

# Editorial

This is the first issue of a new English-language journal published annually by a group of researchers at the Department of Psychology, University of Copenhagen in cooperation with researchers in Sweden, Norway and Finland. It has sprung from an existing sister journal, "Nordiske Udkast", which continues to be published annually in Danish, Swedish and Norwegian by the same groups of researchers, and which was launched in 1995 as an extension of a Danish journal, "Udkast", founded in 1973. Outlines and Nordiske Udkast have national editorial boards in all four Nordic countries, combined by a main editor in Copenhagen, and it is possible to subscribe to both or one of them separately.

With the publication of Outlines we want to make Nordic research in critical social studies more widely known to readers outside of the Nordic countries and, at the same time, to include the Finnish research community more comprehensively. We want to strengthen the links between research within and outside of the Nordic countries by issuing a journal which contains Nordic and non-Nordic contributions alongside each other. In so doing, we hope to intensify discussions and mutual inspiration between researchers in many countries.

Outlines has its background in the work that has been done in the Nordic countries based on Marxist psychological positions such as Critical Psychology and Activity Theory. But, of course, the journal is also open to other positions and interested in

mutual discussion and inspiration among different positions which contribute to critical social studies. From its background in such psychological positions the journal reaches into other social sciences in order to include them in the unfolding of interdisciplinary critical social studies.

Outlines aspires to develop theoretical positions which combine the critique of science, professional practice, and social issues in order to intervene in public discourses and establish counter-discourses in various social fields.

Outlines provides a forum for theoretical debates about the relationships between individual subjects and social structures in subjects' lives in ongoing social practice. It is also crucial for our editorial policy to stimulate forms of social research in which theory and practice presuppose and move each other in reflected processes of development. Outlines seeks new paths between practiciness and academism which do not settle for a relationship between theory and practice in which the one is merely modeled in the image of the other. This implies a reflection on the socio-historical context and impact of science and knowledge. Outlines gives room for open, critical debates between different positions on the role of research and the self-understanding of institutions of research and higher education in our contemporary social formations.

As the name Outlines indicates, critical social studies are never complete. They report research and development efforts in the

midst of their emergence. An orientation towards the unfinished and the new is an inseparable component of critical research, and we prefer inventiveness and audacity to formal perfection. The unfinished nature of critical social studies provides their outgoing lines. Outlines are sketches full of living promises. They are contrasting lines pointing towards figures not yet clearly seen. They come to life in the richness of concrete social practice if they can make a difference in the field, in contemporary movements and public opinion. And it is by reaching out into social practice that theory may become self-critical.

This first issue provides a patchwork of themes and approaches in these matters. The range and the contrasts between the contributions, along with the way they relate to each other, in our view, evidence a fertile soil from which to cultivate critical academic undertakings.

Dreier's opening paper marks an important step in the development of his theory of subjectivity in social practices. Basic categories of a non-Cartesian psychology are the concern. 'Psychology', however, not seen as a well-bounded, taken-for-granted field of knowledge: the aim being to theorize social practice and subjectivity, the lines of division to sociology and social anthropology become problematic. To be sure, such problematization can be domesticated with the invention of a domain: "(critical) social psychology". But at a closer look, Dreier's ambition may be much more unsettling: it is to explore and unfold such concepts as participation, conduct of life, and life trajectory as pathways to a theory of personality proper.

How does such an essay in general psychology and social theory match with Engeström's empirical analysis of doctor-patient interaction? The institutions and discourses of theoretical psychology seem

wide apart from those of the Finnish health care provision. Yet, Engeström's scope is by no means limited to the pragmatics of an empirical analysis. When Engeström argues that "we have to be able to enter in and to step aside from the empirically constructed actuality", and states that "the world under interpretation gets constructed with the old meanings as well as with tensions of meanings which are attached with new action possibilities", the 'we' must be both researchers and people in everyday life. Might not the tensions of meanings that connect to action possibilities be provided also by theoretical discourses? Engeström's illuminating analysis clearly suggests as much – and uses that provision in the development of a theory of communicative action.

