

Viewings into the mirror kaleidoscope of my life

Jürgen Kriz

KI-Translation from: *Psychotherapie*, 2022, 27(1), 77–94 (<https://doi.org/10.30820/2364-1517-2022-1-77>)

Summary: In this autobiographical contribution, I present some scenes, decisions, and circumstances that were essential for my path in life as a psychotherapist, scientist, and university teacher. Rather than a linear sequence of events along a historical timeline, I choose the metaphor of a mirror kaleidoscope. This makes it possible to view important events scenically and narratively. Such scenes relate to aspects such as kairos, people who fostered my development, what I have learned as a psychotherapist and as a scientist, and what matters to me — the latter also with respect to my own approach, "Person-Centered Systems Theory." The contribution closes with an outlook on a desirable psychotherapy and its research.

Keywords: autobiography, kairos, psychotherapy research, relativity, discursivity, responsibility, synergetics, person-centered systems theory

"What is the past? Could it be that the immovability of the past is only an illusion? Could it be that the past is a kaleidoscope, a pattern of images that changes with every disturbance — a sudden gust of wind, a laugh, a thought?" — Alan Lightman

Framing: On the meaning of a mirror kaleidoscope

For his speech at my retirement ceremony in February 2010, Arist von Schlippe chose the title "A Look into the Kaleidoscope, or: A Virtual Slide Lecture." Von Schlippe, who was my collaborator for over two decades and has long since become a colleague (at the University of Witten) and a good friend, presented me on that occasion with a physical kaleidoscope — the kind one can buy in a good toy shop. He used the symbol of the kaleidoscope to unfold, instead of any temporally and logically structured narrative, individual images that he, based on our long shared time together, regarded as typical of my work. A kaleidoscope, after all, allows one to look again and again at "the same thing" — a handful of small, colorful shards of glass — from different angles. Depending on how the kaleidoscope is turned, these pieces arrange themselves into an astonishing number of often surprising images.

A kaleidoscope is therefore a very fitting metaphor for looking back at the past, especially at a person's life history. Such a "history" can only be constructed and told by applying rather artificial, historically ordering interventions with reference to external "facts" and records from declarative memory. Internally, what we call our own past, and what we remember of shared experiences with others, is far more the domain of episodic memory: it consists of meaningful islands in the stream of time, which we may connect narratively into a landscape. But since these narrations select and include different islands depending on mood, question, concern, intention, and so on, there are in principle many narrative archipelagos, which we then clothe in words and call "the past" — just as the Lightman quote above expresses.

This contribution should be understood as such a kaleidoscope of images and islands of meaning in the stream of my life. One important difference must be noted, however: the kaleidoscope that my friend Arist von Schlippe turned on my life was shaped by his view of me and the corresponding images. An autobiographical perspective, by contrast, involves something like mirror images. It is thus a matter of observations in a mirror kaleidoscope. On the one hand, this strikes me as especially challenging; we know, after all, that a theme such as "shame," for example, arises only because a person recognizes how other people see him and his actions, and thereby feels exposed. On the other hand, this also has something reassuring about it: in this mirror I see, alongside myself, the many people who stood and still stand by my side, as well as those behind me who have strengthened and continue to strengthen my back. Only this awareness of support and solidarity, which sustains my life, has made it possible for me not simply to swim along with the "mainstream." The many images that arise in me on the theme of "solidarity" fill me with great gratitude — even though I reproduce the people and scenes here only selectively and much of it only implicitly.

In keeping with the therapeutic maxim "as personal as possible, but nothing private," I will largely keep private and family matters to myself here — even though they are contained, in some form, in almost every

image of the kaleidoscope. Much of what happened could not have come about at all without the backing and support of my family. There have been other occasions to express my deep gratitude for that as well — and hopefully there will be more. In this text, that would not be possible to an appropriate extent.

Kairos

When I turn the mirror kaleidoscope to the question of what actually brought me to psychotherapy, the variety of images is best described with the term "kairos": a convergence of favorable circumstances and inner readiness to recognize and use them, so that a fortunate coincidence results. Let me note, only in passing, that I consider sensitivity to such possible constellations — both in people who offer therapy and in people who experience it — to be very important, and therefore worth supporting and encouraging.

Part of the kairos of my psychotherapeutic experience was the good fortune that one of my first patients was a supposedly "severe case": psychiatrists had diagnosed her with "endogenous depression," and accordingly she had been "treated" with electroshocks in clinics in Göttingen, and two years later in Hamburg. By the time she came to me, she was doing so poorly that, despite her negative experiences in those clinics, she was considering committing herself once again. But somehow she had heard about me through an acquaintance of mine and simply wanted to try whether it would help. The therapy lasted about 30 sessions. She then felt so much better that she wanted to continue on her own path. Many years later I happened to meet her again: she was coping well with everyday stresses and had not had a single further depressive episode. "Endogenous depression" had, of course, been a misdiagnosis — and the two rounds of electroshock treatment (euphemistically termed, in professional jargon, "electroconvulsive therapy," ECT) must be called at least "questionable." But the memory of this success repeatedly helped me withstand self-doubt whenever therapies took far longer and were by no means so clearly successful.

