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Street level society. Social interventions into young people's drug taking in Copenhagen

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Abstract

This paper aims to reflect on research findings from different empirical studies of social work with young drug users and socially excluded young people in Copenhagen. In the paper we account for historical changes in social policy and interventions into young people's drug taking in Copenhagen, and we discuss some of the most central dilemmas in today's social work with young drug users. Among other things, we identify pervasive marginalizing dynamics in the social system that result partly from the deep-rooted cultural dichotomy between stigma and taboo that organizes the drug issue, and partly from the decentralizing and specializing efforts characteristic of the Danish welfare state and its institutions. We discuss a general turn towards street level interventions to address the problems of social exclusion, as well as different attempts to create what we term *street level heterotopias - sites of alternate ordering* - where issues of drug use and other social problems can be dealt with and objectified in more flexible ways and handled as part of ongoing social practices of everyday life.

Introduction

Since William Foote Whyte's classic book "Street Corner Society" (1973) it has been understood that the street is the place where marginalized young people meet and establish a society of their own, physically as well as culturally and legally on the outside of mainstream society. However, whereas communities in general are often conceptualized as normatively benevolent, culturally self-sustaining, and primarily socially rather than geographically determined (Bauman, 2001), the opposite is characteristic of the street level societies of marginalized young people and drug users. The street, in drug treatment and in drug policy, has typically been regarded as the scene of hard asphalt, crime, and hostile subcultures, as sites for interventions and places from which young people should be removed whenever possible. Typically, the street has been the intervention site of the police, and at most, drug treatment facilities have provided entry points at "street level", and waited for users to come by. As long as the social workers remained inside the walls of their service facilities, the street level was outside the reach of the social work, the place where persons were either self-

responsible citizens or submitted to law enforce-ment.

However, in recent years, we have seen a growing tendency among social workers to reach out into the streets. This development can partly be seen as the result of a general strengthening of harm reduction policies: measures directed at minimizing risk and interventions emphasizing care rather than cure tend to replace the idea of using the force of misery to motivate drug users to attend treatment. Furthermore, harm reduction policies seem connected with a general shift in control strategies: from an exclusive focus on governing the individual to a focus on the regulation of geographical sites and places. The tendency to reach out into the streets can also be seen as partly connected with the renewed focus on young people as a special target group characterized by mobility and cross-contextuality that challenges traditional interventions of social work.

When these movements in the fields of social work and drug treatment are juxtaposed with the discourse of youth, however, they seem to lead certain dilemmas: first, harm reduction drug policies (such as methadone maintenance or day-care drop-in centers) are generally considered counterproductive or unethical towards vulnerable children to which welfare state provision must be extended beyond their immediate choice. Furthermore, special harm reduction measures for young people (such as open anonymous facilities for testing party drugs) generally cause political trouble because they collide with the concept of early prevention and with general views of law enforcement as preventive and necessary in order to defend the general sense of justice in the population.

Second, following (Rose, 1999) and (Dean, 1995) when the welfare state engages with society outside of itself, in these years, it is generally envisaged as a respectful partnership with communities which can or should be mobilized as responsible agents of what is termed an *active society* which is deemed preferable to a dependency-engendering welfare state. But this kind of respectful dialogical approach is challenged every time so-called "problematic youngsters" restate "the social problem" with loud media attention. Every street level scandal seems to provide an argument against the idea of an active society.

Third, if the notion of vulnerable children and the characteristics of mobility and cross-contextuality of youth pushes the social workers out into the streets where young people are, the focus on drugs seems to pull them back into the closed spaces of the institutions and to a demand for specialized interventions. But whether it is coercive inpatient treatment or more liberal kinds drug counseling, such methodologies, in general, sit uneasily with the characteristics of youth.

In this paper we will, on the basis of our empirical research findings, discuss how some of these dilemmas unfold in the current development of social interventions into socially excluded young people and young drug users in Copenhagen.

Practice Research

Our empirical access to these developments, in general, comes from an action-research type of cooperation with different practices of social work and their participants – e.g. other researchers, key persons in the municipal administration, social workers and other professionals since 1990 (See Mørck, 2000; Nissen, 1997, 1998, 1999 a & b, 2002, 2003 a & b, 2004) In this work, Morten Nissen has been employed as a PhD student, a university-based evaluator, and as a university professor, with accordingly different conditions for engaging in the research cooperations.. More recently, and in connection with a three-years national drug research project, called the "Street Level Project", funded by the Danish government The Street Level Project was organized under The Danish National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre at the University of Aarhus (see www.crf-au.dk/page243.asp)., some empirical studies of the social interventions directed at young people's drug use in Copenhagen were carried out. One study was a mapping and investigation of the different kinds of social interventions into young peoples drug taking in Copenhagen, primarily by means of 20 key person interviews, and another was a research cooperation with a social project for cannabis smoking girls - consisting of 20 focus-group interviews with social workers and youngsters and participant observations of 6-10 hours (Vinum, 2002, 2003, 2005)

These studies were primarily carried out by Christine Vinum while she was a graduate student at the University of Copenhagen, and while she was employed at the University of Aarhus and by the municipality of Copenhagen. .

The methodology we refer to in our studies and that we share with a network of other researchers and professionals as a common frame of reference is called *practice research* (Mørck, 2000; Nissen, 1999a, 2000, Nissen & Langemeier, 2005). Practice research has it roots in the dialectic-materialistic philosophical traditions of social practice theory, critical psychology and cultural-historical activity theory and to some extent resembles the action research traditions developed on the basis of critical theory and pragmatism. The general idea is to view the field and the research as social practices engaged in more or less well-defined joint ventures generally aimed at social development. In these joint ventures, certain 'references' are introduced and transformed, such as experience, knowledge, views, problems etc. on the part of practitioners (often referred to as empirical 'data'), or on the part of researchers (often referred to as 'theoretical concepts' and 'methods'). The term *reference* points to the general underlying ethnomethodological assumption that the meaning of data, concepts etc. is *indexically* established: that is, all meaning is situated yet any situation is indexed by general meaning (Garfinkel, 1984).

