

Subjectivity as critique

Methodological collectivism in Phenomenology and Critical Psychology

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Sofie Boldsen & Niklas A. Chimirri
Subjectivity as Critique

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Phenomenological Psychology

Herausgegeben von: Alexander Nicolai Wendt,
Ralph Schickel und James Morley

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Subjectivity as Critique

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Summary

Recently, the notion of critical phenomenology has gained momentum in philosophical scholarship. Yet, in psychological research, phenomenology's critical resources remain underdeveloped. In this article, we investigate the critical potential of phenomenological psychology by exploring how phenomenology has been an overlooked source of inspiration for the development of critical psychology. We argue that the phenomenological emphasis on the interrelatedness of subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and lifeworld enables a little acknowledged critical reflection on the role of societal-historical development in shaping subjective experience. Retracing the notion of *Je-Meinigkeit* through Klaus Holzkamp's »phenomenological turn,« we find a basis for considering the dialogical processes of qualitative inquiry and recognizing phenomenology as a collective methodology. Finally, we develop these points in an empirical context by discussing two research projects that actualize the critical potential of phenomenology through collective research processes with young children and autistic persons respectively, each of whom remain marginalized in processes of knowledge production and societal development.

Keywords: phenomenological psychology, critical psychology, qualitative methods, critical phenomenology, autism, early childhood

Zusammenfassung

Subjektivität als Kritik

Kollektive Methodologie in Phänomenologie und Kritischer Psychologie

Der Begriff der Kritischen Phänomenologie wird in philosophischen Debatten derzeit verstärkt diskutiert. In der psychologischen Forschung verbleibt der kritische Impetus der Phänomenologie jedoch wenig beachtet. Der vorliegende Artikel untersucht daher kritische Potenziale der phänomenologischen Psychologie mithilfe der subjektwissenschaftlichen Kri-

tischen Psychologie, welche die Phänomenologie als wichtige Inspirationsquelle heranzieht. Insbesondere das Insistieren auf den inneren Zusammenhang von Subjektivität, Intersubjektivität und Lebenswelt ebnet unseres Erachtens den Weg für eine selten hervorgehobene, gemeinsame kritische Reflexion der gesellschaftlich-historischen Zusammenhänge, welche konstitutiv für subjektive Erfahrungen sind. Der Modus der Je-Meinigkeit, dem wir uns durch Klaus Holzkamps Studium phänomenologischer Philosophen annähern, unterstreicht, wie letztere eine notwendigerweise kollektive Methodologie zur Erforschung von Subjektivität im Dialog einfordern. Dies veranschaulichen wir empirisch anhand zweier sozialpsychologischer Forschungsprojekte, welche die kritischen Potenziale der Phänomenologie nutzen, um die Erforschung von gemeinsam gelebter Welt zusammen mit ansonsten in der Wissensproduktion und der gesellschaftlichen Entwicklung marginalisierten Gruppen zu ermöglichen: Kleinkinder und Autisten.

Schlüsselwörter: phänomenologische Psychologie, Kritische Psychologie, qualitative Methoden, kritische Phänomenologie, Autismus, Kleinkindforschung

Introduction

What is the critical potential of a phenomenological approach to psychology? How can it, for instance, question established systems of normality and work toward the creation of better life conditions of groups that only have marginal influence on societal-historical development? We pose these questions since in the psychological and social sciences, phenomenology has been disregarded as an emblem of uncritical thinking, a theory of the status quo indifferent to historical, social, and political issues of the times (Horkheimer 1972; Adorno 2013). According to critical practice psychologist Morten Nissen (2012), phenomenology falls prey to *methodological individualism* by dichotomizing the study of subjective experience from the societal, social, and ideological structures in which it is inextricably embedded, and importantly: from collective action and societal change.

In this article, we will investigate the critical potential of empirical phenomenological research and reflect on how critical thinking already lies at the heart of phenomenological methodology, as formulated by the late Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. Recently, the notion of »critical phenomenology« has gained momentum in philosophical scholarship (Weiss, Murphy and Salamon 2020; Zahavi and Loidolt 2022). However, in psychological research, phenomenology's critical resources remain underdeveloped. Ours is a first attempt at filling this gap by investigating a somewhat marginal aspect of phenomenology's reception history, namely how it has been an overlooked source of inspiration for the development of critical psychology in the German-Scan-

dinavian, subject-scientific tradition. We are aware of the differences between these traditions of thought, but we think that there is an untapped potential in engaging them in renewed conversation with each other. The founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, was concerned with developing an ultimate theory of knowledge, a »first philosophy,« while the central figure of critical psychology, Klaus Holzkamp, sought to reformulate psychology as a societally relevant discipline based on dialectical-historical materialism. Thus, the two traditions may seem an odd couple. Yet, both have as their core a substantial critique of the widespread distinction between subject and object in philosophy and psychology respectively, and they share the fundamental insight that scientific inquiry must be conducted from the standpoint of the experiencing subject (Schraube 2013). As we shall argue, this recognition of subjectivity at the heart of scientific inquiry calls for a methodology with a scientifically and societally critical scope. We suggest that the critical psychological adoption of a phenomenological approach to scientific inquiry significantly deepened its critical resources, and that furthering the dialogue between the two traditions in the context of empirical research methodology may develop each's ability to address the social and societal issues of our times.

Each of our empirical work with a phenomenologically grounded psychology tells a different story, where phenomenology's ontological and epistemological premises invite for what we, in response to Nissen's above mentioned criticism, would term *methodological collectivism*: opening an exploration of subjectivities together with people whose experience and knowledge of the world is seldomly consulted in the structuring of society. One of us has collaborated with young children for over a decade to mediate their daily experiences and actions in relation to technology and living environments from a subject-scientific, critical-psychological point of departure. The other has drawn on the phenomenologies of Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty to develop a better understanding of social problems in autism through the study of autistic experiences of social interaction, thus redefining how we understand the autism spectrum from the perspectives of autistic persons.