However, the theme of "psychotherapy" does not appear at all in the first three decades of my life. As the youngest of three children of a war widow from the working class, bombed out and without family support, I was more interested (besides music) in technical and scientific questions. It was already rather unusual to attend the Gymnasium: of the roughly 100 children in my cohort at the primary school I attended, only four made that leap — and I was the only one who went on to complete the Abitur. My brother, seven years my senior, had also managed to complete his Abitur. I chose psychology as a field of study rather by chance. I had read somewhere that it could lead to becoming a "lecturer at a college of education," which I found somehow attractive. At the time, neither I nor the general public had any clear idea of what a psychologist was or did. In hindsight, I would reconstruct that the humanities and social sciences meant absolutely nothing to me (for reasons of social background), while the natural sciences in the narrower sense (physics, chemistry, etc.) felt too remote from human beings. Psychology was — even in my naive conception at the time — something like a bridge or a compromise between the two worlds.

In Hamburg, where I began studying psychology in April 1964, there was (as yet) no psychotherapy; the same was true in Vienna, where I transferred after three semesters. Both psychological institutes were dominated by a scientific-experimental orientation, which suited me very well. Since I received only a tiny orphan's pension, I constantly had to earn money on the side. In Vienna, in 1966, I heard about the Institute for Advanced Studies, which had one of the first computers in Austria (years before the University of Vienna had one), and asked whether I could learn to program there. After two weeks, the institute offered me a scholarship position in the computing center, which — converted into a research assistant position — I held until my move to the University of Hamburg in April 1970. In fact, Peter R. Hofstätter had offered me a lectureship in Hamburg; I had even already inspected "my" rooms and met the staff intended for me. Shortly before the contract was to be signed, however, a scandal broke out over Hofstätter's past as a psychologist with the military during the Third Reich. The position I was to take was cut from him — but the sociologists (who were in the same department as the psychologists) reportedly said at that very meeting, "Well, then let's just take him!" Years earlier, in Hamburg, alongside psychology, I had also taken courses in a supplementary program in social pedagogy, and some of the sociologists apparently remembered me favorably.

Even these outlined early stages were carried by a great many coincidences and much good fortune: the choice of psychology as a field, the move to Vienna, the position at the Institute for Advanced Studies, Hofstätter's job offer (because he had heard me speak at a conference), and the "takeover" by the sociologists — all of these were simply strokes of luck to which I had contributed little. When they came

together in this way, I simply seized them. Something similar applies to the further turning points: that a professorship in statistics was advertised in 1972 at the newly founded University of Bielefeld, and two years later a chair for research methods, statistics, and philosophy of science at the University of Osnabrück — these, too, were happy coincidences, as were the many circumstances that led to the success of each application, details of which would exceed the scope of this contribution. It was certainly helpful that in the 1970s a number of new universities were founded and many professorships were created. In any case, it was anything but a planned career. And I do not believe that something like this would be possible under today's university conditions.

In Osnabrück, from 1974 onward, my engagement with psychotherapy began. I was 29 years old, held a chair, and had far more of my life still ahead of me than behind me. It thus made sense to think carefully about what should become more, and what less, important in my life from then on. It became clear to me that I had actually always had an interest in helping contact with people, but had had no opportunity until then to pursue this professionally. In addition, I was increasingly interested in questions of what constitutes a person's "reality," how this changes, what the social environment and society contribute to it, and how processes of change can be fostered. I therefore began training in psychotherapy. In retrospect, this was a first step back into psychology. At the time, however, this was not clear to me: I could not have imagined — and it was certainly not planned — that a few years later I would actually move to a professorship in psychology.

Nor was the choice of therapeutic orientation for my training a careful selection; rather, it was determined mainly by the fact that a large part of the training could be completed locally, in Osnabrück. That is how I came to person-centered (client-centered) psychotherapy, which soon proved to be a further fortunate coincidence. For Carl Rogers's approach — and his person as a whole — corresponded, and still corresponds, to an ideal with which I can fully identify. Part of this is that this approach does not consist of prohibition signs or pre-chewed material to be simply swallowed, but of central foundational principles that may and must be further developed and unfolded by oneself. In any case, I am fairly certain that Rogers would look with benevolence on my "Person-Centered Systems Theory," even if orthodox "Rogerians" cannot trace some of it back to an exegesis of his writings.

The last significant turning point I owe to kairos was the founding of a department of psychology at the University of Osnabrück in 1980. Until then there had only been a number of professors and lecturers in psychology within the framework of teacher training. I myself was in a faculty of social sciences. But at a university that was (at the time) still manageable in size, "everyone knew everyone" through various contexts. So I was asked whether I would like to take part in founding the faculty. This invitation actually implied that I would take up a professorship there in research methods and statistics. I, however, used the offer to make clear that I would only come if I were offered a professorship in psychotherapy and clinical psychology. This was ultimately agreed to by all sides (including the university leadership and the ministry) — by then I had also published quite a bit in this field. The Department of Social Sciences, however, wanted to let me go only on the condition that I would continue to teach the central courses in statistics, research methods, and their epistemological foundations, so that I formally held a half-position in each of the two departments. In reality, though, teaching in these subjects was rather undemanding — in stark contrast to building and running a psychology faculty (I was dean twice) and, especially, a clinical-psychotherapeutic division (housed, moreover, in buildings of a state psychiatric hospital that at the time had over 1,000 psychiatric beds). The actual distribution of work therefore lay at roughly 85% to 15% in favor of psychotherapy. Since expanding my official title — "Empirical Social Research and Statistics and Its Epistemological Foundations" — to include "as well as Psychotherapy and Clinical Psychology" seemed to me somewhat too showy and self-important, I simply left it at that: everyone knew, and could see, what I did. Only from 1999 onward did I have my official title changed to "Psychotherapy and Clinical Psychology," thereby also leaving the Department of Social Sciences.

