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The Societal Nature of Subjectivity: An Interdisciplinary Methodological Challenge

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Abstract: *»Der gesellschaftliche Charakter von Subjektivität: Eine interdiszipli-näre methodologische Herausforderung«.* The HSR Focus presents a psycho-societal approach to qualitative empirical research in several areas of everyday social life. It is an approach which integrates a theory of subjectivity and an interpretation methodology which integrates hermeneutic experiences from text analysis and psychoanalysis. Its particular focus is on subjectivity – as an aspect of the research object and as an aspect of the research process. By the term "approach" is indicated the intrinsic connection between the theorizing of an empirical object and the reflection of the research process and the epistemic subject. In terms of methodology it revives the themes originally launched in *FQS* exactly ten years ago: "Subjectivity and Reflectivity in Qualitative Research" (Breuer, Mruck and Roth 2002; Mruck and Breuer 2003). This editorial introduction presents the intellectual background of the psycho-societal methodology, reflects on its relevance and critical perspectives in a contemporary landscape of social science, and comments the way in which an international and interdisciplinary research group has developed this approach to profane empirical research.

Keywords: psycho-societal, subjectivity, in-depth hermeneutic, unconscious, constructivism, practicism, interdisciplinarity, reflexivity, material, embodying.

1.   A Psycho-Societal Approach in Empirical Social Research

The main ambition for this issue is to address a theoretical and methodological challenge in qualitative social research, namely understanding the complexity of subjectivity in social interaction. It will do so by presenting a psycho-societal approach which is a combination of a theoretical and a methodological element. The theoretical element is a concept of subjectivity based in a material and psychoanalytic theory of socialization. Drawing on the most fundamental idea of psychoanalysis, the unconscious, and focusing on the acquisition of language as the dominant socializing process it conceptualizes subjectivity as an embodied experience of social interaction which has conscious as well as unconscious levels. Subjectivity is not seen as an individual attribute but as a relational and dynamic aspect of the social interaction, in which also the relation between conscious and unconscious levels are continuously reconfigured. This concept of subjectivity is a unique framework for empirical studies of social interaction in everyday life if you want to understand the subjective meaning of agency and relations. The other element is to introduce a methodology of cultural analysis, and demonstrate its wider application in empirical social research. Methodologically this research tradition takes advantage of hermeneutic experiences from psychoanalysis, condensed in the notion of scenic understanding, in empirical research of everyday life. By interpreting texts in a wide sense it seeks to understand subjective dimensions of social agency and communication in a holistic and concrete way, attending to conscious and unconscious meanings and their relation to sensual and bodily experiences.

This approach to culture and social agency fundamentally has much in common with the symbolic interactionism and similar cultural analysis of social interaction, but it seeks to understand the interaction and meanings in a wider historical and societal context. It has been launched as a cultural analysis under the nick-name of in-depth hermeneutics (Lorenzer 1986), which – indicating an understanding which reaches beyond the surface – first of all draws the attention to a psychodynamic dimension in the analysis of symbolic activity, meaning making and social agency. This name may unfortunately remind of traditional stereotypes of psychoanalysis, although the interpretation is equally oriented to the societal context. Emphasizing the hermeneutic nature in this methodology it is more appropriate to focus on the notion of *scenic understanding*. The first point in *scenic* understanding is to interpret subjective meaning and especially conflicts, by attending to emotional and relational aspects of communication which require a situated attention and imagination. But it is also to understand how the whole of a societal context has influenced subjective experience and form the context for conscious as well as uncon-

scious imagination of a future. Within the theoretical framework it would be more appropriate to talk about a *wider* (in societal context) rather than a *deeper* understanding of the meaning under study than what is normally understood in hermeneutic interpretation. On the one hand, this means a material(istic) interpretation of meaning and language use, linking it to social practices and societal structure. On the other hand – here the reformulation of a psychoanalytic heritage – it counts on levels of meaning which may not be represented, or not adequately represented, in the socialized language, but nevertheless are embodied and subjectively significant. They may refer to practices which have become unconscious routine, or which are just societally emerging – but they may also refer to symbolic representations which have become repressed socially in general or in the individual life history. In brief: All the marginal meanings.

