

Against the Luxury of Misunderstanding. Revisiting the Debate between Carl Ratner and Barbara Zielke on an Interview with Kenneth J. Gergen and his Theory of Social Constructionism

Jürgen van Oorschot & Lars Allolio-Näcke

Key words:

fundamental anthropology, activity theory, social constructionism, integrated kind of science, VICO

Abstract: In our contribution we revisit the debate in *FQS* between Carl RATNER and Kenneth J. GERGEN—the latter also represented by Barbara ZIELKE. First we discuss the hidden premises of each position. Second we give a short introduction to both authors' versions of psychology that *consequently* result from these premises. In doing this their fundamental thinking about anthropology and human nature in general will arise, and the reader will understand why the debate is so emotional. In summing up, we propose an integrated kind of science that is characterized by a productive dialogue between the positions.

Table of Contents

- [1. The Debate](#)
- [2. Fundamental Anthropology](#)
 - [2.1 Carl RATNER and materialism](#)
 - [2.2 Kenneth J. GERGEN and idealism](#)
- [3. The Self and its Relations to Society/Culture](#)
 - [3.1 Activity as a key concept for cultural psychology](#)
 - [3.2 Language as a key concept for cultural psychology](#)
- [4. Towards a Theory of Pragmatic Understanding](#)
 - [4.1 Activity and language](#)
 - [4.2 Towards an integrated kind of science](#)

[References](#)

[Authors](#)

[Citation](#)

The constructivist as well as the constructionist have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.¹

1. The Debate

What can the reader of the debate in *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* expect? It should be critical and—in the sense of the original Greek term *krínein*—help to decide and evaluate. Therefore, each evaluation needs criteria that form the basis of a well-grounded standpoint of reasoning. Actually, this was the intention of Carl [RATNER](#)—but he slides into a polemic. Who ever is interested in RATNER's as well as Kenneth J. [GERGEN](#)'s criticized standpoint needs to take a peek behind the scenes. He or she should look at that point where science ends, or better, where it begins again and again: "the belief"² or faith. [1]

2. Fundamental Anthropology

The debate between RATNER and GERGEN colorfully shows how important the fundamental preconditions of an understanding of reality, truth and insight are. These preconditions are the bases of our own idea of humankind. And this idea permanently influences our scientific work. Is reality ascertainable or not? Is language the only way to capture human reality or do we need other methods—psychological as well as metaphysical? Is it necessary that knowledge be produced within the same hermeneutical way of thinking or in small closed communities? Or is it better to open this thinking up to other intellectual resources? [2]

Behind all scientific questions and debates an unrecognized and unexplained set of preconditions can be found, what we call faith—absolute faith in somebody or something, in his or her thinking, feeling, and living. These preconditions can be called a fundamental anthropology³ that each person owns. The emotional debate of RATNER and GERGEN shows that these questions about the preconditions of thinking can distress one's own belief: the belief in one's own existence and action potency (*Handlungsfähigkeit*). In general, these questions are not answerable in scientific terms, as we can see in the debate. Claims like "There is no individual knowing subject" (GERGEN, 1991, 1994, 1999), as well as "man is a rational thinker and owns action potency" (RATNER, 2005, Topic 5), cannot be determined by scientific methods. [3]

1 The skilful reader is surely aware that this is a variation of the 11th thesis on FEUERBACH by MARX. The original is: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it" (ENGELS, 1969, pp.13f.)

2 RATNER uses the term *belief* numerous times to ask for the implicit preconditions of *social constructionism*. From a German perspective, this term is too rational. "Faith" would be the better term, but in a more complex sense than ZIELKE's "religious belief" (ZIELKE, 2006, paragraph 4).

3 Fundamental anthropology is not just asking for material aspects of ideas of individuals, furthermore, it picks the epistemological preconditions of these aspects as central themes. We use the term "fundamental anthropology" in analogy to "fundamental theology," and sometimes it is used as the antithesis of HEIDEGGER's "fundamental ontology."

Unlike the constructionist, the materialist's faith becomes certainty, i.e. "there *is* a reality and we *are able* to grasp it." Or in RATNER's words: "[T]here is a common reality to be understood, and also [...] a common way to understand it" (RATNER, 2004, paragraph 7). But the constructivist as well as the constructionist is aware that his or her faith is just an individual one. Consequently he or she uses the term *relativism*, i.e. "there *is* reality, but we *are not able* to grasp it. But we can describe its interpretations." Or in GERGEN's words:

"Likewise, constructionism itself should not be considered a universal truth; it too is a view that emerges from social process. As you can see, the constructionist is not, then, interested in truth as a scientific outcome—or at least truth with a capital 'T'—a universal or transcendent propositional network. There may be local truths, established within various scientific fields, within the various communities of humankind, and these must surely be honored from within the traditions of these communities. However, the future well-being of the world community depends on facilitating dialogue among these local traditions. Declarations of truth beyond tradition are, in this sense, a step toward tyranny and, ultimately, the end of communication" (MATTES & SCHRAUBE, 2004, paragraph 13). [4]

In the debate we can see that nobody is explicitly talking about one's own faith and the preconditions of reasoning, so both talk at cross-purposes. Without explicitly talking about these preconditions and the resulting image of man, they are neither able to understand the viewpoint of the other nor are they able to debate in the sense of a dialogue. This is necessary to accept differences and gain new insights: if we can accept the differences in preconditions we will be able to work together on one problem. Knowing that the own position is limited and that other positions are also limited is the precondition of multi-perspectiveness—even though this will never be complete. If we do not reach this point, our debates will remain on the level of accusation. Furthermore, our arguments remain pseudo-scientific and this causes misunderstanding. To avoid this, we first try to reveal the *fundamentum*, the faith (Glauben) and its preconditions in both authors, GERGEN and RATNER. In doing this, we try to show why both argue the way they do. [5]

2.1 Carl RATNER and materialism

Paradigmatically, Carl RATNER represents materialism, furthermore, the historical materialism that was established by Karl MARX. Marxism is based on two basic ideas: (1) historical materialism is a historical positivistic theory of development and (2) an inversion of HEGELian idealistic dialectics (HEGEL, 1830, pp.118ff.). According to HEGELian dialectics our world is constituted by antitheses. If these antitheses "merge," they produce an "absolute truth," a world without any inconsistency. MARX transfers this idea into his own social theory, but does not think of the world in terms of an idealistic standpoint. He rather thinks from the standpoint of practice: social "existence precedes consciousness." [6]

That Carl RATNER can be labeled a Marxist, can be seen in his fascinating *relecture* on MARX's "Theses on FEUERBACH." RATNER accuses GERGEN of scientism, meaning truth is a question of axioms and not a question of reality (see the example of craziness that RATNER, 2005, paragraph 28 gives; a different constructivist position is represented by ZIELKE, 2006, paragraph 7). This accusation repeats the thesis: "The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth—i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice" (ENGELS, 1969, pp.13f.). When RATNER criticizes the relativism of truth in GERGEN's conception, he echoes the third thesis (see RATNER 2004, paragraph 7), with the pathos of a teacher this means "it is essential to educate the educator himself" (ENGELS, 1969, pp.13f.). In doing so, he promotes his own "objective truth" (RATNER, 2005, paragraph 13-14). When RATNER is criticizing solipsistic systems and when he argues that each individual is embedded in a social or cultural system, he repeats the sixth thesis: "But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations" (ENGELS, 1969, pp.13f.). The accusation that GERGEN has a bourgeois attitude (see RATNER, 2005, paragraph 18) repeats theses nine and ten about bourgeois society: "The standpoint of the old materialism is civil society; the standpoint of the new is *human* society, or social humanity" (ENGELS, 1969, pp.13f., our emphasis). Finally, RATNER's critique culminates in the accusation of neutrality and intolerance (see RATNER, 2004, paragraph 5) that corresponds to thesis eleven: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it" (ENGELS, 1969, pp.13f.). [7]