A little later, together with Karl-Heinz Wiedl, we filled a second clinical chair, whose title simply reversed the two terms, namely "Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy" (the designation that is also standard today at most universities), which suited my primary interest in psychotherapy very well. Together with further professors, including Peter Machemer, who were engaged in "clinical" teaching, along with numerous staff and many adjunct instructors, we created the "Osnabrück Model." After two semesters (in the advanced

program) of overarching therapeutic courses, this offered the possibility of a multi-semester specialization and practicum in one of four areas: behavior therapy, psychodynamic therapy, humanistic psychotherapy (with a focus on person-centered psychotherapy), and systemic therapy. I was responsible for the latter two, and — as a further great stroke of luck — I was joined especially by Arist von Schlippe, already mentioned above, with his particular systemic expertise (who later also earned his doctorate and habilitation under me). This extensive teaching in psychotherapy, combined with a high proportion of practical work through cooperation with clinics, counseling centers, and practices, and numerous corresponding projects, made the "Osnabrück Model" so attractive that many notices hung on the bulletin board: "Seeking to trade a place at Osnabrück for a place at X" — where "X" could be filled in with several "famous" universities. Since I headed the psychology examination office for many years, I know that a surprising number of students found well-paid positions in clinics and institutions long before they had submitted their diploma theses. Numerous certificates had to be issued confirming that all examinations had been completed and only the diploma thesis remained to be written, whose positive outcome, given prior performance, was highly likely.

Looking back, it was a very labor-intensive but also fulfilling time — marked by a spirit of departure and renewal in psychotherapy and its university teaching. As former students still occasionally write to me today, many of them felt similarly. Even ten years before my retirement — that is, in the late 1990s — I could not have imagined voluntarily choosing to retire earlier than necessary (as a full professor being made emeritus, one is allowed, within certain limits, to determine this point in time oneself). The conversion of the diploma program into a schooled bachelor's/master's system, in which the uncritical reproduction of supposed "facts" and the ticking of prefabricated answers is far more encouraged than the motivation to think for oneself and critically question what is given, made it easier for me, however, to decide to take early retirement after all.

In the field of psychotherapy, this was further reinforced by the fact that the institutional advantages of the Psychotherapists' Act of 1999, and thus the formal upgrading of psychotherapists within the healthcare system, were achieved at the price of entering into a medical system governed by a technically medicalized ideology and questionable efficiency. Too much of what is essential to what I understand by psychotherapy falls by the wayside here, or is subordinated to a superficial way of thinking about efficiency. But as with any major systemic shift, there are of course people to whom such a new perspective is congenial, and who are drawn to the levers of power and function. This would be good for developments and renewal — were it not that such power tempts people to abuse it by wanting to impose their own ideology on everyone else, and to discredit everything that does not correspond to their own "truth" as "unscientific," or even to regard it as "hostile" and something to be eliminated. As someone who has always advocated for a diversity of perspectives and a plurality of therapeutic approaches — in the conviction that only this does justice to the heterogeneity of values and biographies in our multicultural society — I feel increasingly worn down by having to fight against the narrowing of perspectives and the propagation of a single "truth."

The future will show whether this systemic shift in psychotherapy, for which the Psychotherapists' Act of 1999 acted as a catalyst, ultimately benefits people more than it harms them in the long run, and whether its destructive excesses will disappear again. I admit to being rather skeptical here.

People who fostered my development — teachers, colleagues

Many of the inner images have to do with the people whom I can recognize in the mirror kaleidoscope of my autobiographical scenes, above all through their influence on my self-understanding. I had the good fortune to study at a time when many universities had only very few professors, who therefore each represented "psychology" in considerable breadth. They were probably inferior to today's specialists in the sheer volume of detailed knowledge. But they made an effort, and were able, to establish and convey manifold connections, and could thereby awaken enthusiasm for the field.

