Dialogic Pedagogy
an International Online Journal

Meeting youth in movement and on neutral ground

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Abstract

The article articulates an educational motto – expressed in the title – found in a 'prototypical narrative' of social youth work carried out by activists in Copenhagen in the 1990s. This way of modeling pedagogical practice is first outlined as different from the standardizing approach dominant in science. As a prototypical narrative, the story alternates between descriptions and contextualizations of events, theoretical debate, and analytical suggestions. The key idea that is unfolded is the 'critical trans-pedagogy' of a creation and tinkering of collectives and their participants in struggles for recognition, and for the democratic social engineering of a responsive welfare state. It is suggested that a singular historical situation spurred this development, both in the practical youth work, and in the theoretical traditions with which I could articulate it. This included the post-industrial crisis of labor, the post-cold-war shaking of state forms, New Public Management, and the simultaneous expansion and attack on the welfare state. It also included how the Foucauldian rethinking of power and the performative turn in the social sciences informed the broadly Vygotskian traditions. On these backgrounds, the youth work practices could be approached as generalizing, performative reenactments of social problems. The approach is finally spelled out in and around the story of one participant, before the concluding remarks return to the issue of how a prototypical narrative deals with theory.

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Introduction

The article represents an elaboration of a lecture given to the "Active Citizens Symposium" at the Pontifica Universitate do Sao Paulo, in November 2012. The lecture tried to represent and discuss lessons learnt from collaborating with a community of youth workers in Copenhagen in the 1990s. "Meeting youth in movement and on neutral ground" was a motto of that community that neatly captured some key aspects of their form of youth / social work / education, which I came to articulate as a 'critical trans-pedagogy'. Although I recently published a book that unfolds and explains that articulation to an international readership (Nissen, 2012a), the question whether and how standards of educational practice can be transferred across great spatio-temporal and socio-cultural distances is far from straightforward and simple: addressing a Brazilian audience with Danish experience, I was impelled to reconsider it. After all, as readers of a journal of Dialogical Pedagogy will appreciate, I was not exactly out to standardize education or youth work, urging my Sao Paulo colleagues to buy (into) 'critical trans-pedagogy[®]' as an evidence-based program.

That consideration, however, was not an obstacle or a detour, since the questions of standards and standardization are both very contemporary and at the same time at the heart of why it makes sense to work with theory[1]. The globalized empiricism of standard educational methodology sets the scene for a renewed meta-scientific and trans-disciplinary reflexivity, once we realize that rejecting standards by invoking idiographic situated complexity *in a text* (or in a lecture two decades and 10.000 km away from those situations) is necessarily self-refuting[2].

Accordingly, the issue of standards frames the present argument: Theory is considered in the light of *standards*, that is to say: *how practices may be articulated as relevant across important differences*. We come across that frame as we enter and as we exit this article.

Still, the narrative form, which derived, first, from the genre of an oral address, is retained at several levels in this text. Indeed, it is argued that some narrative structure must be crafted to connect the temporalities and tensions of individual, socio-cultural and theoretical developments, and thus to facilitate the reflection of the singular historicities of experiences, concepts, and standards. However, this does not imply or suggest any immediate common-sense, i.e. everyday sense-making as the counterpart to standards. It is true that narrativity sometimes serves as a vehicle for a critique of 'abstractions' and a claim to what is then cherished as 'concrete', while, in the same moment, veiling its own work of abstractions. But instead of this ideological trope, I intend to mobilize narrative as explicitly prototypical, as carrying standards, and thus as a way to accentuate the irreverence and dialogicality that is inherent to theoretical analyses, and cultivated by their textual form, which cannot help but continuously defer sense into meaning, in something like what Fernanda Liberali (2009) calls a 'creative chain'.

Forming Persons: Standards and Concrete Universals

How is the practice of forming persons – pedagogical practice – transferred? Two simple answers to this question are dominant: There is a) the blank rejection of standards that I have just rejected (and which will not occupy us more in this text), but the general scientific understanding is that b) this is a job of abstracting and focusing on specific causal relations by clearing away differences: *Ceteris paribus*, all other things being equal.

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[1] That whole issue is the topic of a research program I am currently involved with on "SUBSTANce – Subjects and Standards". See http://substance.ku.dk/english (April, 2014).
[2] Derrida (1981) makes this point nicely in his discussion of Plato's (textual) critique of textuality in *Phaedrus* – so the issue is not only contemporary, but also very old.

Thus, for instance, the world's most cited living psychologist, Albert Bandura, staged experiments that sought to strip away everything else so that only universal psychological mechanisms appeared; he famously proved that people can learn from observing each other ('social learning'), and that you'll be more motivated to do things if you believe you are able to do them ('self-efficacy'). Banal as it may look, this mock rephrasing comes quite close to the actual scientific findings, precisely because Bandura did such a good job of clearing away complexities. For the same reason, they seem to be easily applicable to all kinds of situations.

At a closer look, it takes quite some effort to make these generalized statements in ways that will be accepted as relevant and significant, rather than as signs of utter simple-mindedness. As in many crafts, the art is to conceal the effort – not the effort of scientific abstraction, but the effort of making it relevant. The great effort of standardizing psychology lies in restructuring the practical field of relevance – in this case into one where learning is conceivable as an individual's collecting of information (even when it is 'social'), and where the presumed feasibility of actions appears as stable patterns of that same individual's way of dealing with herself. In many parts of the world, that has taken, and may still take, some very hard work. Typically, though, it forms part of the establishment of larger institutional structures, and it is rewarded with the authority of expertise that comes from referencing 'the world's greatest' psychologist.

It is a general point about standardization that there is a lot of work of providing the conditions necessary for the standard to be relevant and to work; and that, once it is in place, that work is typically overlooked, because the standard also directs the gaze (see e.g. Bowker & Star, 1999; Busch, 2011; Timmermans & Berg, 2003). Indeed, that is often part of the point in standardization: to allow us to focus and forget. In many cases, this is achieved mostly through a material and technological automatization in a global division of labor (as with e.g. computers, smartphones and cars); in other cases, it is more of an imposition of habits and institutional structures that have to be reaffirmed each time anew (as with e.g. forms of pedagogy). All cases, indeed, include both these aspects. Further, in all cases – but more obvious and immediately pertinent in the latter type of cases – simplifications are not achieved by eliminating differences, since they cannot be removed, but rather by pushing them aside and covering them, paradoxically adding to the complexity they appear to reduce.

It is typically easy to let one's gaze be directed by the standards of a car, and forget about the complexities of carbon emission, health issues etc. But in the case of pedagogical standards – standards for the practice of forming persons – the complex ecology of the imposition of the standard remains in view in a different way. This makes the choice between a standardizing and a reflexive standpoint especially acute: Although institutional power is invested in such standards – as we shall discuss further below – they are never quite taken for granted, since pedagogy itself necessarily includes a precarious imposition, adoption, and recreation of standards. For this reason, the tradition of conceiving of general relevance within the framework of standardization – the scientific *ceteris paribus* – has never achieved a complete hegemony in pedagogy. There is room for an alternative. This alternative does not, of course, imply a denial of standards, but a kind of modelling of standards that does not conceal, but includes a reflection of their concrete conditions, realizations, and relevance. It creates vulnerable and contestable prototypes rather than clear-cut blueprints. It thinks in, and with standards, but, crucially, also about, around, and sometimes against them[3].

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[3] This paraphrases and expands Wolf Haug's characterization of critical theory as thinking about, rather than in, the thought-forms of a bourgeois society (Haug, 1977).

