where CMS had become most institutionalized from 2005-16, and the decision by university management to sack 16 staff on the basis that they published in CMS and ‘political economy’ (Parker, 2021). The evidence provided was publication in particular journals – such as *Organization* or other journals with the word ‘critical’ in their title – as well as co-authorship with known CMS authors, or citation of CMS literature.

There is no evidence that a high proportion of CMS identified employees damaged the financial out-turn for any of these Business Schools, even at Leicester, but it was enough that senior management believed that it did. In the UK, the assumption then and now was that Business Schools are the primary cash machines for an increasingly privatized university system and that any hint of heterodoxy was hence dangerous in marketing terms. The league tables measured conventional metrics, and the marketing stressed personal career benefit. This produced a set of parallel mimetic strategies, with all schools claiming to be ‘distinctive’ and ‘different’ just as what they actually did was pretty much the same. Whilst words like diversity, responsibility and sustainability were used liberally, they did not seem to prevent schools from engaging in research and teaching in financial derivatives, marketing for unnecessary products and services, international business relying on carbon emitting supply chains and so on.

I have painted a depressing picture here, suggesting not only that CMS was much more parochial than many might want to believe, but also that it was (in terms of its practice) much less radical. At its core, it began with a small number of academics

in the people and organization departments of some Business Schools in North Western Europe. What they did was to claim an identity as dissenters whilst doing relatively little to challenge the dominant practices of university scholarship, publishing obscure articles in highly ranked journals and being handsomely rewarded with pay and promotion. Despite this, in many schools over two decades, they have been regarded as a threat to the profitability of the schools themselves. In summary, CMS has done very little of importance, but has been punished anyway.

What can CWOP learn from such a dismal and depressing history?

Future

Well, let me begin this last section by being a little kinder to CMS. Many people would argue that CMS has opened up the intellectual landscape of Business Schools, and provided legitimation and company for many academics with heterodox views. In that sense, it has succeeded in making Business Schools in North Western Europe rather more pluralist places than they might otherwise have been. What we have also seen over the last decade is an increasing interest in CMS beyond its heartlands, particularly in Central and South America, as decolonial ideas become more central to the critical project, including criticism of the insularity and positionality of ‘Manchester School’ CMS (Prasad et al., 2016; Vijay, 2021). In that sense, the institutionalisation of CMS continues, but perhaps in more places than I have presented above.

Neither is the picture that I have painted about the orthodox nature of academic labour entirely fair, because over the last decade there have been many calls for CMS to become more relevant to radical practice, with ideas about ‘critical performativity’ being used to publish articles which criticise the mere publishing of articles (Spicer, Alvesson & Kärreman, 2009, 2016), as well as louder and louder calls for active and practical support of alternative organizations and a new economy at the other (Parker, Cheney, Fournier & Land, 2014). In this sense, it seems to me that CMS is now needed more than ever, not as an identity claim for some academics within some Business Schools, but a political practice which attempts to help co-produce a low carbon, high inclusion, high democracy economy.

Of course this rather begs the question that lies behind this special issue, and this paper. What is the purpose of a critical moment? Is it, as some might argue, an intellectual movement *within* the academy which is intended to change the way that some people in the academy think about their discipline? In this sense CMS, or CWOP, are (by the addition of the C) movements inside MS and WOP in the same way that

critical sociology is a form of sociology, and critical legal studies a form of legal studies. This is a perfectly defensible position, and one that is precise about the restrictions and ambitions of these critical moments. In other words, if they have some impact on teaching and research, they are successful. If we take this 'restricted' version of the addition of the C, then CMS has been a success, even if rather a parochial one so far.

Of course the specification of a 'restricted' ambition implies an opposition with something rather more ambitious. I will call this a 'general' ambition¹. It is based on the idea that the addition of the C is meant to signify that intellectual argument within the academy and practice outside should it be somehow related. This is to say that the critical work being done within the university is also critical of the university itself, and of the institutionalized epistemologies that sequester 'intellectuals' within the ivory tower and restrict their conversations to professional journals. If this is the ambition, then CMS has been an unqualified failure, since it is barely known outside Business School academic circles, and has no discernible influence on managerial practice, activist organization or public policy.

I think this invites some parallel reflection on what CWOP is for. What are its collective aims? What would success look like? It seems clear enough that a 'restricted' version of CWOP will open up new academic spaces for considering questions about the role of work and occupational psychology concerning the production of neoliberal subjects who are framed as individual bundles of skills, competencies, attitudes and so on. It will also encourage discussion about power, whether structural or discursive; as well about gender, ethnicity, sexuality, identity and identification. This would mean that over-work, stress and anxiety would be considered part of the 'normal' functioning of capitalist work organizations, and not pathologies that can somehow be managed away or managed out. To imagine organizations without such symptoms, work psychologists would need to explore different forms of work organization, particularly those with worker ownership and control. In wider terms, CWOP would doubtless be producing forms of thought aimed at addressing the climate and ecological crisis, consumer capitalism and the epistemological and material imperialism of the Global North.

Building this restricted CWOP would be an achievement, and in that sense it might well echo (and perhaps amplify) the work done in CMS over the past 30 years. However, the key issue, I think, is whether CWOP can travel beyond the academy, whether it can build alliances with practitioners, disseminate in

professional contexts, influence regulatory bodies and ultimately employment practices. A 'general' CWOP would have to build a political strategy that connects outside the university, that translates academic work into practical action by the careful (and probably academically unrewarded) business of building networks and coalitions that press a wide variety of related institutions into making changes.

The question that lies behind this paper, and reflects my obvious impatience with what CMS has done over 30 years, concerns the relation between a restricted and a general critique. Is there a link between academic institutionalisation and political action that makes change in the world? To me, it seems that part of the problem is that most CMS academics behaved as if uttering statements of the restricted type impacted on practices and understandings outside the academy, and they simply didn't. There is, to my knowledge, no evidence that any of the core work within CMS has made any substantial difference to the wider world. It isn't helpful for policy makers, practically relevant for managers or activists, or even intelligible for most ordinary readers.

Simply stating that the world should be different, that patriarchy, imperialism and capitalism must end, that neo-liberalism is a historical mistake, is not the same as actually strategizing for change. So, imagined CWOP curious reader, what do you want CWOP to be and to do? Do you want it to produce journals, chairs, conferences, companions, handbooks, key concepts volumes, and classics sets? To be academically legitimate, in the sense of having a corridor within the institution where people like you can do the things that people like you do? CMS achieved this quite quickly in North Western Europe, partly because the business school expanded so rapidly from the 1980s onwards and because of an importation of social scientists who were to be its labour force. It's probably too early to say whether this was 'entryist' politics in the Gramscian sense, 'the long march through the institutions' suggested by the German radical student and academic Rudi Dutschke in 1967, but there doesn't seem much evidence that business schools have collectively become more 'critical' in the last thirty years. Indeed, the example of Leicester seems to suggest that they might become more hostile, perhaps because of the financial centrality of Business School income to institutions that have effectively become privatized.

