Prolegomenon to a Contemporary Psychology of Liberation

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ABSTRACT. This prolegomenon outlines a framework for a contemporary, critical psychological theory of liberation. It is argued that recent developments in metatheory have led to problems in both form and content for theory construction in the domain of liberation. As a viable solution to the formal problem, a non-foundational 'conceptual network' is suggested. As 'knots' in this quasi-systematic network, and thus as a preliminary solution to the problem of content, three critical research programs are reconstructed to deal with different, yet complementary, aspects of power, and which are thus relevant for conceptualizing liberation: Klaus Holzkamp, representing traditional Marxism, and reconstructed in terms of participation in life conditions (labor); Jürgen Habermas, representing neo-Marxism in terms of communication (interaction); and Michel Foucault, representing post-Marxism, in terms of self-representation (aesthetics). From these reconstructions the subject's possibilities against power, essential for a psychology of liberation, are derived. Finally, it is argued that a conceptual network that strives to cope with practical problems must entail contextualization.

KEY WORDS: conceptual network, contextualism, critical psychology, liberation, Marxism, postmodernism

The term 'liberation' has been used in a variety of contemporary discourses and in the service of a variety of goals. It has been used in commercial advertising for selling beauty products, by born-again Christians to inspire a particular spiritual vision, and by armies in subjugating (in the name of 'liberation') their own people. In political contexts, the term is used by the left as well as the right; both challenge the status quo, but with different intentions and for the sake of different utopias. Within the North American cultural domain, a personal, individualized liberation is a central theme, evidenced, for example, in popular film. Liberation is thus portrayed as tantamount to getting rich, which would then open the door to all possible worlds and all possible opportunities for the individual.

Historically, all social movements have been motivated by some form of liberation concept, whether the movement's goal is ultimately judged to be

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ethically wrong (eugenics) or morally right (equality, freedom). Among those movements motivated by goals that are likely to be considered ethically right, some of the most well known are the labor movement, the feminist movement, the anti-imperialist movement (of so-called third world countries), the anti-racist movement and the civil rights movement. Despite its impressive history, however, contemporary liberation in the industrialized world finds itself in a state of crisis, as local and particularized issues have become more dominant than global and universal ones, and as the ideology of individualism, so pervasive in the western industrialized world, has allowed for mainly limited thought-models of liberation.

In psychology, liberation is a widely unexamined but important topic, especially in the clinical and applied contexts. Every clinical psychologist has implicit ideas about liberation, that is, liberation from psychological suffering, or about where a patient's or client's liberation should ultimately lead. These implicit ideas, in turn, are explicated in terms of therapeutic goals. For example, in psychoanalysis, an explicit therapeutic goal is that the ego should prevail over the id (Freud, 1940), whereas in behavioral therapy, the therapeutic goal is expressed in terms of modifying individual behaviors (cf. Thorpe & Olson, 1990). Liberation, thus, is implicitly construed as achieving individual, personal or intrapsychic end-states. In community psychology, liberation in terms of individual empowerment has played an important role (cf. Rappaport, 1981).

Within critical frameworks, whose impact on mainstream ideas of liberation can be considered negligible, liberation (or emancipation) has been addressed as a central topic (recently, e.g., by Fox & Prilleltensky, 1997; Parker & Spears, 1996). Liberation in the critical psychological discourse entails the notion that an individual's psychological suffering is inextricably linked to his or her position within the societal status quo. Thus, within such a framework, practices of liberation have been conceived from a societal perspective.

The view taken here is that the term 'liberation' is not self-evident, but rather requires critical examination, as human beings are involved in a myriad of daily practices that are difficult, if not impossible, to transcend individually. But beyond these immediate practices, human beings can and do dream of a better world. In the individualized utopias of the western world, such dreams of liberation may entail such goals as being able to afford a house, and thus being independent from a landlord; choosing a successful career; landing a particular job; achieving a satisfying marriage; successfully losing weight; or even being able to afford cosmetic surgery. In contrast, in a third world country, a personal utopia of liberation might include the dream of having daily food or clean water. But a critical reflection on liberation reveals that the issue is much broader than individualized notions or realizations of dreams. Thus, a theory of liberation must address such broader domains—those in which social, economic and

political inequalities (viz. racism, sexism, classism, imperialism) make it necessary to think about liberation. Yet a *psychology of liberation* must emphasize the individual's possibilities in these domains—even when goals can only be achieved in cooperation with others. Thus, a psychological theory of liberation must do justice to both domains: the individual as well as the societal.

