

**Dropping Depth Hermeneutics into Psychosocial Studies
– a Lorenzerian perspective**

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Introduction

Depth hermeneutics is a predominantly German tradition of critical cultural analysis with a psychoanalytic orientation. It was developed throughout the 1970s and 1980s by the sociologist and psychoanalyst Alfred Lorenzer (1922–2002). Lorenzer understood psychoanalysis as a science of the social that departs from the concrete being of the individual (Lorenzer, 1986: 12); he approached it from the perspective of critical theory – i.e. with a normative view to improving the live situation of the aggrieved and powerless and making society more just – a view, however, which needs to be reflected upon and checked for the blind spots in the researcher’s relations with her/his sociocultural situation (e.g. Horkheimer, 1976). While, in Germany, depth hermeneutics as a theoretical and methodological direction is almost synonymous with what in Britain has been advanced as ‘psychosocial studies’ (with a psychoanalytic orientation, that is; see e.g. Walkerdine, 2008), it is still relatively little known within the British context.

Recent attempts to introduce and develop further this approach by British researchers (Redman, Bereswill and Morgenroth, 2010; Froggett and Hollway, 2010; Hollway and Froggett, 2012; Whitehouse-Hart and Taylor, 2012; Froggett et al., 2014) have coincided with a debate within psychosocial studies about what characterises the field, how to delimit it and, importantly, which theories and methods to include and which to exclude (see Redman 2014 a, b). This article is intended as a contribution to both processes: to help depth hermeneutic thinking gain more of a foothold in British psychosocial studies and, through this effort, to advance discussion on central aspects in the field of the psychosocial. As I will show in my discussions of exemplary case studies, Lorenzer’s extension of historical-materialist thinking to the psychodynamics of intersubjective relations and his consequent dialectisation of the relationship between the psychical and the social offer a constructive critique and corrective to both Kleinian and Lacanian approaches to the psychosocial. This critique refers both established approaches to the

sociopolitical implications of their findings in that it directs its inquiries to the sounding out of the psychic potentials for social change.

I will focus my presentation on two central themes around which the field of psychosocial studies has orbited. These two themes, which Peter Redman (2016; 2014 a, b) has worked out, are (1) the mutual co-constitution and co-production of the psychical and the social – their implication in one another – and (2) the question of a core psychosocial practice – a practice that Redman, in quoting Rustin (1995), terms a ‘negative practice in a positive structure’. Going beyond that which is straightforwardly measurable and describable, a ‘negative practice’ is interested in ‘what escapes, is missing from or exceeds [...] positive content’ (Redman, 2014a). At the same time, explains Redman, such a negative practice needs a ‘positive structure’, i.e. ‘memory, desire and understanding’, which form the ‘ground on which we stand’ (2014a).

Looking into these themes from a depth-hermeneutic perspective serves to introduce a historical-materialist current of thought into the established approaches to the psychosocial.

Methodologically, this current requires the consequent dialectisation of findings at both the psychical and the social level – a dialectisation which brings the two fields into an inextricable, intermixed relation with one another, without, however, making them collapse into one. As I will show in my discussion of two case studies, even though the application of this kind of (Hegelian) dialectics seems to be an intuitive and obvious choice, strong traditions in British psychosocial studies seem to have struggled with it.

The Depth hermeneutic approach to cultural analysis

Before entering into the discussions of these two themes, i.e. the form of the psychosocial and the form of psychosocial practice, a brief outline of depth hermeneutics seems to be in order. Alfred Lorenzer started out on his project of developing a psychoanalytically oriented practice of cultural research in 1970. He advanced this project in a number of systematic steps and published a series of volumes dealing with various aspects of his envisaged cultural-psychoanalytic practice in a historical-materialist frame.¹ In these works, Lorenzer laid the groundwork for an approach to cultural analysis that has been influential in Germany for the past decades and is

now also emerging as a paradigm within British psychosocial studies.