In order to reach this form of scenic understanding the psycho-societal approach – similar to some other recent constructivist approaches – takes advantage of the researchers' subjective relation to the field being researched. The subjective imagination of the researcher(s) is an active part of the interpretation, not a contamination in the lab (Breuer and Roth 2003). The point is here that imagination is scenic in its format: It inter-relates all informative, sensual and situated impressions in holistic images. The interpretive power of the imagination is that it enables an understanding of some aspects of the researcher interaction which are not explicit and conscious to the interacting subjects. The methodology uses the notions of transference and counter-transference to understand the relation between research object and researcher subject(s) (Marks and Mönnich-Marks 2003).

2.   Problem-Oriented Research and Grand Theories

An interdisciplinary approach, which integrates psychological and societal levels and emphasizes the dynamic nature of the relation may seem an obvious way of doing empirical social research. Never the less it is not. It seems to challenge a bundle of reductions or frozen dichotomies – between individual/subjectivity/agency and society/objectivity/structure – slashes indicating their unclear and intertwined status. These dichotomies are often declared dead and passé but they are still very active in social theory as well as everyday consciousness. When "resolved" it is mostly on the cost of harmonizing contradictions or reducing either the one or the other side of the dichotomy. When summarized briefly the psycho-societal approach might be read in continuation of the historical discussions between psychoanalysis and Marxism. Although both Marxism and psychoanalysis were critical theories, and also were excluded from the mainstream academic and cultural scene, they did not recognize each others. Attempts to synthesize these grand theories were few and difficult.

Only in the wake of western neo-Marxism and critical theory in the 1960s the critique of the repression of individuality and subjectivity in "real socialism's" Marxism and radical re-interpretations of psychoanalysis opened a new dialogue (Sandkühler 1971). One of the important outcomes of this opening was Lorenzer's development of a materialistic socialization theory, and later the in-depth hermeneutic cultural analysis. The psycho-societal approach that is presented in this issue owes a great deal to critical reformulations of each of these traditions, which will be touched upon in some of the articles (Salling Olesen and Weber 2013, this issue; Leithäuser 2013, this issue), but not particularly to the grand theory discussion. Instead, the psycho-societal approach as a research practice has emerged as a response to and a result of *empirical studies of everyday life and the specific social practices*. It has been a response to the challenge of developing a flexible and sensitive approach which is valid in discovering the dynamics and potentials of profane social phenomena, avoiding the shortcuts of using psychoanalytic concepts on societal level, or reducing subjective phenomena to overall societal structures.

The contributions in this HSR Focus come from researchers who are engaged in empirical research with a close relation to practical fields and professions like education, work life, and social work. Most of the researchers have been more engaged in their research field than being observers. In the previously mentioned thematic issues of *FQS 3*(3) and *4*(2) many of the contributions discuss the issues of reflexivity and subjectivity from the point of view of epistemology only, whereas the psycho-societal approach has been developed with at least one foot in the field itself.

Seeking to develop theoretical positions and sustainable methodologies for research which provides critical and at the same practically relevant knowledge has led to a development of qualitative methodology, drawing on experiences from several neighboring disciplines – beside the basic social science disciplines like sociology, ethnography and psychology – emerging research areas like media research and gender studies. At the same time as requiring quite pragmatic ideas these research areas continuously raise basic issues around the imprint of society in human beings and the boundary zones in society in which human agency and imagination reproduces and/or transforms societal relations, even when people pursue their own immediate needs. The reasons for adopting the inspiration for a psycho-societal approach have been in the substance matter and the engagement in social practice. We needed an approach which could handle our engagement in the inside perspective of the agents in the fields at the same time as provide an external (political) framework of reflection and theorizing. In spite of a different theorizing this is in line with the activity theory statement that "researcher activity is but another form of activity so that the theories used for understanding observed phenomena also account for the research. This framework does not allow researchers to split methodology from epistemology" (Roth and Breuer 2003, §16).

Let me give an example from my own background: In education and learning research we have experienced a drift from educational philosophy – which was mostly quite holistic but also very normative – through an "industrial" modernization of formal education from the middle of the 20th century, using learning psychology and didactic rationalization, in order to meet new societal demands – to the emergence around the end of the century of an output oriented thinking, less connected with institutional training and education, and more interested in learning as an integrated aspect of everyday life, under the headline of lifelong learning (Salling Olesen 2006).