What this argumentation unveils is a kind of realism that is centered on the scientific paradigm. That is also the reason why RATNER's examples—except that of the genes—are examples from chemistry and physics. With that attitude he *must* argue that there is an "objective truth" (see ZIELKE, 2006, paragraph 2): there is a truth outside and we can grasp it. Reading this together with his critique, we could formulate RATNER's psychology in the following words: "If circumstances in (social) reality are well organized, then mind will be healthy." [8]

2.2 Kenneth J. GERGEN and idealism

The scientific usage of the term "constructivism" is mostly influenced by the sociological works of BERGER and LUCKMANN (1966), but the epistemological idea of constructionism is quite older. Giovanni Battista VICO formulated this idea in the early 18th century. He declined the exploration of the human mind with the help of scientific⁴ methods as a counter-movement to the scientific and rational philosophy of DESCARTES. According to VICO's critique DESCARTES' anthropology misinterprets man to be an objective observer of the world, rather than a constructor of his world by meaning and symbols.⁵ Or as Paul

4 We here use the term "scientific" in the same sense as RATNER does in his texts. We use this term to exclusively refer to sciences (physics, chemistry, biology etc.). If we refer to science as an umbrella term for all disciplines, we use the term "scientific."

WATZLAWICK formulates: "Constructivism is the examination of how human beings construct their own realities" (1986, p.115, our translation). [9]

As we have seen, a constructivist worldview does not mean per se there is no objective world "out there" that can be explained by scientific principles.⁶ This means that we are not able to uncover reality, rather we invent (construct) our perceived reality (Wirklichkeit). Or in other words: *verum* and *factum* do not coincide in human action and insight.⁷ The human being can only gain truth by constructing it by thoughts, language, and history. The narrowness of human understanding is therefore the origin of the interpreting (*percipiendi*), compounding and distinguishing (*componendi secernendique*), as well as the arguing (*rationandi*) science (see VICO, 1982, p.83). The world of this productiveness is the world of probability. This world should be obtained in an integrated manner—that is a reaction to the dominance of critique in DESCARTES' philosophy. Reason *and* fantasy, logic *and* action—nothing can be separated (see VICO 1947, pp.36f.). The world—as a human world—is always an interpreted and constructed world; incidentally, an idea that was almost erased from the history of psychology. Today in academic psychology—especially educational psychology—the term "constructivist" is used as an empty word that refers to the fact that the outcome of learning depends on the learner's experience; or it functions as a placeholder for scaffolded learning (see e.g. MOLL, 1990 and WINEGAR & VALSINER, 1992). [10]

Just beyond the halls of the academy the constructivist idea that people can only refer to facts and artifacts that are their own creations kept alive, for example, systemic therapy. Systemic therapy deals with problems of human relations or partnerships, as well as relations between individuals and groups. The basic idea of this therapy is best formulated by WATZLAWICK: "It is only important what construction is the best and most human" (2001, p.22, our translation). [11]

Kenneth GERGEN is trained in this therapeutic approach. In fact, he is not interested in *how* the world works as long as he has a plausible explanation that it works. One example:

"One audience group had commented that the couple seemed to have an addiction to crisis. Another group, referring to a local spot that was known as the Bungee Capital

5 VICO's constructivism is part of a philosophy of history of wide comprehension that thinks the divine presage can only gain its intentions via the mental construction of the world. VICO's interweaving of human and divine acting during history can be read as a precursor to HEGEL.

6 In VICO's conception this corresponds to the separation of nature and history. But only in the latter does he unfold the idea of constructivism that is analogous to the gods acting: "The divine truth is what God identifies, arranges and creates. In the same manner, the human truth is what man can know, compose and create. So in this sense, science is realization (Erkenntnis) of how things develop; a realization that creates things by composing their elements" (our translation). (et quemadmodum verum divinum est quod Deus, dum cognoscit, disponit ac gignit, ita verum humanum sit, quod homo, dum novit, componit item ac facit: et eo pacto scientia sit cognitio generis, seu modi, quo res fiat, et qua, dum mens cognoscit modum, quia elementa componit, rem faciat) (VICO, 1979, pp.36f.). So he can say: "'Verum esse ipsum factum'—The truth is the creation itself" (ibid, pp.34f., our translation).

7 *Verum* and *factum* only coincide in the notion of God as well as in God's creative harmony of action and insight (see VICO, 1979, p.37).

of North America, likened their relationship to a pair of married bungee jumpers. The couple objected to the first idea but warmly accepted the second. Operations like this replace the usual expert model for diagnosis with a less pejorative one" ([GERGEN, HOFFMAN & ANDERSON, 1996, p.109](#)). [12]

All is good that ends well: the problem is solved. Why the couple is in crisis is not interesting. As long as they accept the idea of being a pair of married bungee jumpers and they can manage their lives with the help of this idea, everything is in good order. Analogous to RATNER we can sum up GERGEN's psychology: "If everything is good in mind, perceived reality is also well."⁸ [13]

Insofar as GERGEN's ideas are part of the constructivist paradigm, even though he does not favor the word "constructivist" we can see in his self-characterization a "constructionist." GERGEN created this new label in the 1980's to mark his differences from BERGER and LUCKMANN (1966) as well as the psychological constructivism, e.g. PIAGET (see ZIELKE, 2004, p.204). He therefore argues that constructivism "essentializes" material as well as the mental things (GERGEN, 1994, p.67). Now it can be understood, why GERGEN declines every reference to the material world—even though he already fails in the usage of words. He must speak as a scientist of experience and refer to the reality of everyday life to explain and make terms plausible (see ZIELKE, 2004, p.227). He knows about this problem as we can read in the interview:

"With this said, if I am to write at all I will necessarily have to privilege some set of words in my descriptions and explanations. As a result, these words will seem to make claims to the real. They will appear to be what you call remnants of substantialism. If we are to use a language of nouns, we can scarcely escape this tendency" (MATTES & SCHRAUBE, 2004, paragraph 21).

"The challenge is thus to create an alternative reality, one that binds us together, renders us inseparable. One problem I confront in generating such a picture is that our language for relationship is already wedded to an individualist tradition. We understand relationship as 'between two or more independent entities'. As a theoretical poet, this tradition poses a problem, and invites ways of conceptualizing the self as always already a matrix of relationships. The challenge is to begin with the assumption of relational process, out of which the very discourse of "individual entities" becomes intelligible" (ibid, paragraph 22). [14]

If we do not need a material basis—that is realized in the form of a sensual experiencing and acting subject—it seems to be plausible just to rely on language and words, as GERGEN does. In his theory this culminates in a non-personal term of discourse (see ZIELKE, 2004, pp.255f.). But such a non-personal term of discourse privileges social functionality compared to pragmatic semantics (see ibid, p.255). Psychology, as his credo pronounces, does not need a human subject or an objective world. Only mind (*Geist*) and its productions are important. [15]

⁸ We knowingly use the term *perceived reality* here because the German word *Wirklichkeit* refers to something different than *Realität*.

