

“Toward a psychology of everyday living” – A review of Schraube, E. & Højholt, C. (eds.) (2016). *Psychology and the Conduct of Everyday Life*. New York: Routledge.

Teemu Suorsa

Faculty of Education, University of Oulu
Oulu, Finland

Introduction

Psychology and the Conduct of Everyday Life is a new book from Routledge, edited by Ernst Schraube and Charlotte Højholt from Roskilde University, that strives to bring psychology out of the laboratory and beyond individual heads toward the everyday lives of human beings in contemporary contradictory societies. The book begins with a clarifying and forward-looking Introduction that presents the concept of the *psychology of everyday living* and gives an account of the formation and challenges of this approach in psychology. The Introduction also gives a nice overview of the 13 articles included in the book. The articles are written by researchers from Europe, North America and Oceania who come from the fields of psychology, sociology, anthropology, and philosophy. Even though it is mainly European and psychological, the composition of the book reminds the reader of the meaning of keeping the discussions open globally and with relation to other disciplines.

The editors suggest in the Introduction that the approaches presented in the book also direct psychological attention beyond the individual and his/her immediate social relations “to the social conditions in and with which the people act, participate and live their everyday life” (Højholt & Schraube, *PCEL*, p. 1). The concept of the conduct of everyday life also “includes the question of how people are subjected to socio-material dispositions of power, knowledge and discourse” (Højholt & Schraube, *PCEL*, p. 1). In addition, the editors suggest that the emerging psychology of everyday living would be able to facilitate explorations of “emerging new ways of everyday living and how these contribute to

remaking the social world” (Højholt & Schraube, *PCEL*, p. 1). For those who do not think that this sounds like a proper scientific psychology, the editors explain that the idea is precisely to “promote fundamental renewal of psychological theory, methodology and practice” (Højholt & Schraube, *PCEL*, p. 1).

The book shows that this renewal was not invented yesterday, but stems from decades of theoretical and empirical work. And, even though the emphasis is on German–Scandinavian critical psychology – or: Critical Psychology, as many of the authors put it – there are also authors who do not start with this tradition, but come to everyday life from different directions. As the editors explain, the relations between the authors (also those coming from the tradition of Critical Psychology) are not self-evident: the authors use the same or similar concepts in a somewhat different manner. The book is thus not an authoritative introduction to what the conduct of everyday life means and how it is to be researched. Rather, it is a new beginning that invites the reader to participate in the book’s worthy endeavours. Nevertheless, it is good for beginning and advanced students, as well as for research groups who wish to conduct research on the conduct of everyday life, as it discusses the concept, methodology and practice at different levels and in different contexts (e.g., in higher education, day care, and working with homeless men).

In this review, I begin with a discussion of the concept of the conduct of everyday life in sociology and in psychology. The discussion moves toward the transformative dimension of the conduct of everyday life, and the relationship between person and society in general. Next, I concentrate on the concept of “reasons for action”, which is central in many articles of the book with regard to researching the conduct of everyday life. I discuss the limits of reason, as well as the question of different languages in the making of the psychology of everyday living. Before concluding, I take a brief look at concrete examples of how to utilize and develop the concept of the conduct of everyday life in different contexts. I also address ideological individualism and the question of how psychological research can contribute to a more general striving toward the common good, instead of only advancing individual solutions. It goes without saying that my selective discussions leave out many important topics in the book. Nor does this review try to be – even my own – last word on the matters considered. Rather, this is the beginning of trying to think, write and discuss about some of the complex and important topics in the book.

The conduct of everyday life

Introducing the concept

The psychological concept of the conduct of everyday life is presented as originating from the tradition of Critical Psychology. Ole Dreier (*PCEL*, Chapter 1) starts the book with his article on *Conduct of Everyday Life – Implications for Critical Psychology* by describing the major steps in the development of this concept thus far. He also articulates the concept’s current status and challenges. Dreier (*PCEL*, p. 16) emphasizes that human beings “are not merely located in a situation”. Rather, their “immediate situation is a particular part of their ongoing everyday life” that contains “many different situations in different places and spheres of activity” (Dreier, *PCEL*, p. 16, 17). This presents a continuous challenge for persons to “coordinate their various activities, tasks and relationships with their various co-participants across different times and places” (Dreier, *PCEL*, p. 17). Acknowledging this, Dreier (*PCEL*, p. 16) argues, contributes to providing “a sufficiently solid, concrete grounding of a worldly approach to subjectivity”.