Both these socially more or less clearly defined groups, young children and autistic persons, have in common that their perspectives remain marginally consulted in the understanding of the issues they encounter in their everyday lives, much less made part in the social and political development of the society in which they live their lives. As it seems, their experiences and actions, perspectives and knowledge, make them appear less valuable as interlocutors and co-arrangers of collective practices: They are evidently considered less important to learn from and collaborate with when it comes to understanding and organizing social and societal life. This does not mean that they are never consulted, heard, or seen within the processes of arranging these structures. However, they are not systematically made part of setting the agenda of processes that affect the quality of their respective everyday lives, including their social and societal relation-

ships to others. What we came to identify as a common problematic connecting both our empirical fields of research, as well as our different entry points into phenomenological theorizing, is that our research participants, our co-producers of knowledge, are seldomly acknowledged as *co-equal centers of intentionality* in their daily interactions with others, despite their existentially invaluable contributions to social and societal life.¹

Both phenomenology and critical psychology offer methodologies that precisely acknowledge research participants as co-equal centers of intentionality, irrespective of their societal positioning. This and other commonalities between each tradition of thought, especially the methodological implications of their respective ontological and epistemological considerations, are by no means arbitrary: Holzkamp was not only inspired by Soviet cultural-historical psychology in his reformulation of a general psychological theory, but also by reading Merleau-Ponty, Husserl, in more detail the German phenomenological psychologist Carl Friedrich Graumann, and presumably (but never explicitly acknowledged) Martin Heidegger. We historically retrace some of these points of connection between both psychological paradigms, inspired mainly by a text written by Jürgen Hilbers in 2008, who proposes the concept of *Je-Meinigkeit*, *first-person givenness*, or *mineness* as a key feature of phenomenological approaches to subjectivity, as well as of Holzkamp's critical psychological project.

As we shall argue, the concept of *Je-Meinigkeit* accentuates the social and collective dimension of the first-person perspective. In contrast to common readings of phenomenological research as beginning and ending with subjective experience, *Je-Meinigkeit* emphasizes the particular, the historical, and the contextual nature of subjectivity. Thus, it adumbrates a renewed critical potential in psychological research and resists standard iterations of naïve and individualist tendencies in phenomenology. However, it must be further nuanced that *Je-Meinigkeit* is the ontological entry point to a study of how a collective >we< can methodologically create knowledge together, and thereby act toward societal change, and cannot be understood as »Selbstzweck,« as an end in itself.

We will suggest that the critical impetus in critical psychology profits in crucial ways from phenomenology's approach to subjectivity and experience, although the critique in critical psychology and the orientation toward subjectivity in phenomenology have often been juxtaposed. We also suggest that subject-scientific critical psychology may gain from explicitly highlighting how social processes of self-understanding must be able to systematically include the researcher's own *Je-Meinigkeit*. Conversely, the critical psychological emphasis on the collectivity of the subject can push phenomenological psychological research in realizing its own societal and critical promise. First, however, we will follow and describe the reception of phenomenology in Holzkamp's work in order to discuss the critical implications of phenomenology's methodological focus on experience and subjectivity.

From Psychologism to the Fundamental Situatedness of the Subject

In 1984, Holzkamp published a paper entitled »Kritische Psychologie und phänomenologische Psychologie. Der Weg der Kritischen Psychologie zur Subjektwissenschaft« (Holzkamp 1984) in which he acknowledges the contribution of phenomenology to the development of critical psychology. In this text, Holzkamp comments on Graumann's presentation at the 1984 Marburg Congress (Graumann 1984) discussing the (in)compatibility between phenomenological analysis and experimental methods in psychology. Holzkamp is concerned primarily with Graumann's description of phenomenology as a form of »structural analysis,« that is, the phenomenological articulation of the relatedness of the subject to the world through the analysis of the immediately given lifeworld. As Charles Tolman rightly points out, since Holzkamp's discussion centers so heavily on the work of Graumann, Holzkamp's points can only be extended to the broader movement of phenomenology insofar as Graumann's analyses are representative of the phenomenological project (Tolman 1994, 146).

As Hilbers (2008) emphasizes in his reading of this exchange, Holzkamp accepts the idea of the first-person experience as the ontological *sine qua non*. But he is concerned about how this philosophical insight could translate on an empirical level into everyday societal action. Tolman (1994) similarly points out that Holzkamp accepts and embraces phenomenology as a basic science within the framework of critical psychology but remains concerned with its ability to account for the historical and societal production of subjectivity. Holzkamp's interest in developing the phenomenological understanding of subjectivity in a more societal and historical direction is evident from a passage in Holzkamp's writings, in which he comments on Husserl's early phenomenological ideas, as expressed in *Logische Untersuchungen* (Husserl 1900-01/2001). Here, Holzkamp explicitly draws on Husserl's famous criticism of psychologism to arrive at a parallel criticism of »traditional psychology« as a world-less enterprise unable to recognize the societal and historical formation of the structures in which each individual subject is embedded. In his unfinished manuscript on the notion of »conduct of life,« Holzkamp writes:

»When one generalizes what has been said here about logical structures and applies it to societally produced structures, the decisive reason for the worldlessness of a psychological psychology (under the dictate of the standard design) becomes obvious: traditional psychology (in its mainstream) denies the difference between individual operations of thinking and the societal-historical formation of structures as well as their discrete form of existence; for this reason it cannot recognize the >world< as a socio-historically developed >structure< in its own right either« (Holzkamp 2013, 263; see also Schraube 2013).

Just like psychologism in logics and mathematics severs truth from the world, so does psychologism in the field of psychology strip subjectivity of the societal-historical structures that condition human life. As is well known, Holzkamp rejects the idea that nomothetic positivist psychology is or should be the basic science of psychology. But to understand why Holzkamp pairs Husserl's critique of psychologism with his own interest in exploring the co-constitution between subjectivity and society, we need to take a closer look at the understanding of phenomenology that Holzkamp draws into his own work.

Here, we return to Graumann's discussion of phenomenology as an analysis of the fundamental structures of the lifeworld. In response to misconceptions of phenomenology as subjectivistic and antiscientific, Graumann sets out to explicate the axiomatic thesis of intentionality as a fundamental relationality between subjectivity and world and discusses its methodological implications for the study of psychology. As the fundamental unit of analysis in phenomenology, Graumann highlights the intentional interrelatedness between person and environment and the fundamental task of phenomenology, correlatively, as a structural analysis of *situations* (Graumann 1988, 38). Such analysis presupposes *persons* as always related to an environment, and environments as the meaningful correlates of the persons, groups, or classes whose environments they are (Graumann 1988, 36). Thus, the person is regarded as situated in a strong sense, since the basic feature of consciousness is its intentional directedness toward and engagement in a concrete milieu. As Graumann emphasizes, the relation between person and world takes the form of reciprocity or bidirectionality:

»I started by calling the intentional person-environment relationship an interaction, thus deviating from traditional phenomenological phraseology. This expression calls for elaboration, because intentionality can only be assigned to human (and animal) consciousness and behaviour and not to the objects in our environment. Nevertheless, things act upon us in >pure contingency<: the stalled car stops us in our hurry to reach a destination, the knife cuts into my finger, a member of the family falls ill and dies. We are (intentionally) concerned in anger, pain and sorrow about what happens to us« (Graumann 1988, 37).