In this prolegomenon, a term which refers in philosophy to the introduction, preamble or prologue to a larger theory or research program, I outline a contemporary psychology of liberation that takes several levels of liberation quasi-systematically into account. The term 'prolegomenon' is necessary as developments in the area of epistemology, metatheory and cultural studies have shown that systematic *theory development* in a domain such as 'liberation' is highly problematic, in both form and content. These theoretical developments make it necessary to reconstitute a theory of liberation from its very 'foundations'.

In addition, the term 'prolegomenon' outlines a new approach in critical theoretical thinking, as the proposed psychology of liberation, intended as part of a critical theory of subjectivity, underlines the *conceptual-empirical* possibilities of a subject. By focusing on these conceptual-empirical possibilities, I am aware that the suggested psychology of liberation is very much reflective of a European, continental, critical tradition of thinking. This tradition has produced remarkable insights; still, I am aware that insights developed in other contexts must not be neglected. Having a certain perspective does not exclude—at least in the program that I am suggesting—perspectives that are lesser known than the mainstream critical European approaches.

In addition, I use the term 'psychology' in an admittedly idiosyncratic way when I argue that it is necessary to reflect upon the conceptual-empirical possibilities of a subject. The term 'conceptual-empirical' emphasizes that conceptual possibilities derived through theoretical reflection are not merely hypothetical, but can be realized and revealed through human experience. A psychology of liberation entails reflection upon the possibilities of a subject with regard to *power structures*, a theoretical task usually neglected in mainstream psychology. The term 'subjectivity' refers to these psychological, namely action possibilities, of a subject. Thus, I will explore the contexts in which a subject might ask him- or herself in which dimensions of social reality, especially power structures, he or she might become active; these are domains of liberation. Owing to this conceptual focus, I will not talk about traditional psychological subject matters such as motivation, emotion or cognition that might accompany liberation. Moreover, I emphasize that a focus on the subject's action possibilities does not imply individualism, as the possibilities of the subject might be realized through participation in a social action or larger group process (e.g. a worker engaging in strike actions in solidarity with other workers).

As the prolegomenon incorporates criticisms of postmodern theoretical discourses, yet grounds its concepts within a modern tradition, it might be labeled neo-modern. It provides an informed reconciliation of certain modern as well as postmodern ideas.

At this point it must also be said that the nature of this article is academic and *philosophical-psychological*, and thus its application is not immediately explicated. This may be disappointing for activists or practitioners, but it is necessary from an intellectual point of view. In general, my goal is to provide a framework that allows for the conceptualization of a theory that can withstand recent challenges to theory construction in the natural and human sciences, and which is able to reconstruct Marxist, neo-Marxist and post-Marxist theories in such a way that they complement rather than exclude each other.

Challenges to a Contemporary Psychology of Liberation

Developments in both the philosophies of knowledge and metatheory reveal theoretical problems that are relevant for any attempt to elaborate a quasi-comprehensive contemporary psychology of liberation.

In the metatheory of the traditional sciences, we find an obvious retreat of claims and assumptions. While Popper (1959) challenged Hume's principle of induction, as well as logical empiricist attempts to provide a rational basis for this principle, Kuhn (1962) identified irrational moments in the development of the natural sciences, and banished Popper's 'rational' falsification principle into a kind of neverland. Since Kuhn's pivotal work, the logic of research, the nature of science and the dynamic of scientific theories—to mention only a few problems—are more uncertain and controversial than ever before, and normative claims with regard to concepts such as truth, reality and objectivity have become remarkably 'soft'.

Within the past two decades, authors such as Feyerabend (1978), Goodman (1978) and Rorty (1979) in North America; French postmodernists and post-structuralists such as Derrida (1976) and Lyotard (1984); feminists such as Harding (1986), Keller (1984) and Alcoff and Potter (1993); black feminists such as Collins (1991); and philosophically oriented cultural theorists such as Toulmin (1990), have argued that the foundations of western science are neither strong nor fundamental. This contemporary post-empiricist critique has taken the concept of theory-ladenness further. The concept not only applies to a *paradigm* (Kuhn, 1962), or to a *research program* (Lakatos, 1970); it is also relevant to social characteristics such as gender, class, race, culture and ideology, and to personal idiosyncrasies.

The social sciences are in an even more vulnerable position than the natural sciences, since the human and social sciences have immunized their ambiguous position (cf. Koch & Leary, 1985) with a seemingly rigorous

antidote—a traditional philosophy of science. Thus, the criticisms against the traditional philosophy of science hit the human and social sciences that much harder than they did the natural sciences.