Sociological and psychological concept

The next chapters re-present the main originators of the concept, starting from Karin Jurczyk's, G. Günter Voss's and Margit Wehrich's account of subject-oriented sociology's concept of the conduct of everyday life. They also describe empirical research that has helped the researchers in the articulation of this concept (*PCEL*, Chapter 2). It is indeed a wonderful idea – in terms of clarifying the concept of the conduct of everyday life in Critical Psychology – to bring the very authors from whom Klaus Holzkamp (1927-1995) appropriated the concept, to explain their research on the conduct of everyday life. It was also Holzkamp's (*PCEL*, p. 69) suggestion that anyone interested in developing subject-scientific research on the conduct of everyday life should get to know the work of this research group. The book makes it very easy for the English speaking community to start carrying out this suggestion. 20 years after the publication of Holzkamp's manuscripts, it is also interesting to see how the sociologists describe the concept these days.

Holzkamp's manuscript, translated for this compilation (*PCEL*, Chapter 3), was originally published in German in the journal *Das Argument* in 1995. To begin with, the manuscript introduces Holzkamp's notions about overlooking everyday life in experimental psychology and psychoanalysis. Surely, there are researchers who would criticize Holzkamp for not discussing the notion of everyday life in other approaches to psychological research. On second thoughts, however, one realizes that his manuscript should be read as the beginning of something new, not as a finished steadfast claim. This is obvious, as the manuscript published here is indeed an unfinished manuscript. The idea of starting something new holds, however (I think), also for Holzkamp's earlier writings, for example his book *Grundlegung der Psychologie* (Holzkamp, 1983), where he pieced together and developed further the analyses that had taken place during the 1970s in the tradition of Critical Psychology. A worthwhile idea would be to turn the criticism into a request: who would discuss the critical psychological questions of the conduct of everyday life in relation to, for instance, existential and phenomenological approaches to psychological research?

After the critique of experimental psychology and psychoanalysis, Holzkamp introduces the concept of the conduct of everyday life in subject-oriented sociology. He starts by discussing to what extent the concept can be appropriated into the conceptual equipment of psychology from the standpoint of the subject. As I read Holzkamp's discussions and his concretizations of this concepts, for instance, with regard to the "subjective groundedness of the elementary cyclicity of the conduct of everyday life", they seem to be a kind of "phenomenological exploration" (Husserl) – or, if you wish: "empirical philosophy in theoretical psychology" (Brinkmann, 2015; see also Tim Ingold's article on *Walking, Imagining and the Education of Attention* (Ingold, *PCEL*, Chapter 4) – of which one cannot actually say where they would lead the explorer, if he had time to walk through all the paths that were opening up for him.

For Critical Psychology, which has emphasized that human existence must be seen as societally mediated, it is naturally interesting to focus on the concept of the conduct of everyday life that is seen as "a mediating category between subject and societal structures" (Holzkamp, *PCEL*, p. 88). One of Holzkamp's questions in his manuscripts was indeed: "How are we to reformulate this mediating relationship in the language of science from the standpoint of the subject" (Holzkamp, *PCEL*, p. 88)? For Holzkamp, it is the

“discourse of reasons” that opens up the psychological aspects of the conduct of everyday life. The possibilities for the action that persons realize, depend, as Holzkamp suggests, “on the reasons that they have – in accordance with their respective interests in life” (Holzkamp, *PCEL*, p. 89). With respect to interests, Holzkamp differentiates between a person’s “objective interests” and “my interests in life *as I experience them in my situation*” (Holzkamp, *PCEL*, p. 89). The discourse of reasons as scientific language of psychology seeks to take seriously a person’s own, experienced interests and subjective reasons without detaching them conceptually from “objective interests” and from objective societal conditions that determine the person’s action and experience – which in turn participate in maintaining and changing these conditions.