Depth hermeneutics thinks anew the Freudo-Marxist project of understanding how the constitution of subjectivity at the individual level is impacted upon by modes of production at the societal level, but also, vice versa, how the societal is impacted upon by the individual and subjective (Lorenzer, 1974).ⁱⁱ In line with Lorenzer's thoughts, Robert Hinshelwood (1983) wrote about the Freudo-Marxist project in general:

There have been many attempts to reconcile the two great systems for thinking about man—those of Freud and of Marx. [...] A satisfying bridge between the two has been challengingly elusive. It has become in recent years the search for a twentieth-century philosopher's stone. [...] It seems that the hunt for these links may have been persistently taking the wrong direction. (1983: 223)

Lorenzer (1974) had reached the same conclusion as Hinshelwood. Realizing that a straightforward merging of the two theories would not be feasible, he took a different approach, drawing upon the work of Lucien Sève (1972), a French Marxist philosopher (who Hinshelwood also uses for his article), to make this point:

We cannot and must not remain at the level of merely registering the parallels [in the analyses of political-economic and subjective structures; S.K.]. Rather, '[...] we must find the points of mediation that make it possible to work the uniquely concrete, the real, historical struggle, the person, out of the general contradictions between the productive forces and the relations of production'. (Lorenzer, 1974: 228)¹

Sève suggests that research should observe how social conditions are worked into the individual person; progressing from an assessment of the societal to a view of the concrete individual as embedded within this force field. Lorenzer turns this idea upside down. His inquiry into the psychosocial departs from observing the subject in concrete interactions with its surroundings to finding traces of the *general societal contradictions* in these micro interactions. His approach identifies the social practices that produce the subject – i.e. the interactions between individuals

¹ If not indicated otherwise, all translations from German to English are the author's.

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and institutions that have a socialising effect. Yet, the psychoanalytic part of his orientation requires him to go further and inquire into the effects of such socialisation – and especially those effects that are somehow in resistance to this socialisation, or the symptoms that are in excess of the cultures arising from it (e.g. Lorenzer, 1986: 26; Bereswill et al., 2010: 230).

Depth hermeneutics shares this level of complexity with other conceptions of the psychosocial. It is articulated, for example, by Lynn Layton in her work on neoliberalism (e.g. 2014), in which she criticizes Foucauldian approaches: ‘Foucauldian theories describe neoliberalism’s ideal rational actor, but without a notion of unconscious process, these analyses offer only a partial sense of how neoliberalism is psychically lived’ (2014: 165). As Layton elaborates, the wounds inflicted by socialisation express themselves ‘not only in character structure and defences but in relational scenarios’ (Layton, 2014: 167).

Scene/the scenic and forms of interaction

Layton’s concern with ‘relational scenarios’ provides the cue for the next step in this article, specifically, I want to give a brief introduction of the way in which Lorenzer conceived of his mediation between psychological dynamics and societal structure. He did so by developing a set of concepts that would systematically open psychoanalysis’s focus on subjective, relational experience towards the societal; the most central of them being what Layton calls ‘relational scenarios’ and what Lorenzer simply calls ‘scenes’ (1973: 138 ff.).

For Lorenzer ‘scenes’ are not only the basic units of depth hermeneutic inquiry; they are also the fundamental units of lived experience. What becomes perceivable in such scenes are the most formative ways of people relating to one another – ways that are being established from the earliest interactions between infant and mother/caregiver (see Lorenzer, 1972). Following Mahler (1952), Spitz (1959) and others, Lorenzer conceives of scenic experience as pre-, or proto-cognitive, a ‘dual entity’ (1972: 25), in that this experience does not yet locate what is sensed and perceived as separated into ‘me’ and ‘not-me objects’.

What is produced in scenes and in the scenic mode of experience, i.e. what is acquired or learned

in those scenes, are *forms of interaction* (1977a: 43; Bereswill et al., 2010: 226 f.). It is through daily routines and repetition that these forms are worked into stable patterns. True to their relational quality the resulting interaction patterns are never simply the result of the social acting upon the individual; rather, they are the results of processes of negotiation and settlement with both caregiver and infant. Lorenzer understands this working out (and in) of patterns of interaction as the processes through which the child is ‘initiated into history’ – a history ‘in which it had already existed as part of the organism of the mother’ (1972: 53). In other words, through this patterning the social enters the new organism, and the subject is formed. After all, the patterns of interacting between caregiver and infant have their origins in former interactions and in routines that again were informed by the routines of others.