Insofar as RATNER is a materialist; we can say GERGEN is an idealist. This means mental being is the basis for material being, not vice versa. We agree with RATNER when he accuses such approaches to be "mentalist views of culture":

"A good deal of scholarship in cultural psychology construes culture as shared concepts and understanding of things. These social concepts are seen as molding psychological processes. From this perspective, both culture and psychological processes are mental. The relationship between culture and psychology is an interaction of mental processes" ([RATNER, 1996, p.407](#)). [16]

Obviously, GERGEN's psychology is no longer a psychology, rather it is linguistics. He views the individual, culture and action as ideas, texts within texts: "The semantic link between world and word, signifier and signified, is broken" (GERGEN, 1994, p.44). But texts gain their meaning in differentiation from other symbols and texts and do not need an idea of knowledge, experience, and other relevant psychological constructs, because "if the texts of the culture are without authors, actions are without underlying agents" (GERGEN, 1991, p.106). We can conclude that GERGEN's psychology is part of the humanities' paradigm, RATNER's psychology is part of the scientific paradigm. [17]

The debate first repeats the positivist dispute of centuries ago⁹ and then repeats the antagonism of culture and society/civilization or *cultural patterns/social structures* that culminated in the split of ethno-science one century before. The dispute led to an American version (e.g. Alfred KROEBER) and an English version (e.g. William H. RIVERS). The former analyzes "culture" under a historical and comparative view and labels itself *cultural anthropology*. The latter labels itself *social anthropology* and analyzes social structures and compares them. [18]

The debate also reflects the clash that Charles Percy SNOW described in 1959 that takes place between "The Two Cultures." Instead of cooperating and developing shared perspectives, the sciences and humanities developed in different directions in their individual histories. This gap remains today and culminates in misunderstanding and as effect in ignorance. Specialization and ignorance on both sides produce animosity that is disastrous for the whole academy. Furthermore, in politics this gap may have serious consequences, primarily when both sides are no more able to evaluate whether the advice of the other is "right" or "wrong." This misunderstanding is the main barrier, as SNOW writes, to solve the existing problems of the world. Therefore, it is not surprising that RATNER provokes GERGEN with political questions:

9 Classically each positivist dispute can be seen analogue to the dispute of universalia from medieval times. ANSELM OF CANTERBURY and WILLIAM OF CHAMPEAUX thought that ideas have an objective reality ("universalia sunt ante rem" or "universalia sunt realia"). This position is labeled as *extreme realism* and can be dated to the 11th century. One century later PETER ABELARD, ALBERTUS MAGNUS and THOMAS AQUINAS established the school of *moderate realism* that was influenced by the ideas of ARISTOTELE. All of them thought that ideas have predominance before the material ("universalia sunt in re"). But in the 13th century the nominalists, especially JOHN DUNS SCOTUS and WILLIAM OF OCKHAM, saw categories just as labels for genres ("universalia sunt nomina" or "universalia sunt post rem").

"This subjectivistic turn has alarming implications. It frees psychiatrists to express their prejudices in diagnosing women as irrational. It frees any woman to make reckless charges that a man is sexist or abusive. It frees police and judges to express their prejudices in regarding Arabic people as terrorists. It frees teachers to express their prejudices that lower class students are incapable of learning" (RATNER, 2005, paragraph 24). [19]

Should we bridge the gap unidirectionally, as SNOW does when he in regard to scientists states "In the moral, they are by and large the soundest group of intellectuals we have" (SNOW, 1993, p.13)?¹⁰ [20]

3. The Self and its Relations to Society/Culture

Before we ask how this gap can be bridged and how the dispute between GERGEN and RATNER can avoid the luxury of misunderstanding we briefly introduce both psychologies. They arise consequently from the premises discussed and the inherent fundamental anthropology. [21]

3.1 Activity as a key concept for cultural psychology

Carl RATNER's psychology is well described in his article [Activity as A Key Concept for Cultural Psychology](#) (1996) and receives elaboration in his cultural psychology trilogy (see RATNER, 1997, 2002, 2006). Even though this trilogy is labeled "cultural" psychology, there is no culture in it. RATNER's psychology is therefore not really a cultural one—compared to other cultural psychologies—, in fact it is a societal (gesellschaftswissenschaftlich) or sociological psychology that expresses itself in the term *activity*. [22]

The first psychological school that referred to the term *activity* was the Soviet cultural historical school that was founded by Alexei N. LEONT'EV, Alexander R. LURIA and Lev S. VYGOTSKY. As the first Marxian psychology (we can also cite here the Critical Psychology of Klaus HOLZKAMP [1985] as a later development) its influence in the 1920's was limited to the Soviet Union. When LEONT'EV's Œuvre [Activity, Consciousness, and Personality](#) was first published in the U.S.A. (1978), later in the former GDR (1979) and a few years later in the FRG (1982), a wide-ranging debate about the "re"discovery of the Marxian "classics" began; the debate also reached the U.S.A. at the same time, with RATNER acting on LEONT'EV's ideas. [23]

Activity is one of the main terms of Marxian theory and can be seen as the main term of activity theory as well. Activity theory explains that any human action has a goal to achieve that is the expression of personal sense (e.g. I am studying

10 "Most of our fellow human beings, for instance, are underfed and die before their time. In the crudest terms, *that* is the social condition. There is a moral trap which comes through the insight into man's loneliness: it tempts one to sit back, complacent in one's unique tragedy, and let the others go without a meal. As a group, the scientists fall into that trap less than others. They are inclined to be impatient to see if something can be done: and inclined to think that it can be done, until it is proved otherwise. That is their real optimism, and it is an optimism that the rest of us badly need" (SNOW, 1993, pp.6f.).

psychology to become a psychologist to be able to help people.). By an individual action we also fulfill a societal motif—the theory on that level talks about activity (e.g. society needs psychologists to help other people).

Individual Level	Action	→	Sense	→	Goal
Societal Level	Activity	→	Meaning	→	Motif

Table 1: Double structure of human activity [24]

With that differentiation, the theory makes allowance for the societal existence of individuals. Insofar as the individual cannot be seen as an asocial one, but has to be seen as interwoven into and subjected to society. Since social development *always* begins on an individual level, even when goal-oriented actions conflict with motifs that have to be realized. But before such a conflict arises, continuous processes are necessary, because

"[t]he formation of personality presupposes a development of the process of goal formation and, correspondingly, the development of actions of the subject. Actions, becoming ever richer, outgrow that circle of activity that they realize, and enter into a contradiction with the motives that engender them" ([LEONT'EV, Chapter 5.5](#)). [25]

Cross currents converge in that contradiction (Widerspruch), in which lines of development of society and the individual meet; points in which "a displacement of motives to goals occurs, a change in their hierarchy, and the engendering of new motives, new kinds of activity" (ibid, see also VYGOTSKY, 1985). At this juncture the emergence of new motives corresponds with societal development; that is the ideal model, but as we know, this is not proved empirically yet. [26]

Fulfillment of personal sense corresponds to goal achieving and societal meaning corresponds to motifs (see Table 1, also LEONT'EV, Chapters 3.5 and 4.4)—this distinction of sense and meaning is also relevant in the contemporary field of cultural psychology (see ALLOLIO-NÄCKE, 2005a). Since socialism collapsed and as a result activity theory lost its relevance, it stood to reason that RATNER tried to reintegrate his activity approach into the new field of *cultural psychology* using the described distinction of sense and meaning. This turn is in itself consequent, because at first glance many ideas are describable with the term culture: culture is a shared system in which each individual takes part, but which is not reducible to the individual itself. With that trick RATNER pretends to do cultural psychology, but this is truly different from what most other cultural psychologies do, e.g. GERGEN's version based on the *linguistic turn* and therefore on the writings of the Austrian philosopher Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN (see next chapter). [27]