Holzkamp’s attempt to give the sociological concept of the conduct of everyday life a subject-scientific interpretation begins with the discourse of reasons and the particular subject-scientific interest of knowledge of self-understanding. This might, as Holzkamp suggests, require arriving “at *conceptualizations and research questions that go beyond the [sociological] approach*” (Holzkamp, *PCEL*, p. 88). The manuscript ends by pointing out that the sociological concept accentuates the conduct of everyday life as an ongoing active, integrative and constructive effort “through which everyday life is organized in the face of multiple requirements” (Holzkamp, *PCEL*, p. 96). The manuscript leaves the reader with the question: “What is it exactly that needs to be ‘integrated’ by the conduct of everyday life” (Holzkamp, *PCEL*, p. 96)?

Person and society

The sociological definition of the concept emphasizes first of all that the concept is defined primarily as practice. This also differentiates the concept, in Jurczyk’s, Voss’s and Weihrich’s (*PCEL*) account, for instance, from similar phenomenological concepts such as lifeworld and everyday life. The concept “emphasizes the element of personal construction and effort involved in life conduct, while simultaneously highlighting the fact that it should not be equated with the psycho-physical individual” (Jurczyk et al., *PCEL*, p. 48). The conduct of everyday life is also “not a social system or social entity” but instead “a system *sui generis*, which with its own form and logic inserts itself between the individual and society” (Jurczyk et al., *PCEL*, p. 48).

The idea that the conduct of everyday life is *between* the person and the society is interesting. It is even formulated that it is an “entity through which the person communicates with social spheres and thus with society as a whole” (Jurczyk et al., *PCEL*, p. 49). On the one hand, this concretizes the idea that Højholt and Schraube (*PCEL*, p. 1) present in the Introduction – that the emerging psychology of everyday living would be able to “facilitate explorations of emerging new ways of everyday living and how these contribute to remaking the social world” – as Jurczyk, Voss and Weihrich (*PCEL*, p. 49) write that “life conduct can simultaneously, through its clustering form typical patterns, have social percussions”. In this way, the authors suggest, “it can (co-)construct society and therefore has a potentially transformative dimension” (Jurczyk et al., *PCEL*, p. 49). On the other hand, placing the conduct of everyday life *between* the person and society raises questions about seeing the person and society as two separable entities (and the conduct of life as a third). One of the main arguments in Critical Psychology – and also more generally in socio-cultural psychology (e.g., Martin, 2006) – has been that if we conceptualize the person as a separate entity, extracting it from its surroundings, we end up talking about a ghost that does not really exist (Dreier, 2008). Talking about separate

entities here can perhaps be seen as a polite formulation where sociologists leave room for psychologists' expertise on personality. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to see whether and what kind of implications it would have for the sociology of the conduct of everyday life, if the (conceptual) divide between the person and society¹ were to be deconstructed.

Reasons and grounds

Subjective reasons for action are discussed further in Thomas Teo's article on *Embodying the Conduct of Everyday Life* (Teo, *PCEL*, Chapter 5). Teo suggests that adding "body-based critical concepts" to Holzkamp's critical psychology would help researchers "move with Holzkamp beyond Holzkamp" (Teo, *PCEL*, p. 111). In Teo's account, this suggestion implies that Holzkamp's critical psychology can be seen as "a progressive research program that is able to assimilate and accommodate critical traditions from inside and outside the West" (Teo, *PCEL*, p. 111). I do agree that interesting and fruitful points of resemblance can be found, for instance, with regard to the concepts of habitus, performativity and privilege, as Teo suggests. In general, discussing fine-grained body-based critical concepts with relation to Critical Psychological concepts can also help in accentuating the objectives of Critical Psychology that are evident in the concept of the conduct of everyday life, but also in earlier conceptual developments, e.g., in the way that psychoanalytical body-related concepts have been a part of the development of the science from the standpoint of the subject.