It seems to me that CMS has been a success at institutionalising itself but a failure at doing much else. Its success has been the way that it has opened up space for 'critical' forms of research, writing and teaching within some Business Schools, but its failure has been its inability to organize and be heard beyond

¹ Apologies to Georges Bataille.

the academy. It would be a shame if someone ended up saying the same thing about CWOP in thirty years.

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Bricolage of positions and perspectives from the panel discussion on prospects and contestations of Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology: Are we ready to take over?¹

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a compilation or, rather, composition of the position statements by the participants of the panel discussion at the first International Conference on Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology, held from the 11th to the 13th of July 2022 at the University of Innsbruck. Unlike the loosely sewn together „patchwork quilt“ one might expect, the resulting text deserves the label „bricolage“ – a sculpture of ideas, complementing and contextualizing each other to form a higher-order meaning that goes beyond the sum of its parts. Bricolage can refer to the creation of cultural identity among social groups as well as to the psychological processes through which individuals retrieve and recombine knowledge. Both meanings seem fitting here and, in this sense, each individual contribution is a fractal of the overall gestalt of this article, which is structured as follows: The first contribution by Laura Röllmann is entitled „Creating niches or intervening from within – How individual theories of change influence our strategies towards transforming Work and Organizational Psychology“. This introduction is followed up by Johanna Degen’s thoughts on „Why a critical stance comes without didactics“. Subsequently, Edina Dóci writes on the topic of „Deterritorializing and reterritorializing Work and Organizational Psychology“, followed by Matthijs Bal, pondering the issue of „Criticalizing our colleagues?“. Next, Severin Hornung raises the question „Or should we even aspire to? Dialectics of resistance and assimilation in times of crisis“. After that, Gazi Islam elaborates on „Critique of practice and critique by practice: Collaborative possibilities in Critical Work and Organizational Psychology“. Next comes Thomas Kühn’s vision, entitled „The urge for a revolution of hope in Work and Organizational Psychology“. Finally, Zoe Sanderson concludes with „Building a house we want to live in: The importance of how we do Critical Work and Organizational Psychology“. Aside from adjusting the order of contributions, the organizers have refrained from summarizing or commenting on the contents, convinced that the „magic of bricolage“ speaks for itself.

Keywords

Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology – transforming academic psychology – scholarly activism – radical engagement – bricolage

¹ The order of authors does not reflect their relative overall contributions to this article, but the sequential order of their individual contributions (position statements) in the text. This bricolage was compiled and edited by Severin Hornung. We thank Christine Unterrainer for her moderation of the panel discussion.

Creating niches or intervening from within – How individual theories of change influence our strategies towards transforming Work and Organizational Psychology (Laura F. Röllmann)

Critical Work and Organizational Psychology (CWOP) is an emerging perspective promoted by a loose network of people that have found each other after the first Small Group Meeting on the Future of Work and Organizational Psychology in Breda in May 2018. Since then, we have been working together, in slightly changing constellations, to organize workshops, a journal special issue, or panel discussions, like this one. What brings us together is the conviction that conventional Work and Organizational Psychology (WOP) does not serve the precarious and oppressed. We do not target a specific area of change (e.g., feminism, anti-racism or climate justice), but approach a broad range of topics. Many of us personally and professionally aspire to contribute to a general societal transformation towards a sustainable and more equitable future. Many of us want to make their access to academia and connected resources available and beneficial to the people that are affected by discrimination and/or precarious living conditions.

I am confident that our individual aspirations do align pretty well, in all their distinctiveness. However, the activities we engage in mostly arise from spontaneous ideas and are often based on sentiment. Seldom, our doings in CWOP are the result of a thorough strategic exchange to attain a defined common purpose. I think what is still missing in our network, such that it can become a real „movement“, is strategic exchange about several aspects. A central question for me is: How do we think that conditions and mindsets change – in WOP and in the world in general? This question is reflected in the concept of „Theory of Change“ that aims to visualize what participants of initiatives strive towards and by which processes they hope to succeed (Weiss, 1995). A common strategy (or several common strategies) should be further grounded in our concepts of the person – our ideas of how humans behave and why they behave the way they do.

I do not know what theories of change and concepts of the person are held by each individual who is part of CWOP or wants to join (by the way: you are very welcome!). When we look back to historical social movements, we can extract very different strategies that we can try to back-translate into a theory of change. Of course, these strategies do rely on context. However, they also rely on a strategic decision or on individual preferences. To give a few examples: Even if the two strategies have been later analysed as being fruitful for one another (Ali, 2015), Antonio Gramsci, with his idea of cultural hegemony and organic intellectuals, tried to find a different lever for societal change than Frantz Fanon, who thought that colonized people have to fundamentally fight for being able to live freely – eventually also using militant

actions. Angela Davis fought with different weapons than Kimberlé Crenshaw (e.g., Crenshaw, 1994; Davis, 1998). Also, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King had very distinctive strategies for fighting against racial segregation and discrimination in the United States during the 1950s to 1970s (Carson, 2005). As a side note: Malcolm X and Martin Luther King are certainly very interesting examples, as they were, at times, very annoyed with each other's political strategies, disagreeing on the role of (non-)violence, love or hate, and religion for the success of black liberation struggles. However, Malcolm X' apparently tried to support Martin Luther King when he was under arrest in Selma, Alabama in 1965.

I think it is crucial that we are transparent with our theories of change, so that we can see if they match or if they counteract each other. We should try to find out where they complement one another, where we have blind spots, where we need allies, and which allies we should search for. To that aim, first, I think each and every one of us should at least broadly think about the following questions:

- 1) What is my vision of a good world?
- 2) How do I think that society can change?
- 3) How could society approach my vision of a good world?

Then we should analyse our strategies to determine if we want to continue every step as a unit or if there are fundamentally different approaches that some of us want to pursue together as a subgroup. This scenario should not be a divisive one: No matter how different our strategies may be, it is important to me that we respect and support each other. But I imagine that we can use our energy in a more focused and purposeful way after we have had an exchange about our strategies. In the end, a multitude of strategies might emerge, in more or less detail. For a better visualization, let me exemplify the two strategies mentioned in the title to depict what I mean regarding strategies for CWOP: On the one hand, we might search to create a *niche*, from where new things can develop – a safe(r) space that is as undisturbed from traditional (WOP) academia as possible. Establishing own journals, mentoring, funding, institutions might be a part of this strategy. The theory behind this would be that the creation of alternative environments empowers participants and inspires others to also become part of the movement. Finally, this niche could become more and more hegemonial, until it supersedes the former infrastructure. On the other hand, intervening from *within* could mean staying within the prevailing institutions and attempting to change structures from the inside. The theory behind this approach could, for example, be that more people are reached if the focus is not on exclusive, parallel „filter bubbles“, but on the entirety of the field of WOP. I am curious and sincerely looking forward to getting to know your visions.