Through this process of moulding and negotiating, social conflicts and contradictions enter into the individual and become part of it. We can neither expect an infant to be born to an ‘ideally healthy’ mother, Lorenzer explains, nor can we expect this mother to be embedded ‘in a societal practice free from contradictions and antagonisms’ (1977a: 50). Moreover, Lorenzer argues that we have to account for ‘individual differences’ in the involvement of the ‘inner nature of the child with societal practice’ (1977a: 50–51). Conflicts arising at the subjective level might therefore be subjectively suffered, but are always produced in relation with others and therefore never without a sociocultural dimension or free from the contradictions of society at large. It is this opening out of subjective experience towards the sociocultural that Lorenzer has in mind when he articulates his project as extending psychoanalysis to the ‘critical theory of a non-subjectivist subjectivity’ (1972: 155).

Depth Hermeneutics between Kleinian and Lacanian approaches to the psychosocial

Equipped with the above theoretical outline, I now want to take a closer look at the similarities and differences between depth hermeneutics and approaches to the psychosocial developed in Britain. As I will argue, what depth hermeneutics can bring to both object-relational and Lacanian approaches is a stringent dialectisation of the relation between the psychical and the social – a dialectisation that has a palpable impact on empirical case work. It opens the view to the distribution and meshing of forms of interaction and relational styles across various sites –

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individual, collective, institutional etc. – and, in so doing, challenges conceptions of the division of the psychic and the social (which are frequently held by psychosocial researchers working in an object-relational paradigm) without entirely giving up on this division either (which is frequently suggested by Lacanians).

For my comparison, I return here to the 2008 *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society* issue (13/4) that stimulated debate that continues today. Frosh and Baraitser (2008) suggested there was a ‘stand-off between Kleinian and Lacanian thinkers’ which they saw as representing opposing conceptions of the connection between the psychic and the social. This is how they delineate the opposition:

In theorising what we mean by the unhyphenated psychosocial, the most obvious image, with or without its Lacanian gloss (Lacan, 1973), is the Moebius Strip: underside and topside, inside and outside flow together as one, and the choice of how to see them is purely tactical, just like the decision as to whether to look at the subject from a ‘social’ or a ‘psychological’ perspective. (Frosh and Baraitser, 2008: 349)

Taking the image of the Moebius strip as their point of orientation, Frosh and Baraitser then criticize Kleinian and post-Kleinian approaches that posit the psychosocial in a less entwined and shimmering way, ‘for instance dividing them into inner and outer or same and different’ (2008: 450). Particularly Hollway and Jefferson’s (2013 [2000]) *Doing qualitative research differently* is discussed as one such approach that looks for

mechanisms that will link the ‘out-there’ with the ‘in-here’, and to find convincing in doing this the narrative structures of a particular kind of (object relational) psychoanalysis, based on the formative influences of relationality in forging a certain kind of psychic being (Frosh and Baraitser, 2008: 353).

Interestingly, Lorenzer can be seen to endorse, indeed, anticipate aspects of Frosh and Baraitser’s critique while not being uncritical of the latter’s position either. In his outline of *a Materialist Theory of Socialisation* (1972), he places the object-relational theory of Melanie Klein in close proximity to what he calls ‘the familialistic variation of drive-biologism’, stating that, in Kleinian object-relations theory, all ‘crucial settings of [developmental; S.K.] directions [...]

occur, if not as totally cut off from the outside, then at least in inner sovereignty' (1972: 19). With this finding of inner sovereignty, Lorenzer indeed points to the danger on the part of object-relational approaches to, in Frosh and Baraitser's words, prioritize the 'inner' over the 'outer' and pose a 'holistic individual who [...] has to be theorized in relation to an often persecutory "outside"' (Frosh and Baraitser, 2008: 350).