Researchers engaging in practice research deliberately seek out platforms of cooperation and try to let 'their' research agendas emerge in a constant, and constantly reflected, tension and movement between the scientific communities and the (other) communities of practice. The various specific methods of establishing dialogue, inscribing, computing, analyzing etc. that become useful or are demanded in the research process are all reflected not only according to their own intrinsic standards (e. g., qualitative interviews establish certain rules for respectful dialogue), but also as practices themselves that relate to the overall context of the joint venture.

This very 'decentered' and profane attitude towards methods does not imply a watering-out of scientific aspirations. Far from it, some kinds of reference transformation are specifically theoretical, that is, directed at seeking out contradictions behind practical dilemmas and mediating them in the building of consistent theories that accumulate knowledge, and these analytical processes are carried out as visibly and rigorously as possible. Thus, practice research distinguishes itself from other research traditions by its inherent tendency to question and rework even the most fundamentally presupposed, taken-for-granted 'practice concepts' encountered as references. This includes, contrary to hermeneutic interpretations of action research (e.g. Guba & Lincoln, 1989, Argyris, Putnam & Smith, 1985, Whyte, 1991), but in line with poststructuralist approaches (e.g. (Pedersen, 2003; Stenson, 1993; Valverde, 1998), questioning the very constitution of the subjects and the concepts that organize practices as intervention in the first place, its ends, means, subject positions, and objects, in a kind of discourse analysis that maintains that discourse is immanent in and transformed by practice (Nissen, 2003b).

This is not merely a general methodological point. As we shall see, social work in some cases can assume the form of a 'cultural pedagogy', a creation and transformation of cultural forms that work reciprocally to transform participants. In line with the tradition of cultural-historical activity theory (Jensen, 1999; Langemeier & Nissen, 2005; Wertch, 1991), but also, we believe, with some of Foucault's theoretical works (Foucault, 1985), such "objectification" should not be seen, either critically or descriptively, only as the deployment of a fixed conceptual structure (such as that surrounding the notion of addiction, misuse, dependency, or the corresponding structure of institutions and target-groups) that represses, excludes, or simply forms subjectivities. Rather, objectification should be conceived of as productive and subjectifying in more positive and subtle dialectical ways (cf. Ilyenkov, 1977; Wartofsky, 1979; Willis, 2000). This implies that social work and scientific/ theoretical projects, at least potentially, converge, since basic issues are dealt with and even pushed forward by social workers in everyday practices.

In the following, before presenting and discussing findings and examples from our empirical investigationsstudies, some of these basic issues are raised in - we should perhaps warn the reader - a somewhat dense theoretical consideration of the discourse of street level social work.

Everyday life, interpellation, and heterotopia

The current turn towards the street level in drug treatment and social work matches a maneuver that is characteristic of some kinds of social work with young drug users in Copenhagen: a *critical invocation of everyday life*. It is a rhetorical and practical move where the essentially unspecific and all-encompassing character of everyday life (see Heller, 1981; Heller, 1985; Nissen, 1999a) is opposed to certain forms of discipline, thinking, practice and institutions etc., which in the light of that opposition are criticized as abstract and one-sided, and appear of limited scope or use.

Thus, for instance, to invoke everyday life in a community, and to let the community be the true site of social and personal development, rather than some therapeutic or educational closed environment, means moving from the specified/ specialized (and professionally sustained) to the indistinct and boundless. In certain communities of social work, as in certain theories (Bech-Jørgensen, 2001; Christie, 1990; Hegland, 1994; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Mattingly, 1998) the "real" and "concrete" everyday life is conceived in anthropological universal terms that have certain utopian qualities. Whereas *inside* the treatment institutions there are 'patients', 'delinquents', 'trainees', 'clients', or 'users', *outside* them there are 'human beings', 'citizens', 'persons' or perhaps 'subjects' who can be called upon as 'participants' in communities. Further, *inside* institutions specific 'methods', 'knowledge' and 'skills' are applied to reach definite goals by specialized professionals in terms of what can be characterized as an instrumental rationality, whereas *outside* institutions, 'social practice' unfolds, 'life' is lived, and a 'communicative rationality' can prevail.

The method of critically invoking everyday life in social work serves as a corrective to prevailing narrow individualistic, pathologizing, stigmatizing conceptions of social problems and of persons. But it can also function as an ideological mechanism that can be used to recruit and align agents and resources. Significantly, it can function as a kind of humanistic *interpellation* of otherwise marginalized subjects. Interpellation, in Louis Althusser's seminal account (Althusser, 1994), is the hailing and recruitment of an individual as always-already subject of a state. While practically enacted, this interpellation is *ideological* in the sense that it constitutes community and participant (state and subject) in certain discursively ordered (or in Althusser's term imaginary) relations that have certain "transcendental" (e.g. religious) reference points (Højrup, 2003). In some accounts of the history of social work, the task of creating subjects out of socially excluded individuals is viewed as central (Philp, 1979), and, at least in welfare states, social work can be understood as a process that also contributes to a re-formation of the state itself. Following these lines, various public and private communities and networks represent and perform the social work of an ideological interpellation of marginalized subjects on behalf of the state – on behalf of a reformed, more "social" state, perhaps – and some precisely by forming holistic, humanist alternatives to established, specialized institutions (cf. Nissen, 2003a, 2004).

Thus, although social work, of course, cannot be a universal phenomenon, it may be that when street kids in Cape Town are encountered as "also God's children" (Lewis, 2001), when Norwegian mentally handicapped are renamed as "unusual persons" who participate in a humane local community (Christie, 1990), and when undocumented Mexican immigrants in New York define themselves as "human beings" (Solis, 2002), there is a similar ideological recruitment and struggle going on as when, as we shall see below, criminal, drug-using Copenhagen youngsters are positively rephrased as "wild" and invited to join the activities of the network organization "Wild Learning" (Nissen, 1999b).