Moreover, developments within the human and social sciences have always been accompanied by a critical discourse, which in its Marxist version confronted the social sciences with their ideological affiliation with the political-economic system. Michel Foucault has become the theoretical counterpart of Thomas S. Kuhn in the human sciences, in arguing that a *true* discourse in the human sciences is not possible, since any discourse is determined by a historical a priori, and in claiming that the human sciences are understandable solely within a given *episteme* (Foucault, 1970). Foucault (1977) demonstrated the relationship between knowledge and power, and argued that a liberation discourse, whether within a Freudian or traditional Marxist framework, reproduces the oppressive outcome against which it fights, as the framework is itself part of the discourse (Foucault, 1978).

If one looks carefully at the basic and specific arguments against attempts to develop a quasi-comprehensive theory and psychology of liberation, one may extract core issues that must be addressed in a prolegomenon. But as soon as a psychology of liberation attempts to address elementary topics of liberation, it is confronted with the problems of a grand, systematic and foundational theory. This issue refers to the *formal* problem of theory development. Second, although not independent from the first problem, the concept or notion of the liberation of a subject itself has been challenged in many ways. This issue refers to the *content* problem. Both issues will be discussed in some detail below.

Formal Problems for a Contemporary Psychology of Liberation

Within postmodern discourse (cf. Docherty, 1993; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988; Kvale, 1992a; Natoli & Hutcheon, 1993; Rosenau, 1992; Welsch, 1995), the idea of a grand theory, and the possibility of a global, universal and inclusive theory, have been challenged systematically. Hegel's (1807/1986) statement that 'truth is totality' (p. 24) is turned in postmodern discourse to the idea that totality never can do justice to the truth. Thus, in postmodern discourse, one refers to the demise of large projects, and to a departure from meta-narratives, while favoring instead affirmation, multiplicity, plurality, difference, anti-fundamentalism and local truths (see Welsch, 1992).

Revealing the social context that underlies postmodern thought (Harvey, 1990) does not imply that there is no rationality in postmodern ideas. Studies in the history of thought and practices demonstrate the relativity of truth (regarding psychology, see Danziger, 1990). Thus, it seems reasonable—particularly within the social and human sciences—that every holistic claim

for an understanding of reality must fail, due to the historicity and contextuality of claims, and to the logic of research.[1] The complexity of the subject matter of the social and human sciences and the reality of different paradigms suggest that a universal and systematic foundation is prone to failure. The history of philosophy shows that foundational and universal theoretical approaches either ignored parts of a reality that were not represented in a given system or simply assimilated such parts within the framework while distorting and misrepresenting the specificity of an object or event.

Not surprisingly, theories of liberation are cultural, historical and social events. Understandable from a practical viewpoint, but unfortunate for practices, traditional left-liberation discourses maintained exactly the idea of a grand theory, while criticizing small 'reformist' attempts at change, as well as the fragmentation of social reality. In traditional Marxism (e.g. Autorenkollektiv, 1982), social reality was viewed under the core concept of 'capital', while other problems of domination were interpreted as secondary contradictions of the class struggle. Psychologies that worked within the framework of traditional Marxism, such as German critical psychology (Holzkamp, 1983), maintained these assumptions by proposing an inclusive and systematic-hierarchical psychological theory.

Content Problems for a Theory of Liberation

Yet a contemporary psychology of liberation must not only cope with formal problems; it must also address content problems. The goals and methods of emancipation and liberation are nowadays criticized widely as part of the deconstruction of the 'enlightenment' and the idea of progress through rationality.

Especially in the German tradition, critical approaches remained close to the moments of emancipation or rational enlightenment, and to the idea that the use of theory might allow societies (Habermas, 1971, 1988) and subjects (Holzkamp, 1972) to be emancipated from individual and societal dependencies. Thus, they argued, science should connect theory to practice. Marx himself argued that a theory in the hands of the masses has an important practical value (Marx & Engels, 1970).

Interestingly, the idea of the Frankfurt School, that rational emancipation must be a core concept of the social sciences, has been criticized within traditional 'positivist' discourse (cf. Adorno et al., 1969), but also within contemporary, seemingly progressive, postmodern discourse (e.g. Kvale, 1992b). As a reminder, the critical theoretical concept of emancipation was developed in opposition to the assumption that the social sciences and psychology are empirical endeavors which discover in a 'value-free' way objects and laws within an objective, empirical reality; which examine hypotheses using objective methods; and which interpret results in a

'neutral' way. In the critical discourse, it has been argued that both the context of discovery and the context of justification are determined through societal relations, and, thus, there are ideological influences on theory construction and application (cf. Wiggershaus, 1994).