The theoretical development can be seen as a response to a societal development in the role of formal education and learning in general. Competences and learning have become decisive aspects of societal development, and not exclusively related to institutional education and training. The scientific consequence of this societal development is confusion and vagueness. It has become difficult to distinguish a particular learning research domain, since learning is a dimension of every social activity. As a consequence you might today regard learning research as a broad and embracing social research, even though it still has names like "educational research" or *Bildungsforschung*. Several other areas of social research have discovered a learning aspect in their field of inquiry without really conceptualizing it in its own right – e.g. management and organization studies, work sociology, criminology, social work and health research. It has become increasingly important in management and professional practices to understand the subjective aspects of social interaction which may or may not involve learning. Under these societal conditions research must develop concepts and methodologies which understands learning conditions and learning practices in very different contexts. In critical approaches most often the subordination to societal work conditions have been the main frame of reference – sometimes in the form of conservative resistance to functionality of learning at all, but mostly in an analysis of qualification requirements and the constrained and ambiguous nature of learning in a capitalist societal environment. This objective societal context of learning, however, immediately raises issues of the subjective aspects of work. Competences and learning are in themselves subjective and the very outcome of learning can only be understood by simultaneously relating to the contradictions in societal context and the corresponding ambivalences of the learner subject. A psycho-societal approach to understand the learners offers an understanding of these subjective aspects of the learning situation.

One way of addressing methodologically the challenge of a multiple and variable context of learning has been to focus on the learner subjects. Some researchers have adopted biographical research methods, based on autobiographical narratives – influenced both by narrative structural semantics but also by the symbolic interactionism – others are more oriented to psycho-dynamic interpretations of life histories (Alheit and Dausien 1985; Salling Olesen 2004;

West, Alheit, Andersen and Merrill 2007). This type of empirical social research gains its plausibility and relevance by focusing on specific individuals – how can we understand his or her present in the light of his/her past and an imagined future? But the research interest is not in the individual processes of learning and knowing. It is to use this individual case to theorize learning as an aspect of the social practice, a moment in a subjective life history embedded in the symbolic and social environment, and contributing to societal processes of reproduction as well as innovation. To the extent individual learning processes represent transformative or even utopian dimensions you may even discover collective learning processes in which new knowledge or new practices emerge. Societal knowledge building and cultural dynamics are on the micro level mediated in individual learning.

Another development in learning research is participatory observation, in a variety of versions from ethnographic field work to action research. These methods offer a way to understand the cultural and societal dimensions of classroom interaction but even more important to trace learning processes in the complex dialectic between individual and social environment in everyday life interaction at work, in leisure activities and civil society, drawing on the qualities of "thick description." The notion of "culture" has served as a search notion for a social level of reality which is present both as an environment and as an embodied meaning of the individual.

In practically engaged research the researcher gets involved in the field under study. It can be in policy making. It can be the engagement in the people whose lives the researcher tries to understand. In action research it may appear as more or less desirable identification, in more traditional fieldwork it may appear as a disturbance of the observation or as a window of opportunity (Breuer and Roth 2003).

Although always in opposition to hegemonic positivism the learning research has tended to see the subjective involvement in the field of study as a resource and a basic condition. It has not always reached a very deep reflection of the involvement. But since these relations involve both conscious and unconscious aspects – on the side of the researcher as well as the community under study – it seems that the psycho-societal approach can offer a broadening of the reflection of the researcher subjectivity to also include the unconscious relations with and within the field more substantial (Nadig 1986, 2004; Weber 1996; Bereswill 2003; Andersen 2003). It can be argued that even autobiographical narratives or other subjective accounts of learning and experience unintendedly involve psychodynamic aspects such as selective memory, idealizing self-presentations and unconscious emotional engagements. So just even for methodological reasons you need to reflect psychodynamic aspects of subjectivity.

The tradition of qualitative research was always justified by and engaged in the particular phenomenon. Sometimes just due to the conviction that "truth is

particular," like in historicism. Sometimes being subjectively engaged in a specific object – like many humanistic disciplines interested in a specific culture or a body of arts work. But only rarely motivated by a scientific focus on subjectivity as such.