In this view, the "outside", negative character of the street level allows it to represent everyday life as a whole, across or in-between all specific contexts. By representing the movement of going beyond the traditional institutional spaces of the professionals into what is understood to be the "natural habitats" and "home grounds" of their users, the street level can provide critical social workers with the transcendental reference point necessary to interpellate those users as subjects of communities ideologically defined as alternative. Much like the idea of "nature" prevailing in some romantic ideologies, the street can be at once an unspecific raw material and a holistic-utopian reference.

This is particularly evident in the case of youth work. Young people are often seen as

intrinsically marginalized in their transition phase between the institutions of childhood and those of adulthood, suspended in a 'moratorium'. In street level work with young people the street can be conceived as a negative or empty space of transition, in which young people can and must constitute an identity as autonomous subjects; a site of necessary freedom and risk. But it can also be re-conceived of as the site of positive, socially supporting subcultures – when it is called upon or created as such in a critical invocation of everyday life in certain "alternative" social work communities.

We might consider the significant *spatiality* of the idea of the street level a bit closer, since the spatial organization of social work has always been one of its founding characteristics (Becker, 1963), (Donzelot, 1979; Foucault, 1997; Foucault, 1967; Prior, 1993). Following (Foucault, 1986), we might conceptualize the "street level" as a *heterotopia*: a site of alternate ordering, a location which is made to represent and contain a certain Otherness that makes it different from all other ordinary locations in society. In Foucault's words, heterotopias

"… are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault, 1986).

The inherent counter-quality or incongruity of a heterotopia is an important aspect. Foucault uses the metaphor of a mirror that at the same time copies and reverts. But rather than taking this aspect to be necessarily synonymous with a (post-modern) kind of "resistance" (as does to some extent (Hetherington, 1997), we would take Foucault's point to be that the counter-quality is a necessary implication of *any* realization of an utopia or a pure idea (Harvey, 2000).

The turn to the street level in social work with young drug users can be viewed as the establishing of a new heterotopia, which opposes and replaces the heterotopias of the drug treatment institutions. In the old days, the detoxification centre, in some cases supplemented by country-side tours to remote places, was for a while the closed space where the addict occupied the status of client or patient, in the "rites de passage" of drug treatment, on his way towards his rebirth as a re-socialized or cured citizen. The treatment institution was a kind of a heterotopia since it realized a certain utopian purity onto a completely colonized everyday life of its "inmates". As such, the institution mirrored (i.e. represented, contested, and inverted) the ordinary "normal life" (or "real sites") outside of the institution. Inside the institution, the most radically deviant treatment regimes could be established to match the 'otherness' of the addict and this could coexist or shift with the most extreme attempts to normalize him.

The turn to the street level in social work with young drug users is often an oppositional maneuver against those traditional institutional orderings, and when coupled with the above-mentioned critical invocation of everyday life, the street level can become itself an *opposite heterotopian ordering*. As such, street level social work is also basically ambiguous. It establishes itself with explicit and positive reference to the "normal" youngster (characterized by mobility, cross-contextuality, innovation, experimentation, flexibility, development, potentials etc.), but, at the same time, it is organized around and deals with the shadow side of deviant otherness that is implied in the notions of potentially disruptive, criminal, drug using sub-cultures of marginalized youngsters which established the need for an intervention in the first place. The street level may be the "wild jungle" into which daring outreach expeditions venture and at the same time the utopian "home land" for alternative communities.

This ambiguity makes the spatial relations between social institutions and the surrounding environment more complex than is sometimes suggested. Nikolas Rose (1999), see also (Cohen, 1985), (Prior, 1993) claims a general shift in the relations between social institutions and the "residual" space outside of the in-sti-tu-tions, epitomized in the image of the beautiful sites of 19th century asylums that have been turned into luxury condominiums – where guards once again occupy the gate houses, but now to make sure that the insane are kept *outside*. That is, a shift from a relation of the unproblematized normal outside of institutions as opposed to the pathological and special that is collected inside institutions, to a new relation between the rough and wild outside as opposed to the regulated and socially-supporting (and more or less 'gated')

communities. Though a catchy image, this notion of a shift conceals some existing tensions and contradictions, which social workers must deal with. Not only in the spatial organization as such, but also in the relations that it mediates between state, society and its margins: thus, the state that built the 'total institutions' (Goffman, 1961) of Modernity may appear absent in the time of so called 'advanced liberalism´ (Rose, 1999). But in practice, at least in Denmark, an ongoing redefinition of state institutions coincides with the recruitment of an active society out of which new state agencies repeatedly emerge (Hulgård, 1997). In our view, it is important, both to maintain the inherent complexity of spatial notions in social work, but also to be aware of the intimate ways that spatial organization is intertwined with the constitution of state agencies and communities (after all, territory has indexed the comprehensiveness of state power and of state ambitions, as well as provided the most important of its internal structuring

principles, at least in Europe since the 17th century (cf. Harvey, 2000; Hirst, 2001; Højrup, 2003).

A short ideal history of Copenhagen City's interventions concerning young drug users

After thus having presented these few key theoretical concepts concerning the discourse of some kinds of street level social work, we will now provide a short general outline of the historical development in the field of social interventions into young peoples drug taking in Copenhagen. This historical view on the field puts into perspective the ideals of the present policy and some of the most recent initiatives taken, we have studied (Vinum, 2002, 2003, 2005).