Thus, what is the difference between RATNER's approach and the other ones? RATNER's primary unit of analysis is activity and not, like in cultural psychology, sense and meaning. Even though RATNER tries to bridge the difference of mind and society or psychology and sociology, he cannot answer the following

questions: How are both connected? How does mind emerge from society? But RATNER states: "Social activity *causes* psychological phenomena in the sense of *eliciting* them and being their objective or *raison d'etre*" (RATNER, 1996, p.423, our emphasis). This means, RATNER believes that mind and society are two sides of the same coin. We call this socio-psychological parallelism in analogy to psycho-physical parallelism. Likewise nobody knows how mind is born from soma, RATNER—and HOLZKAMP also—cannot really explain how this *eliciting* is going on. Marxists evade this dilemma by referring to the dialectical leap in which both antitheses merge and produce something absolutely new: "The interdependence and reciprocal influence of language thought, and activity and psychological phenomena is a dialectical relationship. From a dialectical perspective, activity and psychological phenomena are interdependent, interpenetrating moments of one relation" (ibid, p.424). [28]

RATNER is not able to describe the emerging process. We wonder why he prefers this approach and not the "experience near concept" of Clifford GEERTZ (see ibid, 1996, p.410); e.g. this is the model that ZIELKE (2004) would prefer as the best unit of cultural psychological analysis. The experience near concept is more comprehensive, because it allows reconstructing the historical dimension of cultural development; e.g. transformed experiences into knowing-how or interpretations that accompany actions. In our opinion this approach does not need any dialectical leap to explain psychological phenomena. But experience only plays a minor role in RATNER's approach. It is just an effect of the objective analysis of social structures as well as the individual self-constitution as minor social processes (see ALLOLIO-NÄCKE, 2005b, p.7) [29]

Cultural psychology itself deals primarily with individual experiences that are not just elicited or caused by social structures, as conceptualized in RATNER's approach. Cultural psychology places emphasis on experience as an active construction that will be integrated into mind, this is in accordance to what we would call an integrative constructivist argumentation, cultural phenomena that are unaccounted by the logical approach of activity are also part of these experienced based psychic contents, e.g. fantasy, Christian faith or the transcendental in general, cultural myths and aesthetics. These phenomena are not explainable by instrumental rationalism. If we express this phenomena in our every day speech,

"[I]n terms of folk-psychological categories it is that we experience ourselves and others. It is through folk psychology that people anticipate and judge one another, drawn conclusions about the worthwhileness of their lives, and so on. Its power over human mental functioning and human life is that it provides the very means by which culture shapes human beings to its requirements" (Bruner, 1990, pp.14f.). [30]

Moreover, these ideal contents often have precedence over objective and observable social structures: "Obviously, the situation of the acting person is only in part oriented on objective contents. [...] This also means that the perception of a situation is not determined by material facts, but driven by the ideal contents" (BOESCH, 1988, pp.238f., our translation). Furthermore, this insight is an

undetected treasure of BOESCH's cultural psychology: All things that must be excluded to remain capable of acting during a goal-achieving action keep their relevance in terms of action: the knowledge about alternative options to act (see *ibid*, p.242). These alternatives are always present in mind. If we exclude or disregard them, we cannot explain why people are able to further act when an initial action reaches a dead end: "The integration will be progressively adapted to the anticipations that change themselves as a result of the evaluation of new situations" (*ibid*, p.241, our translation). [31]

3.2 Language as a key concept for cultural psychology

The opposite of RATNER's psychology is GERGEN's. There are no intentional subjects who have the capacity to act, and there are no objective facts to act upon, social structures or material environment, because "all propositions are subject to deconstruction" (MATTES & SCHRAUBE, 2004, paragraph 21). With this idea social constructionism is one of these cultural psychological theories that deny answers to the following central questions: What is the nature of the relation between biology (nature) and the mind (culture)? Consequently, the main focus is set on language/speech as an expression of mind (see GERGEN, 1991, 1994, 1999; BRUNER, 1990; SHWEDER, 1990; SHWEDER & SULLIVAN, 1990, 1993; HARRÉ & GILLET, 1994). [32]

Nevertheless, many (cultural) psychologists search for answers to the above question (see e.g. BOESCH, 1980)¹¹, primarily because the question challenges the unity of humankind and they want to answer that question in the positive with the help of "hard facts." Others, like BRUNER, argue that this question and the following wrong conclusion is just the result of "a widely held and rather old-fashioned fallacy that the human sciences inherited from the nineteenth century [...] In that version, culture was conceived as an 'overlay' on biologically determined human nature. The *causes* of human behavior were assumed to lie in that biological substrate" (BRUNER, 1990, p.20). But Bruner gives no reason why this is a fallacy. He just offers a different interpretation of the relation between biology and culture: "What I want to argue instead is that culture and the quest for meaning within culture are the proper causes of human action. The biological substrate, the so-called universals of human nature, is not a cause of action but, at most, a *constrain* upon it or a *condition* for it" (*ibid*, pp.20f.). SHWEDER (1990) similarly argues when he speaks of environment as an intentional world. [33]

HARRÉ and GILLET are no longer interested in this question. They just refer to BRUNER and LÉVI-STRAUSS¹². For HARRÉ and GILLET environment is

11 The whole first part of BOESCH's book *Kultur und Handlung* deals with that question—that means about 100 pages (!).

12 LÉVI-STRAUSS was one of the first anthropologists who stated that the natural environment is always cultural. A gap between reality and perceived reality (*Wirklichkeit*) does not exist, because "the natural habitat of man is always culture, that means that structural schemata of thinking and action are not given in the outside, rather they are products of our perception" (BOESCH, 1980, p.27, our translation). In other words: Nature is that, what we perceive of it through our cultural glasses; in consequence nature is just a part of culture (see LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1962, pp.125f.).

perceived through the medium of language and insofar a relational perception (see below). In doing so, they abjure a NEWTONian ontology that is the basis of RATNER's thinking. Instead they offer a "'Vygotskian' ontology for psychology" (HARRÉ & GILLET, 1994, p.30):

	Ontologies	Locative Systems	Entities	Relations
Reality – RATNER	Newtonian	Space and time	Things and events	Causality
Perceived reality – GERGEN	Discursive	Arrays of people	Speech acts	Rules and story lines

Table 2: Competing ontologies in psychology (according to HARRÉ & GILLET, 1994, p.29) [34]

As we can see, HARRÉ and GILLET replace time and space by "arrays of people" (ibid.), because an individual acts at any time from a hierarchical and a horizontal position inside the social structural system. "People are things specified something like special points, defined in notions of interpersonal, social and political frameworks" (ibid, p.31). Position in that sense means two things: (1) to be subjected by the social and political circumstances and (2) to be able to act in these restrictions and change them (see ALLOLIO-NÄCKE & KALSCHEUER, 2003). Positions realize themselves by speech acts that include the view on negotiation in discursive practices. Such speech acts are not random; (social) rules and strands of specific genres (e.g. discourse, story, autobiography etc., see BROCKMEIER & HARRÉ, 2001) guarantee their use. "Norms and rules emerging in historical and cultural circumstances operate to structure the things people do" (HARRÉ & GILLET, 1994, p.33). With this, HARRÉ and GILLET indicate that these norms and rules themselves are historical and cultural artifacts that are mostly invariant during time, but from the perspective of decades or centuries are changeable in principle. [35]