At the same time, Lorenzer would not have been prepared to fully endorse Frosh and Baraitser's approach either. In a critical appreciation of Lacan's reconceptualization of psychoanalysis, he takes issue with Lacan for positing a subjectivity that seemingly 'precedes all involvement in societal processes' (Lorenzer, 1977b: 166):

Claiming that the unconscious is structured like a language [...] is a significant step in the right direction compared to the original Freudian terminology [...]. However, why stop half way? If we have gathered that the problem of the individual is not one referring to instincts, but one that we have to refer to a social relation, why render the linguistic relation abstract from the ensemble of social relations? (Lorenzer, 1977b: 170, quoting Sève, 1972)

For Lorenzer, this abstraction leads to a fragmentation of Lacan's theoretical outlook, which becomes torn between the extremes of subjectivism and objectivism:

Lacan is subjectivistic because he does not conceive of the constitution of the subject as anchored in concrete objective processes [...] but posits it as an abstract constitution; he is objectivistic in the sense that objective social processes [...] do not determine the form of subjective routines but in that a language 'speaks' its abstract objectivity within the individuals. (Lorenzer, 1977b: 170)

Again, Lorenzer anticipates with this critique a standpoint that became relevant in the 2008 debate. When Tony Jefferson (2008) responds to Frosh and Baraitser's critique of his and Hollway's approach with the counterargument that 'the Moebius strip image [...] collapses the psychic and the social' (Jefferson, 2008: 369), this comes very close to Lorenzer's critique above. Only Lorenzer would have nuanced it by saying that Lacan either severs communication between the poles of the subjective and objective, psychic and social, so that there is no longer

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any dialectical tension between them at all, or that he renders them synonymous, which results in the same effect. Therefore, whereas Lorenzer's critique of Lacan has not remained unchallenged in Germany, where scholars have argued convincingly for the historicity of Lacan's approach (see e.g. Heim, 2016: 134 ff.), this critique remains valid in the point of the indeterminacy of the concept of the Möbius strip and the problems this poses for its operationalization in psychosocial research.

Studying the Psychosocial – from a depth hermeneutic perspective

With his critique of both object-relational and Lacanian positions, Lorenzer effectively positions depth hermeneutics between the two dominating paradigms within applied British psychosocial studies. The question thus arising is whether and how this in-between position can be turned productive in the ways in which the psychosocial is being researched. Addressing this question, I will now examine two concrete case studies, one by Hollway and Jefferson (2013 [2000]) and one by Frosh, Patman and Phoenix (2003), in order to give them a critical re-reading from a depth hermeneutic perspective.

Part I: Hollway and Jefferson (2013)

In *Doing qualitative research differently*, Hollway and Jefferson (2013) set out to deconstruct quantitative approaches to research into the fear of crime. Pointing to the deluge of academic studies and newspaper articles that produce and reproduce the same stereotype of the 'fearful old lady, afraid to venture out after dark' (2013: 6), their idea is to test the validity of this stereotype by choosing a more complex, conflict-oriented approach to the field. In their words, they want to 'show how conflict, suffering and threats to self, operate on the psyche in ways that affect people's positioning and investment in certain discourses rather than others.' (2013: 17)

The concept of 'investment', which is central to their approach, has drawn particular criticism, beginning with the discourse psychologist Margaret Wetherell (e.g. 2005), continued by Frosh and Baraitser (2008) and, recently, by Stephanie Taylor (2015). The critique is that the concept of investment explains an individual's participation in culture mainly by offering a

developmental account of this individual, which – in Lorenzer’s words – is steeped in *inner, familialistic sovereignty* (1972: 19). This account is then coordinated with the discursive positions available to the individual.

Taking a central example from Hollway and Jefferson’s study, we are offered the case of a man named ‘Roger’. Roger’s fear of crime is nourished by ‘lurid tales of vicious violence that he avidly recounts’ (2013: 14). In wondering ‘How is Roger making sense of his fears about crime?’ (2013: 15), the authors suggest:

The main discourse appears quite familiar: its themes are the failure of law and order, a decline of respect for authority in young people, and the consequent rise in criminality around him. These claims rely on comparisons with a better time, and Roger, like many older people, constructs his past, as well as his current life, within this discourse. (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013: 15)