In any case, in both papers, 'empirically constructed actuality' is, as it were, side-stepped, in the sense that both work on the project of building a theory without explicit limits to its historical range of relevance. This marks them off from at least the first part of Forchhammer's paper in which we witness the historical emergence of (the discourse of) clients' perspectives in cancer treatment. Yet, Forchhammer's story concludes in the claim: "The next step is to take up the challenge of further development of concepts and theories from this critical perspective", which leads her to ask: "Do we really need a specific theory of life with illness?" Again, who are 'we'? It becomes evident, here, that 'we' are historically situated. No matter what may be the answer to Forchhammer's question, any theory, thus, is in one sense specific to 'us'. It may be argued that any theory which is limited in relevance to the needs of those who make it fails to be really a theory. But as Forchhammer's argument unfolds, it grows into a convincing support for the case that 'universality' and 'historicity' may be dialectical rather than mutually excluding opposites.

Perhaps this same tension is most evident in the two final papers. At the face of it, Fahl & Markard's approach to social practice is worlds apart from Goldberg's, not simply in time (about 7 years between the original writings) and place (Germany vs. Britain), but also in terms of the relations between general theory and historical discourse. In this respect the two papers represent the differences in the traditions of their origin. While the explicit ambition to found a new psychology characterizes German 'Critical Psychology', its British namesake is reputed for relentless deconstructions of any theoretical systems.

What makes us think that such a chasm can be bridged so far that placing the two papers alongside each other provides for a constructive debate? Is it merely an expression of our traditional Scandinavian ambition to reach into both a Continental and an Anglo-Saxon culture? No doubt, this reveals part of what *Outlines* is for – to give voice and space to the kinds of mediation thus facilitated by geographic and historical coincidence. But we hope it is more than that. Our aspiration is to make tensions of meanings that lead to new action possibilities – and we view the relations between Goldberg's and Fahl & Markard's contributions as tensions rather than distances.

It has been argued that what necessarily remains out of deconstructive reach is the very (post-modernist) theoretical framework of deconstruction. However, Goldberg's genealogy of humours disproves any such charges of a lack of self-critique. She sets out to show that "no concept is so mundane or 'natural' as to be immune to social analysis". Not only does the social analysis document a history of interiorisation and privatisation of humour; it also leads to problematizing the celebrations of irony, paradox, and

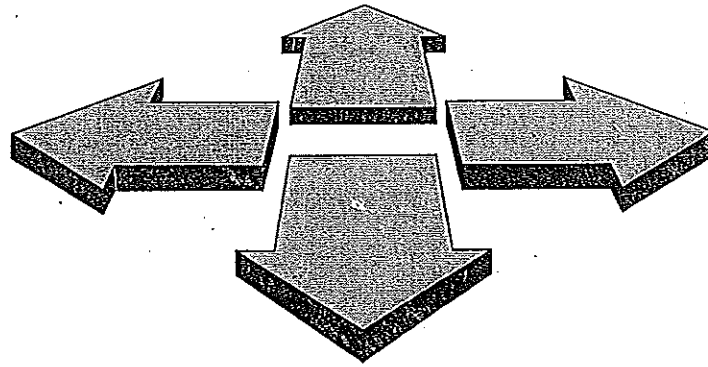
playfulness that give a place for humour in contemporary critiques of the prevailing modernist science. Goldberg identifies alternative theoretical pathways: does 'humour' subvert, or does it, in the shape of chaos theory, lead again into the project of a reconstruction of science, even parodying the quest for a Grand Unified Theory, or – on the contrary? – the craving for an 'achetypical', premodern form of knowledge?

Fahl & Markard, too, while clearly opposing any postmodernism, and while basing on, and contributing to, an explicit general psychological theory, are in the business of playful problematization and de-construction. In vivid empirical examples, we follow psychology, as a discipline, being reappropriated into the mundane contextuality of the everyday, as it provides a repertoire of professionals' ways of handling problems and accounting for rationality and expertise. Fahl & Markard do not accept this as fate. Rather, the evidence of a decline of any theoretically critical stance is counterposed by the project of building a critical psychology. But does this inevitably imply scientific phantasies of a universal Grand Theory? Anyone who considers that might ponder the significance of Fahl & Markard's concluding paragraph which begins: "These considerations should make evident that the development of a culture of discussion about practice is not simply an academic question, but rather an eminently practical problem with a dynamic that should not be underestimated."

And please note, at the very end, "Lewin's maxim that there is nothing more practical than a good theory". This places theoretical concerns at the core of the dynamic practical development of a 'culture of discussion'.

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