A similar ontology is the basis of GERGEN's cultural psychology—although we believe, according to RATNER, that this approach is an unacceptable variant because, to avoid essentialisms, it throws the baby out with the bath water: the human subject as an acting person. This is also the main difference to the above mentioned other cultural psychologies. We think GERGEN's theory results from a misinterpretation of WITTGENSTEIN: "*The limits of my language mean the limits of my world*" (WITTGENSTEIN, 2000, p.56, paragraph 5.6). Furthermore, he confuses language and speech (see MICHAELER, 2005, p.27):

"The confusion of language and speech inveigles Gergen to refer solely on language. Instead of analyzing the joint action of reality construction, he solely deals with the formal language system. In throwing away the acting subject he loses the reference to the objects, although they are necessary to proof the construction of reality" (ibid, p.40, our translation; see GERGEN, 2002, p.52). [36]

Furthermore, GERGEN refers to his theoretical position in the sentence: "[T]he meaning of a word is its use in the language" (WITTGENSTEIN, 2001, p.18, paragraph 43). The often cited *meaning-as-use* realizes itself in social relations, or in GERGEN's words as "social practices," "social use" or "patterns of ongoing exchange." This social use is the place, where words receive their meanings, "within what Wittgenstein metaphorically terms 'language games'" (GERGEN, 1994, pp.52f.). Because GERGEN is obviously not interested in how individuals transform meanings into sense, he degrades the individuals to "participants in practices" (ZIELKE, 2004, p.242, our translation). Rather, they are "passive overtakers than active co-constructors of meaning" (ibid., our translation). Furthermore, in GERGEN's opinion, words have no referring objects behind them, words do not denote something objective, but "it seems that the meaning of the word 'aggression' is constituted solely by its use in social context" (ibid, p.243, our translation). This is because "things that someone thinks to know are not his or her personal knowledge, but are localized in social speech acts" (ibid, p.242, our translation). "In doing so, GERGEN presents on the one hand a radical interpretation of WITTGENSTEIN's concept of meaning as well as an improper understanding of it" (ibid, p.243, our translation). [37]

Meaning-as-use is not thinkable without speaking and acting people who "play language games" (see SCHNEIDER, 2000, p.313). Just by participating in these games we learn the meaning of words and the construction of meanings that are important for that specific game. More radically: Meaning without acting and interpreting individuals is meaningless as well as senseless. Language itself does not need any actor. But—as we think—that was not the intention of WITTGENSTEIN when he was writing about the *use* (Gebrauch) of words. The progressive form of language is not formal language; rather, it is speech or speaking. This is where GERGEN fails, or in ZIELKE's words: "The complex relation between the actor, action and interaction is not reducible to Saussure's distinction of signifier and signified" (2004, p.297, our translation, see also p.248). [38]

In general, ZIELKE treats GERGEN's theory too gingerly when she states with regard to his doubtful eclecticism and his overbearing assimilation of other concepts that this "derives from his remarkable style of reception that is characterized more by width than depth" (ibid, p.273, our translation). Nevertheless, she systematically deconstructs and brilliantly exposes GERGEN's theory. By doing so, social constructionism denies to be an experience-based approach; it just analyzes discourse *about* experience (see GERGEN, 1994, p.71). As ZIELKE states: (1) "But, if social constructionism tries to propose, illustrate and make terms plausible, it is forced to speak as an experienced-based approach and to refer to the reality of everyday contexts" (ibid, p.227, our translation); (2) GERGEN's concept of knowledge is inconsistent because he deals with two classes of knowledge: a relativistic one about reality and an objective/positivistic one about discourses—if not, he would not be able to speak about discourses and their rules in the way he does (see ibid, p.250); (3) GERGEN neglects the semantic dimension of meaning by focusing on its social functionality; (4) neither is GERGEN's emancipatory demand founded in his theory, nor is it apparent who will profit from this emancipation, if he claims that there is no "individual knowing

subject" (GERGEN, 1991). Without such a subject a critical consciousness about serious shortcomings cannot exist. That such a conception of a critical consciousness does not make sense, ZIELKE charmingly formulates (pp.261f.):

"I would reformulate GERGEN's understanding of culture as follows: Potential and desirable is a critical analysis [...] of the traditional and established as prospective and ideological—but *only* with the goal to establish a value-free dialogue a lot of different positions. [...] Each emancipatory goal and each critical demur *is* ideological and *has to* be relativized. Only doubt seems to be right. Just the fact that one should criticize at all seems to be not accessible to deconstruction. But this itself is a normative claim that should be reasoned. Second, the critical impetus of GERGEN loses its eligibility, if we would take it seriously" (ibid, p.261, our translation and accent).

"Third, this critical impetus would end in a dead end, if it is just formally legitimized and not in respect or content, if it is not accompanied by concrete theses that are reasoned. Then critique abolishes itself. [...] Each critical-emancipatorical position needs an idea of a subject of this critique—and in consequence any legitimized beneficiary of that anticipated emancipation. Those are those beliefs that social constructionism [...] declines" (ibid, p.262, our translation). [39]

4. Towards a Theory of Pragmatic Understanding

We hope it becomes clear at this point that the debate is held by two different scientific paradigms represented by two psychologies, paradigms that cannot hold a productive debate. *Positivism* and *idealism* as well as *universalism* and *relativism* oppose each other. If we have stressed the borders as well as the fundamental preconditions of each position till now, we will ask further: What are the potentials of each position? How is a productive dialogue possible? Which supplements can we extract from each position? As we hope, the answers to these questions will give us an indication of a scientific understanding; this can lead both discussants—and all of us—out of the luxury of misunderstanding. [40]

4.1 Activity and language

We extract four important insights that are, in our opinion, indispensable for a cultural psychology and/or fundamental anthropology from activity as well as action theories:

1. Key to these theories is the reference to the *responsibility of the individual*. In consequence, they call on a subject that can be demanded from that responsibility. Reasons for this postulate can be quite different as the history of theology and philosophy shows. In the Western context it suggests Immanuel KANT. It also evokes the later works of Michel FOUCAULT, who beside WITTGENSTEIN is the *quasi* founder of all post-modern and post-cognitive psychologies, the reference to the indispensable subject as dependant on anonymous power-knowledge constellations can be found; here in the shape of a concept of *savoir vivre* (Kunst der Existenz) (see FOUCAULT, 1986) or "aesthetics of existence" (FOUCAULT, 2005, pp.902ff; see KÖGLER, 1990).

If we would give up this *a priori* and prefer the idea of someone who disbands in relations or would prefer the idea of someone who is just a ball of determined structures, we would not be able to address caused harm, to address responsibility and, in consequence, we would end in a world of *anything goes*. Harm would be individualized by the victim and responsibility would be discussible in small self-regulating groups. Seen from cultural history we would regress to a fragmented system of clans and tribes.