Finally, proponents of these developments within metatheory criticize the idea of a *subject* as a center of meaning, consciousness, speech, action or intentionality. The traditional critical emancipatory discourse within psychology has emphasized the notions of subject and subjectivity as essential but excluded concepts within mainstream social sciences. In doing so, the critical discourse (German critical psychology or Freudo-Marxism) never shared traditional assumptions of subjectivity, but rather maintained the subject as socially, culturally and historically mediated. The term 'subjectivity' was even used to attack mainstream psychology as an alienating psychology, one without subjects, and interested only in distributions and central tendencies or in irrelevant tests of significance (Holzkamp, 1972). It was argued that such a psychology failed to understand the ontological difference between the objects of research in physics and in psychology (Holzkamp, 1972).

As a psychology of liberation deals—within a *psychological* approach—explicitly with human subjectivity, or with the subject's possibilities, it is my view that human subjectivity is the genuine psychological subject matter, and one which requires no further justification in terms of its relevance. This does not mean that the nature of subjectivity, or the subject's conceptual-empirical possibilities, are already known. This will be the topic of the following discussion.[2]

Suggested Solution for the Formal and Content Issues

While keeping to the concept of a subject, this prolegomenon must solve the problem of a grand and systematic theory, as well as the problem of the content of liberation. I see at least five possible ways to deal with these problems.

Let's go back to a psychology as a natural science! In following this slogan, issues of liberation are no longer an appropriate topic of inquiry for a scientific psychology. One must then admit that mainstream psychology was right after all, and that such topics cannot be dealt with in a scientific psychology.[3] Psychology in this sense explores small, defined, 'local' areas, free from any emancipatory rhetoric, in which the subject itself is of no interest.

Back to the roots! If one understands the old as being the true or genuine, and thus would rather ignore the problems raised by post-empiricist contemporary discourses, then one could always retreat to psychoanalysis or phenomenology. One might well consider such a romantic longing for the

apparently proven, clear and solid, in the thicket of a diversity of problems, as an understandable response, since psychoanalysis and phenomenology are the most important theories and practices with regard to concrete subjects. However, although they might include personal perspectives of liberation, one might doubt that psychoanalysis will be able to address the complexity of liberation, due to the non-societal nature of its basic categories.

History of psychology: As a historian of psychology, one might challenge research practices and psychological concepts, reveal the social underpinnings of research, and even argue for an understanding of the status quo as only one of many possible. In my view, however, such a position is insufficient for a critical psychology and for progressive theory construction.

Postmodern psychology: This approach is confronted with a series of contradictions, as soon as the goal of criticism is gone (cf. Teo, 1996). A prominent proponent such as Gergen (1994) argues that postmodernism implies 'sterner stuff'. But this sterner stuff leads to a rapprochement with the mainstream, by demanding that mainstream psychology reduce its universal claim, become more reflexive, and less narrow, and not fear the use of multimedia in research. The issue of liberation, as far as I can see, is not addressed adequately.[4]

Finally, it seems obvious that psychology and the social sciences require a new type of theory in the field of liberation. The one proposed here is future-oriented, and one might call it neo-modern, as it retains certain aspects of modernity. As I will describe, its aim is to both develop a *quasi-systematic* theory and to uphold the goals of emancipation, liberation and freedom, while at the same time taking into account justified criticisms and thus avoiding foundationality.

As the present prolegomenon outlines a *theory* of liberation, it seems necessary to emphasize the importance of theory construction for those who view liberation as essentially a practice, and not a theory. First, I suggest that the post-empiricist discourse is correct in arguing that research and other practices are theory-laden. Thus, theory is needed in any case. Second, if the borders of my theory are the borders of my world (paraphrasing Wittgenstein, 1968), then we will need broad theories. Third, if theory provides the basis for practical actions, then we require not only a broad theory, but a useful and good theory. The proposed psychology of liberation intends to address all of these problems.

How can one conceptualize or formulate a theory that transcends a rigid systematic foundation? And how will it be possible to include contemporary criticisms while simultaneously grounding a psychology of liberation within a modern tradition? The basic idea proposed here is to use a 'postmodern' solution for the formal problem, while at the same time using an integration of some modern ideas to address the content problem.

Formal Solution: A Conceptual Network

A basic error relevant to theories of liberation was the idea that there is one concept or one theory that encompasses all relevant aspects of liberation. Given the above arguments, it becomes evident that a broad theory of liberation may be realized only as a conceptual *network* that is able to incorporate different traditions of liberation theory. Nevertheless, such a conceptual network must possess certain qualities or characteristics. To meet this requirement, it seems to me that the best notion developed so far is the concept of a 'rhizome', as described by Deleuze and Guattari (1987). The authors distinguish among three forms of book writing or thought in the history of philosophy, and to describe them they use the metaphor of a 'root' (cf. Welsch, 1995).