My two great role models in this respect, already as a student, were Peter R. Hofstätter in Hamburg and Hubert Rohrer in Vienna. My image of a "good" professor — as a guiding model for how I wanted to convey things to other people in study, training, and supervision — undoubtedly comes from these two personalities. This guiding image also contributed to why my first textbook on psychotherapy — *Grundkonzepte der Psychotherapie* [Basic Concepts of Psychotherapy], 1983, now in its seventh, substantially updated edition — turned out to be so comprehensive and thorough. Since, by that time, as a full professor, I was no longer under any career pressure, I could afford to invest a great deal of time and to

work through each of the roughly 20 psychotherapeutic approaches described in it until I was convinced by that particular approach. My primary goal was to give students something that would let them recognize the connections more easily than in the many far more detailed but overall fragmented individual accounts of the various methods. I was then very pleased that the representatives of these approaches, too, mostly gave positive feedback. For it was by no means foreseeable to me that, for example, psychodynamic theorists, with their rather detailed and precise concepts, would appreciate my comparatively brief and thus selective accounts. On the other hand, engaging with the psychodynamic approaches also offered me the most positive surprises, since I already knew the humanistic and systemic-family-therapy approaches quite well before working on the book. Thus Wilhelm Reich has stayed in my memory precisely because I found his manner of argumentation extremely clear and precise — in stark contrast to the stories about his later mental illness. Especially impressive for me, of course, was my encounter with the writings of C. G. Jung. They remain, to this day, an essential aspect of my thinking, particularly in their systems-theoretical aspects, which he formulated in his joint work with Wolfgang Pauli. A joint work on archetypes from an interdisciplinary perspective, sketched out on the margins of a conference with Verena Kast, unfortunately could never be realized due to various other commitments. I regret this very much.

Working on the *Grundkonzepte* naturally did not leave me unaffected. For once I had more than a dozen descriptive models "in my head" for what leads people into psychotherapy and how we can help them professionally, the question inevitably arose: "How does all this fit together?" For despite all my appreciation for the many people who had each managed to bring their lifelong experience in the field of psychotherapy into a more or less coherent explanatory system, the particular focus arising from each one's biography and the resulting choice of perspective also became clear. Precisely in comparing these approaches, and the underlying images of the human being and of how change works, their respective "omissions" also became apparent to me.

So I was, and am, grateful for the great wealth of insights that these diverse approaches gave me. But none of these explanatory systems could really satisfy me. At the same time — and this should also be emphasized — I am convinced that many of these approaches can help, in concrete therapeutic work, the people who seek out psychotherapy (or counseling or coaching). This is especially true when textbook or purely explanatory knowledge is not "enforced" upon these people (a tendency to which poorly trained beginners in particular may be prone), but the concepts instead serve as heuristics. Ultimately, the professional therapeutic encounter between clients and therapists is about overcoming, in a highly complex joint struggle, the obstacles that hinder the use of resources. Precisely the complexity of real psychotherapeutic processes — beyond artificially restricted research-laboratory situations or the application of ready-made programs within limited time windows (as in clinics) — makes it necessary to exclude as few aspects as possible of the dynamics that are actually at work. This has been, and remains, the concern of "Person-Centered Systems Theory," on which I have been working since roughly the mid-1980s to this day (see below).

Such an undertaking is, of course, also a risk. Precisely in the mirror kaleidoscope, my fears regarding its reception by others emerge — by the so-called scientific or professional "community." This concerns less the fact that "Person-Centered Systems Theory" moves outside, or across, the mainstream. Rather, I feared it might appear presumptuous and be misunderstood as an attempt on my part to understand and explain the individual therapeutic approaches "more correctly" or "more fundamentally" than their own representatives do. Whereas my primary concern is instead to promote the compatibility of method-specific perspectives with those of other approaches. I am therefore very grateful to see, in the mirror kaleidoscope, many benevolent and supportive people as well. From the many "systemicists" and "humanists" with whom I have been in close and friendly discourse, in some cases for decades, I expected this; but they were joined by people who, for instance, come from the psychodynamic camp, or who are simply interested in psychotherapeutic questions, and who told me that they felt addressed and stimulated by these perspectives and their presentation.

Such "discursive support" was always important to me. Already during my three semesters at the University of Hamburg, a small working group formed that studied together and took exams together, and whose members are still in contact with one another today. Far more important, however, was this group experience during my years in Vienna. Faced with a mass influx of psychology students that had to be

handled by only very few teaching staff, I quickly found my way into a small group of like-minded people who organized their own seminars and invited interesting speakers. Participation was open, but rarely more than 30 people came to the talks and events of the "student seminar" (out of well over 1,000 officially enrolled psychology students). The "hard core" of those who attended regularly numbered about 15 people. We spent many hours together each week, went swimming together at the Danube, or celebrated many parties together. Despite the many opportunities to enjoy life, our conversations tended to revolve around psychology (not least because there were some 30 exams to get through). Many years later, at least ten of these 15 people held professorships — and, as far as I can judge, not through any kind of "old-boy network" support, but simply because those semesters of intense joint discussion, combined with *joie de vivre* and learning, had made us quite fit professionally. The memories of that shared time are as pleasant as they are wistful — such intense group experiences probably occur only in one's younger years, among people who are relatively unattached and can devote a large part of their time to one another.

A great many people I was fortunate to meet in multi-day or multi-week seminars also had an important influence on my thinking. This was already the case at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Vienna, part of whose philosophy was to invite leading scientists from around the world as guest professors for a few weeks at a time. In the 1970s and 1980s, as an accompanying phenomenon of the awakening of the '68 movement, there was a great range of seminars offered by leading "unconventional thinkers" (a term that, until recently, still had positive connotations), such as Capra, Maturana, Varela, Pribram, and many others.