In the course of the 1990's, the Copenhagen municipality developed its first explicit policy on the issue of young people's drug abuse. This was the result of at least two parallel developments. First, from the 80's on, youth discourses increasingly emphasized issues of unemployment and social exclusion and construed youth as a matter for social policy, which, in turn, focused still more on the socially excluded. Second, the young – who had originally (in the 1960's) been considered the core drug users – had gradually been excluded from the drug treatment system as a result of the professionalization of therapeutic interventions targeted at the addictive personality. With the rise in harm reduction policies in the 1980's the exclusion of the young drug users from the treatment system became even more outspoken. When new phenomena such as "street kids", "heroin-smokers-who-think-only-injection-is-dangerous", party drug users and cannabis addicts alarmed the media and called the authorities to attention, the soil was prepared for an explicit policy on young people's drugs misuse.

From the beginning, two very different kinds of services were established. One kind was specialized inpatient treatment institutions for young drug users, which were basically continuing the tradition of a closed, drug-free therapeutic community. The other kind began with the establishment of the "street kids project" in 1993 that consisted primarily of the projects "Check-Point" (Danish: "Tjek-Punkt") and "The Crew" (Danish: "Sjakket"). Check-Point was a specialized professional outreach facility for the most marginalized drug addicts, criminals and prostitutes primarily in Vesterbro, the "red lights district" of Copenhagen. The Crew, as a social work facility, was the City's (and the Danish state's) support to a grassroots community of self-appointed social workers, self-helpers, and young volunteers who worked by way of ad-hoc cooperation projects with groups of young marginalized people, and who in that sense were from the start situated "in the streets".

In the middle 1990's, there was a heated debate between representatives of these two very different forms of services and their underlying philosophies. The professionals in the specialized drug treatment institutions stressed that the only efficient treatment was driven by the drug users' motivation, and based on a tightly structured therapeutic community that could match the 'weak ego-structure' of the users. Furthermore, these professionals basically considered the social workers and the indigenous 'resource persons' from the street level projects as unprofessional. The project social workers, on their part, criticized the bureaucratic admission procedures and the rigid rules (such as the rule of abstinence, the demand of treatment motivation etc.) of traditional institutions for being unfit to help young drug users in trouble, and instead they viewed the rules

and procedures of the institutions as the result of sheer conservatism and self-protection of the professionals themselves.

Seen from the above-outlined theoretical perspectives what was at stake were opposite ways of embodying ideal concepts in sites – a contrast of different heterotopias: one was conceptualized as inside the walls of the institution and the other outside. Common to both was the ideal of a holistic and comprehensive treatment of the person, but that ideal was by one part sought realized by including that person in a total institution, and by the other part by following the person's everyday conduct of life between institutions. The emphasis on community work, also a common feature of both strands, was realized either in therapeutic communities or through working with the communities of the streets or the local districts.

In the long run, the street level projects matched the overall discursive and political development of the city better. Generally there were weighty economical reasons for outsourcing and scaling down expensive specialized services and inpatient treatment in a number of social areas. In addition, it was recognized by the municipality that the specialized drug treatment institutions in fact had great difficulties in helping especially the most marginalized of the young drug users. At the end of the 90's when the city's first policy on young people and drugs was formulated, it was officially declared that young people's drug use should be treated as a *youth problem*. The handling of the drug problems should be embedded in general social youth issues (such as problems with unemployment, education/school, housing/parents) and incorporated in the already existing social interventions; or to quote the policy statement: "To put it slightly provokingly, it must be slipped in through the back door" (Ege, Rothenberg & Madsen, 1999).

Compared to the special problems of drug addiction, crime, or prostitution, youth can be seen as a general human condition, epitomizing universal features of life in modernity. Thus, focusing on youth in social interventions means broadening the perspective, and this includes potentially a normalization of the many problematic aspects of an everyday youth life - among other things, drug use and its cultures – as well as a broadening of the schemes and purview of social interventions such as interventions directly in the streets and other places where young people stay. In that sense the new policy of the city could be seen as an overall support to a critical invocation of the everyday life of the youngsters.

A number of initiatives were taken to implement this "youth perspective" in the city. First the municipality hired an academic official and three additional street level social workers to intensify the outreach work and act as 'drug experts' to help qualify boarding homes and other social pedagogical treatment institutions for young people that had been identified as having great difficulties containing young people with drug problems.

Further, a youth employment/education guarantee was declared, and an employment agency for marginalized young people was established to implement a change in legislation that provided for labor-market oriented social rehabilitation for youngsters under the age of 18. By means of 'activation' / work-fare and continuity in adult contact, the goal was to create "a meaningful everyday life" for the 200 most marginalized youngsters in Copenhagen (Rothenberg, Madsen & Ernager, 2001).

Finally, the small but significant organization "Wild Learning" (Danish: "Vilde Læreprocesser") was launched by some of the social workers who had participated in The Crew (Mørck, 2000; Nissen, 1999a, 2002, 2003a, 2004). The organization comprises an informal network of institutions, projects, self-help groups and youngsters all over the city, not comprehensive, but selected and used strategically as a driving force. It is the as yet most ambitious cooperation of the municipal officials with grassroots organizations and informal groups (such as sports clubs, labor unions, and religious and political communities). The organization aims at working with youngsters in the street, train street level social workers, and achieve system reforms (cooperating with social centers, youth clubs and schools), all in the same process.

Gradually, these central city-level initiatives were supplemented by developments in the local city districts. Throughout the 90's, there was a general decentralization going on in the city, both politically and administratively, and the idea was often expressed that

local welfare offices and counseling facilities would be better suited to engage with young people as partners in an active society.

Taken together, the strategy of the City of Copenhagen was not to create new and specialized institutions to deal with what was identified as a growing problem with young drug addicts, but instead to qualify and intensify the social work already carried out, to mould it into a comprehensive system of shared responsibilities, and to intervene directly at street level and in the everyday lives of youngsters.

Marginalizing dynamics in the field

However, as our interviews with social workers and other professionals in the field reveal, the new policy of the city has met several obstacles when implemented in practice. Overall, it seems that the ideal of establishing a comprehensive system of shared responsibilities, and the ambition to integrate the interventions towards young drug users in the already existing social services runs into problems because of certain marginalizing dynamics in the field.