2. We think that categories like *action* and *activity* allow us describe contextualized and prepositional as well as procedural knowledge embedded in social structures. Few projects of cultural psychology lack of this back-formation of gained insights on this social context.
3. The question *to what purposes* meanings are created is, in our opinion, not completely answerable from the narrow perspective of linguistics; speaking is just *one* of our abilities to act. Nonverbal phenomena are not ascertainable without an idea of action. This regard to *pragmatics* would include the dimensions of body, *sensuality* (Sinnlichkeit), and *emotionality*. The deficiency of a pure anthropology that is based on linguistics is not compensable to represent present phenomena by meaningful words. For instance, the experience and meaning of crying are not completely describable by quivering voice or full scale sobbing as POTTER (2005) and HEPBURN (2004) believe.
4. If we adhere to ideas like *reality* and *truth* we are able to ask for things, and threat them as "right" or "wrong." These ideas can be no more than markers of our narrowness, because they are not available. This cannot mean abolishing such ideas as naïve realism, essentialism or dogmatism. They are necessary as leading ideas.¹³ If we would accept such a narrowing, this would lead to self-immunization to separated communities of discourses or interests. [41]

Our suggestion of an integrated constructivism can be fruitful with regard to a productive dialogue in many ways. That GERGEN's version of social constructionism is not able to be included is by now, we hope, obvious. Concerning constructivism we are following a modernized constructivist theory in the sense of VICO. This theory is able to integrate the constructions that are made by human action and insight; in doing that we try to avoid reductionism as in GERGEN's approach. In this theory it is possible to supplement the dimension of constructing and assembling perceived reality (*Wirklichkeit*) by non-human reality (meaning nature). Beside the dimension of perceived reality we are confronted with a reality that is "stumbled" across, and in its totality not reducible to perceived reality (*Wirklichkeit*).

13 This includes what social constructionism tries to decline: "to attach the possibility of dialogue to the fixed objective of either reaching 'truth' or an otherwise commonly shared perspective" (ZIELKE, 2005, paragraph 5).

1. *Human perception* is a productive process and is not reducible to the deduction of insights from material facts or structures. Human thinking and acting is more than acquisition of material or social facts, and it is also not essentially instrumental-rational. At this point we also have to discuss the point of human freedom to point out the narrowness of derivability of human action and perception.
2. Productive acting and perceiving is *social acting and perceiving*. Both normally occur in speech communities because human beings have to use this shared language and they need the acceptance of speech communities to develop new ideas. This is what ZIELKE means by evocation of alterity: "Limits in the communicability of meaning make visible the borders between language games or 'cultures' and makes some people outsiders for others" (2005, paragraph 4). In our suggested integrated constructivism these speech communities would not be separated and closed "islands" as in GERGEN's approach. As we can see *in fact*, they take part in the whole, therefore they are partial systems, with boundaries not borders; i.e. they are open to others. We prefer the term boundary to border because boundary rather implies overlapping spaces than a parting line. In that sense, we mean a cultural contact zone not a zone of exclusion.
3. One fundamental insight of constructivism is the *narrowness of human action and insight*. The constructivists "were the first to insist that we see the lives of others through lenses of our own grinding and that they look back on ours through ones of their own" (GEERTZ, 1984, p.275; see also ZIELKE, 2005, paragraph 4). In consequence, "speaking of things which must needs be so, is no longer possible. If we wanted home truth, we should have stayed at home (GEERTZ, 1984, p.276). Or as we would formulate as followers of VICO: If we take the human being as a perceiving subject serious, truth and reality will become identifiable through their appearance in his or her thoughts, speech, and history. But situation, perspective and horizon keep narrow in principle. The whole itself is neither ascertainable by observation or a *theoria*, nor by summing up separated perspectives or merging of different horizons. In consequence, the leading idea of *doing science* would be "the world of probability" (CACCIATORE, 2002, p.48, our translation). Gaining scientific insights would be visible every time as asymptotic approximations by models (e.g. categories, theories) and discourse. For the term culture we would suggest defining it as "preservation of potentials" (KONERSMANN, 1996, p.354, our translation). In that space of potentials the unlikely would be preserved for future efforts at gaining insights.
4. Another consequence of the perception that human action and perception is narrow is the necessary supplementation of a pure Cartesian rationality that reduces doing science to experimentation and quantification.
5. Gaining insights is not reducible to a "confident minimum." Furthermore, we have to preserve the potentials for new games. That also means to integrate logic *and* action as well as reason *and* fantasy. If that means after a four century long domination of the Cartesian scientific tradition somebody thinks such a demand is stupid or crazy, we would answer him or her: your reaction is just the fear to meet the challenge.¹⁴ [42]

14 With his book *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (2004) Hans Ulrich GUMBRECHT initiates a vivid debate about the scientific (rational) dominant production of

4.2 Towards an integrated kind of science

Understanding science integratively will not just bring these described elements of positivism and constructivism into a new game. Furthermore, we suggest a discourse that is able to overcome restrictions of understanding between both cultures in the sense of SNOW. If science is able to take part in such an effort of understanding, it would be able to offer orientations to act, as is increasingly demanded. Following SNOW both cultures are called to work *together* on problems, to respond to instrumental-rational demands, as well open spheres beyond rationality and utility for human beings and society. [43]

The quality of medical care as well as the relation of patient and doctor can be enhanced by cooperation with communication scientists (see VOGD, 2004). Currently, medicine is primarily concerned with purely technical approaches to illness (see DIECKHÖFER, 2005); thus reducing a patient to an ailment or a treatment and not considering the patient holistically. To emphasize that the patient's view must be included in medical decision-making is the role of the humanities (see LERCH & DIERKS, 2001). Instead psycho-social care as well as pastoral care are difficult to evaluate in terms of money and their effect on convalescence is not easily measurable; they stand for a different view of the patient that is more than his or her physical existence. [44]

The humanities should not remain distant from the inroads made by science. The methodical reduction that qualifies as science produces an immense potential of insights and options to act in various societal sectors. However, the critical objection of the humanities and cultural studies, vis-à-vis the field of genetics, has to recognize this. Science can also be a corrective of scientific misconceptions in the humanities—as the so-called SOKAL affair has shown. In 1996 Alan SOKAL published the reviewed article [Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity](#) in the journal *Social Text*. In this article SOKAL juggled with scientific metaphors like most of the post-modern theories do. Subsequently in the journal *Lingua Franca* SOKAL revealed that his *Social Text* article was a parody. He wanted to hold the mirror up to those who adopt scientific terms or ideas to describe social processes without inadequate understanding of those terms. [45]

For psychology this would mean paying attention to the warning words of STAEUBLE. She calls on *societal* (gesellschaftswissenschaftliche) as well as cultural psychology to return to their roots, which would mean that social psychology would have to avoid to operating with a weak term of "culture" to remain or become acceptable in scientific discourses. For the same reason, cultural psychology would avoid expanding beyond its genuine object of subjective experience and its expression. STAEUBLE's reason for that call is to show,

"that the term 'culture' should not be a weak substitute of the term 'society'. The term culture can augment the societal perspective by insights that are relevant to action:

meaning.

the perspective of the acting person [...] One effort of societal psychology was to demur against naturalism in psychology that constructions of the psychological have to begin with specific subjective existences. In contrast, cultural psychology could highlight feeling, desiring, knowing, or acting from the socio-cultural perspective of the acting persons themselves" (STAEUBLE, 2002, pp.1f., our translation). [46]

An integrated science means bringing in the backdrop of doing science in each discussion. These preconditions realize themselves in an anthropological statement that helps to highlight the moral conceptions and ideas of individuals (see ZIELKE, 2005, paragraph 9). As proposed above, our integrated approach is based on the following: [47]

The human being acts and understands as a finite, narrowed subject, and as one who is open to new experiences. In being so he or she tends to fail him or herself, and others. But at the same time he or she remains open to new questions and can be called on to account. With these traits he or she takes part in a dialogue; a dialogue that is indispensable for his or her accountability as well as a feature for gaining new insights and new orientations to act. The dialogical existence of the individual is in that sense more than an exchange of ideas without obligations as this is expressed in the coexistence of "polyphony, and pluralism of perspectives" (ibid, paragraph 5) as conceptualized by GERGEN and ZIELKE.¹⁵ In conclusion, this can not lead to an exclusion of a joint search for "'truth' or an otherwise commonly shared perspective" (see ibid.). Furthermore, the search for "anthropological constants," philosophically, the question of the nature of human beings, has to be the main theme of communication (in the sense of the Latin *communio*) that is oriented to the development of criteria that qualify such a dialogue and search. [48]