As Graumann emphasizes, this description deviates from the typical phenomenological psychological understanding of the constitutive function of consciousness. Graumann's emphasis on phenomenological analysis as a form of situational analysis acknowledges and brings out this constitutive performance of the world on an empirical and methodological level, thus reverberating with Husserl's mature phenomenology. Indeed, it was Husserl's idea that the transcendental subject is itself situated bodily, socially, and historically that led him to develop the concept of the lifeworld in his late writings (Husserl 1970). Graumann's phenomenological psychology follows

this basic intuition by delineating the *situation* as the basic unit of phenomenological analysis.

Building on the concept of lifeworld, Graumann outlines how a structural analysis of the person-world relationality must start with the *bodily nature* of the subject, the *materiality and spatiality* of the »intentional environment,« the *temporality* of experience, its entanglement in *history*, and the *sociality* and *communality* of subjective life (Graumann 1988, 39–40). As Graumann emphasizes, these structural features of the lifeworld are entwined in their function as concrete conditions of our experience and possibility for action in any concrete situation. Here, he paraphrases Merleau-Ponty's *Structure of Behavior* (Merleau-Ponty 1967, 176):

»What Merleau-Ponty (1967) in his phenomenological structural analysis of behaviour calls the >dialectics< of the >human order< is characterised through this interplay of the mutually determining structural elements, mainly, however, through the capacity, founded in the horizontal structure of situations, to >negate and transcend< all forms of social and cultural structures, which – once they have been created – tend to limit and, to confine us« (Graumann 1988 40–41).

For Graumann, it is essentially the horizontal structure of the experience of the lifeworld and corresponding openness of the intentional environment as a field of possibilities that constitute human freedom in relation to the »limiting and confining« social and cultural structures. These considerations of the relation between necessity and freedom did not sit well with Holzkamp, who, quoting Karl Marx, emphasized that »freedom as insight into necessity is not simply >given< but is rather a >task to be accomplished<« (Holzkamp 1984, 25, translation in Tolman 1994). According to Holzkamp, Graumann and the phenomenologists identified necessity as a structure of subjectivity in place of a proper theory of society and history.

Despite this discontent with Graumann's way of formulating the relation between experiential and societal structures, the dialogue between Graumann and Holzkamp on these matters enables a better understanding of why Holzkamp – as we discussed earlier – used Husserl's critique of psychologism to situate his own critique of >mainstream psychology< and approach to the societal and historical structures of subjectivity. Based on the discussions above, one plausible answer is that Husserl's criticism of psychologism does not merely target the psychologization of logics, truth, and epistemology, but already prepares for a critique of the psychologization of the lifeworld, a critique of subjectivism in a broader sense, and an anticipation of the role of society and history in phenomenological analysis. In fact, Husserl's critique of psychologism culminated in a critique of psychology itself based on its inherited and taken-for-granted naturalism in his seminal work *Crisis of The European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*

(1970). Based on a teleological-historical reflection (Husserl 1970, 18) on the naïve inheritance of the >facts< of science, Husserl proposes a new mode of phenomenological thinking: one that sets the stage for phenomenological analysis as a critical historical practice.

Through analyses of geometry, physics, mathematics, psychology, and the human sciences, Husserl approaches a concept of the *lifeworld*, of the taken-for-granted character of the experienced world, as a historical, social, and societal structure (Husserl 1970, 115). Regarding our present purposes of fleshing out a renewed critical methodological potential in psychological research found in the intersection between phenomenology and subject-scientific critical psychology, we shall continue by exploring further the phenomenological notion of the lifeworld and its relation to the critical psychological rehabilitation of the standpoint of the subject through the concept of Je-Meinigkeit.

Je-Meinigkeit and the Intersubjective Character of the Self-World Relation

In his 2008 article on the relationship between phenomenology and (critical) psychology, foremost between Graumann's reading of Husserl and Holzkamp's reading of Graumann, Hilbers (2008, 139ff.) also underlines the reciprocal process of constitution implied in the concept of intentionality as pointing to the necessarily *intersubjective* character of the self-world relation. Yet, this intersubjectivity can be experienced very differently, as it is exclusively each one's own situated experiencing of this *conditio sine qua non* that the subject can relate to and act on. Experience is characterized by *Je-Meinigkeit*, meaning each-my subjective experiencing.

While Holzkamp did not explicitly acknowledge the Heideggerian origins of the concept of Je-Meinigkeit, it is useful to return to its inception in *Being and Time* (2001) for the purposes of introduction. Here, Je-Meinigkeit is a concept that largely replaces the previous use of the temporal character of Dasein, termed *Jeweiligkeit*, often translated to *awhileness*. A fundamental characteristic of Dasein is thus that it is in each case *this* Dasein existing at *this* particular time; it is a historically situated being. In relation to *Jeweiligkeit*, Je-Meinigkeit emphasizes the *mineness* of this temporally particular existence:

»That be-ing which is an issue for this entity in its very be-ing, is in each case mine. Thus Dasein is never to be taken ontologically as an instance or special case of a genus of entities as things that are extant and on hand... Because Dasein has in each case mineness [Jemeinigkeit], one must always use a personal pronoun when one addresses it: >I am<, >you are<< (Heidegger 2001, 67–68).

Theodore Kisiel relates this emphasis on the particularity and concreteness of each one's personal situated existence to Heidegger's concepts of »mineness« (Je-meinigkeit), »yours-ness« (Je-deinigkeit) and »ours-ness« (Je-unsrigkeit), is ultimately aimed at configuring the sphere of ownness as an event or process in which »the I, you, and we come together and in each instantiation become themselves« (Kisiel 2021).