Why a critical stance comes without didactics (Johanna L. Degen)

The title of symposium asks „Are we ready to take over?“. However, the more pressing question to ask might be: „Are we *being* taken over?“. I believe the answer is „Yes“ and in the following will outline, why this is the case.

The radical humanist stance could be called the core and the overarching value in the otherwise diverse field of critical scholarship. However, this very core is currently threatened, leaving the critical stance undermined by neoliberal capitalism, „woke-capitalist“ discourses, and dissolving of opposite political poles. Within such conditions, the critical core becomes ungraspable and didactics become directive and instrumentalized – such that they are no longer about the subject’s autonomous enlightenment, but turned into an interest-guided ideology. Such challenges start, but do not end with linguistics and discourse. Below, I will give some contemporary illustrations.

First of all, there is a problem with the term radical *humanism*, because what does „humanism“ mean after all? How can humanist values remain the meaningful core of critical scholarship, when it becomes increasingly clear, that „the human“ needs to be understood as being inhumane, ill-defined and even threatening life on earth (Degen, Rhodes, Simpson & Quinnell, 2020; Degen, Smart, Quinnell, O’Doherty & Rhodes, 2021; Fluss & Frim, 2022)? Contemporary and historical events only seem to prove that humans are hardly able to maintain any relationship, neither the human-human relationships between single subjects and groups, nor the human-ecology, or the human-non-human-species ones. If critical scholarship wants to continue using the word „humanism“, but really meaning higher values, we might need to reconsider the wording.

Second, neoliberal capitalism has been *co-opting concepts and wordings* of the critical stance, twisting them into the – more or less hidden – format of the „business case“ (Boyd, 1996; Köllen, 2020). This is well-proven in green- and pink-washing (de Luca, Schoier & Vessio, 2017; Vassilopoulou, 2017) and structural changes, such as diversity being taught in marketing programs at business schools. It becomes increasingly hard to communicate what really is meant by equality and sustainability, when such concepts have been transformed into facades, empty phrases, and woke capitalism (Rhodes, 2022), to the point that their connotation even sounds cynical.

Third, critical scholarship is increasingly robbed of the core of the *identity of being leftist*. Under the current dynamics, where political poles of left and right become intertwined and their distinctions blurred (Noury & Roland, 2020). Specifically, this refers to an observed

change where the left becomes radicalized, also in a non-humanist manner, and once distinct humanist values then become lost in radicalisation and populism (Gandehsa, 2018). In this confusion critical scholarship is challenged by where to locate and how to position.

In the context of these developments, power increasingly seems exercised thorough discourses aimed at narrowing down and quieting subjects and groups – and stifling dialogue as such. Within the restrictions of the „sayable“, the once established „right to say something back“ is suspended and replaced by the right to „never be offended“. This deterioration of discursive practices, where unfinished thoughts, discussions, the controversial and differences are not welcome, but are connotated negatively and seen as a threat within a *cancel-culture* (Teixeira da Silva, 2021), restricts communication and impedes mutual growth.

Didactics and critical teaching are noticeably changing their principles. Initially, at their very core was the idea of nudging subjects to become enlightened by developing their *own* understandings and reflections on meanings. Nowadays, the critical doing seems to be more about spreading a moral stance, an *ideology*. Under the flag of critical scholarship, enlightenment and trust in subjects to change their own subjectivity has been suspended in favor of directive didactics. Situativity and individuality are then sacrificed for generalizable universality (read more on situativity and ethics here: Gergen, 2009). Ethical principles are abandoned in favor of simple solutions and being right– phenomena that the critical stance once explicitly criticized. Critical didactics thus tend to suspend their principles in favor of „checklists“ of politically correct thinking, name-dropping, hidden business cases, and literature summaries that accelerate the zeitgeist of „who reads a book anyways?“. And this is why we need to distance ourselves from directive didactics and redirect our efforts towards situativity, exploration, trust in the other, and dialogue – daring to let subjects go free, to find their own truths, whether it is ours or not – at the risk of learning something new.

Deterritorializing and reterritorializing Work and Organizational Psychology² (Edina Dóci)

What might Critical WOP (researchers) do? There are many ways to do critical research in WOP and contribute to the critical project. We may problematize existing social and organizational practices and arrangements, in terms of their underlying ideologies and naturalized assumptions and their impact on the individual’s psychological experiences. We may try to understand how social and organizational (power) structures translate

² This opening statement emerged from conversations with Gazi Islam. The title is inspired by the terms used by philosophers Deleuze and Guattari (2009).

into the subjective, lived experience of (marginalized) individuals. We may contribute to emancipation, by revealing the impact of the social and the political on the personal (in organizations) and vice versa. By doing so, we may empower the individual to enact their agency toward social change. We may create new, alternative sets of concepts to understand the social and organizational world, thereby creating the vocabulary for social change. We may foster social change by researching alternative social and organizational arrangements and by imagining different ways of organizing the social and organizational world. We may problematize the underlying assumptions, worldviews and philosophical underpinnings of our field. And the list goes on.

But what are our underlying assumptions, worldviews and philosophical underpinnings? Social constructionism instead of positivism? Postmodernism instead of enlightenment thinking? Post/structuralism instead of functionalism? Relativism instead of rationalism? Processism instead of reductionism? Becoming instead of being? Collectivism instead of individualism? Collaboration instead of competition? Others instead of self?

But what if by choosing sides we walk into dogma in the other direction, because no singular perspective can reveal the complexity of the human experience? Perhaps the very tension between these oppositions is at the heart of the human experience (de Beauvoir, 1962) and inquiry. These oppositions may never be reconciled, they've been structuring societal, philosophical and scientific discourse and debate for centuries. We cannot resolve the tensions between these opposing perspectives. We may take sides, temporarily, strategically, because we have to make sense of the social and organizational world and our place in it, but with the awareness that our final vocabulary is no closer to the truth than others' final vocabulary (Rorty, 1989).