Metaphysics can be characterized through a 'root-tree' in which everything is derived from a single source. Thus, multiplicity is differentiated from a single unit. Descartes's (1637/1960) 'method' may be considered the most important exemplar of such an approach; binary logic and Chomsky's linguistic approach are mentioned as contemporary examples. However, Deleuze and Guattari argue that this metaphysical model does not do justice to multiplicity, as it underestimates its specificity.

In contrast, *modernity* may be characterized by a 'fasciculated root', a system of small roots whereby one finds many sources. Within this conceptualization, modernity appears to take many autonomous sources into account and plurality is acknowledged. Yet Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argue that while, on the one hand, multiplicity is considered, on the other, a different kind of unity is established. Thus, James Joyce breaks up the unity of the word while producing a unity of text; Friedrich Nietzsche's aphorisms break up the unity of philosophical knowledge while introducing the unity of eternal return. Thus Deleuze and Guattari argue that it is insufficient to demand multiplicity because multiplicity must be produced. As a way out this problem, they suggest the *rhizome*, which I will use as a metaphor for the proposed conceptual network of liberation.

A rhizome is a stem organ, in which branches in the air can grow again into the soil, where old parts die out, and where new branches are formed elsewhere. A rhizome has many branches with many separate roots and appears differently over time. As there is no basic or central point, one may call it a network. The rhizome might be considered a vivid network that allows one to bridge differences and to consider non-parallel developments. It allows one to think in terms of dynamics instead of statics, complexes instead of monoliths, and multiplicity instead of unity. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), even evolution may follow this model.

Accordingly, a conceptual network for liberation may be much like a non-foundational rhizome, a quasi-system, where certain integral concepts might die out over time, and new concepts form at different knots. Thus, a

psychology of liberation, and its basic conceptual knots, might appear differently in the course of their existence. Further, there is no basic knot in a network, and the network may be applied differently by different people in different contexts. The quality of the concepts may be evaluated in terms of practical reason (cf. Febbraro & Chrisjohn, 1994; Prilleltensky, 1994; Teo, 1996). Although the term 'practical reason' has a broader meaning, one may refer at this point to Foucault's idea of theories as practical tools (see Lotringer, 1996), or Vygotsky's (1962, 1978) emphasis on scientific concepts as central tools for human activities. The emphasis on concepts as empowering instruments is derived from the idea that concepts enable us to develop our perceptions and analyses of the world and thus can open or lead the way to practices (cf. Haug, 1987).

Content Solution: Possibilities for the Subject

It is difficult to deny the existence of exploitation, humiliation, degradation and injustice in the world. Psychology can either ignore or address these facts. If psychology chooses to address itself to these problems, then it would seem necessary to develop a *psychological* theory of liberation, whereby the term 'psychological' refers to the subject's conceptual-empirical liberating possibilities with regard to power, and whereby an emancipated subjectivity refers to a subjectivity that is conscious about these possibilities.

A network consists of knots, and one must begin somewhere to build a conceptual network of liberation. Taking the above characteristics into account, these knots must nevertheless be considered a preliminary first step.

From a historical point of view, it makes sense to study those theoretical traditions that have taken issues of liberation as their theoretical center. A significant critical tradition and thus a 'strong knot' in this conceptual network is *Marxism*. Social and theoretical changes lead to *neo-Marxism*, another strong knot, as it maintains the notion of emancipation. Other traditions that went beyond Marxism nonetheless have their roots in Marxism, and thus I will refer to this strong knot as *post-Marxism*. These traditions are psychologically and theoretically well represented (see my justification below) by the theories of Klaus Holzkamp (1927–1995), Jürgen Habermas (born 1929) and Michel Foucault (1926–1984), respectively. In this prolegomenon I will *reconstruct* some of their ideas and will introduce them into the proposed conceptual network as momentary knots.

Worth mentioning first, however, is one commonalty and one difference among these authors, each of whom has taken subjectivity, power, liberation and possibilities of the subject into account.[5] If one looks at the biographical-historical dimension of these authors, one realizes that for each of them Marxism played a different role in their lives. Marxism played a role

for the young Foucault in the early 1950s when he was a member of the Communist Party of France (cf. Eribon, 1989), for Habermas in the 1960s when he introduced Marxist theories into his thinking (cf. McCarthy, 1978), and for Holzkamp in the 1970s when he developed a Marxist psychology (cf. Teo, 1993; Tolman, 1994). Yet one might describe their relationship to Marx in reverse sequence: Holzkamp, the latest, is Marxist; Habermas is neo-Marxist; and Foucault is post-Marxist.