First, there is the issue very often referred to by professionals in institutions as the problem of "contagion": who will take responsibility for placing an innocent youngster with hard-core drug users such as "heavy hash smokers"? To prevent this contagion problem, most institutions (boarding homes, social pedagogical treatment institutions etc.) choose to get rid of youngsters known as persistent drug users. In interviews, social workers from these institutions sometimes justify this exclusion by reference to simplistic epidemiological models that depict the spreading of drug use as similar to the spreading of a virus or to the so-called 'stepping-stone-hypothesis' that cannabis leads to heavier drugs (see Winsløw, 1984). The contagion problem, however, more likely results from certain structural features of these social institutions. In particular, from the absolute divide between staff and client-group regarding access to information, responsibilities, and general everyday life (Goffman, 1961), from the fact that the institutions tend to comprise vulnerable and inflexible constellations of persons with an abundance of social problems, that the institutions are organized according to the principle of artificial "target groups" (that legitimizes exclusion as a classification issue), and that decisions must routinely be made regarding the referral of particular individuals (in or out of the institution) (Vinum, 2005).

When first stigmatized as heavy cannabis smoker, the young drug user is also very likely to be excluded from other institutions in the social system. This has to do with the second problem, namely, that social workers and institutions today must manage their positions in a competitive field of institutions and that no institution wants to become known as the "garbage can" that deals with the drug issues that all the other institutions manage to avoid or to get rid of (Vinum, 2002). This is a question of tightly evaluated quality management A point made by (Järvinen, 1998) in a study of the exclusion of the worst-off alcoholics from Copenhagen social services, but also of the institution's reputation among youngsters and their parents or among potentially referring social worker colleagues (case managers, school counsellors etc.). Both are features, which have become more salient with the general decentralization and specialization that has been going on in the Danish welfare state (Hulgård, 1997; Prahl, 1993).

Thirdly, it is not only drug users, but also the issue of drug use, which is marginalized. Drug use, in general, is a taboo in most modern Western countries even though the instrumental use of chemistry as part of strict bodily regimes and as 'technologies of the self' in fact *characterizes* modern Western culture and not just some exotic minority subculture (Nissen, 2002; O'Malley & Mugford, 1991; Plant, 1999). But if social workers openly allow drug use even as a debatable theme inside the institutions, many of them will have to face the fact that a majority of their clients/ users engage in illegal or at least strongly controversial activities. To avoid legitimizing these activities many social workers choose the simple option to "forbid" drug use, in effect, to re-taboo it - as for instance at one school, the principal significantly stated in an interview: "Hash is prohibited because it is prohibited!". In this way, the cultural taboo of drug use is intimately connected with the stigmatization and social exclusion of the drug user (Vinum, 2002).

This connection is well known in youth work, were a traditional problem is that of a choice between cultural and social approaches (Williamson, 1997, Mørch, 1996). A cultural approach often seems to lead to an emphasis on colorful sub-cultural activities that can attract curious and experimenting youngsters. In contrast, a social approach will generally focus on education and employment and the development of skills and knowledge that enhance 'normalization' or adaptation to societies' existing systems, institutions and businesses. In terms of drug use, a social approach will, generally, either taboo drug use, or focus directly on the drugs problem in the form of treatment or counseling. A cultural approach that attempts to enable social workers to circumvent the drug use taboo without turning drug use into a fixed object of treatment, on the other hand, will typically imply that the problem of social stigmatization and marginalization of the drug user is left unchallenged. This is the case in various uncommitted youth club leisure activities where social problems are very often ignored – as well as in forms of care that accept the social exclusion as a given premise, such as drop-in centers and the like known from street level work with homeless etc. (although these latter are still, however, by and large politically untenable in the youth field) (Bovbjerg & Kirk, 2001).

The deep-rooted dichotomy between stigma and taboo that pervades the issue of drug use in our society, and their marginalizing dynamics, are hard to challenge, and it seems that those institutions, projects etc. who attempt to face social exclusion and cultural taboo at once run the risk of being marginalized themselves and of an eventual drying out of financial sources and political backing. Thus, instead of taking part in establishing a comprehensive system of shared responsibility for the young drug users, the social institutions, in general, have been more keen to hand over the young drug users to specialized professionals and special drug treatment institutions (Vinum, 2005).

These marginalizing dynamics in the social system form the concrete background for the recent turn to the street level in social work with marginalized young people in Copenhagen. Street level social work, in this view, functions as a counter-measure to the problems of social exclusion in the social system. However, as we will discuss in the following, there are different kinds of street level social work, and it appears that the most prominent forms of street level social work with young people in Copenhagen today, in spite of intentions, also risk reproducing the marginalizing dynamics of specialized spaces and institutions.

Street level work in or from 'free spaces'

As mentioned, when social services at street level specifically for the young people are proposed, it is argued with reference to the marginality and de-contextuality intrinsic to youth: young people should be met outside of any institution or any home, school, factory, shop etc., and supported in their self-reflection, ideally in a kind of 'free space' that is separated from the attachments and obligations to parents, teachers, bosses, case managers etc. This assumption of a free space is also central to the 11 open, anonymous youth counseling services that have recently been established in Copenhagen (Vinum, 2003). The anonymous counseling services function as a sort of "bridge-heads" of the social system mediating between the youngsters' "wild-life" in the streets and the bindings of the adult worlds.

This immediate organizational autonomy of the open counseling services allows the social workers to define themselves as different from the social work carried out in traditional institutional settings and in a way that refers specifically to these 'moratorium' features of youth. For instance, the young will be attracted when the social workers present themselves as being 'on their side', when they ally with the young rather than automatically with parents or colleagues in neighboring institutions, and when they present themselves as 'alternative' to the established social services and at the same time as decently concerned. The free space of the open counseling service thus can become a heterotopian ordering that allows a critical invocation of everyday life and organizes an ideological interpellation on the basis of the utopia that it embodies.