For different purposes and stages of a critical project, we need to position ourselves differently, acknowledging the limitations of our approach. Instead of taking categorical positions at opposite ends and make truth-claims, we may use these oppositions and the tension they create to become a meaningful field. Not trying to eliminate contradictions, but not getting stuck in one perspective and dismiss the other side either: but being in a productive, ongoing dialectical tension, in dialogue with the other side – for the field to move forward. Because when science gets stuck in a singular perspective that debilitates it. So, as CWOP, instead of taking a rigid position at one end of these spectrums, we may use and cultivate the tension productively, to generate energy, to get the field moving. To be able to accept that most we can do is a temporary, strategic and reflective positioning based on the current purpose of our critical project, we may want to embrace ambiguity, instead of resisting it and trying to eliminate it (de Beauvoir, 1962).

Perspectives for the further positioning of critical research in WOP can be analyzed based on a dynamic model of the three interrelated axes of *location* (where? – internal and / or external), *mode* (how? – discovery and / or creation) and *purpose* (why? – denunciation and / or emancipation), which is outlined in the following.

Location: Internal / External. The location of critical WOP inquiry is always somewhere in the intersection between the Internal and the External, that is, how people's subjective, psychological experiences interact with contemporary social and organizational arrangements.

Mode: Discovery / Creation. If our mode of inquiry is Discovery, by doing research we want to get closer to understanding how the individual (and their psychological experiences) interact with, and operates within, contemporary social and organizational arrangements. If this is our goal, we are influenced by enlightenment thinking, reason, rationalism and reductionism; we are thinking in distinct and objective categories and try to discover the relationships between them, we try to order them and compare them. While this approach has been heavily criticized by critical scholarship, we might need it as a prelude, or groundwork for social change. For example, to overcome workplace inequalities in mental health, we need to first prove that such inequalities exist, for which we need to think in categories that can be compared with each other. If the mode of our inquiry is Creation, by research we may want to (de-construct and) re-construct contemporary social and organizational reality. We may go about this by denaturalizing social arrangements and the widely accepted assumptions they are built on, by constructing alternative ways to look at and organize the social world, and by imagining possibilities for fairer and more humane workplaces and society.

Purpose: Denunciation / Emancipation. If our purpose of inquiry is Denunciation, we may want to reveal and problematize social reality, and how it impacts (and manifests in) people's subjectivity. For example, we may reveal how capitalism dictates every parameter of social reality that people need to navigate in contemporary organizations, and how it permeates all psychological experiences, aspirations and actions, and creates an epidemic of mental health problems. This means revealing how the external (social and organizational structures and arrangements) act on and manifest through the internal (the individual and their subjectivity). By Emancipation we mean working towards the liberation of people's minds from oppressive structures. By generating a sense of critical consciousness and agency to challenge and change social arrangements, this contributes to paving the way toward the realization of new, more fair and (radically) humane versions of social and organizational reality, where people's mental and physical health, well-being and dignity is protected. Thereby, it refers to how the individual acts on the social structure.

There is nothing essentialist in these axes, they form a dynamic, interrelated (and, of course, arbitrary) system. Different phases, moments of the critical project require different tools, different ways of looking at the social world and the individual in it. Depending on the purpose of our inquiry, we can strategically and self-reflexively position ourselves on this map. And what is most interesting anyway are the interrelations between these axes – just like what is most interesting when it comes to people in organizations.

Criticalizing our colleagues? (P. Matthijs Bal)

A crucial element of the Critical WOP (CWOP) initiative pertains to how scientific work and the development of a CWOP community relates to the ‘mainstream’ area within WOP. While much has been said in relation to such divide within the Critical Management Studies area (Islam & Sanderson, 2022), it is important to differentiate among the various positions that can be held by critical WOP scholars in relation to the ‘remainder’ of WOP – i.e., all those scholars who may not identify as ‘critical’. Bringing this debate much closer than an abstract treatise on the critical-mainstream divide, we have to ascertain that many of the scholars active within CWOP have been ‘mainstream’ researchers themselves, or still are invested in more mainstream research. Moreover, both collaborations and friendships with scholars not identifying or even distancing themselves from critical scholarship, may still be present at the time of ‘criticalizing’. The question therefore is: how do ‘we’ relate to the more mainstream scholars within WOP? While CWOP is often critical of hegemonic practices in WOP (e.g., the dominance of positivistic ontologies and the lack of pluralism), the position of outsider who ‘knows it all’ is problematic and often leads to antagonism. At the same time, while the CWOP scholar may engage in genuinely reflexive practice, critically investigating not only hegemonic practice, but also one’s own position and practices in line with one’s values, this may not necessarily be recognized by other scholars in the field. In contrast, critical scholars are often subject to harsh criticism from (powerful) mainstream actors. Mainstream scholars often (implicitly) argue that it is preferable to remain firmly invested in one’s current position, rather than to engage in a process of criticalizing oneself, and be potentially confronted with one’s hypocrisy due to critical self-questioning. Is there a constructive way forward, even if genuine reflexivity is merely criticized by the mainstream as hypocrisy?

To remedy some of these problems, CWOP scholars have introduced the term criticalizing to get beyond an artificial binary critical-mainstream distinction. It is about criticalizing our thought and work, denoting a process of trying to more critically assess the research we do, the way we teach our students, the practices inherent to

scholarship (e.g., public engagement) and so forth. It is not about trying to reach to a certain level where one can justify the title ‘critical scholar’, but about implementing ways to criticalize our work. This criticalizing as a process is something that is not unique to critical scholars, but can be something that is much more widely shared, and which may manifest through many different ways and perspectives. For instance, the rise of attention to social justice and decent work in WOP (McWirther & McWha-Hermann, 2021), shows how mainstream journals become more open to critical work.

A process of criticalizing should be an invitation to anyone in the field to more critically reflect upon one’s work and assess how one’s own personal values could be more strongly aligned with one’s research. For instance, many scholars may not identify with neoliberal values such as self-instrumentalization (Bal & Dóci, 2018), but may nonetheless feel pressured to include such values in research designs to comply with hegemonic practices in top-tier journals. Critical reflection may help scholars to conduct research that is more strongly aligned with their own values. To do so, an important task for CWOP is to create visions and narratives of how critical scholarship may look like. As shown in previous CWOP meetings, a cohesive community has been formed of likeminded people in an atmosphere of trust and friendliness. The next step, therefore, is to show to our colleagues in the field how critical scholarship not only provides more meaning to one’s work, but also comes with strong friendships, a community of belonging, and a sense of direction towards a more sustainable academic field (Bal et al., 2019), and a better world generally. It might be difficult to appeal to senior scholars in the field who have invested their careers into hegemonic practice, so therefore, CWOP may have the broadest appeal to early and mid-career scholars, as our experience has also shown. CWOP’s task is not only to criticalize research, but also to showcase a more *humane* academia, and telling this story will be the strongest narrative for our colleagues in the field, a story of an academic discipline that exists in which we jointly, collaboratively, and in a spirit of friendship, work together towards a more humane and dignified academic field, and where we conduct research that helps to create more dignified workplaces and a more sustainable world generally.