As an example, Paulo Freire's concept of *conscientization* (Freire, 1996) models a standard of pedagogical practice. But if one looks into Freire's texts (or secondary texts about them) for simple and transferrable cause-effect formula, one does not find any. Freire's legacy remains bound to his time and place. For this reason, one might guess that his texts would be relevant only for specialists in Brazilian educational history. But this is, as is well-known, far from true. Rather, they are taken up world-wide as a key reference in a critical pedagogy that seeks relevance in conditions that differ widely from Freire's. Parts of this bid for relevance are disputed – as, for instance, the question whether the concept of 'empowerment' in a mostly North American community education should be referred back to Freire's 'pedagogy of the oppressed', or should rather be described as a form of psychologization of issues of power and privilege that Freire would probably detest (see, e.g. Cruikshank, 1999 and below). But, precisely since the context of relevance is itself part of the knowledge, that dispute is, too.

The reason a work like Freire's can be transferred is not that it is simplified and appears to be easily applied. On the contrary, it is that, with all its complexities, it can be seen to address fundamental issues. Freire's pedagogy was revolutionary, not only in a direct political sense, but also in the sense of ground-breaking contributions to an ongoing discussion of applied philosophy. Although Freire's texts, as any model must, works with abstractions, they visibly and reflectively add to the complexities of any pedagogy by posing the question of how it connects to social transformation in a wider political meaning. They pose this question while maintaining that it must be a rich and complex question, in Freire's Brazil as in, for instance, Copenhagen 40 years later. But they also suggest that this troublesome work is worth the effort, since it addresses core issues.

Learning from one of Freire's favorite philosophers, Hegel, we can call such issues *concrete universals*: Issues that can never quite be abstracted from their time and place, but still useful to learn about at other times and places. To learn from them, we have to engage with specifics. The more we engage with different specifics, the deeper we can understand the universal concepts. Again and again, this movement requires us to reflect on the concepts. As we reflect on their differential referents, this implies that we also reflect how they are distinguished from and related to other concepts, as proposed and carried by different traditions. For instance, how did *conscientization* develop from Christian *conscience* and Enlightenment *consciousness*, and how did it later transform into a psychologized *empowerment*? Thus, to the complexities of reference and relevance are added those of cultural and scholarly traditions. In other words, concrete universals are *theoretical*. They do not easily translate to an immediate common sense as do the simplistic and reductionist standardized concepts. That is to say, they do not lend themselves to ways of hiding complexities of transfer. To use them, we need time and effort to first take them seriously, in their own right, and then time and effort to make them relevant.

Thus, we need some kind of academia – some kind of school. But this does not mean we need the school as we mostly know it – an institution which typically, by not addressing relevance as problematic, sanctions the unreflective imposition of standards, and pretends to ignore it. Although it may appear paradoxical, empiricism and scholasticism are two sides of the same coin, and conversely, theoretical work is closely related to practice and social transformation. Recently, Anna Stetsenko has coined the term *transformative activist stance* for this epistemology of practice (Stetsenko, 2013), which originates in the philosophical tradition going from Spinoza through Hegel to Marx, explicitly stated in Marx' Theses on Feuerbach (Marx, 2003, see also Jensen, 1999). Freire was one of the most important in a line of pedagogical theorists who drew out the implications of this general epistemology for education: working with concrete universals, engaged in transforming fundamental socio-cultural standards and conditions, is formative of persons as well as of theories.

We could say that this work of changing standards, conditions, persons and theories, is basically what 'meeting youth in movement and on neutral ground' means. But spelling out the implications of this pedagogy is more than merely exemplifying Freire with Copenhagen social youth work.

Forming and rethinking collectives

My collaboration with the experimental social youth workers in Copenhagen took the shape of a 'joint venture' where our different, but ethically allied projects met and exchanged, *transforming references* from their experience and from my theoretical traditions. I did general ethnographic fieldwork, interviewed all kinds of participants and stakeholders, and participated in more or less formalized discussions; I fed back my analyses in numerous ways, including lectures, webpages, and various other genres. Twice, I was formally appointed evaluator on behalf of the State. Overall, I worked to articulate the standards of their collective practices by modelling those practices as *prototypical*, that is, as embodying concrete universals[4].

When I engaged with them in 1990, I was soon impressed with their skills in mobilizing and organizing. This was not surprising, since many of them, like myself, had experience and schooling from organized political work. And of course, if you are trying to do practical experiments in pedagogy, that is a good deal of what you will be doing: You must create, maintain, modify, develop etc. not only participants, but also what they participate in – arrange meetings, provide venues, establish groups and activities, secure funding, decide on names and logos, etc.

That is not usually considered part of education itself. But in this community, and in our discussions, it was deemed crucial. One important reason for this was that, although we shared a tradition of political organizing, that tradition was changing. Even before 1989, and even in the most militant quarters – such as communists and Maoists – the hierarchical and rationalistic organizational traditions were crumbling on the European left, not least through the demise of industrial labor, and the rise of the peace, environment, feminist and student movements. Notions of 'grass-roots' or 'flat democracy' were ready at hand, but they were obviously simplistic and did not much address the key issues of pedagogical design and development of collectives.

This set of practical problems matched a problem in the theoretical traditions that I had been working with. Contrary to the individualism of the standardized psychology exemplified above with Bandura, the cultural-historical psychology, from Lev Vygotsky (1962) and on, was broadly speaking collectivist, maintaining that people develop through the appropriation of culture in social interaction. But it was not easy to take the step from that psychology to the question of the formation of collectives.

The social psychology of the time, even in off-mainstream versions, was dominated by the agency/structure model that blocked attempts to overcome divisions between disciplines. Thus, regarding individuals as social almost certainly implied their more or less smooth fusion into given structures or systems, which, in turn, formed part of the reproduction of society[5]. In the Vygotskian tradition, those theorists who were most keen to take up the radical implication that human subjectivity arises through *participation* – rather than mere interaction – were struggling with that functionalism, in different ways and with different solutions. Leontiev's activity theory (Leontiev, 1978) presented a bluntly functionalist sociology, from which he tried to shelter subjective agency by insisting that personal sense could not be reduced to objective meaning – although he could not quite explain why, since he saw sense as anchored

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[4] I have unfolded this methodology in Nissen (2009a) and of course in the above-mentioned monograph (Nissen, 2012).
[5] Some theorists – most prominently, at the time, Giddens and Bourdieu – declared agency and structure to be mutually constitutive or internally related, but since they could not escape the model, they had to declare that intention over and over.

in motives that were socially produced. Engeström and his colleagues solved the problem by fusing sense into meaning and focusing on 'activity systems', hoping instead to avert functionalism by seeking out their 'contradictions' (Engeström, 1987). Holzkamp (2013) and his followers, by contrast, developed a 'subject-science' by reducing meaning to sense; this increasingly phenomenological approach then merged in many ways with Lave and Wenger's theory of 'communities of practice' (1991), most characteristically in Dreier's work (2008). Whereas Engeström ends in functionalism each time he proposes an 'activity system', Lave (2008) refuses it by denying the ontic reality of collectives as singular entities at all (see, on this issue, Nissen, 2011, or 2012, ch. 5).

This may all appear a quagmire very 'internal' to a particular theoretical tradition in psychology. But, in fact, these were broader ideological issues as well. The privatization of agency is a cornerstone of capitalism, and functionalism is deeply rooted in the constitution of social sciences as practices of social regulation that claim political neutrality. Further, as could become clearer as the dust settled on the rubbles of the cold war, even the Marxist traditions that tried to overcome just those ideologies, practically and theoretically, had severe problems with collectives from the start.

Through many years of interdisciplinary collaboration, I have learned to wonder about how so many Vygotskian and otherwise Marxist psychologists could insist that "society" is vital to understanding persons, yet give it so little attention. A part of this could be attributed to divisions between scientific disciplines, as mentioned. But it is not only in psychology. Sociology, right from its foundation by Durkheim, Tönnies and others, outlined 'society' as a strangely fuzzy unit of analysis, sometimes covering the entire globe in all its history, at other times only the territories of present nation-states or even smaller units. How one 'society' was constituted as distinct from another was considered a minor practicality and largely ignored. This, in turn, can be seen as a result of sociology's place within an unchallenged political territory[6], and the identity of society and politics are of course obscured also by another division of disciplines, the border onto political science.