Daniel Bertaux, a French sociological biography researcher, in a lecture used the metaphor of the *flare* and the *flame* to illustrate the difference whether biographies serve to illuminate something else – which is the "real thing" – or they are seen as interesting in themselves. At the end of this argument is in Bertaux's case an argument that the particular (biography) may serve as a useful flare for understanding societal realities, whereas he leaves the study of the flame (the subject of the life story) to other disciplines (psychology) (Bertaux 1997; Bertaux and Thompson 1997). However, when it comes to subjectivity in more profane contexts I think that "truth *is* particular" – in all our empirical fields we need to understand the specific individual subjects, their articulations and their engagements in interaction. Like Bertaux we want knowledge that is not particularistic, we want to understand "them" and "it" as basic societal processes and interrelations, but we think the way to obtain it goes through the specific subjectivity. Metaphors make difficult issues simple. Without taking it too far one may read Bertaux's argument as an attempt to justify his use of specific qualitative data for obtaining general knowledge without having to involve too much in the relation between individual lives and societal processes, and without involving the researcher subject. But does this hold? The metaphor may also lead us to one of the key challenges of contemporary social science. Is it possible to benefit from the flare without immersing in the flame?

The reconfiguration of the learning research field, with its societal dimensions, requires and enables new theorizing and a new methodology. It can take several directions but the question about the subjective aspects of social relations seems inevitable. The engagement in a problem oriented research requires a research approach which is sensitive to concrete lived life in social practices that are complex and ambivalent, and not necessarily entirely rationalized, conscious and controlled – at the same time as maintaining a societal perspective on the field and its practices. The example from learning research could be paralleled in many of the professional fields which deal with human services and engage in their clients/users' subjective life world in different ways, obviously depending on the field. The theorizing of the primary object as well as the reflection of the research method makes a psycho-societal approach favorable. The researcher involvement in the field needs to be reflected both in terms of unconscious aspects – issues of the transferences and counter transferences – and in terms of its socio-historical dimensions of cultural encounter between the researcher and the field.

Researchers from many fields have adopted the inspiration from psychosocietal traditions because they helped deal with basic theoretical and methodological issues in their specific field. But of course it would also be a point in

itself if experience of specific problem oriented research could contribute to the discussion of the "big issues" of grand theories. And I think this is the case.

3. Psycho-Societal Approach and Contemporary Challenges in Social Science

Social science is constituted by constructing society as an object beyond individual agency and intention. Within a Cartesian framework, and reinforced by positivist standards of science, the attempt to bring social life and its historical and global diversity on formula of regularity and instrumentality, has generated (or reinforced) a number of interwoven exclusionary dichotomies, of which two are particularly important here: The one already mentioned between society/structure and subject/individual (Leledakis 1995), and the other one between the rational and instrumental mind and social materiality, including the circular and self-referential body and ecological-historical environment (Adorno 1967; Habermas 1971; Bourdieu 1977; Negt and Kluge 1981). These dichotomies exist in everyday consciousness, and they are theoretically replicated in the discourses of scientific disciplines. Even in the most holistic social science discipline, sociology, the classical problem of structure and agency remains a challenge for a comprehensive and holistic theory, and the role of embodied experience and practice is only represented on the margins (Leledakis 1995; Salling Olesen 2002).

These dichotomies also structure much critical thinking. Most clearly (and most importantly?) this is the case within feminist critique of dominant paradigms for being interwoven with patriarchal power has often taken an essentialist feminist position, and developed their alternative outlook and hope from its positively defined qualities (Becker-Schmidt 2000). Paradoxically feminism is also the best (the only one?) example Habermas (1981) can give for a practical realization of his philosophical notion of communicative reason. Also other critical theorizations, however productive they are, have been caught in the dichotomies by defining alternative societal developments as negations of the dominant and hegemonic structures they criticize. Many qualitative research methods have related to these dichotomies by focusing on "the other side" of the dichotomy (from below, from the silenced and marginal groups, etc.), sometimes declining from theorizing, sometimes constructing theory from there (Strauss and Corbin 1998), more often connected with political engagements.