Also significant was Hermann Haken's invitation to one of his legendary conferences on synergetics in 1989, at Schloss Elmau. For me this was a substantial boost to my systems-theoretical work; at the same time it was the impetus for the so-called "autumn academies," which, as a kind of continuation of the synergetics conference within psychology, were carried forward for many years by Brunner, Schiepek, and Tschacher, and which I often attended. My numerous guest professorships, too, naturally go back to people who invited me to their universities — and many of these connections grew into friendships. I would especially like to mention Raivis Bičevskis, professor of philosophy at the University of Riga, who, beyond inviting me for guest professorships, translated some of my work into Latvian and compiled it into two books. He fostered and strengthened the philosophical dimensions in my work. To report at greater length and in more detail about these countless encounters and their influence on my thinking would exceed the scope of this text format. Many memories remain with me, however, not only in my head as knowledge, but also in my "heart" as a feeling of gifted enrichment.

When I turn the mirror kaleidoscope, even slightly, toward teachers, sponsors, and friends, all those people whose benevolent and supportive influence is manifest in some of my awards quickly appear as well. I have always been aware that in this I stand, so to speak, only in the foreground of such a "distinguished" dynamic, and thus really only receive these honors on behalf of everyone involved. To emphasize this is not documented modesty, but the knowledge that even a Nobel Prize, in the end, only spotlights the heads of very large teams and networks — and that, moreover, it takes people willing to nominate someone in the first place. So, with my honors, I see many people honored who remained in the background for the public (in some cases even for me). My thanks go to them especially, because this gave me the inner freedom to stand up more courageously for humanistic and systemic concerns in the unpleasant scramble over the distribution of institutional resources among the four basic orientations: I always had the feeling of not being alone. Even when there was no visible support in whatever committee I happened to be sitting on at the time, the certainty that my position required me to stand up for many others, and the feeling of being carried by them, strengthened my back.

In the kaleidoscopic images that follow, the historical-biographical recedes somewhat, and what has become important to me over the course of my life comes to the fore. But it is the essence of my life experience and, unlike the content of any specialist article, highly personal.

What I have learned as a psychotherapist, and what matters to me

The person who sits across from me in psychotherapy is usually described, within our healthcare system, by diagnostic categories. These diagnoses can indeed be important for insurance funding, for reports, for research, and in other contexts. For therapy, however, they are inessential. The complexity and diversity of a person's experiences over the course of their life so far, and what currently expresses itself out of this — including in the form of symptoms — far exceeds any standardized system of categories. What I consider

essential, rather, is the question of what contributed to a sweet little baby becoming a person who suffers because of themselves, others, and/or the world — and who, where applicable, inflicts suffering on others. The person themselves does not know this very precisely. And even less clear are the operative forces that prevent them from changing on their own, by their own strength. But the very fact that this person seeks out psychotherapy at all is a large, important, and hopeful step, signaling "that things cannot go on like this."

As a therapist, I therefore see it as my task to bring this person into such contact with the forces that shape them that they can at least reasonably sovereignly command the most important of these forces, rather than being subject to them (what we call "symptoms" is to be understood as an expression of this subjection). The point is that the person's space of options for deciding and acting expands significantly. Even physical symptoms change or lose their disabling significance — or sometimes disappear entirely — when the underlying operative forces are deprived of their point of impairing leverage through a change in the person's life and their own understanding of it.

Over the past decades, my view has broadened considerably, both with respect to the diversity of these operative forces and to their complexly interconnected relationships, leading to a guiding understanding that I have tried to formulate under the name "Person-Centered Systems Theory" (see below). One essential aspect of this is the "order-order transition" — from a suffering-laden, lived-experiential-dynamic structure into a structure that better corresponds to the developmental tasks currently at hand and is therefore less laden with suffering. In wisdom traditions of various times and cultures, this is often described with the formula "die and become," or corresponds to "growth" or "self-actualization" in humanistic psychotherapy approaches. This "die and become," however, is itself associated, even to a limited degree, with considerable uncertainty and anxiety — for the new has not yet really been achieved, often not even clearly visible, while the old no longer carries. A therapeutic relationship that offers trust and support, that is secure yet not constricting — of the kind that Carl Rogers, above all, researched and described — is therefore essential. To ensure this to a high degree, as far as possible, lies within my therapeutic responsibility.

The concrete methods of bringing people into better contact with their operative forces belong to the therapist's "toolkit." This may, I believe, quite properly be rich and varied, and should not be dictated by the boundaries of schools and by pigeonholing. The precise selection and combination, however, is ultimately less important. For there are not only patient biographies but also therapist biographies. And not everyone is suited to "everything" needed to achieve a good fit with a particular patient's and therapy's dynamics — least of all what textbooks can predict. I have found it extremely helpful to use my creativity to generate, as far as possible, new experiences of these operative forces, since these, unlike purely verbal acts and verbal images, better reach the embodied aspects of the person as well. But even the extent and manner of generating experience should arise from the situation itself, rather than being handled as a matter of principle or planned by the textbook independently of the concrete person.