Hilbers meanwhile argues that the particularity and context-sensitivity of Je-Meinigkeit is also pivotal to Holzkamp's work, in that it points to the fundamental sociality of the individual subject's perspective on the world. However, from this critical-psychological perspective, the intersubjective constitution of subjective experience is not a necessity but *a task to be accomplished by recognizing one another as co-equal centers of intentionality*, and origins of one another's agency (Schraube 2013). The prerequisite somewhat paradoxically lies in acknowledging other subjects as being ontologically just as first-person given as we experience each ourselves to be. Situating one's own perception, experience, and action in a first-person givenness, which is unavoidably each-mine and yet also of others, rendered possible by others, becomes key to (temporarily) transcend one's standpoint and perceive oneself as being someone who can potentially act in multiple ways. Hilbers adds the premise >je< or >each< when citing Holzkamp on this note:

»Experience relates to a reality independent of [each-]me to the extent that it is accessible to [each-]me from [each-]my standpoint and perspective. Reality being always more than what I have already perceived of it or acted on, [each-]my experience of world and self is structured as a horizon of possibilities open to all sides. As perceiver and agent, I am thereby always confronted with reality as expression of situational scopes of possibilities. Thus, intentionality is a relation of potentiality to the world and to [each-]myself, in which the dimensions and scale of [each-]my action alternatives are delimited by the situational scope of possibilities, but [each-]my >relating-to< this scope implies having action alternatives. It is in this sense that I am >free<« (Holzkamp 1984, 8; brackets added by Hilbers 2008, 142; own translation).

By adding the >je< or >each<, Hilbers underlines both the relativity and the collectivity of the first-person givenness. Je-Meinigkeit thus fundamentally acknowledges the other subject's mineness by decentering each-my own mineness. Yet, as mentioned, this acknowledgment of each other's mineness remains a task to be accomplished, in word and in deed, to open up for the necessarily situated freedom that Holzkamp argues for and seeks to collectively accomplish by means of a dialogical exchange of perspectives on commonly experienced, problematic conditions of reality. Thus, a collective methodology is proposed that conveys (and ideally makes it possible to embody) the relevance of the ontology and epistemology of Je-Meinigkeit.

Holzkamp has argued for the necessity of such an exchange already in his first monograph after his turn to critical psychology in the wake of the 1968 student protests and criticisms of psychology as control science (e. g., Schraube 2015), entitled *Sinnliche Erkenntnis: Historischer Ursprung und gesellschaftliche Funktion der Wahrnehmung* (Holzkamp 1973). While Ute Osterkamp and Ernst Schraube (2013) suggest the translation »Sensory Knowledge: Historical Origin and Societal Function of Perception,« the first part could be more poignantly translated as >sensuous knowledge.< In the spirit of Karl Marx' *Theses on Feuerbach*, this term couples knowledge creation less to the physiological understanding of the body's sensory and motoric apparatus (understood in a physicalistic sense), and rather to the diverse perceptual modalities of this experiential process. Irrespectively, Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (2012) was a central source of inspiration for Holzkamp's arguments, in particular for underlining the inevitable and immediate *corporeality* of knowledge creation, but also of its situated limitedness, in that it always remains partial and particular. Holzkamp (1973) writes: »The body that I experience and can dispose over as >my body< is basically immersed in an environment of bare corporeal materiality, which occludes itself to my perceptual enlightenment and access« (299; own translation). But not only the body remains partially ungraspable in its apparent immediacy: Any object of perception can only be more intentionally related-to from the perceiver's situated, materially limited position, or to be more precise: so it appears! To break with this more immediate reliance on appearance, and to experience intentionality and thus subjectivity beyond one's directly accessible, corporeal-material, and partial relatedness to the world, Holzkamp suggests each-my perceived meanings must be brought into a critical and self-critical dialogue with others' perceived meanings, to create knowledge of more general relevance. It is this process of coming to acknowledge each other's intentionality and agency by recognizing the historical and societal mediateness of each our being and experiencing that Holzkamp in the 1980s came to term >soziale Selbstverständigung< (Holzkamp 2013, translated as >social self-understanding< in the collection of Holzkamp texts edited by Schraube and Osterkamp 2013). Holzkamp describes this as a dialogic process about how (problematic) conditions are experienced and articulated in everyday life, based on a meta-subjective (ergo more collective) mode of understanding. The aim of this methodological approach is the development of a more inclusive conceptual language from within everyday life that allows for purposeful practical fellow action on the shared conditions, grounded in the fundamental insight that intersubjectivity is primordial. In this process,

»intersubjectivity itself is made into the object of structural reflections. [...] The decisive criterion is thereby the reflection upon the *reversibility of standpoints* within a scene of life conduct. [...] [T]here is no privileged centre of structuring: neither the >earth<, as in the

Ptolemaic universe, nor my own standpoint (even as >researcher<) within a scene of life conduct. [...] This would be the standpoint of *multiple reciprocity* of all standpoints involved in a specific scene: each person does not only have equivalent relations to the others within the scene of life conduct but, moreover, these relations are essentially qualified by the fact that they imply (within the intersubjective mode of relationship) the other's relations to me as equiprimordial. I, as a subject, experience you as a subject, who experiences me as a subject« (Holzkamp 2013, 235–236; italics in original).

In this context, adopting the discursive mode of Je-Meinigkeit in the methodology of >soziale Selbstverständigung< concretizes and situates first-person givenness in terms of each person's temporal and historical particularity: each subject's unique take on reality is indispensable to work toward an understanding of more general or collective value. In a sense, this is also what Husserl wanted to achieve with his famous concept of the lifeworld (Luft 2005). In our reading, the historical and communal structure of the lifeworld in Husserl's thinking invites a renewed critical potential in phenomenological psychology, one which was further developed by Holzkamp in his recognition of the implications of the concept of Je-Meinigkeit for social action. In the following, we will present some features of Husserl's concept of lifeworld as a platform for discussing on a methodological level the role of the first-person perspective in psychological research and its implications for societal critique and social action.

The Historical Structure of the Lifeworld

Husserl's complex and ambiguous notion of the lifeworld is presented in the context of a historical analysis of the progression of the European sciences and philosophy. However, what he is interested in is not »factual history« but what he terms »inner history« (Husserl 1970, 378), that is, a reflection on how meaning has become instituted, sedimented, and forgotten while reproduced through tradition. As such, Husserl's agenda is both a *historical critique* and a *critique of history*.

In his introduction to Husserl's concept of the lifeworld, David Carr emphasizes that Husserl has attempted to unite numerous and sometimes contradictory senses of the pre-scientific world from which modern science is an abstraction and an interpretation (Carr 1970). Initially, Husserl describes the lifeworld as the >world of sense experience,< the >intuitively given surrounding world,< and the >meaning fundament< of natural science. As Husserl argues, this intuitively given world of experience is the source of any idea of objectivity. Such understanding would seem to leave the life-world itself untouched by history as the ultimate and a priori ground of experience and meaning. However, Husserl soon introduces a different meaning of the lifeworld connected

to culture, tradition, and history, and, as such, the lifeworld would seem a somewhat particular and relative phenomenon. In this version of the life-world, the sedimentations of meaning through the history of science and philosophy »flow into« the life-world, »adding themselves as such to its own composition« (Husserl 1970, 113, 131). One way of interpreting this apparent contradiction in Husserl's concept of lifeworld is that the immediately given meaning often attributed to the lifeworld is already deeply infused with a historically and socially sedimented sense of the world (Dorfman 2009; Merleau-Ponty 2002). The »natural attitude,« the taken-for-granted-ness of our everyday surrounding world, is already layered with inherited meaning. In other words, our most basic experience and understanding of the world is already historical, social, and societal.