Inquiring into Roger’s past, Hollway and Jefferson find that it is overshadowed by an overly strict and brutal father. This finding is then linked with what the authors identify as Roger’s investment in the crime discourse. For Roger, they write, this discourse of a ‘golden age’ – an age when patriarchal authority still was respected – serves to legitimate ‘and thereby mitigate, an aspect of Roger’s past that caused him suffering. It also allows him to secure a moment when patriarchal authority counted for something. This is in contrast to its loss in the present.’ (2013: 16)

While many of the critical points that have been raised against this study must be taken seriously – and, indeed, have been addressed by the authors of the study themselves (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013) – I nevertheless find its interpretations highly illuminating and satisfying, particularly against the background of the relatively predictable views which quantitative research had produced up to this point. Furthermore, in looking closer at their argument, the opposition between the biographical and the social is by no means as absolute as critics have made it. Roger’s reminiscences seem never purely *familialistic*, but are presented in a way that steadily points to their embeddedness in the social: e.g. National Service, Labour Exchange, the recession of the 1970s (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013: 16). Thus, at the point when Hollway and

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Jefferson refers to Roger's conflicted relation to the authority of his father, this father is already established in a way that has securely placed him within dimensions of class and gender in a historical order that suggests a reading which is not deterministic but plausible.

Offering a few lines on plausibility: plausibility is far from an unproblematic property, since it endows academic (and other) accounts of a given issue with truth and authority by virtue of its consistency, completeness and apparent freedom from contradictions (Frosh, 2007). However, while even narratives of split subjectivity, disintegration, fragmentation and overdetermination have to offer a minimum of coherence to *communicate*, I continue to see the goal of psychosocial research in integrating the stories it tells into our, i.e. the researchers', as well as other people's life worlds. The point that can be made with the help of Lorenzer here is that this urge to integrate is legitimate and productive *as long as the act of integration is understood as ongoing, i.e. as the movement in permanence that is dialectics*. By contrast, Frosh's (2007) attempt to 'disintegrate qualitative research' by injecting a deconstructive, disintegrating moment into that of construction and interpretation – i.e. to construct and deconstruct at the same time – seems to me misguided. It follows the logic that Lorenzer criticizes in Lacan's relation between the subjective and objective (1977b; see above); paradoxically put, it wants to be *either-or at the same time*. This has indeed the effect of wiping out historical process: before either of the various constructions can be identified with, it is countered by another. The effect is paralysis.

Returning to Hollway and Jefferson's case study (2013), we see that the problem brought up by *investment* remains nevertheless. While it is debatable whether the coordination of formative childhood experience with the personal investment in the discourse of crime is *too neat* – i.e. excessively plausible –, the main problem in Hollway and Jefferson's interpretation seems to be the idea that the fear of crime retroactively smooths over the experience of the brutal father. This idea of an investment indeed appears overly constructed and derived for it to have any traction beyond the study's immediate task of proving the stereotypical findings of research into the fear of crime wrong. Rendering this case paradigmatic would require showing that the father-son relationship and Roger's later interpretation of it feeds into a cultural, transgenerational pattern. And while this is in fact what becomes perceivable in further cases in Hollway and Jefferson's study (see, e.g., "Tommy", who is directly compared to Roger, 2013: 55 ff.), Lorenzer's

conception of the psychosocial suggests a different methodological approach in which the biographical data is seen to be more closely connected to the social.

Needless to say, musings about how Lorenzer himself would have approached Hollway and Jefferson's case material are necessarily speculative, not least since his method of 'scenic understanding' would require for us to look at the original interview material in order to trace the gaps, strange turns and puzzling moments so as to identify its central problems. However, what one can say about the case against the background of a 'dialectisation' of the relation between the psychic and the social is that Lorenzer would probably not have found it necessary – or even fruitful – to trace Roger's conflict with his father back into the very early years of his life. For Lorenzer it might have sufficed to observe the conflicts entailed in the variations on the theme of fatherhood in Roger's description of the present situation. This situation is characterised, on the one side, by Roger's inability to either satisfactorily take on a parental role or perform substantial social functions – he is neither needed as a father, or grandfather (2013: 16), nor do readers hear about him having a job or another kind of occupation. On the other side, the situation is defined by Roger's observations of 'the local kids joy-riding or transporting stolen parts in carrier bags' (2013: 14) – observations coloured by the media coverage of street crime. Approaching the scenic material contained in his narration in this way, what comes to the fore is a painful absence of functioning father figures and a feeling of abandonment and lack of direction all around. Indeed, it is something that Roger seems to *share* with the teenagers in his observations.