With the so called linguistic turn in social theory the oppositional positioning has been replaced by discourse analysis and deconstruction of theoretical presumptions. Not least in critical ethnography and in North American feminism it has led to a new reflection of the relation between individual, society and knowledge, referring to Foucault: social institutions and norms of everyday

life as well as scientific production of knowledge may be analyzed as socially constructed and negotiable. It also involves a theorization of subjectivity as socially produced (which is in the Anglophone world a substantial novelty). But this way of reconceptualizing the subject seems to reconfirm the other dichotomy by downplaying material realities – the bodily aspects of subjectivity and the socio-economic materiality – often based on the post-structural emphasis on performativity in confrontation with stereotyped Freudian and Marxist structuralism (Becker-Schmidt 2000; Salling Olesen 2002).

Our psycho-societal approach has much in common with this development, especially in general epistemology and in the critique of knowledge and the power relations connected with it. But it offers a different understanding of the subjectivity, which would be relevant in analyzing social interaction, and it implies a different epistemological ambition. Analyzing subjectivity as a material (bodily and sensual) interaction experience in a life history, in which (societal) language use also plays a decisive role, provides insights in concrete connections between cognitive, emotional and social aspects of language socialization for specific people in specific cultural contexts. This approach to language socialization seems to offer a material and genealogical connection between a societal discourse concept and an interactional language game concept. And instead of relativism which is right at hand in trendy contemporary references to Wittgenstein, this takes us back to a proper material concept of the subject in a bodily as well as a critical historical and societal sense.

However, it is also a point in the psycho-societal approach to analyze subjectivity as an aspect of societal interaction and not fenced to a micro-social level. It may be overdoing a good point, but we should also seek to consider what "societal subjectivity" means in a wider macro-structural material context. In classical Marxism this is a discussion about class, class consciousness and political agency. Scholars in cultural psychology, ethnography and even literature have theorized the individual subject as an incorporation of society, e.g. Eriksson's studies of the Red Indians socializing practices in cultural psychology (Erikson, 1950) and Parin's research of the culture of Dogons (Parin, Morgenthaler and Parin-Matthèy 1963). You may argue that they rather see imprints of society into the subject than the footprint of subjectivity in society. The psycho-societal approach – similar to post-structuralism – emphasizes a performative or practical concept of social reality and hence the ambition to find a method which is sensitive to the societal significance of everyday practice. Oskar Negt has in the first place renewed this theme in his notion of experience, and grounded the notion in the analysis of work and the organization of workers as the basis of societal subjectivity in late modernity (Negt 1971, 2001). In the second place he also developed the more general notion of sustainable economy, "the household economy" [*Ökonomie des ganzen Hauses*] (Negt and Kluge 1981). In the theorizing of globalization the determining dynamic seems to origin from the capitalist centers, or from an invisible structural

agent, and cultural and local heterogeneities are largely seen as objects which may be at the most, inhibiting or just residual. Attempts to elaborate a more full and dialectic theory of globalization are few (e.g. Samir Amin's self-centered development [1976] and more broadly ideas about "southern theory" or modernization in the periphery [Souza 2007]). The theoretical understanding of subjectivity in everyday life has political perspectives for ideas about endogenous dynamics of society and their macro-political significance – e.g. for the analysis of globalization and the relations between trade unions, World Social Forum, and nation state politics.

On the theoretical level it also takes us back to the question of the relation between consciousness and language on the one hand, and body and social practice on the other hand. It will appear from the detailed presentation of the psycho-societal approach later in this issue that it emphasizes the bodily and practical aspects of interaction, experience, and socialization. On the one hand this opens a door to recent developments of new biological understandings of relations between mind and body in consciousness building, health, and emotional processes. On the other hand it points to the need to theorize this relation different from the classical Cartesian assumption about the superiority of the mind. The saying: *Cogito, ergo sum*! is an ex post wishful rationalization – it is on the ontogenetic as well as the phylogenetic level far more true to see it the other way round.