Of course, we would expect something radically different from a Marxist social theory that was trans-disciplinary and allied with projects of socio-political change from the beginning. But it turns out the problem is even deeper. Marx himself and his followers would largely think of those projects of socio-political change as the *dissolution* of social units, most famously in the Communist Manifesto's utopia of the withering away of the state. This was probably a reaction both to Hegel, for whom the given (Prussian) state was the epitome of a concrete-universal collective formation, and to the grim realities (largely unaddressed by Hegel) of the 'night-watch states' of the time. Societies were formed as distinct units, as states, in processes of alienation, in dirty wars that unfailingly served the interests of the privileged, even as they presented themselves as embodiments of universals values. The Marxist utopia was one of an emancipation of the true substance of society, "the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live" (Marx & Engels, 2000), and this emancipation would finally free the universal from the impurities and distortions of its particular and singular formations. From this perspective, concrete collective formations were either considered purely instrumental to the higher cause of a revolutionary vanguard – as in Lenin's political theory and practice – or rejected as false and oppressive (by an even more revolutionary vanguard – such as the Trotskian opposition). As the Soviet Union consolidated itself in a very concrete and bloody state formation, this 'eschatological' ideological dynamic contributed to the emergent Stalinism (cf. Zizek, 2001). No wonder that Vygotsky and his colleagues, although in the early Soviet years eager to contribute to forming the 'New Man' of the 'New Society' (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004), stepped back from explicitly engaging with the political formation

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[6] So, for instance, Tönnies declares explicitly on page 1 of his seminal 'Community and Society' (Tönnies, 2001) that his theory exclusively concerns social relations that are mutually beneficial, that is, both community and society are abstracted from power.

of collectives and finally accepted the functionalist division of knowledge. Understandable, also, that many theoretical reflections on collectivity, after the fall of communism, would be attracted to the idea of a truly 'inoperative community' (Nancy, 1991), or accept as inescapable the Modern paradox that we can only define ourselves as "the community of those without community" (Derrida, 2005).

In other words, the split in the Vygotskian traditions between functionalist (Engeström) and utopian (Lave) collectivity that I found around 1990 was far from accidental. But there were two elements of that historical situation which suggested ways toward overcoming it. First, the acute dilemma that the political struggle in Western Europe for more democratic forms of welfare state took place at a time when this welfare state was under increasing pressure from global neo-liberal deregulation and dismantling. This nurtured an appreciation of the concrete state formations that had come out of the political struggles of the 20th century, even as those formations were also obviously problematic. It taught (some of) us that a successful revolution is one that cultivates the state, not one that tears it down. It also helped to make clear the difference (and thus, the dialectics) between the negative and the positive aspects of political transformation[7].

Secondly, and in partial contradiction to this, there was the rethinking of power in the increasingly influencial Foucauldian tradition in social theory. Although Foucault certainly represented a 'negativist' ethics – an ethics of 'refusing what we are' rather than one of collective construction (even if he does, vaguely, open to a positivity of self-creation in his later writings) – his generalization of power to being a fundamental and productive expression of the objectification implied in inter-subjectivity provided a way of approaching the 'politics' of practices that are not defined as political, as well as that of the discourses with which they are regulated. This helped to escape the functionalism/utopianism oscillations by making it evident that society's various collectives and their participants are neither cogs in well-greased machineries nor innocent and free. It did not provide an approach to how collectives are constituted, let alone how this might be conceivable and cultivated as a kind of empowerment, but it pushed toward a rethinking of power as a way of approaching it.

For this, it was necessary to dive even deeper into the theoretical relations of power and subjectivity. Foucault's concept of subjectification could be seen as one development of a tradition of theorizing agency and selfhood that goes back to Spinoza and crucially includes Hegel's theory of the emergence of consciousness as the self-consciousness of a subject in a dialectics of recognition (Hegel, 1977). Theories of recognition have formed a curious side-current, spanning versions of Marxism, pragmatism and critical psychoanalysis, but they never much influenced the Vygotskians. Seen from the vantage point of recognition, the Foucauldian narrative of the diffusion of sovereign power into societies of loosely coupled governmentalities – from which we can pick technologies to build ourselves – appears, after all, ideologically affirmative and a continuation of the sociological evasion of politics. Recognition provides a much more troublesome and fertile general approach. To be sure, this presupposes a reading of recognition which takes off from an epistemology of practice and social transformation.

In my 2012 book, I suggest the concept of 'collective' as a kind of subject: A community whose singular existence is no longer accidental, nor simply a function of a shared project, but self-constituted and self-conscious, mediated by its precarious relations to other subjects – including, importantly, participants – as these relations are formed in and with cultural standards under singular circumstances. Recognizing itself as recognized by these others. In the terms of Hegel's dialectics, it is a singular 'we' that exists *in and for itself* as an 'us' (Nissen, 2012, ch. 7). The implication is that true empowerment involves recognition as participant of recognized collectives.

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[7] One expression of this is the 'state and life-mode theory' developed by Thomas Højrup and colleagues, see (Højrup, 2003)

Let us return to the pedagogical practices and see how this spells out.

The Ama'r Total Theater Project

My community of Copenhagen 'wild' social youth workers originated in the middle 1980's, when a small group of students formed a youth work project called the *Ama'r Total Theater* (ATT)[8]. They had, as mentioned, a background in union work, peace movement, and youth politics, and they knew how to mobilize and organize people. Now they wanted to use their know-how to help young people who had dropped out of school and faced the high levels of youth unemployment of the time, and who were vulnerable to various social problems such as crime and drugs.

In Denmark, it is not that there are no institutions or that children are not allowed into decent schools because they are too poor. We Danes have been luckier than most. By the 1980s, Denmark had developed quite far in the direction of a *universalist welfare state*. To a large extent, schools were tax-paid and free and the same for all, as were child care, hospitals, and many other welfare institutions. Youth clubs were universal and almost free of charge, established as a crime prevention measure, to help first of all those young people who dropped out of schools. But the fact was, as the ATT activists saw it, still many young people in Copenhagen City could or would not use these clubs. They were often half-empty, and the kids were bored with them and would often vandalize them. They were not very well-equipped (by Danish standards), but even the resources they had seemed to be in the wrong place, useless. The Ama'r Total Theater activists were not very keen to see themselves as future staff in those places.

Now, they could finish their training, get jobs there and suggest changes: table football instead of leather workshop; computer games instead of basketball; dance instead of sewing etc. And hope for that to appeal to young people more than drug dealing; for a time… But they did something else. They established the Ama'r Total Theater, in a way that they would later refer to as "*meeting youth on neutral ground and in movement*".

The Total Theater was never established as a standard institution. Instead, it had the form of a social movement. Grass-root democracy decided everything. No structures existed except the ongoing campaign for the next event (no staff, no executive). These events were street theater happenings, musicals, festivals, parties etc., culminating in a grand-scale participation in the "*Next Stop Soviet"* anti-nuclear movement in 1989, where they went to Moscow and performed a big total theater event.