In this interpretation, the looming aggression that in Roger's story makes the young adults prone to crime would be anxiety provoking to him precisely because he has a part in it and carries this aggression within himself. The fear would thus arise as the result of an act of projective identification (Klein, 1946; Hinshelwood, 1989: 178 ff.) and from a tacit, unconscious knowledge – a feeling of resonance – about the roots of this aggression and the dangers of its legitimacy. Fear of crime would thus be produced by/as the unconscious, nagging knowledge of the shared conditions bringing it forth. In Roger, it would be a reaction fending off his own aggression.

When Hollway and Jefferson write that Roger 'locates the bad [...] in people who are not his

kind’ and that ‘His kind (and himself) can thereby be experienced as good’ (2013: 18), this supports the interpretation offered here. In this respect, my emphasis on the projection of aggression in the scene is merely a play with and reshuffling of Hollway and Jefferson’s text along the lines of Lorenzer’s theory and practice. What is important in my shift of emphasis is that the psychological dynamic becomes *distributed* over the entirety of the scenes presented in Roger’s associations. Roger’s fear can then be seen as an equivalent and symptomatic articulation – as a *re-production* – within himself of the same aggression which troubles him in the young adults’ proneness to crime; both are closely tied to the absence of a ‘good enough’, present and caring authority – an absence which Roger embodies as well as suffers from. From there on, the discussion could be opened up to the role of paternal authority in current British politics in a more general way (see Yates, 2012).

Methodologically, one can gather from this shift in emphasis that the depth hermeneutic approach of ‘scenic understanding’ points us away from tracing individual psychology *in the individual*, but rather traces *expressions of culture in the subjective* and as dialectically produced and distributed over the individually psychical and the collectively social (Lorenzer, 1986: 28 + 84 ff.). In this respect, it would be more meaningful here to map the *distribution of feelings* of abandonment that are focused in discourse, rather than conceive of Roger and his relation to this discourse as an investment. It is this move from a *psycho*-analysis of subjectivity which is then coordinated with a social interpretation to the cultural analysis of a subjectivity in its social environment that distinguishes the method of scenic understanding in this example.

Studying the Psychosocial Part II: Frosh, Patman and Phoenix (2003)

Turning to Lorenzer’s critique of Lacan, the second case I would like to present is part of an article by Frosh, Patman and Phoenix (2003), ‘Taking a stand – Using psychoanalysis to explore the positionings of subjects in discourse’. As with the above, this case study also serves as a foil against which to discuss the conception of the psychosocial and its operationalization in research. Obviously, the article from which it is taken is an early attempt at bringing Lacanian ideas and concepts into empirical psychosocial research, and one can see how it cautiously tests the waters for such concepts. Its value, however, lies in exactly this tentativeness, as it puts on display some

of the more problematic aspects that can still be found in approaches with a Lacanian orientation today (e.g. Parker, 2005; 2010).

The authors present their argument in terms which is a mix between Hollway and Jefferson's approach discussed above (2013), discourse psychology and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Arguably, it is due to this compromise between different approaches that the question of the relation between the psychic and the social, as well as the specific form of the integration of the two poles in research comes to the fore even more clearly than in the above example.

Introducing their paper's argument, the authors write:

[O]ur argument is that the psychological applicability of discourse analysis will be advanced if we can gain clues to what structures discourse at the level of the 'personal'. While culture makes available the subject positions we can inhabit, the 'investment' that people have in these subject positions is not necessarily captured by the articulation of the discourses themselves; rather it may hinge on unspoken and at times unspeakable events, experiences and processes, *all of them 'cultural', but also deeply embedded in subjectivity*. It is here, very specifically, that psychoanalysis might have something significant to contribute. (Frosh et al, 2003: 42, emphasis added).