Or should we even aspire to? Dialectics of resistance and assimilation in times of crisis (Severin Hornung)

Referring to the provocatively worded title of this panel discussion, asking „Are we ready to take over?“, it seems warranted to reflect upon the question if and how critically-minded scholars should even aspire to „take over“ the academic field. In this context, I want to discuss the positioning of CWOP with regard to WOP

based on the concepts of *resistance* and *assimilation* (e.g., Fontenelle, 2010). These two terms were partly chosen for rhetoric or polemic reasons and alternative terms could be used (e.g., Goetz, Gotchev, Richter & Nicolaus, 2020). For example, related concepts would be *revolution vs. reform*, *antagonism vs. agonism*, *macro-emancipation vs. micro-emancipation*, and *anti-performativity vs. critical performativity* – as debated in the field of Critical Management Studies (CMS; e.g., Fleming & Banerjee, 2016). Towards the end of this position statement, I briefly discuss current societal developments that may influence prospects and contestations regarding the future of CWOP.

Resistance (thesis)

First, a strategy of resistance or refusal implies an antagonistic counter-position, emphasizing divergence, conflict, and incommensurability of the critical and the mainstream paradigm. Resistance stands for the more radical approach, emphasizing principled refusal to compromise or play along with the mainstream. Advantages of such a genuinely critical perspective include being able to call out the injustices and wrongs of the system, as well as the complicity of both mainstream functionalist as well as „moderately“ critical research in maintaining and justifying these systemic dysfunctions (e.g., Klikauer, 2015, 2018). Radical resistance allows preserving theoretical purity and categorical opposition, in the sense of the credo of critical theory: „There is no right life in the wrong one“. Disadvantages of such a confrontational approach, however, are isolation and rigidity of fundamental opposition, possibly resulting in categorical negativity and „critical paralysis“ without real-world impact.

Assimilation (antithesis)

The other strategy of assimilation or integration implies a degree of trying to „fit in“, seeking compatibility, or at least communication or exchange with the mainstream. This could mean trying to provide a complementary critical perspective or a strategy of *criticalizing* the functionalist mainstream from within. Advantages of such a more pragmatic approach would be the greater potential for making an impact on the field and maybe also on people’s lives. However, the disadvantages or dangers would be to dilute and water down the critique. Indeed, there is a risk that critical research is assimilated as one compartmentalized stream, serving as a „fig leaf“ to legitimize an overall uncritical field of WOP, complicit in social and environmental exploitation (e.g., Klikauer, 2018). The idea here is that „too much compromise is compromising“ the integrity of radical critique. Or, to put it with Oscar Wilde (1895 / 2001), the worst slave-owners are those that are kind to their slaves – as they prevent the horrors of an unjust and exploitative system to be seen for what they really are.

Dynamism (synthesis)

As a dialectic synthesis, I suggest a hybrid strategy, combining both – seemingly incommensurate – approaches. This could mean pursuing a two-pronged strategy of principled theory-based dissent and radical refusal, combined with more hands-on, engaged, and subtle subversion to ensure the continuous development and impact of the movement of critical work and organizational psychology. There are actually role models for this. For example, in research on social movements, such a dual approach of radicalism and reform has been called „*movement dynamism*“, whereby the tensions between different fractions advance the momentum of the common cause (Rowe & Carroll, 2014). Notably, a similar discussion has been led in the field of CMS with regard to more radical proponents of anti-performativity and more moderate advocates of critical or progressive performativity (e.g., Fleming & Banerjee, 2016). This debate is highly relevant and instructive for our cause (even though I am not sure that they have really resolved the problem). Based on our discussions in the CWOP steering committee, I feel that to a certain extent this is what we are already doing and that the conversation between those two positions is productive and does bring our movement forward. Moreover, I would suggest that this is not only a matter of fractions or wings within the overall movement, or within research groups, but also a dual strategy of each individual researcher – where and how they seek to advance resistance versus assimilation or infiltration into the mainstream.

Prospects and contestations

To conclude, what are prospects and contestations for CWOP in these times of crisis? What gives me some hope is that there is an increasing consciousness that we are in the middle of a social and ecological crisis and that things need to change dramatically. I can especially observe this among our students (who are very open, not to say enthusiastic, about the critical perspective we try to provide in our teaching), but this can also be observed in the scientific literature, for example, on concepts of critical sustainability and degrowth (e.g., Banerjee, Jermier, Peredo, Perey & Reichel, 2021; Ergene, Banerjee & Hoffman, 2021). Moreover, the COVID-19 crisis has shown that regulatory measures and interventions by democratically elected bodies, which many of us deemed impossible, can in fact be implemented (which is not to say that all of them were reasonable or, in hindsight, called for). Among the contestations is the fact that during the crisis social inequality has further increased dramatically and civil rights have been constrained while profits of transnational companies have soared and national states have increased their debt, making further austerities likely – and as always these are mostly readily imposed upon the poorest and most vulnerable groups. To summarize, I see some extended theoretical prospects, but practical mostly

contestations to the project of CWOP. How does this affect the most appropriate or effective mix of resistance and assimilation strategies? I personally would suggest that the current extreme developments demand and justify a stance of more radical and categorical resistance, but this is just my opinion, which I want to put forward for further debate.

Critique of practice and critique by practice: Collaborative possibilities in Critical Work and Organizational Psychology (Gazi Islam)

It is a pleasure to be able to participate in this collective discussion around the possibilities of critical and radical humanist work and organizational psychology, and to add my reflections to what have been very insightful presentations. I will begin with a thought on the title of this panel, „whether we are ready to take over“, which I found to be a provocative question, even if intended with some humor. Initially my reflex was to resist the idea of „taking over“ from dominant perspectives in psychology, counterposing one hegemony with a newer one, and falling into the position of that which we have been critiquing.

Nevertheless, I acknowledge that there is an important insight contained in this half-joke. Although my reflex is toward dialogue rather than conflict, cooperation rather than opposition, it may be that the moment of refusal, of opposition, and of breaking with a dominant order is a needed prerequisite for a renewed synthesis with work and organizational psychology, one that can find a more equal footing, a just dialogue rather than „just“ dialogue. Seen dialectically, we can demonstrate our opposition in the classroom, in the seminar room, and in our writings, while keeping the sense of collegiality that will allow us to reconstitute the field together with our peers who remain unconvinced at present.