Despite the theoretical, philosophical, and methodological differences between phenomenology and critical psychology, the recognition that our most personal way of encountering and experiencing the everyday world is already social and historical is an important and overlooked common ground and potential for dialogue between the two traditions. Moreover, in *Krisis*, Husserl again and again speaks of the historical and phenomenological reflection as a form of critique. The methodological concepts of *Besinnung* (reflection) and *Rückbesinnung* (backwards reflection) are meant to explore, critically assess, and ultimately revise our practices through penetrating the »layers of sedimented meanings, values, norms, commitments, and goals [...] that condition our experience of the lifeworld as well as our own theoretical work« (Aldea 2022, 57). Granted, such philosophical endeavor could also be thought of as a form of armchair social science. In this context, Julia Jansen emphasizes that a critical phenomenology requires interdisciplinary collaboration with the human- and social sciences (Jansen 2022). This is exactly what we will propose. For a critical, socially, and societally engaged phenomenology to be set in motion, it requires alternative resources than what can be found in the classical phenomenological works. In the following, we will present two empirical psychological research projects (in particular, see Boldsen 2022a and Chimirri 2019a) that each realize such critical potential through concrete research strategies. We will focus on the critical potential of using subjective experience as the ontological and methodological starting point for a more collective psychological inquiry, and, following the basic intuitions of Holzkamp and Husserl, we will discuss how such a starting point enables societal critique and social action. To better include and clarify the researchers' own contributions to the research process and empirical analyses, we now switch to the discursive mode of *Je-Meinigkeit*. In this way, we aim to explicate and highlight the authors' particular roles in co-creating knowledge with the research participants, i. e., autistic persons and young children respectively; knowledge that is collectively relevant and extends beyond the researcher's own scientific interest.

Reconceptualizing Autistic Intersubjectivity: Phenomenology en Route to Epistemic Enablement

Autism is commonly understood as a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by pervasive difficulties with social interaction and the presentation of rigid and repetitive patterns of behavior (American Psychiatric Association 2013; World Health Organization 2018). Much mainstream research explains these manifold features with reference to cognitive dysfunctions, such as theory of mind deficits (Baron-Cohen 2001; Tager-Flusberg 2007). This idea of social-cognitive dysfunction has unfortunately been connected with a broader tendency to epistemologically neglect and exclude autistic experiences from processes of knowledge production (see Milton 2015; McGeer 2005). In this brief narrative of a research project involving a psychological researcher and a group of autistic adolescents and young adults, I (Boldsen) will focus on the possibility of phenomenological methodology to counteract this tendency to bypass autistic voices in the development of knowledge of autism.

Following classical sources in phenomenological psychology (Giorgi 2009) and the micro-phenomenological interview technique (Petitmengin 2006), the aim of the study was to investigate the phenomenological structures characterizing social experience and connectedness in autism. In the context of autism research, I understand the phenomenological method to be, at its heart, a practice of reimagining the social world from an autistic perspective and according to an autistic norm of experiencing. Thus, I took as the basis of my methodology a critical practice of trying to understand autism from the perspective of a marginalized form of experience with the aim of developing a more general and collectively meaningful understanding of intersubjectivity. This understanding may diverge somewhat from typical descriptions of the aim of phenomenological research methods to describe »the essential or invariant meaning and structure of the experience« (Churchill and Wertz 2015, 283). In the following, I will thus stretch what many would associate strictly with phenomenological research by thinking actively about its societal and critical undercurrents and discuss the methodological preconditions for such an approach.

Reciprocation as a Phenomenological Tool: Tackling the Problem of Epistemic Injustice

As part of the study, I participated for eighteen months in two social youth groups aimed at facilitating friendships between autistic adolescents and young adults. I was introduced to the autism groups as a psychology researcher doing a project on autistic experiences of »being social,« hoping to learn something from autistic persons' own

perspectives on being autistic. In this way, I hoped to position myself as an »ally,« defined in the autism and disability rights community as »a person with privilege on a particular axis who makes a conscious choice to work against oppression on that axis« (Kassiane S. 2012). While the aim of the project initially was to elucidate the structures of autistic social experience through data collected through phenomenological interviews, the process of fieldwork in the autism groups revealed the importance of establishing relationality and connectedness with autistic persons to make such a phenomenological exploration possible. Due to stressful and sometimes traumatic experiences with treatment and testing, autistic persons in their adolescence and adult life often come to distrust psychologists and the possibility of evaluation and psychological assessment. In addition, face-to-face encounters are often experienced as overwhelming, stressful, and unsafe, and it can take time to gain a sense of comfort with others. A phenomenological interview is a demanding communicative task and an intense social encounter that requires the interviewer to lean into the other's way of expressing themselves and to flexibly meet the interviewee's communicative and interactive style (see Englander 2020 for a related discussion of the role of empathy in phenomenological interviewing). Thus, it is crucial for the phenomenological researcher to actively *connect* and *relate* to, and importantly, *reciprocate* with the research participants. In the study of autistic intersubjectivity, the goal of fieldwork in the autism groups was not to merely establish the rapport necessary for informants to open up or to ensure *access* to research participants (Schout, de Jong, and Zeelen 2010). Rather, interacting with the participants was a way for me to become familiar with the practices, traditions, and overall social style of the group in order to reciprocate and respect autistic forms of interaction both in and outside of formal interview situations. Some participants did not feel comfortable with eye contact, some took significantly longer response times and others expressed themselves atypically and followed different interactional dynamics – all of which needed to be accommodated in the communicative encounter (Boldsen 2022c).

Crucially, such accommodation and adjustment of data collection to suit autistic needs is not a matter of creating optimal conditions for exploring autistic experiences as >objects of study.< Rather, my attempt to immerse myself in and respect the particularity and validity of autistic social practices and styles was, in an important sense, part of the phenomenological research process as I tried to practice on a concrete level the ambition of de-centering and bracketing my own perspective to explore another's. In this sense, the phenomenological researcher takes the position of a participant observer (Englander 2020). This highlights the crucial interdependence between second-person engagement in autistic communities and the possibility of exploring subjective and intersubjective experience in autism, and further, that any phenomenological-psychological investigation of subjective experience always presupposes second-person engagement.