Already at this point one can perceive what will turn problematic in the course of the authors' argument. While they take over Hollway and Jefferson's (2013) concept of investment, which, as Frosh would emphasise in subsequent works (e.g. 2010), is problematic in itself, the experience that is seen to drive the investment is no longer related to the social but merely to culture. To be sure, Frosh et al.'s focus on discourse does not amount to rendering the "linguistic relation abstract from the ensemble of social relations", as Lorenzer argues in his critique of Lacan (Lorenzer, 1977b: 170, see above). What it does, however, is to reduce the social to what becomes articulated in discourse. In other words, whereas Hollway and Jefferson seek to shed light on a *cultural phenomenon* by offering a *psychosocial explanation* – albeit one that relies heavily on individual biography – Frosh, Patman and Phoenix (2003) narrow their focus down to *the coordination of personal and cultural-discursive aspects*. This move, I argue, results in a situation in which, as Lorenzer puts it, the 'constitution of the subject' becomes an abstract,

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subjectivistic one that is no longer ‘anchored in concrete objective processes’ (1977b: 170).

Again, I want to illustrate this point with a case from the article. The project that Frosh and his co-authors present aims at describing how the unwritten rules of ‘*doing gender*’, i.e. of performing to be a man or a woman (with other options hardly available in the specific context) are policed, transgressed, negotiated, as well as suffered, at various London schools (Frosh et al., 2003: 43). As one particular case of such a performance, they describe a boy named ‘Alan’ and his attempt at constructing ‘a position opposed to that of the hegemonic ideal, which he sees enacted all around him in the behaviour of his peers’ (2003: 48). Frosh et al. write: ‘One possible source for this attempt to differentiate himself from this mode of masculinity was that Alan had the worst relationship with his father of any of the boys in our sample [...], full of bitterness, antagonism and deep depression’ (2003: 48).

As I hope becomes clear, this explanation shows definite similarities with my above interpretation of Hollway and Jefferson’s case study. Instead of the absence of supporting father figures that drives the investment in a populist fear-of-crime discourse on the part of ‘Roger’, a similar absence is described in ‘Alan’s’ case as driving an investment in a conception of a soft, tender and supporting masculinity. Furthermore, Alan’s subject position is presented and discussed in direct relation with the established culture at school – a circumstance that moves Frosh et al.’s study significantly close to the kind of “cultural analyses” that Lorenzer envisioned. At the same time, however, what becomes striking in this respect is the total absence of an interpretation at the social level. Thus, whereas Hollway and Jefferson carefully embed Roger’s narration into dimensions of class, race and gender and in this way offer a dynamic between the individual, the discursive *and* the social, Frosh et al. do not manage to find a similar connection and balance. For example, this becomes apparent when they write that,

in Alan’s particular case, for biographical reasons of his own which we know only in outline, his attempt to buck the trend, to refuse the policing, seems closely entwined with his passionately felt hatred and sadness in the contact he has with the masculinity embodied by his bullying father. (2003: 48)

I find the description of the case touching and feel instantly protective of Alan who tries hard to

be ‘a good man’ (2003: 48) in the face of what appears in his published statements as a significant overall display of ‘bad manhood’ around him. The analysis, however, is caught between a cultural mainstream of *doing gender* and an individual exception that is presented without an attempt to relate both to social circumstance.