There are clear developments more broadly in the social sciences to question the relation between body/mind or idea/matter – mostly by claiming a new type of materialism. The so called practice theory turn has, parallel to post-modern opposition against structuralism, (re)installed agency in the analysis of society, with the focus on the individual, bodily practice (Schatzki, Knorr Cetina and von Savigny 2000). It can in the first place be seen as an attempt to mediate in the structure/agency dichotomy on a methodological level by installing a level of explanation between individual agency and invariant structure. But you can observe a broader neo-materialist tendency in a multitude of works within different social fields and structures (e.g. Bourdieu 1977; Knorr Cetina 1981; Latour and Wooglar 1986; Wenger 1998), which challenge the rationalistic ideas of the social as being directed by reasons and instrumental action. It may sometimes come out very simplistic by detaching artifacts, specific practices, and body from their societal context, – sometimes replacing idealistic ideas of subjectivity by anthropomorphisms of artifacts and institutions. But it may also provide an adequate historical understanding of the materiality of society and seeing the stable societal practices in agency and interaction – not as causal determination but as practical historical sedimentation (Elias 2000 [1939]; Bourdieu 1977).

A psycho-societal approach seems to enable a dialogue with important tendencies in the current theoretical debate. And a social theory based on the assumption of – or just the hope for! – endogenous dynamic must go for meth-

odologies which are adequate for discovering subjective engagements and imaginative/utopian practice – particularly when they are not recognized. On the assumption that subjectivity is ubiquitous and materialized (but very often unconscious) a psycho-societal approach can help to discover how societal relations are materialized in minds, bodies and practices – and sometimes also to discover how imaginations and experimental action may produce real novelties.

4.   From Psychoanalysis to Psycho-Societal Research Methodology References

The lively and innovative discussion in the social sciences – starting with the critique of positivism – has generated a much higher level of theoretical and methodological reflection than before, and also a more dialectic understanding of the relation between knowledge and scientific work and social practices. But the attention to the societal significance of subjective dynamic in concrete social interaction is much less. These social science theorizations, however productive they are, do not really appreciate, and even less provide theoretical understanding of the subjective dimensions of social interaction. Qualitative social research has not contributed very much to meet this challenge – and the problem is that they have generally been poor in terms of theoretical basis. The so-called grounded theory approach is more or less an inductive empiricism, neither recognizing the subjective aspects in the field, nor in the research process (Charmaz 2000; Glaser 2002). Narrative biographical interviews provide great research material, but the interpretation framework is often very problematic since it replicates the narrators' self-interpretations and more or less realistic view of the world and self-understanding. And when it comes to the role of the researcher these approaches often preach self-reflection without supplying very good tools for doing this self-reflection.

In a number of practically related social research fields – as mentioned in Section 2 – it has been essential to understand the experiences of the protagonists in these fields – professionals, clients, users alike – and appreciate the dynamic potential in their agency. This has been an important background for seeking to activate subject theory questions and methodological experiences from psycho-analysis into social research. It has been facilitated by the fact that also scholars within the psychological and psychoanalytical traditions have sought to link with more comprehensive frameworks in social sciences – primarily Marxism and general sociology – for connecting psychodynamic interpretations with societal conditions and forms of social intervention. In some cases related to more social forms of intervention (group therapy, organization development, counseling), in others with a more political perspective (action research).

Practically this HSR Focus is based on the work in an *International Research Group of Psycho-Societal Analysis* (IRGPSA). Danish, German and British groups have been working together since 2001 in the form of an annual conference, research seminars, joint PhD supervision, mutual guest teaching, etc. gradually – but carefully – expanding our membership with colleagues from several European countries. The Group was organized by Kirsten Weber and colleagues from Roskilde University already in 2001 in order to create a meeting place between our own empirical research into learning, gender and work, and two main inspirations to our work: a German tradition of cultural analysis on a psycho-societal ground, represented by social psychologists like Thomas Leithäuser, Birgit Volmerg, Regina Becker-Schmidt, Ulrike Prokop and Christine Morgenroth, and generally inspired by psychoanalyst Alfred Lorenzer and sociologists/social philosophers like Theodor W. Adorno and Oskar Negt – and a UK-based tradition which comes from psychology and social work, and strives to establish the psychic dimension of social organizations and behavior, drawing on Kleinian psychoanalysis, experiences from the Tavistock Institute as well as the cultural studies tradition (Birmingham School), represented by Wendy Hollway, Tony Jefferson, Lynn Froggett, Prue Chamberlayne, and others.