I consider extremely important what a *bon mot* expresses with "the main thing is that the therapist feels good": if I do not ensure that I am currently as unimpaired and unrestricted as possible — that is, that I am "doing well" — then I can only offer 80%, or 70%, or less of my capacities. If one tends, as is typical in the helping professions, to exceed one's limits of endurance, this *bon mot* is a useful reminder not to lose sight of self-care.

For reasons of space alone, I will not go into the particularities of working with couples and families here. I follow the same central principles just outlined, but the interaction is markedly different, since the escalation dynamics of the social system are often continued and actively staged in the therapy room as well. Without very clear and explicit rules, whose observance is also enforced with a degree of authority (for example, "no physical or otherwise injurious attacks!"), I would fear "going under" in this escalation dynamic.

What matters to me about "Person-Centered Systems Theory"

For me, "Person-Centered Systems Theory" is not an abstraction built like some scholastic edifice of concepts. It is, rather, the existential expression of my struggle to better understand the world, others, and

myself. Virtually all the images in my mirror kaleidoscope are therefore permeated by this understanding — certainly with respect to how they can be put into words and described.

The starting point for how I understand a person's experience and action in the "here and now" is taking into account the diversity of operative forces and their complexly interconnected relationships — where "here and now" also encompasses how the past is understood and used, and how the future is envisioned and concretely shaped, "here and now." For addressing these questions, the significance of psychic-cognitive and emotional processes has stood at the center of various concepts since the very beginning of psychotherapy. Likewise, the effect of "family" interaction structures on an individual's psychic events, and its reciprocal effect on micro-social interaction structures, has been known for at least several decades, and is now taken into account in most psychotherapeutic approaches. Neither, therefore, needs further mention here. Beyond this, however, what matters to me is also the embedding of these psychic and interpersonal processes within a broader set of events, characterized on one hand by "cultural processes" and on the other by "organismic processes." The effects of these two levels co-determine what happens at every moment — both in a person's lifeworld and in the therapeutic space.

Thus, the understanding or even explanatory access to the "inner frame of reference" and to "immediate subjective experience" is always already bound to the use of "cultural tools" — that is, of language. And this means we are dependent not only on the forms of this language — its concepts and grammar — which, in our culture, manifests in the prioritization of things (nouns) over processes (verbs), and by which a certain process-like event linguistically becomes a "depression." Bound up with language are metaphors, principles of explanation and understanding, narrations, value orientations, and so on, of the culture, but also of the particular subculture and family, with its history and the stories told about it.

On the other side of this embedding, the operative forces coming from the organism are not active only in the form of "drives," "affects," or "feelings," as psychotherapy has taken into account since Freud. Rather, we have had to recognize that our life processes are, from earliest childhood, influenced by general structuring principles that were acquired over the course of evolution and are now concretized relative to the social community and biographical experience. "Attachment" — the structuring of parts of the social lifeworld on the basis of early experience regarding the reliability of attachment figures in situations of stress — is only one such, by now widely accepted, structuring force affecting present events. In current discourses and findings, this is discussed more broadly under the keyword "social brain."

It is not in keeping with the character of this contribution to present "Person-Centered Systems Theory" as such; this has been done elsewhere. But this rough sketch may perhaps help to understand why it matters to me not to systematically exclude, in explanations of psychotherapeutic events, any one of these four process levels — the organismic, the psychic, the interpersonal, and the cultural (though, depending on the exact question, further levels may need to be differentiated). In addition, one cannot stop at merely listing and describing the levels. Rather, it is only systems-theoretical concepts about their specific interplay that generate a "theory." For me, "synergetics," a concept developed by the physicist Hermann Haken, offers an excellent explanatory system here. Its fruitfulness has been demonstrated, in the interdisciplinary project of synergetics — which comprises many thousands of research studies — predominantly in the natural sciences. With "Person-Centered Systems Theory," however, there is now an elaboration for questions and discourses in the human sciences that has also met with Haken's approval. It is a pleasure for me to be able to count Haken among my friends for a long time now.

One last central concern that I associate with "Person-Centered Systems Theory" is the complementarity of so-called "objective" and "subjective" perspectives. This becomes readily apparent, for example, in the conceptual pair of "findings" and "felt states" — the most important insight I took away from a large, nationwide project involving physicians and psychologists working with severely asthmatic adolescents in the mid-1990s: here it turned out, surprisingly to me, that the objective diagnostic findings, in the form of medical parameters, correlated almost not at all with the patients' subjective felt states. Both perspectives are, of course, important for understanding clinical events, or psychotherapy. And they cannot be played off against each other, either, since a description of the sick based solely on their medical parameters would be just as one-sided as one based solely on their felt states. Something similar applies to many other aspects and concepts, such as "stress" or "resources," which are likewise described predominantly on the basis of

"objective" factors, even though other aspects might be relevant to how the subject actually experiences and acts.

What is problematic for me is that, in descriptions within the field of clinical psychology and psychotherapy, findings overwhelmingly stand at the center, while felt states receive little to no attention. Even when people ostensibly speak of and about themselves, they often cite only findings. Targeted psychotherapeutic attention is needed even to give felt states any room at all. Put more fundamentally: the world as we describe it, and the world as we experience it, are two complementary perspectives. This insight, however, took me many years to mature.