The idea of a conceptual network allows for different frameworks as they offer different insights. Thus, in formulating a psychological theory of liberation, it is not necessary to compare these approaches in terms of their different world views. From a pragmatic point of view, it is only relevant to compare how each of the authors might contribute to a psychology of liberation. Comparisons, analyses of contradictions, and analyses of categories are theoretical tasks that might be neglected within a conceptual network. Nevertheless, it is helpful to suggest certain reconstructions. Thus, I argue that the Marxist *labor paradigm* played the central role for Holzkamp, while Habermas considered this concept outdated and introduced the *interaction paradigm*. Foucault, who focused on topics traditionally rejected and excluded in critical research, such as the body, insanity and delinquency, will be reconstructed in terms of an *aesthetical paradigm*.[6]

A Conceptual Network for a Psychology of Liberation

If one understands liberation as the subjective or psychological side of a dialectical process, and in my view psychology's subject matter is indeed this subjective side, it would still be misleading to think that one can develop concepts of liberation (or empowerment, the traditional psychological term) by focusing on only the subjective part. The subjective side is—to turn a dialectical event metaphorically—only one side of a coin in which power simultaneously reflects the other, contextual side. Indeed, how shall one derive adequate notions of liberation if one does not understand the context, structure or logic of power?

It is my position that an adequate theory of liberation can only be realized by referring to concepts of power. Only then will psychologists understand the possibilities and limits of liberation. Interestingly, however, the psychological literature on 'empowerment' hardly mentions the work on power in social philosophy. Thus, empowerment is seen primarily as an individual competence; an ability or capacity; a form of self-control; an individual skill; a personal growth goal; a capability to speak in one's own voice; and so on (cf. Friedmann, 1992; Gershon & Straub, 1989; Rappaport, 1981). Although it would be unfair to suggest that empowerment in psychology is exclusively discussed in terms of personal, internal, private or subjective experiences, for psychologists have been increasingly incorporating contextual aspects,

there remains a focus on the individual (cf. Riger, 1993), largely due to an inadequate conceptualization of the interaction of contexts such as power and individuals. For a theoretical slogan, it seems appropriate to paraphrase Kant (1781/1982): Liberation without a concept of power is ignorant. And as a psychologist one might add: Analyses of power that do not take into account concrete liberation are vain.

If one agrees with such a position, then it becomes obvious that one must turn to social-philosophical concepts of power for a more adequate conceptualization. Power has been an ongoing philosophical topic since ancient Greek times, but most remarkable from a modern point of view is Hegel's (1807/1986) idea of a master–slave dialectic, one which inspired Marx and Engels (1970) to develop their concept of class struggle within bourgeois society (see also Althusser, 1984). Although Marx's political-economic concept of power is limited, it remains nonetheless a point of departure for many social philosophers, either in its further development, or in its strict demarcation.

Concepts of Power

Holzkamp (1983) draws on the classical Marxist tradition in which power is conceptualized as the material and intellectual domination of people over people (Marx & Engels, 1970). The emphasis is on material domination, a domination derived from a class society in which unequal access to the means of production rules. In terms of historical materialism, it is argued that in slave-holding societies, power is defined as the direct personal dependence of a slave on a slave-holder; while in feudalist societies, power represents the dependence of a farmer on a feudal master; and in capitalist societies, power refers to the economic power of the class that controls the means of production, and thus the participation in the conditions and goods of life. Holzkamp (1983, p. 361) argues from within this tradition that the majority of humans are excluded from control over the societal process. Power in this sense is a *supra-subjective* concept, one which refers to control over objective life conditions.

Habermas (1984, 1987a) refers to power as a disturbance in the sphere of interaction and communication, while at the same time denouncing the traditional Marxist interpretation of power as imprecise, due to the welfare-state character of western industrialized countries (Habermas, 1979). Power appears in Habermas' work as a problem of interaction; power thus refers to purposive-rational action, which is defined as a strategic social action coordinated through egocentric calculations of success, and in which other people are used as means. With such a concept, Habermas comes closest to traditional definitions of power. Power is the antithesis to consensus-oriented, communicative action, which is oriented towards understanding. In his theory of communicative action (Habermas, 1984, 1987a), power is also

mentioned in the context of the colonization of the lifeworld (i.e. the interactive sphere), through imperatives of the system: money and power. And if power regulates the discourse of a given community, but not communicative exchanges, then a lifeworld will encounter severe problems. Interestingly, power as such is not a problematic topic for Habermas, as power may have normative legitimation, and normative legitimation is a prerequisite for the acceptability of power. Finally, it is possible to return to Habermas' (Habermas & Luhmann, 1971) concept of an ideal speech situation. In this case, power is associated with a speech situation in which only certain persons have the right to begin a discourse, to pose questions, to provide interpretations, and to offer statements, explanations and justifications. Thus, Habermas' concept of power can be reconstructed as an *inter-subjective* concept.