Most of these people have a background in psychoanalysis, and the rest have a basic confidence and openness to the usefulness of psychoanalytic theorizing. The two main branches of psychoanalysis share the most important orientation for our purpose, namely a clearly social and interactional understanding of the origins of psycho-dynamics, and an orientation on cultural/social analysis and social intervention rather than a clinical interest on individual interpretation and therapy. We defined the joint project as "psycho-societal analysis." Using the term psycho-societal as opposed to psycho-social is meant to underline the idea that subjectivity and cultural meanings are not (just) local, related to group processes or to immediate social practice, but are established on a societal level, resp. embodied traces of sensual impressions that are result of societal relations and structures, which are mediated in the early childhood as well as in social practices throughout life. In German language there is a notable distinction between *gesellschaftlich* [societal] and *gemeinschaftlich* [communal] whereas *sozial* [social] is less distinct. In English the "social" in the term "psycho-social" is more or less inclusive of all these meanings. This linguistic heteromorphy has also been explored in relation to the underlying traditions of thinking. Beside the fundamental similarities there were – and are – substantial differences and may be primarily uncertainty between the main traditions which are related to historically different schools of psychoanalysis, and have created entirely different discursive frameworks. The German tradition draws on Alfred Lorenzer's theorizing of a complex socialization process, in which cultural patterns are reproduced, and on the function of language in this process. Individuals are seen as historical beings who are at the same time unique

and "typical" in the sense that they (we) have incorporated dynamic cultural patterns of class, gender and generation in the form of individual embodied disposition. Instead of the classic Freudian biological ideas of drives, *libido* and *thanatos*, this socialization theory provides and further develops a cultural understanding of psychic dynamics (Ferenczi 1972 [1926]; Belgrad, Görlich, König and Noerr 1987). It shares an interactive understanding with tradition of object relations theory which has been the main development of psychoanalysis by Melanie Klein and others in Britain and later in USA – interestingly mediating between psychoanalysis and a feminism in which anti-psychoanalytic post-structuralism has played a significant role (Chodorow 1989; Benjamin 1998). The German tradition is more interested in the way the embodied dispositions of the individual are permanent dynamics in collective consciousness building. The unconscious is defined as the socially produced, non-verbalized meaning, a complementary dimension of culture and symbolic expressions – including language use – that are products of both conscious and unconscious processes. The Kleinian tradition traces the basic psychic orientations – the depressive and the paranoid-schizoid position respectively – in individual subjectivities and in social relations. The British tradition has paid substantial attention to group processes, among others in the context of the Tavistock tradition of organizational consultancy. Our German colleague Erhard Tietel, professor in Bremen and himself focused on organization counseling (Tietel 2000), has represented a bridge building between the British group oriented intervention and the German school of cultural analysis, and he also pointed out that there is a widespread inspiration from the Tavistock tradition also in Germany related to the well established profession of organization consultancy (Tietel and Kunkel 2011). So the differences in traditions may well be more related to activity areas than to the original basic psychoanalytical ideas, confirming the general point about theory and social practice put forward in Section 2.

I think it is fair to say that there were many good intentions and substantial cultural gaps both between the different schools of psychoanalysis, and between those who approached the boundaries from the side of psychoanalysis and those who came from different social science backgrounds. Needless to say there are of course also in the social context big differences between post-Thatcher Britain, re-united Germany and Scandinavian welfare state Denmark with political implications that need to be reflected. One might say that the unfortunate traditions in psychoanalysis of holy war against other interpretations than one's own has influenced even those traditions that are not part of the hermetic psychoanalytic scene. So an important challenge has actually been one of clarification of implied differences. Thanks to a huge organizational work – including personal care, practical arrangement and intellectual stimulation – from Kirsten Weber and her initial partners in the organization, Thomas Leithäuser and Wendy Hollway, and later others – the group sustained and

structured a number of collaborations on a bi-lateral and multilateral basis which has had and still has long arms in the research communities.

We have of course explored these relations between different approaches to theorizing subjectivity. Primarily we have developed a very practical workshop activity doing interpretations together and exploring the theoretical issues by their implication for interpretations. We have met one week every year since 2001 with the main focus on doing and discussing interpretation work based on members' actual research.