Funding, recruitment, targets, and all kinds of resources and defining elements were debated, worked and fought for, in a kind of tinkering, from event to event. The concept of tinkering, or 'bricolage', taken from science and technology studies in the 'actor network theory' tradition (e.g. Callon & Law, 1997; Latour, 2005; Mol, 2002), conveys how an ongoing process can imply an emergent and heterogenous collection of all kinds of elements, e.g. who are we, what are we doing, for which purposes, using which tools, in the interest of whom etc. [9]

This was neutral ground, not only because all positions were precarious, at stake, but also because one of the most vital resources was always the participation of the young people who were otherwise marginalized. Some of the activists of the Total Theater later went on to target even more excluded young people, like street kids and drug users, in other communities and projects that I shall

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[8] Ama'r is a Copenhagen neighborhood.
[9] Note, however, that my use of the concept is itself a tinkering, in the sense that I don't accept the more general ontological premise in the ANT that such a 'dynamic ontology' necessarily implies a rejection of more encompassing concepts such as not least those that carry the differences between human agency and other kinds of effects.

return to below. Still with the same, or almost the same, basic method, of meeting young people on neutral ground and in movement. Without the visible success in mobilizing trouble-making youths (delinquents, drug users, gang-members etc.), the ATT activists would not be able to persuade authorities and funding bodies that they should be supported. And conversely, without the visible success in securing that support, they could not persuade the young people that here was something really powerful going on, something that could form their motives and their dreams.

This was politics and education at once. In a way, this is well-known from most political organizations. There is always an issue of leadership, 'cadre work' etc., of making sure that newcomers can learn and grow. But the difference was that here, the organization deliberately and successfully reached out to include the socially excluded, while still doing politics. All through the many shifting constellations of their 'bricolage', the radical inclusion of the socially excluded as participants was one of the main ethical and political values with which they defined who they were. In this, they were different from many others who took up the 'entrepreneurial', neo-liberal spirit of New Public Management (see Du Gay, 2000, Rose, 1999) at the time, and were funded by the state or the EU to organize social development projects. These would typically end up either recruiting more resourceful participants, or returning to more traditional institutional forms with more rigid divisions between positions (staff / inmate, teacher / student etc.).

Of course, this *intention* is ubiquitous. We are many who wish to flag a social responsibility and blame social exclusion on external forces. But in order to articulate what I came to regard as the exceptional inclusive success of the ATT collectives and their successors, it is necessary to go deeper into the harsh power dynamics of how each "we" is constituted. The first part of this route we can follow a Foucauldian track.

Foucault's lesson

Politics have been traditionally understood as a set of institutions and practices that provide the macro structures that in turn give us the foundations, or the overall frameworks for our practices and our everyday lives. For instance, educational politics lead to the building and regulation of schools, as a civil right and a requirement for post-industrial production. Once these macro structures are in place, the politicians can attend to other matters, and the teachers and pupils can begin their peaceful work in harmony. In the ideal liberal society, power is only relevant in exceptional and unfortunate instances; with Freudian metaphors, we can say that it is repressed and returns as phantasy through Hollywood.

But Foucault taught us that power and politics are everywhere. His analysis of clinics, prisons and mental hospitals gave us crucial keys to how all institutions work, including schools and social work projects (Foucault, 1967; 1973; 1997). First of all, these institutions perform a kind of *power of distribution*. People are moved between institutions, and inside institutions, they are moved between wards, cells, classes, positions etc. Secondly, this kind of micro-power is based on a more or less scientific *assessment* of individuals. Participants are tested and classified so that they can be put in the right positions. Thirdly, this power is often almost *invisible* and *uncontested*, since participants mostly do what is required in order to achieve or maintain desirable positions. Finally, this implies that their subjection to the power of potential exclusion leads people to participate *reflexively*, or we could say, responsibly, in their own normatively governed development.

So the power mechanism that appears to be external and is typically disregarded, ignored, is in reality at the core, crucial to the forming of self-reflexive and 'responsible' subjectivity. This takes place even in very rich societies in states with a highly developed structure of welfare institutions. One of

Foucault's main points is that this should not be seen as violently repressive and irrational, but rather to the contrary, it is economic and productive. This is 'bio-power', the power of life – which takes 'life' as its object, its instrument, and its aim.

This is where many readers of Foucault (e.g. Dean, 1999) conjure up an image of a total system, a smoothly functioning apparatus of subtle power mechanisms that transform all kinds of resistance into affirmative self-care. Thus, as I hinted at above, the reception of Freire's pedagogy as "empowerment" into the "war on poverty" in the US in the 1960s can be interpreted as a "will to empower", a new way of subjecting and subjectifying democratic citizens (Cruikshank, 1999), by representing and amplifying those parts of the discourse that merged into US liberal traditions and emphasized individual growth.

This 'totalizing' reading of Foucault has come to be dominant, even though Foucault actually warned, at the end of his book on *Discipline and Punish*, that everything is precarious, and behind it all "we must hear the distant roar of battle" (Foucault, 1997, p. 308). In fact, Foucault himself never focused much on that battle, probably out of a wish to escape from certain restrictive forms of Marxist partisanship. So, struggle and antagonism diluted into differences, heterogeneity and paradoxes that never did much to challenge the idea of a "system". Foucault's main project was to describe the machinery, after all, with the roar of the battle quite distant.

But if we take his warning seriously, we can tune in to the battle cry. We can begin to notice that every time an individual is excluded, there is possible alternative which is to turn the gaze the opposite way and ask ourselves how we can change the institution, or even build new institutions. And often, we *should* do this because the problem of the excluded is always somehow also a problem for the rest of us: a general issue.

The social problem

For instance, if some students are too restless to concentrate and be quiet in the classroom, we might diagnose them with ADHD and see if we can get a doctor to prescribe some Ritalin. But we might also think of such things as: How are their relations to the other students who bully them, and how do these relations form part of the way formal and informal collectives interact at the school? What kind of problems do they face when they go home, in terms not only of family dynamics, but also of (often problematic) relations between the institutions of family and school? And not least, how can we change ourselves as school collectives and practices so that they – and, most likely, in the long run, the rest of us, too – can better participate (etc. - cf. Kristensen & Mørck, 2014; Mathiassen, 2013; Varenne & McDermott, 1998)?

These lines of questioning and action are *generalizing* in a sense described by Haug (1999), Holzkamp (2013) and others: They reach out to general conditions in a move that is at once epistemological and ethical, establishing an approach based on participation, as a larger framework within which the singular events and individual actions can be approached. Whenever this generalizing alternative is taken up, the political struggle over conditions that had been hidden as premises for individuals' choices and actions comes to the surface. In fact, a good part of the history of the emergence of welfare state institutions is a history of that struggle. This has often emerged in the shape of what has been called the *social problem*. When too many individuals have been excluded, they tend to make various kinds of trouble and disturb the society of normal people. Something has to be done. This is the historical origin of social work, and in many ways, this history is ongoing: Social work is often 'reinvented' as reactions to social problems that do not quite match existing institutions (see e.g. Philp, 1979, and Nissen, 2012, ch.3). The story of the trouble-making youth that the ATT activists could mobilize in

Copenhagen in the 1980s is one among countless such 'reinventions of the wheel' that characterize social work.

Often, what has been reinvented as social work can be looked back on in a Foucauldian way as a gentle kind of policing (as does most famously Donzelot, 1979). But if we tune in to the roar of the battle, and remind ourselves to appreciate the historical cultivation of welfare state institutions that came out of it, there is a different kind of story to be told. For instance, in Danish and Scandinavian social history, we have the story of how youth clubs emerged in the 1950s, at a time of rapid industrialization and expanding educational institutions, when many working-class kids had trouble with the often contradictory demands of school and industry (much like it is described in Willis, 1977), and when the powerful labor organizations were keen to prevent the development of a lumpen-proletariat. Or, how pre-school child care institutions were established in the 1960s, when feminists such as my own mother struggled for the idea that combining career and family should not be the problem of the individual woman and the individual child. Now, more than 90% of Scandinavian children attend pre-school child care, and their mothers are all on the labor market.

This understanding of the welfare state as emergent in response to social problems as these have been defined and struggled over has been described as the '*responsive state'* (Tilly, 1975). When the state becomes responsive as the result of political struggle allied with social sciences adopting a 'transformative activist stance', there is a possibility of a democratic version of 'social engineering' (Nissen, 2009b).