What I have learned as a scientist, and what matters to me

Looking into the mirror kaleidoscope from this perspective, the many images that emerge from over 50 years of biography as a scientist can be organized under three terms: relativity, modesty, and responsibility. They are interconnected in multiple ways; I can only call up a few striking images here.

Relativity: The experience of relativity goes back to an episode I had with Jürgen Habermas's book *Knowledge and Human Interests*. When, in 1970, I took up the lectureship at the University of Hamburg in the field of sociology, this was a culture shock for me. Until then, I had seen myself as a natural scientist. My field was indeed statistics, data processing, and research, but somehow I naturally wanted to understand something of the disciplinary context in which this was embedded. Habermas's book was much discussed at the time. So I tried to read it. But after a few pages, I had to admit that I understood almost nothing, even though I tried several times. My arrogant defensive reaction led me to assume (and even to say) that sociologists simply talked nonsense — in contrast to "real" science.

A few years later, by then a professor of statistics at the Faculty of Sociology in Bielefeld, I bought myself a book at the train station for a longer train journey. I read it with great enthusiasm and found much of it as exciting as it was apt. Suddenly I noticed that it was the very same book I had dismissed as gibberish four years earlier. This was a very striking "aha experience" for me, because I realized in a flash how much my own thinking had changed — and with it, my view and my evaluation. Since then, I have never again given an assessment — for example, in reviews — without setting out, as far as possible, the premises under which I am judging a text, and the reasons I might not be able to make anything of it. This rather forceful experience of how, out of insecurity, I reacted with inner and outer arrogance, and simply declared quite a few things "unscientific" that did not fit the narrow horizon of my prior worldview, was an important warning to me for the further path. And I therefore have real understanding for a number of colleagues in academic psychology who react in a similar way to what is unfamiliar to them. Unfortunately, it seems to me, such defensive reactions are found especially in the field of psychotherapy research, and even more so among the powerful bodies that pass judgment on it.

Discursivity: Directly connected to this is a second experience, which taught me how dangerous and misleading the belief in the objectivity of methods and results can be. Convinced that the best way to teach research methods is to look closely at good research, I began offering seminars in Hamburg as early as 1970 in which we analyzed sufficiently complex empirical papers in leading journals. It turned out that alarmingly often, rather considerable nonsense came to light: nonsense in the sense that the chosen methods contradicted the substantive assumptions. Or that different branches of analysis mutually demonstrated that the chosen methodology was unusable for the research question, because it violated the model's assumptions, and so on. In bigoted arrogance, I initially simply declared these people "methodologically incompetent."

But over the course of a number of such seminars, it became increasingly clear that something quite different was actually at stake. For when respected researchers, in respected journals — unnoticed by respected peer reviewers — repeatedly publish "results" that do not come close to withstanding methodological reanalysis, this must point to a more fundamental problem. Indeed, it can be shown that the main reason for these nonsensical research results lies in a methodological misunderstanding about the status of measurement data and methods. It is precisely the mistaken belief that applying "correct" methods would also guarantee robust results that prevents people from reflecting on the many presuppositions and the dependence on seemingly small decisions in the research process, and from putting these up for discussion. In this way, it goes unrecognized that "results" can only ever be

contributions to discourses that must be conducted on substantive grounds, and are never absolute proofs of anything. Above all, equivalent methods applied to the same data quite often lead to different results — something that goes entirely unnoticed if one does not question this, or believes in the one "correct" method. Unfortunately, this error, too, is especially widespread in psychotherapy research.

Responsibility: From these first two thematic complexes, the third follows immediately: the high importance of responsibility for the many decisions that must be made in the research process. Only if I am willing always to understand my own standpoint as a relative one (though, hopefully, explicitly so, and justified with reference to scientific discourses), and to bring the methodology used and its results into a discourse that reflects, in particular, on alternative possibilities — rather than insisting on a "correct methodology" and "true results" — does the sheer number of decisions made, or still to be made, in the research process become apparent. But then I can no longer exempt myself, as the "agent," from my actions, and hide behind the pretext of a "correct" methodology. For I am responsible for the decisions I make. It is I who decide on the methodology and its many individual steps — and, in doing so, discard alternatives.

This sounds like a logical derivation — and indeed, one could reason this way. For me personally, however, this understanding only emerged over the many years of grappling with what I experienced as the destructive workings of the so-called Scientific Advisory Board for Psychotherapy (Wissenschaftlicher Beirat Psychotherapie, WBP). Thus I was astonished, with frustration, that a body bearing the label "scientific" adhered, entirely unmoved, in 2017, to its decision not to recognize humanistic psychotherapy, and that no criticism — including an open letter in which 40 professors accused the WBP of having "disregarded and violated central rules of scientific work" — prompted the WBP to engage in a discourse about the arguments. To me, this is only comprehensible on the assumption that the WBP believes its procedure follows a neutral and singularly correct methodology, for whose many decisions no one is responsible.