The most influential post-Marxist concept of power has been provided by Foucault. Foucault's (1977) power is a disciplinary power that targets the body. Thus, one must study mechanisms of discipline in schools, prisons, hospitals, the military and other institutions. For example, the architecture of a building, or the way in which rooms are organized, leads to learning processes of the body. Power in Foucault's terms is not 'negative' as it is in traditional Marxism; rather, it engenders a positive function (similar to Nietzsche).[7] Bio-power directs life via sexuality and the management of people in a 'productive' way, as it is important for the administration of life. This productive form of power is intertwined with knowledge and the human sciences. Important for a psychology of liberation is Foucault's *intra-subjective* notion that power is constitutive for the subject, that power constructs the self, and that the body is a central object of power. This idea has also proven helpful for many feminist analyses.[8]

Liberation: Possibilities of the Subject with Regard to Power

A psychology of liberation takes the side of the subject into account. Interestingly, the three central authors whose work is the focus of this paper are not just theoreticians of power, but rather they emphasize the active role of subjects and their possibilities of challenging power.

Holzkamp's (1983) elaborations are pre-structured through the concept of labor (see also Tolman & Maiers, 1991). Thus, the subject may fight to participate in determining life conditions; the subject has the ability, in cooperation with others, to overcome a class society, and thus a ruling and dominating class; and the subject has the possibility of recognizing that his or her personal arrangement with the powerful, a typical coping strategy within class societies, may perpetuate the status quo. Furthermore, the subject can overcome anxiety in understanding his or her connection with societal realities. Within a general 'action competence', the subject can work against his or her arrangement with power-laden contexts, for example with

regard to the means of production, but also in the areas of employment, housing and health care.

Habermas' (1984, 1987a) reflections are pre-structured through the basic category of communication. The subject can participate in the formation of his or her lifeworld and fight against deformations of the lifeworld through demands of the system, for example, by intervening in the public sphere. Taking part in social actions and movements could be considered an activity directed against power. In all communicative situations the subject might demand egalitarian processes of communication. Moreover, the subject can examine individual or societal goals under normative points of view, and either confirm or reject them (when its normative legitimation is unacceptable: Habermas, 1984). Finally, the ideal speech situation can be turned psychologically (and thus avoid its sociological problems) by using it as a criterion by which to identify deformed interactions in contexts of communication and as a tool for defining power-laden interaction situations.

Foucault, who rejected in his early works the idea of a subject (e.g. Foucault, 1970), and thus preferred to use concepts such as experience structure, *episteme* and dispositive, returned later to subjectivity in introducing the idea of a subject who is able to install his or her life as a piece of art. Acting against power means to define one's own life as art. Thus, the subject has the possibility of developing an aesthetics of existence; an individual lifestyle becomes possible in the areas of sexuality, the body and other forms of self-expression. The subject's resistance is conceptualized in terms of technologies of the self. Thus Foucault is able to theorize even sado-masochistic practices as liberating (cf. Kögler, 1994)—an unthinkable idea for Holzkamp or Habermas.[9]

Context of Liberation

One might now ask how these philosophical-psychological analyses translate into so-called 'real-world' problems. First of all, it must be emphasized that the concrete possibilities of the subject depend on the context and on the relationship of the subject to this context (e.g. in terms of gender, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation and personal aspects). Although the subject has the choice to challenge power in several ways in situations of 'labor', 'interaction' and 'aesthetics', the means may be different, for example in North America for a woman or a man, a 'black' or 'white' person. The conceptual network (thus the metaphor of a rhizome) is capable of being changed according to these specific contexts.

The proposed psychology of liberation (the knots of the conceptual network) suggests only that one might want to think about one's possibilities in power-laden situations of labor, interaction and aesthetics, for which

Marxism, neo-Marxism and post-Marxism, and their suggested representatives, Holzkamp, Habermas and Foucault, have provided useful ideas.

For example, if 'I'[10] am confronted with racism, and 'I' want to fight against racism, then 'I' have to analyze 'my' context, as racism has a different meaning in Europe, in the United States, or in South Africa (its meaning may also differ within Europe, depending on the legal, political, historical and economic specificity of a given country).

The conceptual network suggests to 'me' that 'I' relate 'my' actions to the dimension of labor and ask 'myself' about concrete action possibilities in this dimension. Thus, 'I' consider labor one dimension in which 'I' may become politically active. 'I' might want to fight racism in labor-related domains such as concrete working conditions, housing, health care, welfare, and so on. 'I' might organize or take part in an action that objects to salary inequities for different ethnic groups, or, even more radically, challenge the fact that the means of production do not belong to all people (issues that are usually discussed within Marxism).