Not all conditions are available for transformation, of course. In both these latter cases, part of what made it possible was a growing economy, a strong labor movement, and a position as a cold war front-line state that would make it seem reasonable for the ruling classes and for the US led allies to buy loyalty with welfare provisions (Højrup, 2003). This was not quite the situation in the 1980s and 1990s, and even far less today.

Performing History

Still, the Copenhagen youth workers precisely took up that kind of struggle, facing the social problem of unemployed young people and street kids in the 80s and the 90s. But they did not only do what historically has been done most often: Fight for the establishment of a specific kind of standardized institution to secure the provisions for a particular target group.

Instead*,* they made the historical process itself into the principle of their own way of doing youth work. The slogan of Holzman & Polk's book: "*History is the Cure*!" (1988) captures this version of empowerment: 'Curing' social problems requires the creation of intensified events or performances where people can become participants in relevant historical processes of transformation. Similarly, when the ATT activists talked about *meeting youth in movement and on neutral ground*, they spoke of their 'bricolage' or tinkering practice of continuously forming and shaping ever new events and collectives, according to the social issues they proposed to identify, and depending on what and whom they could mobilize.

But, in distinction from Holzman and colleagues who went on to claim that performance in and of itself is identical to development and enough to create history (Newman & Holzman, 1996; 1997, see also our review in Nissen, Axel, & Bechmann, 1999), the ATT activists and their followers in the subsequent years – as I and my colleagues came to articulate their work – took on the challenge of the coincidence of social and personal transformation in the creation of collectives in a much wider sense, far beyond the

stage. This is why their story can be a general story of collectivity – why they can be modeled as a prototype of the general problem of creating collectives and forming participants: This was in fact the kind of know-how they developed.

Yet, it should be noted that this generalizing modeling of their 'know-how' could not have been done without learning from the 'performative turn' in the social sciences. It is not only the case that people 'do things with words' (Austin, 1962), but, more widely, any practice is itself a performance and a production (a creation and a display) of ontologies (Mol, 2002). The 'tinkering' of elements to form events and collectives is crucially an *enactment* of categories. In itself, this can be reconstructed as implications of a Hegelian-Marxist epistemology of practice (Jensen, 1987; 1999). But this way of reading the performative turn highlights in a new way the question of how any one situated practice or performance connects with praxis, conditions, and history in a larger sense – precisely since it sets off at a point beyond the agency/structure dichotomy described above. That is, 'performance' *can* be taken as a way of rejecting the whole issue as moot, as Newman and Holzman exemplify. But it is much more productive to take the Hegelian-Marxist insistence on objectivity as an impetus for theorizing about performances as *relations between practices, mediated by standards and models*.

In fact, this connects with another side of the 'performative turn', developed in interactionist sociology (Goffman, 1981; 1986; 1990) and anthropology (Geertz, 1973; Schechner, 1985; Turner, 1987): When "all the world's a stage" (as Shakespeare already noted), this is because everyday action routinely implies creating and recreating relations between practices, mediated by models. If one looks closely into the composition of routine interaction, one finds complex and continuously revised structures of actions that produce (create and display) certain standards, and actions that are to be taken as citations of, or dialogic objections to, such standards. If performance is doing, an important part of doing is modeling. The abstraction of standard 'acts' to be perhaps transferred to other situations was not invented by Western psychology in the late 19th century; it emerges in everyday interaction and was cultivated and stylized in ritual, ceremony and theater long before and elsewhere.

Thus taking performance seriously also implies acknowledging that performance does not rule out, nor even bracket, power, but rather, mediates it. Children's play (Winther-Lindqvist, 2009) and school teaching/learning (Davies, 1990) can thus be seen as particular performances that mediate demands, authority, and exclusion, and thereby enforce certain subjectivities. More generally, performing as citation implies submission or resistance to standard categories and identities (Butler, 1993; 1997). As nicely described by Emily Martin (2007), in today's America (and, let me add, elsewhere), 'being bipolar' is inevitably performing and quoting versions or subject positions available from, say, commercials, popular psychiatry, mutual-help fellowships, cinema, etc., perhaps confirming, perhaps rejecting certain of their implications. This is no different from e.g. 'being melancholic' 100 years ago, except perhaps that in today's culture, performative reflexivity is more ready at hand. The self-help culture, with its autobiographies – Martin's book is actually one of these as well – has helped make identities like 'bipolar' be recognized as something one can be – in particular forms and under particular conditions; and at the same time, 'being' bipolar, at least potentially, becomes something one can externalize – display, quote, control, 'act out' etc.

The Crew

It is this performative reflexivity which was utilized and cultivated in a project that developed from the Ama'r Total Theater, and which is the main community discussed in my book: *The Crew*. In the early 1990s, a new social problem was designated in Copenhagen: Street kids. In a Danish landscape, this is far from what is known from, e.g. Latin American cities, as street kids: Survival was rarely at issue. But these were young people out of reach of existing institutions, often involved with drugs, crime, or prostitution. The Crew, inspired or influenced by the growing self-help culture, developed the ATT's mobilizing and tinkering approach by putting up the words "street kids", "socially excluded youth", and later "wild youth" as signals that defined the collective and its participants, and this was typically done in activities that included elements of display and performance. With The Crew, the youths *'came out'* as 'street kids' etc., directly and publicly addressing and articulating their own situation as part of a social problem, *and* as part of its solution. The Crew quickly

Figure 1: The Crew Man - Logo, 1993

attracted media attention with events like hearings, theater shows, and street happenings, and from then on, their fame created a demand for them to give interviews and lectures to journalists, researchers, students and school classes, as an ongoing activity. It also made it fashionable for politicians to support them, which resulted in grants and other kinds of recognition and material resources, including my own participation as researcher.
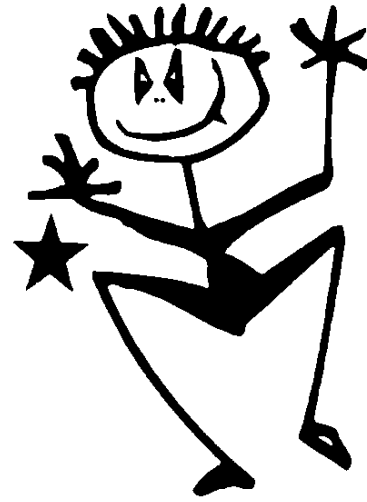
There were two typical reactions to The Crew's version of the performative turn in social youth work. The dominant reaction was to embrace the apparent success visible on the surface, perhaps with the recognition that, no matter what happened to the youths on the longer term, at least now they were within reach. The opposite reaction was to reject it all as a case of 'the emperor's new clothes': a community of people who keep confirming to each other the illusion that this works for real.

In my analyses, I took up the performative side of Althusser's concept of interpellation (1994): Ideology is first of all *practiced*, then perhaps reflected – also present as wisdom in the mutual-help movement: *Fake it till you make it*, as the AA motto goes. But, even if I granted that both phases are important, including the phase of 'faking it' wearing 'the emperor's new clothes', it necessarily led to the question: what constitutes 'making it'? How does performance achieve objectivity – resources, power, and recognition – beyond the stage?

One kind of answer – increasingly important in today's post-industrial societies – lies in the socio-materiality of the stage itself. Resources, power and recognition obviously concentrated in The Crew itself, even as it 'merely' staged social problems. The youth who might talk with a therapist about her loneliness could instead get new friends by participating in The Crew's staging of a performance about loneliness; rather than complain about being disenfranchised she might represent The Crew in negotiations with City officials about an EU-funded project for Youth Participation, or witness unskilled self-helpers barely older than herself giving interviews and lectures to respectfully listening social workers; or she could simply participate in refurbishing the most recently acquired venue for The Crew's activities by painting "The Crew Man", an iconic representation of 'Wild Youth', on the wall. The stage itself, as it were, goes far beyond the stage.