Reading Teo's description of subjective reasons one may get the impression that "reasons" refer only to rational reasons for action that the subject is conscious of. This is a common misunderstanding that Holzkamp and his colleagues tried to correct – and also tried to develop their formulations respectively – on several occasions (see e.g., Holzkamp, 1987/1986; Maiers, 1994), for instance, by emphasizing that they "definitely did not focus so intensively on human phylogenies only to say afterwards: a human being is only a societal being" (Holzkamp, 1984, p. 9). The idea that all human action and experience is grounded in (and mediated through) societal conditions rather means that it is always *in principle* possible to reconstruct this groundedness in psychological research with reference to different kinds of theories about societally produced meaning structures, also concerning bodies and privileges. The theories of societally produced meaning structures might be such as the one C. George Caffentzis describes in his article on the *Everyday Life in the Shadow of the Debt Economy* (*PCEL*, Chapter 9), or the one that Silvia Federici discusses in her article about the *emerging politics of commons* (*PCEL*, Chapter 10).² Admittedly, talking about "reasons" seems to invite critiques that utilize the discussions about Cartesian rationalism.

The German *Begründungen* is a different kind of concept in this regard: this is also the reason why I have personally preferred talking about subjective *grounds* for action (e.g., Suorsa, 2015). In my reading, Holzkamp's *Begründungen* can even carry the meanings related to Heideggerian conception of *dwelling* that Darin Hodgetts, Mohi Rua, Pita King and Tiniwai Te Whetu use in their article on the *Everyday Living Textured by*

¹ And even the divide between organism and environment, see e.g., Palmer, 2004.

² See e.g., Markard (1988) for a detailed description of using sociological theories in psychological research; see also Holzkamp, *PCEL*, p. 92.

Homelessness (*PCEL*, Chapter 6). Of course, the talk of Heidegger (e.g., Heidegger, 1997) with regard to *Begründungen* opens up new paths for the philosophy of Critical Psychology. For some this may seem to be far-fetched, but this path might actually prove to be worth taking, because Heidegger's thinking is an important undertone in many popular and/or important contemporary thinkers of society that may, for instance, help researchers to understand the possibilities and pitfalls of developing different kinds of indigenous or local ways of thinking (see e.g., Vadén, 2014; see also Teo, 2013 on the indigenous aspects of Holzkamp's critical psychology).

The translators of Holzkamp's (*PCEL*) manuscript use the term "reasons for action". They also talk, however, about the "groundedness" of e.g., the "elementary cyclicity of the conduct of everyday life" (Holzkamp, *PCEL*, p. 92). One way to interpret this might be to see reasons as a mundane concept that points toward the more foundational groundedness of human action and experience. Be that as it may, it will be interesting to continue the discussion of translating critical psychological concepts, related to the conduct of everyday life, into – or thinking them anew in – different languages. To me, it seems that the psychology of everyday living (Højholt & Schraube, *PCEL*) that addresses socio-material practices of everyday life inevitably raises the question of how to think and do research on the conduct of everyday life in different kind of societies and life forms that may entail moments that are difficult or impossible to articulate in any language other than the one that has been developing along that particular form of living. This is, of course, an important question for any "progressive research programme" that would be able to "assimilate and accommodate... traditions from inside and outside the West" (Teo, *PCEL*, p. 111).