Scientists themselves bring in—implicitly or explicitly—final and non-deducible certainties; certainties that we have defined as faith (*Glauben*). This absolute faith is the background to act constructively and certainly in the space of the remaining uncertainty and openness of doing science. This is also the precondition to work together in an inter- and trans-disciplinary fashion. The more certain individuals believe in their own faith or the more open they communicate their faith the more the outcome of such a venture of living on the edge will succeed. The latter makes accessible the bases to esteem the heuristic value of the other position as well as to *accept* and *respect* that perspective. At least this makes us able to realize the strangeness of ourselves and the other that is the consequence of our narrowness. In this space of acceptance doing science and engaging in scientific debates will be enriched. In consequence, a critical evaluation will succeed. Let us take the time to open that space of acceptance because that is the luxury we have to afford. [49]

¹⁵ This comes to a head in the work of the few established ethics boards in hospitals. On these boards different professions work together to counsel patients and their relatives as well as caregivers and doctors in making difficult decisions. In their work the different perspectives connect productively in the sense that they become able to influence relevant decisions in a very short time.

References

- Allolio-Näcke, Lars (2005a). Kulturpsychologie – Plädoyer für ein interdisziplinäres Forschungsprogramm. *Psychologie & Gesellschaftskritik* 115/116, 29(3/4), 75-101.
- Allolio-Näcke, Lars (2005b). "In dem Moment würde ich mich selber als Ostdeutscher bezeichnen ..." *Doing Identity 15 Jahre nach der deutsch-deutschen "Vereinigung"*. Inauguraldissertation [Philosophischen Fakultät I (Philosophie, Geschichte und Sozialwissenschaften), Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg].
- Allolio-Näcke, Lars & Kalscheuer, Britta (2003). Doing Identity – Von Transdifferenz und dem alltäglichen Skeptizismus. In Herbert Fitzeck & Michael Ley (Eds.), *Alltag im Aufbruch* (pp.152-162). Gießen: psychosozial.
- Berger, Peter L. & Luckmann, Thomas (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise on the sociology of knowledge*. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books.
- Boesch, Ernst E. (1980). *Kultur und Handlung: Einführung in die Kulturpsychologie*. Bern: Huber.
- Boesch, Ernst E. (1988). Handlungstheorie und Kulturpsychologie. *Psychologische Beiträge*, 30, 233-247.
- Brockmeier, Jens & Harré, Rom (2001). Narrative: Problems and promises of an alternative paradigm. In Jens Brockmeier & Donal Carbaugh (Eds.), *Narrative and identity: Studies in autobiography, self and culture* (pp.39-58). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Bruner, Jerome S. (1990). *Acts of meaning. Four lectures on mind and culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Cacciatore, Guiseppe (2002). *Metaphysik, Poesie und Geschichte. Über die Philosophie von Giambattista Vico*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.
- Dieckhöfer, Klemens (2005). Psychosomatik. In Werner A. Gerabek, Bernhard D. Haage, Gundolf Keil & Wolfgang Wegner (Eds.), *Enzyklopädie Medizingeschichte* (pp.1197-1198). Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Engels, Friedrich (1969). Ludwig Feuerbach and the end of classical German philosophy. In Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *Selected works, Volume 21, 5* (pp.13-15). Moscow, USSR: Progress Publishers. Available at: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm> [Date of access: January 23, 2006].
- Foucault, Michel (1986). *History of sexuality, Vol. 3: The care of the self*. New York: Random House.
- Foucault, Michel (2005). Eine Ästhetik der Existenz. In Michel Foucault, *Schriften in vier Bänden. Dits et Ecrits, Band IV*. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp.
- Geertz, Clifford (1984). Anti-anti-relativism. *American Anthropologist*, 86(2), 263-278.
- [Gergen, Kenneth J.](#) (1991). *The saturated self. Dilemmas of identity in contemporary life*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gergen, Kenneth J. (1994). *Realities and relationships. Soundings in social construction*. London: Sage.
- Gergen, Kenneth J. (1999). *An invitation to social construction*. New York: Sage.
- Gergen, Kenneth J. (2002). *Konstruierte Wirklichkeit*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- Gergen, Kenneth J., Hoffman, Lynn & Anderson, Harlene (1996). Is diagnosis a disaster? A constructionist dialogue. In Florence W. Kaslow (Ed.), *Handbook of relational diagnosis and dysfunctional family patterns* (pp.102-118). New York: John Wiley. Available as draft at: <http://www.swarthmore.edu/SocSci/kgergen1/web/page.phtml?id=manu5&st=manuscripts&hf=1> [Date of access January 23rd, 2006].
- Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich (2004). *Production of presence: What meaning cannot convey*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Harré, Rom & Gillet, Grant (1994). *The discursive mind*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich (1830/1992). *Enzyklopädie der Wissenschaften im Grundrisse*. In Udo Rameil, Wolfgang Bonsiepen & Hans Christian Lucas (Eds.), *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Gesammelte Werke, Vol. 20* (pp.118-120, §79-82). Hamburg: Meiner.

Hepburn, Alexa (2004). Crying: Notes on description, transcription and interaction. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 37, 251-290.

Holzkamp, Klaus (1985). *Grundlegung der Psychologie*. Frankfurt/M.: Campus.

Kögler, Hans-Herbert (1990). Fröhliche Subjektivität. Historische Ethik und dreifache Ontologie beim späten Foucault. In Eva Erdmann, Rainer Forst & Axel Honneth (Eds.), *Ethos der Moderne. Foucaults Kritik der Aufklärung* (pp.202-226). Frankfurt/M.: Campus.

Konersmann, Ralf (1996). Kultur als Metapher. In Ralf Konersmann (Ed.), *Kulturphilosophie* (pp.327-354). Leipzig: Reclam.

Leont'ev, Alexej N. (1979). Activity, Consciousness, and Personality. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall. Available at: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/leontev/works/1978> [Date of access: January 23, 2006].

Lerch, Magnus & Dierks, Marie Luise (2001). Gesundheitsinformation und -kommunikation als Basis für Patientensouveränität. In Marie-Luise Dierks, Eva-Maria Bitzer, Magnus Lerch, Sabine Martin, Sabine Röseler, Anja Schienkiewitz, Stefanie Siebeneick & Friedrich-Wilhelm Schwartz (Eds.), Patientensouveränität – Der autonome Patient im Mittelpunkt. Arbeitsbericht Nr. 195 der Akademie für Technikfolgenabschätzung in Baden-Württemberg (pp.119-147). Stuttgart: OPUS. Available at: <http://elib.uni-stuttgart.de/opus/volltexte/2004/1882/> [Date of access: November 17, 2005].

Lévi-Strauss, Claude (1962). *La pensée sauvage*. Paris: Plon.

Mattes, Peter & Schraube, Ernst (2004). "'Old-stream' psychology will disappear with the dinosaurs!" Kenneth Gergen in conversation with Peter Mattes and Ernst Schraube [39 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* [On-line Journal], 5(3), Art. 27. Available at: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/3-04/04-3-27-e.htm> [Date of Access: January 23, 2006].

Michaeler, Matthias (2005). Das relationale Selbst bei Gergen: Ein erfolgreiches Selbst oder ein Selbst für Erfolgreiche? *Psychologie & Gesellschaftskritik* 114, 29(2), 27-51.