As a phenomenological researcher in a field such as autism studies, one often encounters the same caveat in different versions – namely, that it is difficult to conduct good qualitative research with autistic persons as they are arguably less able to reflect on and express their personal experiences and less aware of or have a lack of insight into their own condition. The consequence of such caveats is the widespread neglect and devaluation of autistic persons as knowers and epistemic agents capable of understanding their own experiences and perspectives (Catala, Faucher and Poirier 2021; Barunčić 2019; Chapman and Carel 2022). This form of injustice relating to a person's capacity as a knower has been defined by Miranda Fricker (2007) as *epistemic injustice*. Epistemic injustice takes two overall forms: *testimonial injustice*, where a speaker's credibility is devalued due to prejudice and bias toward a social group (e. g., gender, race, or disability), and *hermeneutical injustice*, where a speaker's interpretations are disadvantaged and deemed less intelligible due to a gap between the person's experience and a lack of collective interpretative framework for understanding and validating such experiences.

According to Chapman and Botha (2022), autistic persons are victims of epistemic injustices by being constructed as lacking epistemic authority and as unreliable interpreters of their own experiences. Particularly relevant here is the poignant gap between 1st and 3rd person accounts of the nature and character of autistic sociability, or lack thereof (Catala, Faucher and Poirier 2021; Boldsen 2022b). This discrepancy manifests through the stark contrast between the common discourse in autism that autistic persons are withdrawn from the social world and disinterested in social relationships and the desire to fit in with and relate socially and intimately to other persons expressed by many autistic persons. As one of my research participants described it,

»I also need physical contact. The worst thing is when people are scared to shake your hand and give you a hug because they think you won't like it, and it is so hard to ask for it. I need to feel another living person close to me – to feel that I am also alive« (Boldsen 2022a).

Perhaps the idea that autistic persons are inherently socially withdrawn, disinterested, or impaired stems from a poverty of research taking autistic approaches to social relatedness seriously. Here, phenomenological approaches to empirical research are significant resources through their ambition to reimagine the social world through the lens of autistic experiencing.

Describing the Structural Conditions of Autistic Intersubjectivity

In the following, I will briefly delve into some of the possibilities for understanding autistic intersubjectivity that emerged through the research process described above.

Graumann's idea of phenomenological psychology as a structural analysis of situations emphasized how structural features of the life-world form concrete conditions of subjective experience and action in the form of embodiment, materiality, spatiality, temporality, and the sociality of the subject-world relation. How to view autistic social experiences and practices within such a phenomenological framework? In the present study, the experiences described by the participants in the autism groups bore witness to the profound influence of sensory differences on the ability to interact fluently with others as well as the encounter with non-autistic social norms (Boldsen 2022b, 2022c). Following Graumann, a crucial part of a critical phenomenological methodology consists in the active tracing of how such conditions of experience are limiting and confining for autistic persons in their social and societal life. For example, how is the deep sense of disconnection from others often reported by autistic persons related to how we design societal spaces and the ingrained and historical and cultural sedimentation of social norms? One autistic young woman described how eye contact instituted a profound unsettlement in her:

»It's very overwhelming. [...] It feels like they can see more. Like, they see me, and I see them, and then I feel insecure about how they see me. Like, how they look back. [...] I'm looking at them, and I can see that they are observing me, and that makes me insecure because there is something that I feel like I'm not seeing or something that I do not really know how to, like, see. [...] It's like there is a link missing between my perspective and how others experience it. I'm missing a bridge between the two. There is just a gap. [...] There is a bridge between me and the other person, and I think they can cross that bridge, but I cannot do it because there is a gap that does not exist for them« (Boldsen 2022c, 7).

This sense of insecurity of the other's gaze and perspective has usually been explained with an impaired ability to empathize with and understand others' feelings and beliefs. However, what this woman describes is rather a deep-seated feeling of lack of reciprocity, relationality, and connectedness with others. Social experience in autism is strongly impacted by sensorimotor differences that tend to disrupt the sense of presence and closeness to others in social settings that are often sensorially overwhelming (e.g., background chatter, bright lights, or social touch such as handshakes or hugs). What the participants relayed to me was thus not an impaired ability to socialize as such but rather a profound sense of estrangement from others related to the insecurity of trying to meet the norms and demands of social situations while having to endure the sensory and psychological stress of trying to fit in (see Hull et al. 2017 for further discussion).

From a phenomenological perspective, the feeling of estrangement from the social world experienced by autistic persons becomes a structural feature of the autistic life-

world and a pervasive condition of experience that colors how the world and others can be sensed, felt, and interacted with. As such, a phenomenological analysis of autistic experiences does not only lead us back to the structures of autistic subjectivity but also to its normative, bodily, material, social, and historical conditions. And importantly, to how such conditions constrain autistic persons' action possibilities in a shared world.

Knowledge of Autism or Autistic Knowledge?

In my work with autistic youth, I learned that autistic social experiences not only refer to a certain form of experiencing that we can term autistic but also to the sometimes conflictual encounter between manifold ways of navigating the social world. Exploring the structures of experience, whether it be autistic or non-autistic varieties, relies on the central task of understanding and relating to each other despite differences in ways of experiencing and interacting with the world. This is an important part of how we have laid out the notion of *Je-Meinigkeit* and the fundamental sociality of the subject across the fields of critical psychology and phenomenology. On a practical level, recognizing the other as a co-equal center of intentionality implies a demand on the researcher to move closer to the participants' style of being and communicating to enable the other's possibility of action, interaction, and expression.

This feature of phenomenological methodology provides a crucial means to include marginalized and disabled voices and perspectives in the process of knowledge production and create a firmer basis for what Catala and colleagues (2021) have termed *epistemic enablement*. They suggest that autistic persons live in a world of »epistemic disaffordances« that prevent them from being considered meaningful epistemic agents. Such disaffordances take many forms. In everyday social encounters, autistic social and communicative practices are often misunderstood or disqualified, such as stimming, avoiding eye-contact, or delayed response times (Donnellan, Hill and Leary 2013). Both popular and scientific stereotypes and discourses surrounding autism negatively impact the credibility and perceived relevance of autistic persons' own experience and testimony (Yergeau and Huebner 2017). In this context, it is a task for the phenomenological researcher to consider epistemic enablement throughout the research process by accommodating autistic ways of communicating and interacting. A phenomenological study of autism ultimately aims to reimagine the world through the lens of autistic experiencing rather than taking autistic experience, consciousness, or subjectivity as an object of study. The aim is thus not only to improve our understanding of what autism is but also to illuminate sociality from an autistic perspective, thus enabling a more inclusive and nuanced view on the shared social situations and encounters where friction often occurs between autistic and non-autistic forms of interaction and experience.