When such 'free spaces' are connected to the issue of drugs, as for instance one of the youth counseling services did, when it in 2001 established a social project for a group of young marginalized drug using girls with the purpose of combating drug problems,

the oppositional free space initially allowed the social workers to address the drug issue that was otherwise tabooed or marginalized (this was the project which Christine Vinum cooperated with for some years). But, as it turned out, as long as the drug issue remained inside the walls of the free space it was difficult for the social workers to actually do anything about it. In order to realize their professional responsibility for the girls the social workers had to substantiate the dialogical interpellation of the girls through mobilizing resources in those same families and neighboring institutions to which they had defined themselves as opposed. And this entailed among other things that both the girls and the social workers must give up their privileged uncommitted statuses and relate and occupy themselves with the demands, rules etc. of these institutions. Thus, when the free or utopian space is confronted with the "real sites" outside the youth counseling service, the same marginalizing dynamics that trouble all the other institutions in the field are likely to be reproduced, so that either the drug issue will be tabooed or the worst-off cases will be excluded (Vinum, 2003, 2005).

Contrary to the perception of some social workers in the field, we do not consider the issue to be in principle much different when counseling services attempt to stretch their free spaces even further into the streets in the shape of "outreach work", patrolling the streets to reach youngsters who can perhaps be "motivated" back into the system on the condition of anonymity and absence of obligations. It does potentially make a difference that it is the social worker who is accountable for initiating the meeting, on the immediate terms and conditions of the street environment, and that an ethnographic form of knowledge is in demand. Typically, however, the street remains a foreign territory for the patrolling outreach workers, and the purpose of the meeting becomes substantialized only in a subsequent movement of the client into the social work institutions from which s/he had been excluded. Thus representing the institutionalized 'bad conscience of the system', outreach work – at its best – only leads to ongoing ideological struggles and conflicts with the institutional services on which the outreach workers, at the end of the day, depend for street credibility.

From this point, many experienced social workers have abandoned the idea of working in a free space and of identifying with clients or users, emphasizing instead the need to cooperate with the system. But, as we will investigate further below, the relations between any such street level heterotopia and their eventual clashes with 'reality' are always multiply mediated; and it is precisely those mediations – across projects and organizations of experimental social work, via alternative networking and ideological mobilization of youngsters etc. – that in other kinds of street level social work in Copenhagen open venues for a more substantial interpellation of excluded youngsters.

The networking model and cultural pedagogy of "Wild Learning"

One such form is the networking and community-building model characteristic of the organization Wild Learning which in some respects seems more promising in the task of confronting the problem of social exclusion of young drug users (this is the organization with whom Morten Nissen worked closely for some years and that Christine Vinum also studied).

Indeed, City officials, when asked to describe the City's policy, often refer to the Wild Learning network. The network allows the City to reach out into the streets in a qualitatively new way and scope, recruiting and mobilizing young people directly in the clubs, streets, discothèques etc. where drugs are taken. The street level workers directly intervene in groups of youngsters, both ad hoc to mediate conflicts and "put out fires", as they call it, but also on the longer term to establish connections in the forms of negotiations, cooperation and mutual recognition around various project activities, clubs etc.

In this networking model, the street level is attained by a mobilization of young people through creating activities and collectivities "on neutral ground", i.e. in some ways distinct from, but at the same time also part of, the street-level everyday life of the youngsters. The shift from traditional enclosures of institutions and free spaces to networks means a structural change from lines that divide (e.g. what is inside and outside of the walls, the "us/ them" divide) to lines that connect (e.g. connections between the positions of youngsters, social workers, researchers, all equalized as 'participants', and an infinity of acquaintances, meetings, and movements), and it might

appear as if distinct social units evaporate. Yet in the networks, social units and communities are actually formed and reproduced continuously. The social work is organized as ad-hoc projects and built around particular people and occasions, unlike the traditional input/output flow of clients or users in pre-given institutions. In the network model, the range of possible relations between persons, problems, and communities therefore also widens considerably. Moreover, in the absence of professional rationality, broader ideological issues are much more directly referenced to define organizational identity.

This provides a fundamental challenge to the general tendency of specialization and professionalization in social work. It challenges the tradition of 'carving out' social problems and turning them into something specific that designates a target group and requires specialized techniques and skills. Instead, in these communities, general social issues are holistically faced and in this context, any specific problems, such as drugs and drugs misuse, become pragmatic concerns that may or may not be worth addressing.

In the Wild Learning network and its ancestors, the drugs problem has been debated for more than a decade (Nissen, 1998). It can be regarded as characteristic of the Wild Learning network that the discussion keeps reappearing as a problematic issue rather than being 'solved' in a fixed policy, and that the choices between tabooing and stigmatization/ self-marginalization are never really made. In terms of daily work with young drug users, the story one social worker from the partner project "The Street Pulse" told us in an interview is typical and can illustrate this point: the project had arranged a skiing trip to Norway and managed to attract a mixture of relatively known and trustworthy youngsters and new groups whom they hoped to get to know better. Of course, the social workers had lectured the youngsters that it would be unwise to bring cannabis and that the Swedish and Norwegian police might strike harder on the issue than they were used to in Copenhagen; and of course, the social workers knew very well that this would not keep the youngsters from bringing and smoking hash. And indeed, all the way up through Sweden and Norway, the social workers were desperately ambivalent about what to do every time that familiar smell crept up from the back seats. In a sense, the bus was a heterotopia of the kind these social workers often describe as "meeting the youngsters in movement and on neutral ground".