Moreover, this dialectical spirit is reflected in our relation to practitioners, and this relation will be the main object of my reflections. Critical work psychologists have an ambivalent relation with practice, both seeing it as the source of exploitation and domination, on the one hand, and as the source of an emancipatory impulse and a meaningful life, on the other. This raises the question of how critical work and organizational psychologists should best approach practice, with what expectations and in what spirit. To paraphrase the philosopher Amy Allen, critical theory is not so much defined by what it studies, but by who it takes itself to be in the moment of study, how the subjectivity of the analyst herself is positioned in that process. In this spirit, I would like to outline three possibilities for our relation to practice, each with its own possibilities and limitations.

First, in keeping with our critical project and in line with our analytical skills to uncover hidden connections, power relations and forms of domination, we can take

practice as our object of critique. Focusing on the domination of employers, the alienation of employees, and the myriad instances of ideological obfuscation, moral harassment, and dehumanization at work, we can use our analytical tools to uncover these moments and demonstrate their systematic character, revealing what seemed to be idiosyncratic and arbitrary suffering to be systematic and thus allowing for organized opposition. Fundamental to a critical project, this approach nevertheless carries the disadvantage of positioning the analyst in a position of epistemic superiority, able to see what is hidden on the ground, and potentially framing practitioners as unaware of the meanings of their own actions and experiences.

Second, in dialectical opposition to that position, critical work and organizational psychologists can see themselves as the representatives of the stories, experiences and voices of the practitioners that they study. In more of a descriptive, ethnographic style, this positioning accompanies practitioners' own self-attempts to develop their skills and work relationships, find meanings, and interact with others in the workplace. Rather than revealing hidden assumptions, our position would be to give voice to the immanent reflexivity with their own practice, in the Socratic role of midwife to knowledge that was waiting to emerge from below. Didactic only in our questioning and not in our judgment, this position demonstrates respect for and openness to those whom we study. Nevertheless, by exposing ourselves to and taking seriously the narratives and images emerging from practice, we run the risk of validating ideologies that reproduce rather than contest domination, even when these ideologies are carried by the very participants whose emancipation is of most concern to us.

Third – and this in the sense of a dialectical third, a synthesis – we can recognize that diagnosis must come from below, but that the objective conditions for reflexivity in many sites of practice are rendered difficult by the contradictory logics, double talk, and split consciousnesses that characterize workplaces. Taking participants to be highly reflexive and more expert than we are regarding their own lives, we can nevertheless recognize that critical insight is difficult from within the fog of practice, and thus our role is less as an expert knower than as an ally or guide standing in a position from which direction can be more easily given. To paraphrase Perry Anderson, this position is less of an ivory tower than a watch tower, a point partially withdrawn from action specifically because it allows better reconnaissance, for the ultimate benefit of movements on the ground.

As increasing social crises unfold, we will have an increasing number of chances to practice these different forms of relation to practice, and develop allyships with practitioners in ways that can be mutually beneficial. As we do so we will learn both about the world of work and about our own project as critical work and organizational psychologists.

The urge for a revolution of hope in Work and Organizational Psychology (Thomas Kühn)

It's time for a scientific revolution ...

„Under normal conditions the research scientist is not an innovator but a solver of puzzles, and the puzzles upon which he concentrates are just those which he believes can be both stated and solved within the existing scientific tradition.“ (Kuhn, 1962 / 2012, p. 144)

„Though the world does not change with a change of paradigm, the scientist afterward works in a different world.“ (Kuhn, 1962 / 2012, p. 121)

„In science novelty emerges only with difficulty, manifested by resistance, against a background provided by expectation.“ (Kuhn, 1962 / 2012, p. 64)

We are living in the midst of a phase of major upheavals that are associated with considerable global challenges. By way of illustration, debates on climate change, growing social inequalities between and within nation states, and polarization in the population can be cited as examples, without providing anything like a complete list. Questions of work and organizational psychology are directly related to this, be it the role of organizations in shaping change, be it changing modes of interaction between humans and machines, to give again only a few examples. Within critical currents in industrial and organizational psychology, there is a consensus that science must contribute to questioning the status quo. In work and organizational psychology, as in other social sciences, the focus of many projects is too much on the (seemingly) objective measurability of phenomena rather than on the actual significance of projects for understanding how work and organizational psychology can make an important contribution to shaping transformation. Metaphorically, a kind of scientific revolution is needed, in the sense of Thomas Kuhn, which goes hand in hand with a renewed basic understanding of science and its significance for social development.

... the revolution of hope

„Hope is a psychic concomitant to life and growth.“ (Fromm, 1968 / 2010, p. 25)

„Hope is a decisive element in any attempt to bring about social change in the direction of greater aliveness, awareness, and reason.“ (Fromm, 1968 / 2010, p. 19)

More than 50 years ago, not only Kuhn referred to the necessary change with the image of "revolution", but also Erich Fromm, who speaks of a "Revolution of Hope" in his work published in 1968 - with the subtitle "Toward a Humanized Technology". In my opinion, this revolution of hope should be considered as a guiding principle in a

critical work and organizational psychology in a twofold sense: First, in our self-image as scientists. We should not be too quick to assimilate ourselves into a system and orient ourselves to its standards, in which measurability, for example based on impact factors, the classification of different journals according to their coverage, and the general devaluation of longer publications in book form compared to shorter journal publications, are accepted as central normative guidelines. In particular, we should be ever vigilant that we do not ourselves begin to assess colleagues and their scholarly productivity according to this logic. Rather, we should not give up hope for a different togetherness in science and use our possibilities to actively strive for it. Secondly, the critical examination of the prospects of the environment and social development, which are in many respects very questionable, should not lead us to fall into a cynical or despairing basic attitude. Fromm shows how much hope relates to being human and how important hope is also in the struggle for an improved coexistence between people in the world, without this being connected with naivety or the fading out of dangers.

„Not that I am optimistic about the chances of success; but I believe that one cannot think in terms of percentages or probabilities as long as there is a real possibility – even a light one – that life will prevail.“ (Fromm, 1968 / 2010, p. 10)

„Hope is paradoxical. It is neither passive waiting nor is it unrealistic forcing of circumstances that cannot occur. It is like the crouched tiger, which will jump only when the moment for jumping has come. Neither tired reformism nor pseudo-radical adventurism is an expression of hope. To hope means to be ready at every moment for that which is not yet born.“ (Fromm, 1968 / 2010, p. 22)

The urge for a revolution of hope – Prospects and contestations of Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organisational Psychology – 5 Theses

With this in mind, I formulate 5 theses about what a revolution of hope means for prospects and contestations of Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology:

- 1) As scientists we are urged to fight against resignation, cynicism, and doomsday mood: There's a need to re-thinking growth in connection to hope and ideas for a better future (Kühn & Bobeth, 2022).
- 2) We have to take care to integrate hope and still remain critical, e.g. in the sense of unmasking toxic positivity and ideological legitimations of power (Kühn, 2019).
- 3) Research needs to be based on a psychodynamic perspective on motivation and everyday practice (Kühn, 2020), not only on moral-ethical reflections

- (e.g. social character theory, normative identity work, life course frameworks).
- 4) We should realize how much we don't know and stay in dialogues instead of retreating into snail shells: This means to acknowledge shared ambiguity and ambivalences as a base for mutuality and a potential to fight against polarization (Kühn, 2015).
 - 5) We need a self-understanding as political psychologists and not underestimate the power of ideas for social transformation.