With this understanding of phenomenological methodology, I concur with one of the central ethical issues of autism research posed by Hens, Robeyns, and Schaubroeck (2019), namely the tension between producing *knowledge of autism* and producing *autistic knowledge*, where the latter is understood as a precondition for the former. In other words, knowledge of autism should always include autistic knowledge and take autistic experiences and perspectives as its basis. Although phenomenological research methods have typically not been characterized as participatory approaches, I believe that there is much promise in developing phenomenological methodology in this direction. Phenomenological psychology inevitably involves considering the perspectives and insights of autistic persons as the most valuable source of knowledge on autism. In this context, a phenomenological approach can help counteract the epistemic injustices faced by autistic persons due to the disparity between first- and third-person accounts of autistic sociability, where autistic testimony is often ignored in favor of stereotyped beliefs that autistic persons are fundamentally asocial.

Toward Creating Socially More Just Knowledge Development across Ages

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC; UN 1989) with its Articles 12 and 13 not only assures the child as a judicial entity the right to freely express their views, but also the right to be formally heard in any matter affecting them. However, and this is a central limitation, the views of the child are to be »given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child« (Art. 12, UN 1989). The latter formulation opens up for endless debates among and across researchers, politicians, lawyers, child administrators, and all kinds of other pedagogical, educational, and psychological experts on how to best relate age to maturity to the proper weight children are to be granted in matters affecting their everyday life. By clinging to the UNCRC's deontological reasoning, the discourse continues to focus on abstract notions of >the child,< or rather on debates about which adult is to have the best interpretation of children's experiencing and action to most optimally determine when the child should be listened to and with what weight. Reading this discourse through the lens of Fricker's (2007) earlier introduced concept of *epistemic injustice*, the notion of >maturity< arguably already installs testimonial injustice, in that the less mature a child is deemed, the less credible its expressions are considered. Hermeneutical injustice may follow suit, in that parents and professionals are to then interpret children's >truly intended< meanings and needs. Coupled with the authoritative power of academic knowledge creation, such a logic can lead to what Teo (2010) has termed *epistemologically violent actions*: actions that are of detrimental effect to another's every-

day life given specific ways of interpreting empirical material on behalf of a whole group of people.

By instead following a subject-scientific, collective methodology of *mutual learning* through engaging in what has been termed *co-research* with children in order to find out what matters to them (Højholt and Kousholt 2019), it is possible to study what matters to *us* concretely, irrespective of age, in the situated daily life that *we* as fellow, intersubjectively entangled subjects, come to inhabit together. While such necessarily situated knowledge may not be able to result in any definite recommendations on how children will most effectively contribute to the society of the future, it can depart from the intersubjectively and more immediately sensed and perceived, to find out how always unique and yet similar experiences are mediated through the conditions of reality that all co-researching participants can more generally relate to and potentially change if deemed relevant together. To this end, the acknowledgment of *Je-Meinigkeit* is a pivotal entry point for the researcher, just as it may be for professionals working with children, just as it may be for anyone else, to collectively engage in processes of *>soziale Selbstverständigung<* through mutually learning from each other's diverging perspectives and knowledges on matters of general relevance.

Investigating the Relevance of Technology Together across Ages

On the basis of such a phenomenologically inspired, collective methodology across ages, the relevance of implementing digital and any other technology in an early childhood institutional setting cannot be meaningfully studied by exclusively studying the children's experiences and actions with technology. Their perspectives on their experiences and actions are part of a concretely situated relational ensemble, co-arranged by pedagogical educators, parents, the leadership, administrators, at times psychologists, and many more – including the early childhood researcher who is writing these lines (Chimirri). By focusing on the interplay of perspectives of those who manifestly do the institutional everyday life, of which the researcher became part of through longitudinal participation and innumerable conversations and fellow engagements, it is possible to help create conceptual knowledge on how daily life with technology is done in relation to what is deemed necessary and wishful by the different persons developing this practice – including (partly very young) children.

An example from a Danish kindergarten, described in detail in Chimirri (2019a), illustrates the *>soziale Selbstverständigung<* about each other's perspectives on how digital and analogue technology can be meaningfully drawn on in the pedagogical context of preparing, staging and performing a theatre piece co-authored by professionals

and preschool children, a project that lasted several months. The whole storyboard was co-constructed across kindergarten groups and early childhood educators, background music co-selected and incorporated into the story, photos of the neighborhood were taken by the children as background images for the stage projection, while at the same time props such as flags, critters, weaponry, costumes, etc., were designed and made by children, professionals and parents, with some of the artifacts getting later digitalized again (such as the cardboard dragon) to be used as animation in the background.

The entire process was executed in an enormously explorative manner, one could also say: in a very time-consuming, at times somewhat unstructured manner. But for the educators, it was not the main point to create the perfect stage performance, as it neither was for the children. The point was to invite for a social life that, without the imagined theatre piece as *common cause* (see Axel 2020), alongside its function of giving a proper farewell to the children before they head off to school, would have been difficult to experience together. It was the intersubjective, collective exploration of one's experiences and intended actions that counted. In that sense, this pedagogical project approximated what Højholt and Kousholt (2019) call *mutual learning with co-researchers*: The children became fellow researchers of the educators' initially set problem of how to stage a fun and inclusive stage play that bridges digital and analogue technology of various kinds, and co-developed creative processes and products, concepts and knowledges together with them that could render such an exploration meaningful to each one of them. Each contributor took each-their learning and knowledge with them, including the researching author.

To what extent children in such a setup ought to be coined >co-researchers,< given that what they did research on, how they engaged in it, and toward what outcome, was largely framed by the educators, is part of current debates in critical-psychological practice research (see Chimirri 2023, 2019b; Chimirri and Pedersen 2019). As I will argue below, to me this terminology only makes sense if making the researcher a co-equal researcher to the children's and other participants' investigative inquiries, in spite of potentially different epistemic interests. This includes systematically acknowledging the researcher's (critical) contribution to the other's learning.