In the longer term, the drug issue reappears, not only in discussions among social workers and youngsters (including at the Wild Learning website, see below), but also from time to time in "cultural activities" or in the shape of campaign-like activities to which youngsters are mobilized. This was the case, for instance, in the grand-scale theater/ musical performance "Will Twist Survive" in 1993 where the Crew staged itself (to an audience of social workers, officials and politicians) as the answer to the predicaments of a street kid, including the damaging drug habits of criminal gangs and of psychiatric institutions alike; or when in 1995 the Crew launched the "No Hope With Dope" project driven mostly by youngsters who knew heroin users personally, and who organized festivals, printed posters, arranged meetings, etc.; and when in 2002 the youth club "Klub 47" mobilized a large group of youngsters to arrange Hip-Hop style cultural activities as well as debates with parents etc. to address drug issues.

In general, there is no fixed rule as to whether, when, where and how drug issues should be explicitly taken up or made into a project in its own right. When the direct objectification of a drug issue as 'interaction frame' (that which defines what is going on, cf. Goffman, 1986) seems promising – as for instance in terms of making some important pedagogical point or in terms of mobilizing resources (state finances, media backing) and participants (including youngsters) - some kind of 'drugs project' is perhaps made. Otherwise, it is one issue among many others that are dealt with in the flow of everyday practices. In both cases, it is an important premise that drug taking is problematized both in a generalizing 'ethical' mode and from the young drug users' (and friends etc.) 'insider' perspective, as the inescapably ongoing and troublesome issue of *our* regulation of the drugs *we* do or do not consume.

It is this pragmatic and indexical (cf. p. 6) social work, which we call cultural pedagogy. It is pedagogical, because it aims to form youngsters through activities, through participatory identification, and through a self-reflection mediated by cultural objects. Yet it is cultural work because the pedagogical aims never dominate to create an 'as-if'

situation that reduces the objective importance of the cultural objects. Instead, the activities created and the cultural objects used are typically meaningful and 'real' not just to the participants but also to members of society at large in the sense that they carry socially sanctioned power, economy, and knowledge.

The discourse of cannabis misuse in (inter-) action

Of course, cultural objects (or discursive forms), in the broadest meaning of the term, do not only appear as tangible things and explicitly addressed issues that are intentionally created, used, and transformed by participants. In the everyday flow of interaction, they routinely shift between implicitly structuring interaction, narratives etc., or being handled as givens, or being attended to, reflected, and questioned. Such shifts are the substance of cultural pedagogy at the level of interaction. In what follows, we will look at a sequence of one of our interviews with a social worker to get a closer impression of how the cultural object, "cannabis misuse", can be viewed and employed as pragmatically and pedagogically changeable.

This social worker, a former 'wild girl' employed in Wild Learning, reports in the interview on her trip to a Mediterranean resort with two girls and a case manager from a local district welfare office, to develop precarious relationships with each. The form of the time-limited holiday trip, immediately, resembles the earlier described traditional heterotopia of the drug detox tour to remote and enclosed countryside places. But it is also very different from that because the whole point is to go out (on trips to the city, at the beach etc.) and to create a neutral ground as an interaction frame (cf. above), where the social workers' own positions and cooperative relations are at stake.

The social worker, here, talks about her troubles with especially one of the girls, whom we call Kitty, and about the important pedagogical asset of leaving it in some particular situations to the other girl, Jean - who is at the same time 'client' and 'resource person' - to influence and help Kitty:

In restaurants and in the apartment, and when we came home at night, we would play backgammon or cards and talk. But there weren't those long all-night scenes, since we were pretty determined to stick to the rule of getting up at nine in the morning. This was simply in order to turn Kitty around. After about 3 days her withdrawal symptoms, hash withdrawal, you know, started to really break out. What I mean is that every time she was on the street she tried to spot who might be in possession of hash or smoke hash in this place. She would contact all negroes (laughs At this point in time (2000), the term "negro" is only just becoming offensive in Denmark; probably the laugh signals an awkward self-consciousness about either the term or the absurdity of the prejudice reported, or both.) and people who looked target-group-like. She clearly tried to contact them, and then we had this unpleasant piece of work, to tag along right behind her and all that. And then, when we got back one had to check which…or…she had these small cards with all sorts of phone numbers, because then she'd just been 'round the corner and got a phone number from somebody, so that she could call him when she was badly craving, and he would bring her some hash. And of course, that was a lot of work, with keeping an eye on her and making her understand that it wouldn't do. And again here Jean helped a lot, and this was at nights.

But how could you know which small cards she would have in her pockets with phone numbers and the like?

Because she's such a magnificent girl, and they all are, typically, they damn well want to be found out. Because they know they have a problem. And they want sanctions and they want help. She wishes to be as hip as Jean and to be as smart as us

So there were small openings?

There were small openings. Actually, and about that theft too, it is often about attracting attention. If you fuck up you're automatically in focus. And then you can make a drama. And she just started one, the more drama the better, the more conflicts the more attention. What I'm talking about is that sometimes she would actually leave a piece of

paper, and then I was supposed to ask: "Whose phone number is this?" and then (imitates girl's voice) – "Do you really think I'd tell you that?"

Yes (laughs)

And then I was supposed to go into it, you know. But those hash things were quite heavy on the third and the fourth day.

It seems clear that this social worker draws on a quite traditional notion of 'hash misuse' with a structure of dependence, withdrawal symptoms, craving etc., and that she interprets Kitty's actions in terms of the logic of drug issues. When it does appear to us like this, we can see how it organizes the dialogue or interplay between social worker and Kitty, even if it does not create an interaction frame in a total fashion as it would in a drug treatment institution (in this case, there are other concerns as well, such as theft, inversed day/ night rhythms etc., and of course the general tourist activities, and all of those concerns are equally important and constitutive). It is through the 'magic mirror' of hash dependence that we encounter Kitty as a subject who is subjected to the impulses of her problematic 'target-group life' (withdrawal and craving symptoms), spontaneously engaging herself in establishing a new pusher-network, and as the agent of skillful manipulations.