Conducting research and developing practices

Højholt and Schraube note that "all the different approaches in this book discuss the conduct of everyday life as a fundamentally collective process" (Højholt & Schraube, *PCEL*, p. 6). They suggest that "shifting the notion of the conduct of life from single person's lives to the processes of arranging different but interwoven lives changes our understanding of routines in everyday life" (Højholt & Schraube, *PCEL*, p. 6). Charlotte Højholt explains this further in her article on *Situated Conflictuality and the Conflictuality of Children's Conduct of Life* (*PCEL*, Chapter 7). Højholt first points out some of the problems that arise when the psychological gaze is directed only toward an individual and his/her characteristics. Furthermore, she describes how these characteristics (for instance at school: lazy child, careless parent, sloppy teacher, straight-laced principal, etc.) and different perspectives on conflicts actually arise from (and can be analytically linked to) persons' "different positions, and their different types of responsibilities and contributions" (Højholt, *PCEL*, p. 154). Højholt emphasizes that different perspectives in a given situation are not "coincidentally different, but structurally different and structurally connected" (Højholt, *PCEL*, p. 154). One of the tasks of psychological research into conflictual coordination of conducts of everyday life is, accordingly, to "explore the *content* of these conflicts and analyze the contradictory conditions in relation to these conflicts" (Højholt, *PCEL*, p. 159). This can enhance the opportunities to "criticize structural inequalities and highlight the political conflicts with which the personal problems are entwined" (Højholt, *PCEL*, p. 154). The conflicts may also, if explored with proper conceptual and methodical tools, reveal new possibilities for cooperation in the contradictory conditions.

The concept of subjective reasons is also central for Højholt: “reasons point to subjective experiences of conditions related to conducting one’s life” (Højholt, *PCEL*, p. 160). Focusing on subjective reasons and analysing them further helps the researcher and participants to comprehend the structural connectedness of different perspectives in a given (conflictual) situation, and thus enhances the participants’ possibilities for more successful coordination within the (contradictory) conditions of their lives. Ute Osterkamp, in her article with relation to Theodor Adorno’s dictum “*There Is No Right Life in the Wrong One*” (Osterkamp, *PCEL*, p. 173), articulates a fundamental meaning of recognizing all participants’ reasons: “dismissing other people’s views and actions as groundless is tantamount to negating also our co-responsibility for creating the prerequisites for realizing a generalized agency and responsibility”, i.e. a human possibility of participating consciously into maintaining and changing our common living conditions.

Dorte Kousholt’s article on *Collaborative Research with Children* (*PCEL*, Chapter 13) explores further the thematic that Højholt discusses. Kousholt articulates the subject matter in practice research as “common problems in a common world” (Kousholt, *PCEL*, p. 246). This means that the focus is not “other people’s problems”, but what can be learned about problems in social practice by engaging with persons who have different perspectives, positions and engagements in relation to the matter in question” (Kousholt, *PCEL*, p. 246). It is also one of the challenges of the research to learn to see how the problems of and in an individual are actually common problems. Kousholt gives an example of her research with “wild boys” in a day care centre where the research contributed to the formulation of the problem by “breaking with the categorization of ‘wild boys’ as a homogenous group with the same characteristics” (Kousholt, *PCEL*, p. 248). She also goes further in describing the research process with relation to the researcher’s experiences and the nature of scientific knowledge in general. She also describes the importance of arranging the research process in such a way that both the researcher and participants as co-researchers can find the endeavour worth pursuing.

Even though both Højholt and Kousholt describe their research with relation to children, it seems that these articles include important formulations and insights into conducting subject-scientific research in general which can be concretized in different research contexts, for instance with regard to counselling or management. Concrete examples on how to utilize and develop the concept of the conduct of everyday life are also given in Ernst Schraube’s and Athanasios Marvakis’s article on *Digital Technologies and the Transformation of Students’ Learning and Conduct of Everyday Life* (*PCEL*, Chapter 11), as well as on Frigga Haug’s article on *Memory Work as a Method to Study the Conduct of Everyday Life* (*PCEL*, Chapter 12).