Still, there are obvious limits to this kind of answer. These were expressed in educational terms as the reality that very few of the participating youths would develop careers in either The Crew itself or in the entertainment business, and even those who would, would at some point be faced with the kinds of institutional demands that had excluded them in the first place (see Langager, 2003). They could also be backed by references to much of the performance literature (Turner, Goffman, Willis), according to which reflexive performance is generally a liminal experience that eventually gives way to a normal state of affairs, or at least only marginally challenges it. Further, could it be the case that the 'neutral ground' and the 'movement', and thus the tinkering approach that provided for inclusion and generalization in the first place, in fact depended on the liminality, and thus exceptionality, that was only ever meant to be a fleeting glimpse? And thus, that, rather than really 'making it', the pedagogy of The Crew consisted in the 'Road Runner' habit of not looking down to see that there is no ground under one's feet?

Another kind of answer would point to the general historical tendency toward more frequent and more reflective reorganization which is also a feature of post-industrial societies. Important parts of The Crew's resources came from various state development grants; could The Crew perhaps be regarded as achievements of a class struggle in the sense that here, such post-industrial resources flowed into tinkering and self-constituting collectives, 'ad-hocrasies' (Mintzberg, 1993), that realized social inclusion instead of, say, new niches in marketing? If this was the case, *the tradition of 'reinventing the wheel' in social work could be reframed as a vital resource for a welfare state that could now be 'responsive' in a greatly accelerated meaning.*

This interpretation was very ambitious and in its own way also a radical break with the legacy of the building of welfare state. Traditionally, knowledge and resources come with stability. Under poor conditions, flexibility equals poverty and oblivion. The homeless are those who can most effortlessly move their home. You can easily change directions of you are not burdened by resources and by the concerns of those who provide them. And above all, those directions and dwellings will not seem important to remember. On the other hand, if you want to secure reasonable social conditions, you must fight for standardized rights. If you win, you have a clear hallmark of social change. Social equality is achieved as a kind of standardization, and this is where the generalized knowledge lies – even in a 'democratic social engineering'. Thus, it is no coincidence that political struggles for welfare for many decades had to take the form of demands for bureaucratic state institutions driven by professionals. But the downside of this has been precisely the power structure of social exclusion that Foucault described. This is why it made such an important difference when the activists of the Ama'r Total Theater invented the ad-hoc institution that continuously reinvented the wheel, so that the processes of building and re-building institutions could be part of the know-how of pedagogy itself.

But it was only in The Crew's performative development of the approach that this was taken to its full implication. The traditional formation of institutions as described by Foucault and others was always closely connected to specific forms of problematization, standards, and discursive categories which were more or less taken as essences. Thus, the framing of clinical wards embodied diseases; school divisions anchored standards of qualifications; and mutual-help fellowships such as the AA defined themselves by their disease, etc. But the 'performative' interplay of category with collective, and thus, the very 'enactedness' of these categories, was rarely reflected as such. This is not only because of a certain cultural inertia of organizational forms – often lamented in post-industrial management - but first of all because the founding category was always at the core of each institutional collective's constitution in power relations and identities; essentialism comes both from habit and from ideology (see, to this Derrida, 1981, Højrup, 2003).

Thus, The Crew's adoption of performance as fashionable self-display could be articulated as far more wide-reaching than as a culturally obvious way of securing funding. What these reflexive performances enacted was a democratization of the emergent post-industrial practice of 'tinkering' pedagogical collectives.

Senko's Story

Let us finally unfold these suggestions by engaging briefly with the story of Senko, one of the characters in my 2012 book. This is roughly how he presented himself when I interviewed him, and when later my colleague Line Lerche Mørck took over and developed a closer collaboration with him (Mørck, 2000, 2006; 2007; 2010).

Senko was an immigrant boy who in 1994 was dealing drugs with his friends. Bored from sitting around smoking weed all day, they would find adventure in nightly burglaries. Some of the activists from The Crew approached Senko, and it was arranged so that he could be officially recognized as a 'client', as participant in The Crew. This way, he could keep the social workers off his back, and he had a place to relax, with a small but steady income. In other words – still of Senko's own – he used The Crew for his own purposes.
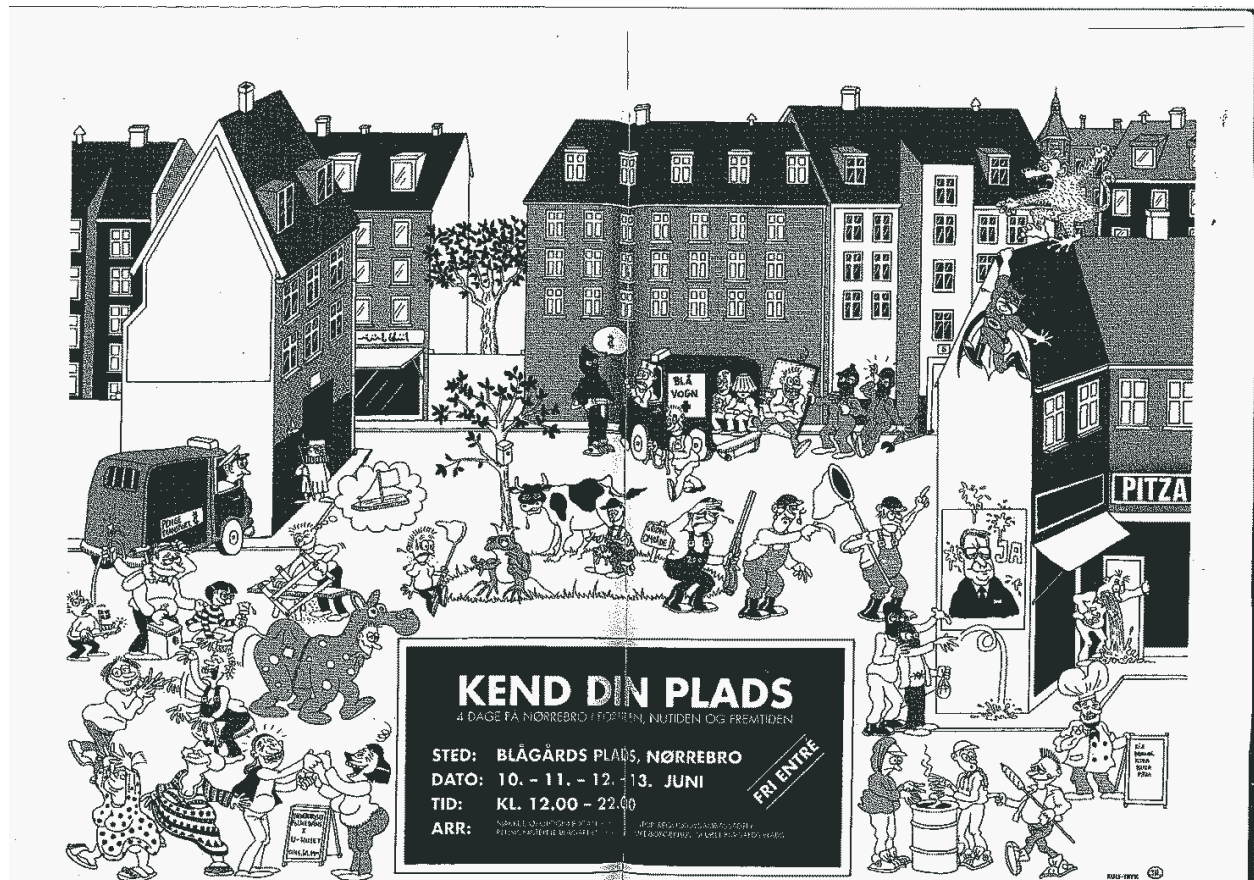

Figure 2: The poster for the "Know your place" Festival

But when The Crew arranged a big street festival on the central neighborhood square, in collaboration with various local groups, they made sure to invite Senko and his group and involve them as

activists. Senko took charge of the falafel booth. As Senko described it, he and his friends got involved because it was easy. The festival was inclusive. Even very marginalized groups such as the homeless were there, doing something to contribute, even while still drinking their beers, because that was how the neighborhood community, as organized by The Crew, wanted to see itself. The "Seeing itself" of the community was a key idea of the festival, expressed in the title *Kend Din Plads* (Know Your Place) – the Danish 'plads' means both 'square' and 'place', so the title used an ironic allusion to a classic conservative motto to express the opposite: The aim was for different groups "around the square" to 'come out' from their 'place' and see themselves in new ways as participants in a community that cared for itself.