Building a house we want to live in: The importance of how we do Critical Work and Organizational Psychology (Zoe Sanderson)

It is possible to develop critical academic fields that are judged to be „fragmented and slippery“ (Fournier & Grey, 2000, p. 188), „consistently negative“ with a „cynical poise“ (Spicer, Alvesson & Kärreman, 2009, p. 542 and p. 555), and that may not achieve much except „think[ing] hard about words and things“ (Parker, 2005, p. 362), even by their proponents. A critical field can fall short of its aspirations and still be worthwhile – as many, perhaps most, change-making efforts do - but that doesn't lessen the importance, or mitigate the urge, of trying to do better. So how can we grow critical scholarship in work and organizational psychology (CWOP) well? One approach is to think like activists as well as academics: nurturing shared values, clarifying visions, and emphasising the importance of practical action.

Values and vision

While we have individual values that we may want to pursue in our own CWOP research, such as prioritising marginalised populations, as we develop a scholarly community it becomes possible to identify values that we share. These principles indicate what does or should matter to us as we develop CWOP together, such as caring for each other or acting inclusively. Working in these ways can be nice, but also potentially consequential. If we are non-hierarchical, valuing the voices of PhD students as much as professors, we will probably see more research and activity led by junior scholars, which may enlarge the potential for CWOP in future years. In caring contexts, we may feel safe to play with untested or innovative research approaches more frequently and confidently, potentially increasing the creativity of our research. While the links between values, practices and outputs are complex, the basic principle is that how we do CWOP affects what it becomes.

Any positive values that are emerging in the CWOP community are contingent: they don't have to exist. Insofar as they are counter-cultural in wider academia, they require effort to maintain, and they may naturally dissipate over time, as often happens in growing movements and

organisations. Valuing our values by articulating and demonstrating them may strengthen them, but each of us understands values differently, they look different in principle and practice, and how they are enacted will vary according to context and the individual assessment of priorities. It is inevitable that we will imperfectly enact our principles, even if we clearly identify what they are. Nonetheless, a reflexive, shared, evolving discussion about values and practices may enable us to stay engaged with the question of how CWOP can and should be conducted as the work develops over time.

Vision-work accompanies values-work. There are as many approaches to this as there are theories of change, but one element is surely imagining the possible impacts of CWOP in academia, workplaces, and the wider world. This will probably generate a myriad of imaginaries, around some of which people may gather, helping to orientate our shared direction of travel. Next, we could identify mechanisms to reify our visions into reality, prioritise, strategise, and take steps accordingly, or alternatively adopt a less linear approach to change that foregrounds emergence and fluidity in how CWOP develops. The tension between these perspectives can be generative if it does not entirely eclipse the possibility of practical action. On this, and many other issues, we can learn from other efforts to develop critical scholarship in work and organizational psychology – historically and elsewhere in the world - and similar fields such as critical management studies, mentioned in the opening section above.

Action

CWOP amplifies individual desires for change through enabling collaborative action. One of the current efforts to develop it has emerged from the grassroots of academia, creating a self-organising network that grows as people find each other, have ideas, and work together to make them happen – the Future of Work and Organizational Psychology network or FoWOP (www.futureofwop.com). There is little institutional or infrastructural support for this work: mostly we only have us. So, if we want CWOP to grow, we need to act. There are many useful things to do. One, obviously, is to conduct research and teaching in more critical ways. Others include promoting the work of critical researchers, planning and attending events, joining reading groups and mailing lists, administrating websites, developing and sharing teaching resources that showcase CWOP scholarship, or helping to organise larger projects. This list is only a starting point, although while new ideas for developing this work are wonderful, those that are accompanied by a relevant offer of practical action are even better.

Opportunities for critical scholarship seem to open and close across academic disciplines at different points in geography and history. We seem to be at a moment of possibility for CWOP. To seize it, I encourage us to take collaborative action while reflexively thinking about

values and vision. Perhaps this will help us to build CWOP into a house we want to live in for the future.

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Addendum: Dedication to Wolfgang G. Weber and acknowledgement of his academic work on the occasion of his retirement

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This addendum is meant to honor the work of Wolfgang G. Weber, who, after more than two decades of service, has officially retired from his Professorship in Applied Psychology at the University of Innsbruck in September 2022. Organizing the International Conference on Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology documented in this special issue was one of his last official functions and a long-term project of his finally being realized. In the following, we will review some personal information and selected milestones of his academic biography and research legacy up to his retirement. Naturally, the overview provided here can only offer a fragmentary and superficial account and we, the authors, take full responsibility for any errors and omissions. However, we hope that this outline provides some impression of the academic work that forms the background leading up to the conference.

Born in Hechingen, in southwestern Germany, in 1957, Wolfgang Georg Weber studied psychology (1978-1985) at the University of Tübingen and the Technical University (TU) Berlin with a minor in industrial sociology at the Free University of Berlin. After graduating (Dipl.-Psych.), he became an assistant at the Institute for Human Science in Work and Education at the TU Berlin (1985-1991). There, he worked in several industrial research projects within the government-funded large-scale program on the „Humanization of Working Life“. These projects were led by Walter Volpert, one of the founders of German Action Regulation Theory and an early proponent of a critical stream in work psychology (Groskurth & Volpert, 1975). This collaboration and friendship lasted throughout their careers (Volpert, 2004; Weber, 2002). In 1991, Wolfgang received his Doctorate (Dr. phil., summa cum laude) for research on task analysis and evaluation of computer-assisted work (Weber, 1994). In 1991, he briefly worked in the media industry as a

consultant in the production of science documentaries – a passion that he continued to pursue throughout his career, resulting in several documentaries on organizational democracy and alternative economic models. From 1992 on he was employed at the Department of Work and Organizational Psychology at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH Zürich) as a research associate and also acted as scientific secretary at the Center for Integrated Production Systems. There, he collaborated with the renown work psychologist Eberhard Ulich, among others, on industrial group work (Ulich & Weber, 1996), and finished his post-doctoral „Habilitation“ (PD) in 1996 on the topic of collective action regulation in work groups (Weber, 1997). Between 1996 and 2000 he worked as a Senior Lecturer at the ETH Zürich, was a visiting professor in Innsbruck and interim professor for Work and Organizational Psychology at the University of Constance. In 2000, he assumed the role as full Professor for Applied Psychology at the University of Innsbruck, where he developed a productive and influential research program on the humanization and democratization of work, organizations, and society. His scientific endeavors resulted in a large number of books and numerous articles, published, for instance, in journals such as Applied Psychology, Journal of Organizational Behavior, Human Relations, and Economic and Industrial Democracy. An exemplary selection of these works can be found in the reference section. However, Wolfgang never misconstrued „impact“ in the sense of bibliometrics and neoliberal quantification, but understands it in the sense of Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach: *The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.* This is evident in the applied nature of his research, strong contacts with practitioners in alternative organizations, and his readiness to connect with social movements and engage in public and

political discourses and controversies. In fact, the boundaries between research for social transformation and scholarly activism are sometimes blurry. Examples for this are his advocacy for and engagement in the global climate movement of „Scientists for Future“ (S4F) and the „Global Forum on Democratizing Work“.