Ultimately, this reflects only one current event in a stream of thousands of frustrating hours of precious lifetime spent trying to convey this responsibility for decisions — and their consequences for German patients and for psychotherapy. Neither during the four years in which I myself was a member of this body, nor afterward, have I managed to get more of the principles that I have advocated for decades, as the most important criteria for good science, to students, doctoral candidates, or international research committees, to find their way into the deliberations of the WBP.

This shows that, alongside the many moments of *kairos* described at the outset, there have also been arduous, frustrating, wearing experiences in my life. It would indeed be an unrealistic miracle if it were otherwise.

Altogether, my at least 30-year struggle for an appropriate plurality of psychotherapeutic approaches in Germany — and thus, in particular, for the establishment of systemic therapy and the (re-)recognition of humanistic psychotherapy — has been a journey often skirting the edge of burnout. It was therefore all the more important to me to experience the solidarity of many people who encouraged me and let me know that they thought similarly and supported me. The honors I received over the years — many of them linked to acknowledgment of my commitment to humanistic psychotherapy — were also especially important to me emotionally: they let me know that, despite all the resistance, my path and its direction were not wrong, and that I was not alone. For the same reasons, I accepted far more lectures, seminars, workshops, and guest professorships than is good for a quiet life. The resulting burdens on my family — and especially, once the children had "left the nest," on my wife — belong among the private, non-public images of this time. Their existence, however, as well as the support, both personal and professional, that I experienced from my wife, who works as a journalist, may and should be mentioned publicly.

In this image of the mirror kaleidoscope, too, the many colorful pieces of the personal, of psychotherapy, and of science thus interact in ways that can hardly be isolated from one another — and are, of course, also interwoven with private life.

My wishes for psychotherapy (... and for myself)

The last image in the mirror kaleidoscope shall be directed toward the question of the future. In a mirror, of course, such a perspective is always simultaneously also a look back. Fittingly, then, a 25th-anniversary image now emerges, in this year, 2021: in 1996, at the first congress of the Swiss CHARTA (an association of

psychotherapy societies) in Zurich, I gave a talk titled "On the Relationship Between Research and Practice in Psychotherapy." Unfortunately, little has changed regarding the critical wishes for the future expressed there over the past 25 years. I therefore consider it fitting to close by quoting the final part of that talk. In 25 years, by human estimation, I will no longer be alive. It would be my most heartfelt wish that others could then report on truly good progress.

"Precisely when we, as clinicians, ask about the relationship of psychotherapy research to its subject matter, the resulting picture is often not exactly flattering. For it is by no means coincidental that we understand the very same structures that are propagated, in classical Western science, as the 'virtues' of a clean methodology, as, in our patients, needs for control serving the purpose of warding off anxiety:

- *the most far-reaching possible elimination of the unpredictable and the uncontrollable*
- *reduction of influencing variables*
- *the most far-reaching possible prognosis of the outcomes of actions*
- *maximal control over what can happen*
- *concealment of one's own motives and emotions behind a 'correct' procedure, i.e., a methodology*
- *restriction of experience to that domain which is predefined by so-called 'permissible' questions and procedures...*

It is a need of mine — into which I also put a great deal of my energy — to arrive at as comprehensive an understanding as possible of clinical and therapeutic processes. I even consider it desirable for psychotherapy research to advance, at the foundational level, toward a largely unified body of theory. But I pray that no one may succeed in imposing a single, universally valid therapeutic 'method.' Given the diversity of people, their needs, values, and goals, I could only imagine this as a straitjacket. We should not — out of fear that our richly blossoming fields of therapy might be overgrown by the much-invoked 'jungle of therapies' — flee into the plantations of an 'effective' monoculture. If one levels the Swiss mountains and uses them to fill in the lakes, one obtains a plain that can presumably be cultivated far more efficiently — and that, planted with a monoculture, allows for the even more efficient deployment of heavy machinery. But the question also remains: what is the price of such 'effectiveness' — and do we want to live that way?

In closing, I would like to extend one more invitation: namely, to reverse, for once, the usual direction of the gaze regarding the relationship between the practice and the research of psychotherapy. Maslow (1977) already put this as follows some 20 years ago:

'Why do we keep asking, again and again, whether psychotherapy is scientific enough? Why do we not instead ask whether science and its research methods are psychotherapeutic enough?'

A psychotherapy research that does not anxiously hide behind the pseudo-objectivity of 'science fiction,' but instead competes with systems-oriented physicists and chemists in doing justice to the principles of 'working with the living,' and that, ultimately, as the knower, does not try to exclude itself from the description of the known — such a psychotherapy research could finally take up this human concern in earnest."

Biographical note: Jürgen Kriz, Dr. phil., born 1944, is professor emeritus of psychotherapy and clinical psychology at the Institute of Psychology, University of Osnabrück. He previously also held professorships in statistics, research methods, and philosophy of science. Jürgen Kriz is a licensed psychotherapist and an honorary member of several psychotherapy associations. He has held numerous guest professorships and received numerous awards; he has published around 300 publications, 23 of them books. He is also the editor of the book series *Basiswissen Psychologie* (30 volumes to date).

See:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jürgen_Kriz

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Person-centered_systems_theory

<https://jkriz.de/>