5.   This Publication – and Others

The research group is a low budget organization, the activities being funded by individual researchers, partly backed by their institutions. It has from the beginning been intended that the main rationale of the group was the sharing of research experiences and practices, but we also wanted to publish joint results. It has become clear – by the accompanying Anglophone globalization – that there is a particular need for publications which introduces research of German and (in this case) Danish to the Anglophone and other academic communities.

Especially we stated the fact that there is little literature available in English of the German research tradition of soci(et)al psychology, which German colleagues as well as most of the Danish research group has drawn on, and the many years of collaborative practice has – we think – provided the background for identifying the important references – similarities and differences – which can make such a communication successful. Actually we see it as a wider challenge to contribute to a dialogue between these academic communities, particularly in a time where the non-Anglophone language communities and in a wider sense also academic traditions tend to be marginalized by the forms of internationalization.

In the first place we have identified the need for a communication of the works of Alfred Lorenzer who has contributed some of the most radical developments of psychoanalytical thinking of a theoretical as well as methodological nature. Lorenzer was a significant figure in post-war German intellectual debate. During the 1970s, his work was widely cited and read both in Germany and abroad (notably the Scandinavian countries) and, today, his ideas continue to inform a vigorous tradition of cultural analysis and social research, which is not limited to the psycho-societal research scene (e.g. Prokop 2008; Prokop and Jansen 2006). But his development of an "in-depth hermeneutic analysis" remains largely unfamiliar outside German-speaking audiences. As briefly outlined here Lorenzer's work is of continuing relevance to a range of major debates in the globalizing scientific community. For example, his ideas anticipate the current emphasis on emotional aspects as significant dimensions of human meaning and experience, and his focus on what might be considered uncon-

scious in the social and social in the unconscious is echoed in contemporary 'psycho-social' debates in Britain. Lorenzer's specific concern to maintain a basic materialistic framework, focusing on embodiment and practice, is highly relevant to contemporary meta-theory as well as policies based on endogenous societal processes.

An introduction to Lorenzer's basic ideas and a presentation of the research tradition which has followed are therefore significant elements in this HSR Focus and will be combined with a number of empirical studies of everyday life culture, social practice, and learning. The international research group encouraged the development of publications. We first considered the translation (by Mechthild Bereswill and Christine Morgenroth) of Lorenzer's 100 pages contribution to a volume of combined works with other authors, "Kulturanalysen" (Lorenzer 1986), because it had served as a main reference in an intensive multilingual discourse between Danish, German and British researchers, of which half were not German-speaking. However, we also realized that an English translation of this text was difficult and would be insufficient as a general introduction for readers who did not know the substance before. It is a complex meta-theory, which, even in Lorenzer's original German-language works, is not readily accessible, and it does not clearly explain the foundational ideas from his previous works which are behind this development of cultural analysis. When invited to edit a presentation of the works of Alfred Lorenzer in the journal *Psychoanalysis, Culture, Society* a small editing team wrote an introduction to Lorenzer and his basic concepts, and a number of articles have been reviewed and prepared for publication. I have been part of this team until late in the process. However in the end I, as a member of the editing team, together with a number of the article authors decided that we would look out for an alternative channel addressing a broader interdisciplinary audience, in order to emphasize the societal dimension of the research tradition stronger. I think it is one of the essential qualities of this Lorenzer based inspiration that it has given tools to empirical studies in very diverse concrete topics, so an introduction to his basic concepts and methodological ideas will also be part of this publication (Salling Olesen and Weber, this issue). The genesis of Lorenzer's theory of socialization will be further developed in the article of Thomas Leithäuser (this issue). Four articles in this HSR Focus will be devoted to concrete studies from Denmark, Germany and UK, which apply a psycho-societal methodology in quite diverse areas Morgenroth, Dybbroe, Weber, and Hollway and Froggett. Finally, at the same time, a couple of the articles address the question about the relation between the two major psychoanalytical traditions which were part of the intellectual drive for our many years of collaboration, the German Frankfurt School version and the Kleinian and Tavistock (Andersen, Hollway and Froggett). It is my hope that the articles can not only illustrate the applicability of the methodological ideas, but also document the fruit-

fulness of an empirical research work to compare and develop theory and methodology.

A wider selection of papers presented in the seminars of the IRGPSA will appear as a book from Policy Press next year.

Special References

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