Now: Whereas in later publications, Frosh (2007; Frosh and Saville-Young, 2009; Frosh, 2010) would make it his point to steer clear of working out such relations, depth hermeneutics would ask the authors to deliver exactly that. Specifically, when Frosh et al. refer to ‘the urgency’ with which Alan looks around for ‘models of masculinity which might be more acceptable’ (2003: 48–9) and Alan’s swift and intense attachment to the interviewer (p. 49), this *form of interaction* of looking for ‘a good man’, as Alan is repeatedly quoted, might have a broader, more general meaning and relevance than is unfolded in the article. Thus, what a depth hermeneutic reading points to as missing from Frosh, Patman and Phoenix’s account is a discussion of the relevance that Alan’s tabooed search for a ‘good man’ has at a social, institutional level. Put in question form: How might Alan’s isolation and abandonment, the loneliness in his resistance to xenophobic gender norms find its equivalent in the educational policies, in the funding of state schools and in the ways in which this funding is put to use, or, for that matter, simply lacking or withdrawn? Such a pulling together of findings at the subjective level of inquiry with findings at the social level holds a necessary element of speculation, as there is no direct connection between the two – no direct way to subjectively experience an abstract such as an educational policy, for example. However, if we indeed want to “gain clues to what structures discourse at the level of the ‘personal’”, as Frosh et al. write (2003: 42, see above), a concern for the social basis seems an indispensable complement. Similarly, when Ian Parker, in his outline of ‘Lacanian Discourse Analysis’ (2005) writes that, ‘at the level of political argument, we do [...] indeed need to take up a discursive framework as a “view of politics and academic work as a more partial, incomplete and corrigible activity”’ (Parker, 2005: 176, quoting Wetherell, 1999: 405), this view nevertheless points to the necessity that an argument be put forth.

Unfortunately, there is little in the article by Frosh et al. (2003) that would point toward such an argument. We only hear that, ‘in the cultural context of hegemonic masculinity’, Alan’s sensitivity ‘places him in the terrain of homosexuality and makes him vulnerable to homophobic

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abuse' (2003: 49). Restricting the analysis to such observations, valuable as they are, amounts to a narrowing down of the social to the mere cultural, and the cultural to the discursive.

It is thus the absence of a counterpart at the social/societal level that makes the psychological assessment of Alan appear overly subjectivistic. To be sure, the authors' reluctance to trace this meaning is partly due to the caution with which they treat their material – a caution that again is due to the poststructuralist basis of their argument that refers all assumptions about the social foundation back to discursive and epistemic structures. However, yet another part seems to me to stem from an insecurity about how the psychic, the social, the cultural and discursive can and should be thought together. And whereas the concept of the Moebius Strip (see above) is not mentioned once in Frosh et al.'s early article (2003), the difficulties in anchoring the psychoanalytic parts of the interpretation of the cases creates a situation in which Lorenzer's (1977b, see above) critique of Lacan's theory – i.e. that it fragments into subjectivistic and objectivistic positions – nevertheless rings true here.

Conclusion

In summing up the main points of this article and in answering the question of what the effect of dropping depth hermeneutic into psychosocial studies might be, I would like to refer back to one of Peter Redman's papers on the psychosocial (2014a). In his search for early statements of the concept, he quotes from an article by Eric Trist, one of the founders of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, entitled 'Culture as a psychosocial process' from 1950. The simple, yet sophisticated balance in the relation between culture, the psychic and the social that is captured in this title is what depth hermeneutics makes available to analysis and interpretation through the stringent dialectisation that is captured in its theory and methodology.

This means that, in the depth hermeneutic conception of the psychosocial, people are neither merely caught up in the net of symbolic resources made available to them in discourses nor in the interactional repertoires integrated into, or banned from, these discourses. Rather, and additionally, their socialisation must be seen as in connection with a societal realm that is, if not *outside* the cultural process, then at least at a step's remove from it. In other words, while social

forces, such as the means of production, information and communication technologies and institutions, cannot and should not be conceived of as existing outside the processes of cultural formation, they nevertheless must be appreciated as being beyond the direct reach and immediate impact of these processes and, by this virtue, as driving and feeding them (comp. Lorenzer, 1974: 218 ff.).

Even though applying such insights to research might seem an intuitive and obvious choice, strong traditions in British psychosocial studies seem to have struggled to do so, as can be witnessed in concepts such as ‘investment’ and in shifts in the balance between the psychosocial and culture to the merely psycho-cultural.

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ⁱ See Salling-Olesen and Weber (2012: 8) for an overview of these works.

ⁱⁱ As Morgenroth, Bereswill and Redman state: 'If we accept Lorenzer's point that neurophysiological development is shaped by and carries the external world within it, then we must also accept that this external world is shaped by (and comes to carry within it) the neonate's neurophysiological responses to it.' (2010: 227–8)