As I mentioned, Højholt and Schraube (*PCEL*) emphasize that all the authors of this book share the idea that the conduct of everyday life is a collective process. When articulating this collectivity, some of the authors also express a concern about the manifestations of ideological individualism. For instance, Federici (*PCEL*, p. 196) discusses the problems of pursuing individual solutions and a good life instead of investing in social struggles for the common good. Frigga Haug (*PCEL*) suggests one way of moving toward the common good through anticipatory memory work:

“As soon as one grasps the workings of society as constant change and movement in particular power relations, one finds out which dimensions are changeable and intervenes at that point. To

do so, one needs a compass to co-determinate the direction of change, that is, to create an image of the desired future as in, for instance, imagining a dismantling of power, the empowerment of all, a good life without fear, and so on.” (Haug, *PCEL*, p. 239)

Conclusion

It is not uncommon to hear the phrase that nowadays it is easier to imagine the end of all life on earth than imagine societal arrangements that are different from the predominant ways of organizing our societies (see e.g., Belt, 2015; Jameson, 2003). One possibility that I read from the book *Psychology and the Conduct of Everyday Life* is that research can provide material for common imagination in this regard: the psychology of everyday living articulates problems in current societies and in persons' conduct of everyday life, but, at the same time, it directs our attention to emerging ways of conducting and coordinating our lives and taking care of common matters. The articles in the book offer various points to seize upon when conducting this kind of research.

References

- Belt, J. (2015). Pääkirjoitus. *Niin & näin*, 4/15.
- Brinkmann, S. (2015). Empirical Philosophy Using Your Everyday Life in Theoretical Psychology. In J. Martin, J. Sugarman & L. Slaney (eds.) *The Wiley Handbook of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology: Methods, Approaches, and New Directions for Social Sciences* (pp. 409–423). New York: Wiley.
- Dreier, O. (2008). *Psychotherapy in everyday life*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Heidegger, M. (1997). *Der Satz vom Grund*. Martin Heidegger Gesamtausgabe 10, Hrsg. von Petra Jaeger. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann.
- Holzcamp, K. (1986/1987) Die Verkennung von Handlungsbegründungen als empirische Zusammenhangsannahmen in sozialpsychologischen Theorien: Methodologische Fehlorientierung infolge von Begriffsverwirrung. *Forum Kritische Psychologie* 19: 23–58.
- Holzcamp, K. (1984). "Die Menschen sitzen nicht im Kapitalismus wie in einem Käfig" Das PSYCHOLOGIE HEUTE Gespräch mit Klaus Holzcamp. In *Psychologie Heute*, November 1984, pp. 29–37. Retrieved from <http://www.kritische-psychologie.de/1984/die-menschen-sitzen-nicht-im-kapitalismus-wie-in-einem-kaefig> (pp. 1–11).
- Holzcamp, K. (1983). *Grundlegung der Psychologie*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus.
- Jameson, F. (2003). Future City. *New Left Review*, 21, 65–79.
- Maiers, W. (1994). Zur Einheit des "nomologischen" und des "intentionalen Denkmusters". *Forum Kritische Psychologie* 34: 39–45.
- Markard, M. (1988). Kategorien, Theorien und Empirie in subjektwissenschaftlicher Forschung. In J. Dehler & K. Wetzell (eds.) *Zum Verhältnis von Theorie und Praxis in der Psychologie. Bericht von der 4. internationalen Ferienuniversität Kritische Psychologie 1987 in Fulda* (pp. 49–80). Marburg: Verlag Arbeiterbewegung und Gesellschaftswissenschaft.
- Martin, J. (2006). Social cultural perspectives in educational psychology. Teoksessa: P. Alexander & P. Winne (eds.) *Handbook of educational psychology* (2nd ed) (pp. 595–614). Mahwah NJ: Erlbaum.
- Palmer, D. (2004). On the organism–environment distinction in psychology. *Behavior and Philosophy*, 32: 317–347.
- Suorsa, T. (2015). Solution-focused therapy and subject-scientific research into personal conduct of everyday living. *Outlines – Critical Practice Studies* 16(2).
- Teo, T. (2013). Backlash against American psychology: An indigenous reconstruction of the history of German critical psychology. *History of Psychology* 16(1): 1–18.
- Vadén, T. (2014). *Heidegger, Žižek and Revolution*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

About the author

Teemu Suorsa, PhD, is a psychotherapist working as a teacher and researcher at the University of Oulu (Research Unit of Psychology, Faculty of Education).

Contact: teemu.suorsa@oulu.fi <https://oulu.academia.edu/TeemuSuorsa>