Yet the conceptual network, as proposed, suggests not only thinking about labor, but also reflecting upon liberation in the dimension of concrete interaction. 'I' might find that an important part of a fight against racism is deconstructing the symbolic and communicative representations of those people oppressed by racism. 'I' might expose and criticize racism in school books, talk about the difference and similarity between traditional and symbolic racism, racism in the mass media, and so on (cf. Teo, 1995b). 'I' have the concrete possibility of challenging someone who is making a racist remark.

And finally, the conceptual network suggests, with regard to liberation in the dimension of aesthetics, that 'I' think about or learn to define 'myself' as a person worthy of self-expression; to take pride in 'myself' as an ethnic minority person and in 'my' physical appearance; to reach for a personal lifestyle and self-definition beyond the constructions of a racist discourse; and to appropriate aesthetical judgments in the service of 'myself'.

The three knots of the conceptual network (Marxism, neo-Marxism, post-Marxism; or Holzkamp, Habermas, Foucault; or labor, interaction, aesthetics) are a heuristic guideline, a scaffolding, that suggest in which dimensions 'I' might wish to think about power and liberation. The conceptual network (rhizome metaphor) also suggests a focus on more than one dimension of power or liberation; it demonstrates that it may be adapted and changed totally according to different social-historical contexts, as power and liberation may have new meanings in new contexts.

The openness of the conceptual network becomes necessary when one realizes that means and goals of liberation in western countries may be different from those in developing countries (the term 'may' is used because it might turn out that power structures in, for example, inner-city areas in the US are very similar to those in developing countries), especially since

liberation practices in advanced capitalist countries have focused in recent years more on the dimension of interaction and aesthetics, and to a lesser extent on the dimension of labor. This includes the fact that continental European authors as incorporated in the network, with their strengths in addressing problems of power and liberation from a philosophical perspective and involved in specific western issues of liberation, require the experiences and reflections of people who have been involved in other (maybe more basic) practices of liberation. A conceptual network is open for the works of Freire (1985), hooks (1990) or Martín-Baró (1994), and is open to the ideas of activists who have had no academic voice. Liberation is much too complex a field to allow itself to exclude the experiences of people concerned.

The proposed conceptual network for a psychology of liberation allows the support of subjects in the enlightenment of societal and individual dependencies and possibilities—a traditional critical theoretical goal. To avoid its foundational fallacies, a conceptual network has been proposed that, by definition, is mutable, and that entails its own suspension as soon as the knots are of no value to people oppressed by power.

Still, at this juncture, it is important to emphasize the position that power or liberation cannot be sufficiently analyzed in social constructionist terms. A focus on written and spoken 'texts' is important but leads to deficits in understanding the complexity of power, domination and liberation. Power is an *objective* social reality. Thus, psychology must include 'structural-societal' concepts in its theories in order to convey the idea that power is not only a personal relationship between individual persons but a structural phenomenon (see Febbraro, 1994; Teo & Febbraro, 1997).

Notes

1. Postmodernists did not originate the idea of the relativity of truth. Already Lenin (1909/1962)—usually considered a representative of a 'simple' correspondence theory of truth—had argued about the historical relativity of knowledge. The difference is that Lenin believed that science would approximate truth over time, without ever reaching absolute truth.
2. The emphasis on theoretical aspects for understanding the decline of the concept of liberation is due to the course of the present discussion. Certainly, however, one would need to take so-called external aspects into account for an understanding of the 'loss of liberation.'
3. Also worth noting is Foucault's positive evaluation of the natural sciences in comparison to the human sciences (see Rouse, 1987).
4. I know that I am not doing total justice to Kenneth Gergen given his enormous theoretical output. Still, I am amazed at his abstemious statements in *American Psychologist* (1994).
5. I am ignoring in this context the reconstruction of different developments in these authors' scientific biographies as well as the theoretical changes these authors made (for details, see Teo, 1993, 1995a).

6. Derrida (1993) might also be considered a post-Marxist contributor, but he does not provide psychological insights as Foucault does (see Kamuf, 1991).
7. Comparative analyses of power as conceptualized by Foucault and Habermas have been provided by McCarthy (1991), Honneth (1986) and by Habermas (1987b) himself. A comparative analysis of Habermas and Holzkamp has been performed by Teo (1995a).
8. Foucault's theory entails much more sophistication than I have been able to sketch here. In addition, his theory of power went through many different stages (cf. Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982). The notion of power as the compulsion to confession (Foucault, 1986), for example, is not included here.
9. The idea that resistance can be turned aesthetically is also evident in Peter Weiss' (1975) novel.
10. The 'I' form is used to convey that the conceptual network can be used as a very concrete tool.

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