They also got involved because it was not a shame to be part of The Crew. It was not just a place for losers, for people whom you pity. On the contrary, it was in fact a powerful agent in local politics, as the great mobilization to the festival would testify. Finally, they got involved because it was fun. The event itself was tailored to participants' ideas of having fun – featuring a 'stunt' performance, a "funny smoking instruments contest", popular live music, etc. – and these activities had promising future perspectives and made sense in terms of these, even if vaguely. Senko could see himself as that kind of organizer; he was already a somewhat leading figure – if at a small level – in the criminal business, and he liked being recognized also for organizing other things.

Senko's involvement was to be a turning point for him. Not long after, he would be recruited as key activist in a project for sports and other youth activities in a nearby park – the very place where he had himself been selling drugs. The next year he was already one of the founders of a youth club called *The Street Pulse*. Later still, he developed into a so-called "wild social youth worker", responsible for recruiting and training other youth workers.

For Senko and many others around him, one crucial kind of condition of development were what my colleague Line Lerche Mørck called the 'boundary communities', where he could participate in undecided or double-faced identities (ibid.). He could belong both to the marginalized criminal communities and those of youth work, at the same time. In fact, this is another relevant meaning of the term 'neutral ground'.

Of course, this was not all. Stories like this, with real people, are always many-sided. There was also the fact that his girlfriend got pregnant at just the right moment; there were the childhood friendships he happened to have in the neighborhood, the lessons he had learnt from spending a few years in a different country, and much more. And just like it was the case with the youth clubs and the child care institution on a national level, political conditions made it possible. This story is in fact also part of the story of the emerging social and youth policies of a City District Council that elected a new progressive leadership who invited Senko and others to provide ideas about how they should deal with the social problem of gangs of young immigrants in the neighborhood.

But the collectives they made and maintained were important nonetheless, right on the boundary between the different social worlds. Mørck uses the term "boundary communities", but I still suggest we talk of *collectives* rather than communities, because they were *deliberately* established; they *established themselves* in a deliberate design that included a concern for, and a recognition of, participants – and because this self-constitution was always a precarious matter of recognition by relevant others, including youth, local agencies, and of course various state authorities.

The concern for and recognition of participants were crucial to Senko's development, and they were clear for him to see, and eventually to take part in himself. Through that participation, he learnt specific kinds of self-reflection, a.k.a. responsibilities. In Vygotsky's terms, here was a crucial 'zone of proximal development' of self-hood: In The Crew, Senko could perform a new kind and level of care for himself. Because The Crew and The Street Pulse were broad-scoped, open-ended collectives, the responsibility that Senko learned through participating was of the flexible kind that he could tentatively generalize to other places as he learned about them. And because they were constantly engaged in struggles in which Senko's own identity was at stake, it was also *disciplined*.

For, of course, as we have learnt from Foucault, power is still everywhere. Empowerment is never a one-sided process, and growing as a subject implies not only expanding agency, but also moments of subjection. This may sound paradoxical, but it makes sense when we remember that agency is always developed though participation (see, to this, Nissen, 2002; 2013). Senko only won his recognition through a process where, being met in movement and on neutral ground, he *surrendered* to the powers of The Crew and the District Council. For instance, as part of the disciplined care for himself, he gradually stopped doing burglaries and reduced his cannabis smoking. This submission was implied in the processes of development that led to Senko's increasing agency, as he co-constructed the park project, the Street Pulse youth club, and more.

Around the turn of the millennium, Mørck and I focused our research on the issue of power, in part because there were intense political discussions about how to confront the rising neo-conservative and anti-immigrant sentiments and policies. Activists like Senko, constantly engaged in 'street-level politics', were not happy with the general liberal appeal to a beneficial human nature that they would learn from most of their friends in the social or youth work professions. So, Senko became one of our key informants, with many dramatic stories to tell us.

Often, neighborhood boys or groups of them challenged him and his authority as leader of The Street Pulse, perhaps more or less consciously jealous with what he had achieved and how his collectives competed with their gangs for the kids' attention. It took some intense and even, at moments, violent confrontations to assert The Street Pulse as gang-neutral and non-violent territory, especially since Senko kept pushing for generalization across boundaries that existed between gangs, communities, neighborhoods etc. Often, he had to walk a tight-rope to secure alliances, including some with family networks that more or less overlapped with criminal gangs. Sometimes, he also struggled with younger colleagues who would keep a low profile to postpone what they perceived as a radical break with their past.

At the same time, Senko struggled with the welfare bureaucracy. In his work of tinkering to get any other funding than the – after all, limited – development funds, he kept encountering one great barrier. This was the way that social work with marginalized youth always had to be accounted for in terms of particular individuals with specified diagnoses or social issues, in the bureaucracy of welfare institutions. Senko and his Street Pulse group would often sketch projects that could mobilize groups of youths to divert them from criminal careers, but in vain, since he could not refer to individual case-files with sufficiently well-described criminal or psychiatric problems. Through this activism, it was made apparent that, even as a great collective achievement in welfare states, the institutions of social work – such as those of education and health – also work as individualizing machineries. As Mørck documented in her further studies, this was finally also a great problem for Senko and the other 'wild social workers' in their ensuing struggles for recognition and learning in a trade that could not be helpfully articulated as

either standard self-help or standard professional youth work, and where the standards of their education were abstracted from their relevance and attached to them as individuals (Mørck, 2007; 2010).

I was increasingly clear that the leverage of the forces and resources that The Ama'r Total Theater and The Crew had been able to mobilize, and which The Street Pulse could still exploit, was finite. The unique historical situation of the 1980-90s changed, with not only a marked growth in the standardized governance of New Public Management and a general political push to the right, but also a sharp decrease in local autonomy. In the present century, even in Denmark, the post-industrial increase in wealth and productivity has been all but reserved for high-tech commercial enterprise and the economic elite, while public sector development is all about cutbacks and re-bureaucratization. As even the left is driven to defend the welfare state in liberal rather than social terms – minimal standard provisions, consumer rights, harm reduction etc. – the hope of an accelerated responsiveness of the universalist welfare state fades away. Those who wish to learn from the unique Nordic welfare state experience had better hurry up.

In Conclusion: Theory as Prototypical Narrative

This somewhat unhappy ending of the story is probably partly unfair, but it serves to once again highlight the historical singularity of any pedagogical practice. Writing this text is to maintain that there are important lessons to be derived about possible forms and preconditions of a critical trans-pedagogy that implies a creative and performative tinkering of collectives, even if that particular historical window of opportunity is closing.

The theoretical work of articulation has addressed deep and far-reaching issues, issues of general relevance, but precisely prompted by a situation that turned out to be more one-of-a-kind than immediately expected. While our spontaneous ideology tends to assume an easy relevance of empirical experience in a static world of variation, we only arrive at concrete universals by a process of *enstrangement* (a.k.a. *defamiliarization* or *exotization*; or in Bertolt Brecht's German, *Verfremdung*). Although I was partly prepared for this task by some dialectical training, it was mostly through the repeated trouble with describing and explaining the idea of "meeting youth in movement and on neutral ground" that I gradually realized how utterly eccentric yet widely relevant it is, or could be. In this text, I have tried to highlight some of the connections between the singularity of the historical situation and the profundity of the questions it poses.