What the Researcher's Technological Setup Can Contribute With

To render the early childhood researcher's role in these knowledge creation processes more visible, I will now shortly let you in on how my own knowledge of how technology can become a relevant part of everyday life for children and potentially anyone else was significantly expanded in a situation in which I did not at all search for this

knowledge. At another early childhood institution in Denmark than the one described above, I got interested in how one kindergarten boy, who largely tended to ignore me while I was participating in the pedagogical practice, was playing with a specially designed set of bricks that can be three-dimensionally connected to each other (called >PlusPlusser<). I cannot recall why I asked, but I inquired whether I may take a photo with my digital camera of his activity. He answered >yes, but wait,< and started re-assembling the bricks in his hand. Once he had finished forming a rectangle, he turned towards me, and said: >now that I also have a camera, you can.< And while I was lifting my camera up toward my face, he lifted his up to his face, covered one eye with his hand, so that I too got >photographed< while he got photographed. With this episode, our relation to one another changed. Not that we became best friends, but we acknowledged each other's presence and engagements differently, we shared a joint story rendered possible by each our technological means. In my interpretation, we established a different sociality, creating the grounds for future collaborative efforts that however did not continue for long, as I had to finish fieldwork shortly after due to the leadership getting exchanged. But who knows, we may meet again, and if we recognize each other, we may draw on the experiential learning that he plus his bricks can be a co-researcher to my social and material investigations, and that I plus my camera can be a co-researcher to his social and material investigations of what it means to be a researcher.

Why Phenomenological-Psychological Researchers Ought to Make Themselves Explicitly Available to the Other's Epistemic Interests

In more recent projects, I have attempted to make my inevitable social contribution to the relational phenomena I am studying a more explicit resource for my (potential) co-researchers' intended learning, be they children or adults, to further specify how we can do research together based on the acknowledgment of each other as co-equal centers of intentionality. If children invite me into their play, why not interact? If they ask for my knowledge, why not try to provide a meaningful answer, or be honest about not knowing or not being interested and ask back what the other thinks instead? Is the co-developing and sharing of knowledge not my institutionally supported contribution to developing sociality and society together? Why not also engage in this on the spot, while >in the field,< instead of sharing my analytical insights only a posteriori, and then, however, never with children, seldomly with educators and institutional leaders, most often exclusively with academic colleagues? What if I can contribute with something that not merely *I* deem relevant for others to know, but that is actively asked by those who I invite to be my co-researchers, from

each their subjective perspectives? Can I not at the same time become and be *their* co-researcher, helping them investigate what they deem relevant to investigate, so that we potentially can find knowledge matters of common interest that we would then co-investigate together? Such as: how we can identify the dead trees in a forest that we can then saw into, as one of the early childhood institutions invited the children to explore while I was present? Even though we never came to any conclusive answer to this question, as there were innumerable beetles, worms and other inhabitants also living in the apparently >dead< trees, it was the social knowledge development process that each one of us contributed differently to what was of joint relevance. We made it a collective exploration, a process of >soziale Selbstverständigung<, about what could be interesting to learn about in the forest setting we shared, now and in the future.

By a stroke of luck, I was recently invited by two early childhood educators to help them with evaluating their long-term forest project. I said that while I am not interested in evaluating their practice, I am however interested in learning about how and why they run their pedagogical project. At the same time, I can help them with developing a conceptual language for better communicating the value of their project. From this arose a wonderfully mutual knowledge exchange setup, based on participating in each other's pedagogical and research practices, me being in their forest, them facilitating a workshop, giving feedback on applications and chapters, and soon co-authoring a research article, us engaging in collective analyses of each our (potentially critical) contributions to society. Each of our >je mein< epistemic interests were maintained by developing them through mutual knowledge exchange and learning about our experiences and actions, as adults, with children, and together with potentially anyone else. It is in this sense that the phenomenological Je-Meinigkeit – an acknowledgment of each other as co-equal centers of intentionality, and of each other's invaluable subjective epistemic contribution to learning about something of more general relevance or value – in my understanding constitutes the foundation of the necessarily society-critical methodological collectivism of subject-scientific critical psychology.

Concluding Remarks

Finally, let us return to the question of the critical potential of the phenomenological methodology based on the concept of Je-Meinigkeit. Subject-scientific critical psychology offers two entry points into this debate: the concept of >soziale Selbstverständigung< and the concept of >co-researcher,< each of which invite for collective processes of >mutual learning< from each other's subjective experiencing and acting.

As we have argued, these concepts have an evident foundation in Holzkamp's reading of phenomenological sources and resonate with central theoretical points from Husserl's late phenomenology and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body. We began this article by taking up some of the common criticisms targeting phenomenological psychology, most notably the charge of methodological individualism and societal naïveté. We have argued that such critiques rest on a crucial misunderstanding of the phenomenological understanding of subjectivity and experience. By reading Husserl's phenomenology through Holzkamp and Graumann, we have argued that taking subjective experience as the ontological and epistemological starting point of psychological research enables societal critique and invites social and collective action. In the context of autism research and early childhood studies, we have exemplified how phenomenological methodology facilitates understandings of the experiences of such marginalized groups that critically reflect the normative and societal structures that disable and devalue their perspectives. An important part of this necessarily collective methodology is the ambition of creating epistemic relationality between the researcher and the researched on the grounds of acknowledging each other as co-equal centers of intentionality. This calls for further development of phenomenological psychology within a critical-participatory research paradigm that can reflexively deal with the inherently intersubjective character of both the phenomenological research process and its object of investigation: the subject and its lifeworld.

Endnote

- 1 With inspiration from Dan Zahavi's 2008 monograph on investigating the first-person perspective, critical psychologist Ernst Schraube proposed the concept of *coequal center of intentionality*. Schraube (2013) writes: »As I experience myself and the world from my perspective, and act in the world from my perspective and standpoint, then logically the other also experiences her/himself and the world from her/his perspective and acts from her/his perspective and standpoint in the world. This reflexive reciprocity of the subjects' first-person perspectives in human relations can be characterized as a *symmetrical reciprocity of the first-person perspective* or as *intersubjective symmetry* and is a fundamental distinguishing feature of human sociality. Human sociality builds on intersubjective symmetry and the reciprocal recognition of the other's first-person perspective. Social thought is therefore actually symmetrical thought and has to be based on an understanding of the other as *coequal* center of intentionality and origin of her/his agency and on an inclusion of the other's interests, perspectives and standpoint« (25; original emphases). We find this concept helpful for underlining that this form of ›equality‹ always presupposes the relationship between me and an other: we are necessarily together in acknowledging each other's intentionality. However, we hyphenate ›co-equal‹ to emphasize that, while this symmetry may be a given, it still requires the agentic epistemic acknowledgment of each other as co-equal to engage its critical potential.

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