

Colloquium in Sociology, Prof. Dr. Takemitsu Morikawa, Keio University, Tokyo

Critical Phenomenology of Power

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The presentation develops a phenomenological perspective with the intention to combine critical theoretical reflections with life-world analysis. Decisive for this approach is the idea to establish a bridge between phenomenology and Critical Theory, two disciplines that in the past used to have divergent and opposed positions. Currently a convergence of both perspectives can be identified: Critical Theory has the standpoint, specifically following Axel Honneth and Hartmut Rosa, that critique needs to be based on everyday experience of the individual actors with the capacity for “innerworldly transcendence.” The aim of this presentation is to achieve a standpoint that takes into consideration the subjective viewpoint of the Other and allows to analyze the lifeworldly constitution of phenomena as power, social inequality, justice, and violence as well as the subjective and intersubjective experiences of alienation, reification and suffering. In this sense, the ethical injustice of discrimination is seen as a process in which the subject is hastily opposing social typifications on the other subject. This way, the other subject is reified, while the perspective of the experience of the other is disregarded, neglected, distorted, suppressed or eliminated. In reification processes, the individual subjectivity of the Other, his or her intentionality, expressivity, identity, and autonomy are not taken into consideration and are disregarded, and furthermore, they may be even replaced by thing-like, anonymous typifications. With respect to phenomena as racism or sexism, “reifying typifications” do have negative, pejorative connotations in the form of stereotypes, prejudices etc.

As far as the phenomenon of *power* is concerned, it is specifically the *concept of life-world* that serves for an analysis of *power constitution* with respect to the subjectivity of the individual actor. If we follow Alfred Schutz and Peter L. Berger/Thomas Luckmann, the life-world is considered a social world as a constituted and interpreted world shared with other human beings, and at the same time produced by individual actors. The process of socialization is not passively experienced by the subjects, they are able to modify, acquire and process social reality. The dynamic concept of the life-world enables us on the one hand to describe the social construction of power as objective reality, but on the other hand, it allows us to describe the subjective constitution of power. The idea of the life-world enables us to describe the functioning of power in the form of objective structures imposed on social actors, but at the same time, it opens up the possibility to conceptualize counter power and social change.