Moll, Luis C. (Ed.) (1990). *Vygotsky and education: Instructional implications and applications of sociohistorical psychology*. London: Cambridge University Press.

Potter, Jonathan (2005). Gedanken zu einer post-kognitiven Psychologie. *Psychologie & Gesellschaftskritik* 115/116, 29(3/4), 59-73.

Ratner, Carl (1996). Activity as a key concept for cultural psychology. *Culture & Psychology*, 2, 407-434. Available as draft at: <http://www.humboldt1.com/~cr2/jaan.htm> [Date of access: January 23rd, 2006].

Ratner, Carl (1997). *Cultural psychology and qualitative methodology: Theoretical & empirical considerations*. New York: Plenum.

Ratner, Carl (2002). *Cultural psychology: Theory and method*. New York: Plenum.

Ratner, Carl (2004). Social constructionism as cultism. Comments on: "'Old-stream' psychology will disappear with the dinosaurs!" Kenneth Gergen in conversation with Peter Mattes and Ernst Schraube [10 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* [On-line Journal], 6(1), Art. 28. Available at: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/1-05/05-1-28-e.htm> [Date of access: November 17, 2005].

Ratner, Carl (2005). Epistemological, social, and political conundrums in social constructionism [33 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* [On-line Journal], 7(1), Art. 4. Available at: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/1-06/06-1-4-e.htm> [Date of access: November 17, 2005].

Ratner, Carl (2006). *Cultural psychology: A perspective on psychological functioning and social reform*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Schneider, Hans-Julius (2000). Was heißt "Explizitmachen impliziten Regelwissens"? *Handlung Kultur Interpretation. Zeitschrift für Sozial- und Kulturwissenschaften*, 9(2), 306-323.

Shweder, Richard A. (1990). Cultural psychology—what is it? In George J. Stigler, Richard A. Shweder & Gilbert H. Herdt (Eds.), *Cultural psychology: Essays on comparative human development* (pp.1-46). London: Cambridge University Press.

Shweder, Richard A. & Sullivan, Maria A. (1990). The semiotic subject of cultural psychology. In Lawrence A. Pervin (Ed.), *Handbook of personality* (pp.399-416). New York: Guilford.

Shweder, Richard A. & Sullivan, Maria A. (1993). Cultural psychology: Who needs it? *Annual Review of Psychology*, 44, 497-523.

Snow, Charles P. (1993). *The two cultures*. London: Cambridge University Press.

Sokal, Alan (1996). Transgressing the boundaries: Towards a transformative hermeneutics of quantum gravity. *Social Text*, 46/47, 217-252. Available as draft at: http://www.physics.nyu.edu/faculty/sokal/transgress_v2/transgress_v2_singlefile.html [Date of access: January 11, 2006].

Staeuble, Irmgard (2002). Wider den eurozentrischen Blick: ein kulturpsychologisches Programm für Immigrationsgesellschaften. In Martin Hildebrand-Nilshon, Chung-Woon Kim & Dimitris D. Papadopoulos (Eds.), *Kultur (in) der Psychologie. Über das Abenteuer des Kulturbegriffes in der psychologischen Theoriebildung* (pp.92-106). Heidelberg: Asanger.

Vico, Giovanni Batista (1947). *Vom Wesen und Weg der geistigen Bildung*. Godesberg: Küpper.

Vico, Giovanni Batista (1979). *Liber metaphysicus*. München: Fink.

Vico, Giovanni Batista (1982). *Inauguralrede von 1699, Le orazioni inaugurali, I-VI*. Bologna: Il Molino.

Vogd, Werner (2004). Ärztliche Entscheidungsfindung im Krankenhaus bei komplexer Fallproblematik im Spannungsfeld von Patienteninteressen und administrativ organisatorischen Bedingungen. *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 33(1), 26-47.

Vygotsky, Lev S. (1985). *Thought and Language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Watzlawick, Paul (1986). *Vom Schlechten des Guten oder Hekates Lösungen*. München: Piper.

Watzlawick, Paul (2001). Wir können von der Wirklichkeit nur wissen, was sie nicht ist. In Bernhard Pörksen (Hrsg.), *Die Gewissheit der Ungewissheit* (S.211-231). Heidelberg: Auer.

Winegar, Lucien T. & Valsiner, Jaan (Eds.). *Children's Development Within Social Contexts: Metatheoretical, Theoretical and Methodological Issues, Vol 2*, Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig (2000). *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*. London/New York: Routledge.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig (2001). *Philosophical investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Zielke, Barbara (2004). *Kognition und soziale Praxis. Der soziale Konstruktivismus und die Perspektiven einer postkognitivistischen Psychologie*. Bielefeld: transcript.

Zielke, Barbara (2005). The case for dialogue. Reply to: Social constructionism as cultism, Carl Ratner, December 2004 [12 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* [On-line Journal], 6(2), Art. 13. Available at: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/2-05/05-2-13-e.htm> [Date of access: November 17, 2005].

Zielke, Barbara (2006). Not "anything goes." A critical assessment of constructionism and its misinterpretation. A comment on Carl Ratner's "Epistemological, social, and political constructionism" [21 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* [On-line Journal], 7(1), Art. 27. Available at: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/1-06/06-1-27-e.htm> [Date of access: February 10, 2006].

Authors

Jürgen VAN OORSCHOT, Dr. theol. habil., is professor of the Old Testament in the theological faculty of the Friedrich-Schiller-University in Jena. Main focuses of research are cultural and literary processes of transformation (e.g. death and coping with death), wisdom and culture of knowledge, anthropology and history of science. He co-edits the international journal [Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft](#) (ZAW), de Gruyter, Berlin and New York, and the Internet-encyclopedia [WILAT](#), Stuttgart.

Contact:

Jürgen van Oorschot

Theological Faculty at the Friedrich-Schiller-University Jena
Sector Old Testament
Fürstengraben 6
D-07743 Jena, Germany

Tel: +49 (0)3641 / 941-111

Fax: +49 (0)3641 / 941-112

E-mail: juergen.van.oorschot@uni-jena.de

Lars ALLOLIO-NÄCKE, psychologist, received his PhD in November 2005 in sociology; works as coordinator for the DFG priority program *The Quality of School* at the [Leibniz Institute for Science Education](#) in Kiel. He wrote his PhD-thesis on East German identity in the graduate school [Cultural Hermeneutics: Reflections of Difference and Transdifference](#) at the Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nuremberg. He co-edits the psychological journal [Psychologie & Gesellschaftskritik](#) and is founding member of [Culture, Development & Psychology](#) at the Free University Berlin. Main focuses of research are identity, philosophy of subjectivity, post-modern theory, and cultural psychology. Recent publications include East German identity, cultural psychology, and transdifference. In previous issues of FQS he has two conference reports: [Focussing on Everyday Life](#) and [How Much Culture is Psychology Able to Deal With. The 100 Years of the German Society of Psychology](#).

Contact:

Lars Allolio-Näcke

Leibniz Institute for Science Education at the University of Kiel
Department of Educational Science
Olshausenstraße 62
D-24098 Kiel, Germany

Tel.: +49 (0)431 / 880-3497

Fax: +49 (0)431 / 880-5211

E-mail: allolio@ipn.uni-kiel.de

URL: <http://www.ipn.uni-kiel.de/persons/allolio.html>

Citation:

van Oorschot, Jürgen & Allolio-Näcke, Lars (2006). Against the Luxury of Misunderstanding. Revisiting the Debate between Carl Ratner and Barbara Zielke on an Interview with Kenneth J. Gergen and his Theory of Social Constructionism [49 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 7(2), Art. 17, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0602175>.