The research program Wolfgang developed with his group in Innsbruck is remarkable both in terms of its breadth and coherence. On the one hand, he continued his previous research on work analysis and design in the tradition of German Action Regulation Theory and group work (e.g., Moldaschl & Weber, 1998; Morf & Weber, 2000). Notably, he was one of the co-founders of the (discontinued) research center for the „Psychology of Everyday Activity“ and is an associate editor of this journal, which grew out of that center. With the editor in-chief, Pierre Sachse, he published a volume on the psychology of activity (Sachse & Weber, 2006) and continued to contribute to this stream of research (e.g., Weber & Lampert, 2010). On the other hand, he developed and led a highly productive and internationally visible and unique research program on organizational democracy – the ODEM projects and research group. Initially funded within the interdisciplinary research program „New Orientations for Democracy in Europe“ (NODE) by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, this research continues to the present day. International connections were established and maintained via the „Organizational Participation in Europe Network“ (OPEN), co-founded by Wolfgang. Further, he played an important role in the university research platform „Organization and Society“ (OrgSoc), which was succeeded by the research area „Economy, Politics and Society“ (EPoS) that contributed to the funding of the conference.

Among others, Wolfgang and the ODEM research group have presented an elaborated taxonomy of objective criteria to classify organizations with regard to their level of structurally anchored organizational democracy, developed an employee self-report measure on perceived organizational participation and democracy, and introduced and operationalized the novel construct of the socio-moral organizational climate (Weber, Unterrainer & Höge, 2008; Weber, Unterrainer & Schmid, 2009; Weber & Unterrainer, 2012; Pircher Verdorfer, Weber, Unterrainer & Seyr, 2015). Taken together, this body of research has provided compelling evidence for the validity and psychological processes underlying the so-called „spill-over“ hypothesis from democratic workplaces to enhance employees' prosocial, moral, and democratic values, orientations, and behaviors (for an overview see Weber, 2019b). A notable theoretical contribution is the integration of the social cognitive approach of human agency by Albert Bandura with Leontiev's activity

theory as framework for understanding employee participation in organizational decision-making (Weber & Jeppesen, 2017). In addition to this original research, two comprehensive systematic reviews have synthesized the extant quantitative and qualitative international research on organizational democracy, demonstrating the economic feasibility and societally beneficial outcomes of democratic enterprises (Weber, Unterrainer & Höge, 2020; Unterrainer, Weber, Höge & Hornung, 2022). Notably, the ODEM research entailed close contact and collaboration with alternative and democratic organizations in the region and beyond, including the movement for the Economy for the Common Good.

While, on the one hand, Wolfgang's research was aimed at strengthening the critical concerns of humanism and democracy within work and organizational psychology (e.g., Weber, 2019a, 2019b), on the other hand, he has always been a vocal critic of the neoliberal economic and managerialist tendencies in the mainstream (e.g., Weber & Moldaschl, 2012). Further, in addition to the two research streams above, a third stream has been explicitly inspired by Critical Theory, specifically, his work on psychological alienation in the economy and society (Weber, 2002, 2006). In light of the theoretical and value-based proximity maybe unsurprising, a notable connection of Wolfgang's research for democratization and humanization is the collaboration with the Erich Fromm Institute Tübingen (EFIT), where he was awarded the honor to give the Erich Fromm Lecture in 2018 (Weber, 2022), and the Erich Fromm Study Center (EFSC) at the International Psychoanalytic University Berlin (IPU), where he held a guest teaching assignment after his retirement. Both institutions were actively involved in the organization of the conference. Since 2018, Wolfgang also became a member of the „Innsbruck Group on Critical Research in Work and Organizational Psychology“ (I-CROP), jointly co-founded by the authors of this editorial as a spin-off of the critical stream of the „Future of Work and Organizational Psychology“ (FoWOP) initiative, which has played a pivotal role in the conference and showed a strong presence in the program. The stated goal of I-CROP is to draw on radical humanist values and Critical Theory in the sense of the Frankfurt School, to promote critical reflections on the role of economic and societal conditions for psychological aspects in the world of work and strengthening the links between critical social theory and empirical research, specifically, emphasizing the critique of neoliberal ideology, related economic belief systems and the exploration of humanistic alternatives (Weber, Höge & Hornung, 2020). Since its inception in 2019, Wolfgang is also a member of the steering committee of the „Critical Work and Organizational Psychology“

(CWOP) stream of the FoWOP movement and has committed to continue this engagement after his retirement. Further, he is a dedicated member of the editorial team for an upcoming *Handbook of Critical Work and Organizational Psychology*. Moreover, he has resumed his research on the topic of alienation, recently suggesting an extended conceptualization and operationalization of alienation in terms of marketing-oriented social character, commodity fetishism, economic thinking and reification of people, naturalization of social relations, and impairment of community-oriented, universal perspective-taking (Weber, 2021). In addition to these current scientific endeavors (and his commitments to spend more time with his family), he has also made plans to continue or even increase his political engagement for the climate science movement. In all these activities, we wish him all the best and are looking forward to be involved and continue to work together.

Die Wurzel der Geschichte aber ist der arbeitende, schaffende, die Gegebenheiten umbildende und überholende Mensch. Hat er sich erfaßt und das Seine ohne Entäußerung und Entfremdung in realer Demokratie begründet, so entsteht in der Welt etwas, das allen in die Kindheit scheint und worin noch niemand war: Heimat.

Ernst Bloch (1954 / 1985, p. 1628)

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«Es gilt nicht nur, den Anstieg psychischer Beeinträchtigungen und Ausfallzeiten im Zusammenhang mit der Erwerbsarbeit zu bremsen, sondern diese leistungs-, lern- und gesundheitsförderlich zu gestalten.»

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