As an alternative, we might briefly consider a different way to articulate much of this. As mentioned, Senko initially spent much of his time intoxicated, and in his own recollection, part of what spurred his criminal behavior then was the edginess he felt from doing nothing much beside smoking cannabis. He could easily have been treated in some addiction treatment facility, like many others from The Crew. Thus, it would have seemed quite easy to frame Senko's as a story of addiction, and The Crew as a new form of addiction treatment (although perhaps I would have then chosen a different venue for publishing). Is not cannabis, and the chemistry of our brains, much the same all over the world? To some extent yes, I could argue, and so are treatment clinics, and even self-help groups like Narcotics Anonymous[10]. But precisely the discipline of keeping to that standardized framework would have encouraged us to create collectives that were not so good at meeting Senko on neutral ground and in movement; and not so easy to move and recreate. There would have been a much stronger focus on failure and choice. It would have been much harder to see Senko as a participant in collectives. The

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[10]I *could* argue, that is: I *could* perform that *ceteris paribus* manoeuver, even though it would gloss over many contradictions – such as the fact that despite appearances, the NA does not at all address the same 'disease' as the professional clinics (cf. e.g. Keane, 2011).

drama would have been almost exclusively about his struggle with himself, his addiction and his level of motivation, and perhaps about how we, as therapists, could or could not cure him in ways that are based on calculated evidence and described in standard textbooks. Instead, Senko's story, here, is a story of social transformation, of politics at many levels, and of concrete pedagogical universals, precisely because it does *not* begin or stay with a disease category that is easily computed through the machineries of measurement and management of individuals in standardized institutions.

Articulating a pedagogical practice as a prototypical narrative is a 'normative' modelling, the setting of a standard as against other possible standards, even when it does not standardize. This articulation of The Crew's pedagogy as part of a radical transformation of institutional forms and forms of knowledge is an expression of what I referred to above (with Stetsenko, 2013) as the "transformative activist stance" which is implied in an epistemology of practice. Thus, I am not claiming that this is the only possible way to articulate it; when I suggest this articulation as prototypical, it is because I believe that learning from it can be relevant in practices and struggles that aim for a democratic kind of social engineering. In other words, it is an expression of *hope*.

In fact, looking back on the historical situation in Copenhagen in the 1980s and 1990s, it is debatable whether what was going on, in general, was a democratization of welfare institutions, or rather a neoliberal dissolution of them. Most likely, it was partly one, partly the other. This is a general point in the methodology of social science: There is always more than one thing going on, more than one tendency. If we regard practices and collectives in their historical context, they are contradictory. And it makes a difference what we choose to articulate – sometimes the difference between despair and hope (for this idea of contradictory articulation, see Jensen, 1999, and Mol, 2008). I am aware that the term 'hope' is sometimes read as implying passivity, perhaps especially on the background of a Latin etymology that brings it close to waiting and expecting. My use of the term, on the contrary, derives from practice-based philosophy and cultural anthropology, in which it designates the possible futures we actively and performatively imagine and strive for; the projects that co-define who we are and the meaning of what we do (Bloch, 1995; Crapanzano, 2004; Mattingly, 2010).

What I am doing here, then, is articulating the hope, the possibility, the deeply historical emergent narrative, still very much unfinished – and perhaps temporarily halted – of a trans-pedagogical tinkering of collectives as part of an expanding and responsive welfare state. The precarious nature of this possibility, the way it points to requirements that are far from given or simple, and thus connects with and demands much wider social transformations, makes this a 'blues hope' in Cheryl Mattingly's sense of the term (2010) – the kind of hope that remains close to its dialectical counterpart, despair. It shares with certain religious utopia a counterintuitive radicalism that calls forth doubt. But, contrary to religious versions of blues hope, this is written as inherently contestable, in the way that it still claims to present a real possibility, a concrete utopia in Bloch's sense (1995).

This combination of radicalism with realism is what calls forth theory. It is to this end that a narrative form is used. A prototypical narrative presupposes theoretical reflection in its very genre – that is, in how its form works to fix a chronotope (a unique structure of past, present and future), and a constellation of author and reader positions (Bakhtin, 1986; Holquist, 1990). These inter-subjectivities and inter-temporalities are disputable at every point. Engaging with them requires problematizing concepts and knowledges, because it shows how these are contingent and invites the reader to reflect on that contingency in order to harness the gains of the text. By implication, the narrative form, when used as prototypical, presents a version of theory that accentuates its dialogicality in a way that is very different from the authoritative argument, in which the final word is always the aim. Thus, for instance, reading this

text might make you wonder about other possible ways to think of power and collectivity, as relevant both to education and to post-communist Marxism, or think about the meaning of 'performativity' in relation to standards of youth work, etc.

It is also important to note how a story like this assumes a spatial or geographical instantiation. Although 'movement' and 'neutral ground', like Vygotsky's 'zone of proximal development' (and many other theoretical constructs), addresses space metaphorically, it is at the same time quite corporeal. The Ama'r Total Theater simply had no permanent residence. The Crew settled as a place of an open youth gathering, with locks only on rooms with expensive machines and important documents. With the festival that sent Senko's development in a new direction, the city square was reclaimed for a redefined neighborhood in which The Crew was an important hub. The drug dealers' park was later refurbished into a sports park that displayed The Crew's and Senko's achievement. And The Street Pulse youth club was the domicile, or home, of a boundary collective, precariously upheld as gang-neutral territory.

This physical spatiality interacts in interesting ways with the standards they contain, house or embody. In the *ceteris paribus* approach, a location may or may not hold properties conducive to adapting a given standard, much as American soil, once cleared, leveled and plowed, could or could not uphold standard European colonies. With our prototypical approach, we do not only expand and complicate the range of relevant conditions on the ground to the point where adaptation exceeds standard, we also point to the ways that the standard is taken to shape and even create the location itself, and the ways that those who do it are indexed as collectives by those locations. The Street Pulse was created with an awareness of the 'neutral ground' of ATT and The Crew, as a place beyond the institutional home ground of professionals, yet also different from 'street corner society' youth venues. And it was constituted in a struggle for recognition that implied universalizing ideological claims. The awareness that The Crew was quite famous in Denmark, and that The Street Pulse contributed to its reputation, was a direct concern on the minds of Senko and his friends, a concrete shape of the ethics they cultivated. Precisely as such, it was ethically and politically accountable in a wide sense, as a 'public space' (Harvey, 2005).

Of course, if we zoom out from there, much the same can be said of a place like Copenhagen, Denmark. In Danish debates over social youth work around 2000, my writings contributed to articulating what was called the 'Copenhagen model' as against approaches developed in other towns, and, as most Danes know, Copenhagen has a singular legacy as crown capital, as historical stronghold of both labor and the radical left, and, more specifically, as a site of social experiments. Further, the present text is written in English in the hope that an international readership might find something useful coming from such a place, mediated by the differences between places that are often hidden by the scientific *lingua franca,* but sometimes becomes visible, when the limits of a second language shows in strange formulations, or in the scarcity of accessible references. Can we still hope for the Danish polity to show concern for how the 'society' on its territory can be upheld internationally as a 'Scandinavian model'?

All in all, this prototypical narrative exemplifies the old anthropological lesson that really understanding such a model always requires a deep, complex, 'thick' historical description of its place and time – and that this investigation is at the same time a journey that will make us question and perhaps revise what we thought we knew about our own society, its spaces and its models. This is how people in The Amar Total Theater and The Crew would read Freire's account of his Pedagogy of the Oppressed. They knew well that they were not working with the literacy of poor Brazilian land workers. But just for that reason, they could perhaps better approach the Freirian lessons, in a proper skeptical, respectful, and creative manner.

I can only hope for some of my texts to achieve, in small parts, the same kind of – as it were (with Derrida): endlessly postponed – meaning and relevance, for people to make sense of them in ways that I could not predict.

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