Hash misuse appears as a set of objective conditions and problematics that can function as an obstacle to building relationships, obviously – and we can see how that obstacle could easily grow to a size that under certain circumstances would legitimize marginalization. But when Kitty's actions are seen as played out in relation to a social worker who is competent *because* she has been there herself, and an older girl, who is positioned somewhere in-between, all her symptoms and skillful moves prove to be moves in a 'game' that, eventually, is meant to lead to Kitty's surrender; a game that Kitty herself is partly aware of and partly assists.

The discursive logic of (any) interaction is indexically formed by the community structure in which it is situated. The narrator's and Jean's strength, the fact that they each have a 'wild girl' history, and the fact that they have in common also a more recent past when the narrator was Jean's 'resource person'/ social worker, the relative and troublesome weakness of the case manager who represents the 'traditional' institutions, the fact that Wild Learning is a 'cool' network of attractive activities and persons, the fact that this network is developing (perhaps now by establishing a new 'hash / wild girls project' Which may, in turn, be part of why the social worker is keen to frame this event as a case of 'hash withdrawal'.), and that this very interaction is at the front line of that development – all of that and more contributes to reframing Kitty's position from one of a client to one of potential participant.

The lay discourse of 'hash misuse' functions here as a kind of *scaffold* (cf. Wertch, 1991, Solis, 2002) for their relationship that Kitty has to 'climb' in the process of her subjectification as a participant in this community. Kitty is invited to reinterpret herself as a person who initially proves worthy of inauguration into the community of self-help/ social workers by her 'wildness', by the very strength and cunning with which she resists, and who then realizes that the hash smoking which had organized and motivated her resistance is really a 'dragon' that they have been fighting together from different angles. Hash smoking, then, is 'narratively externalized' from Kitty's self and objectified as a 'hash misuse' which does not return to frame absolutely the interaction or define Kitty's subject-position, but instead legitimizes the peripheral position (Lave & Wenger, 1991) which she is in the process of overcoming.

This logic is very similar to that which we can witness at the Wild Learning internet site in May-June 2002 (www.vildelaereprocesser.dk – see also (Nissen, 2004). Five girls had been invited to write their account of hash smoking. At a first glance, the accounts impress as shockingly frank, as the girls seem to have no plans of giving up their drug use. At a closer look, it appears that the issues they all address are, after all, shaped in the traditional discourse of addiction: peer-groups, withdrawal, dependence, the danger of hash-psychosis or brain damage, effects on school performance etc. But the girls' participation in writing the politically important internet site of the Wild Learning can also be viewed as a potentially powerful interpellation in which the hash narratives function

as scaffolding devices. The narrative externalization of the hash misuse or addiction discourse in the writing of the internet site becomes part of the cultural performance of the community of Wild Learning and the girls as participants. The identity of a 'hash-dependent' is objictified, but at the same time turned profane and re-framed as one form of legitimate peripheral participation in a community that is defined by much more than (treating) 'drugs' or addiction.

In general, when drugs, dependencies, addict identities etc. are objectified at street level, as in these examples or in the form of ad-hoc projects or campaign activities to which youngsters are mobilized, the method of critically invoking everyday life releases potentials for an ongoing critique of the objectifications around which institutions, communities and identities are fixed, and of the subjectivities that emerge in their reflections, even if at a surface level, it is the same discourses which are employed.

Some general conditions for the networking model

The example of the social worker's story of Kitty and Jean is useful because it clearly shows that the critical potentials of this kind of street level work are not derived from an academic ideology critique based on a scrutiny and rejection of the discourse of addiction. Far from it, it seems that the social worker could easily transfer her opinions, knowledge and skills in this regard to any traditional social work institution. It is in *practice* that her thinking becomes situated as critical.

This does not mean that ideology or ideology critique is not importantly in action here. Some of the ideologies that organize the Wild Learning network are for instance the idea of the importance of the personal experience of having been 'wild', to have the courage (wildness) to go against the 'system', to teach the system, and create alternatives; the idea of personal trust, or perhaps even the idolizing of particular persons; and the ideology of humanist opposition to current xenophobic and conservative law-and-order as well as neoliberal commercialism.

But any such ideology, in order to actually address social problems, needs to be substantialized beyond the immediate interaction in particular communities. The flexible ad-hoc network must be part of a much more stable and committed overarching community that is able to reproduce itself economically and politically. Without such support the Wild learning network will run into the same problems as the 'free spaces' of social work when confronted with the harsh realities of social exclusion, adverse political forces, bureaucratic administration and other conditions of the social system. Ultimately, such communities are (within our societal horizon) only conceivable as parts of a welfare state, provided the welfare state (as described in the beginning of the paper) can be seen as developing at the interface with more or less oppositional communities or NGO's that have universalizing political-ideological aspirations. The general environment of Copenhagen at the turn of the millennium: a welfare state stronghold in dire need of reform under the combined pressure from humanist, socialist and liberalist critiques, and a rich local grassroots culture, could prepare a quite unique soil for such communities and their cultural pedagogy.

However, as is also apparent in our empirical material, some adverse overall trends presently seem to gain influence.

One is the political pressure for visible and decisive measures against young criminals, connected with nationalist tendencies. A wide-reaching potential of the community/ networking approach is the way it often supercedes the ideological dichotomizations of power from social support (as well as from knowledge), which are embodied in the institutional structures. The self-taught 'third way' of these social workers (who often have a background in voluntary organizations or political activism) is a kind of political work of handling power struggles, forging alliances, recruiting support etc. - ranging all the way from national media, across city politics and bureaucracy, and on into the specific street gangs and groupings of young people. With the rise of law-and-order rhetoric, *and* with its liberal opposition, such networks become harder to sustain, because attention and resources become focused on either incarceration or individual harm reduction / risk minimization measures.

Another prominent trend is the increasing popularity of evidence-basing as the managerial approach to social work (as to health), which leads to a demand for interventions that are precisely targeted and can be accounted for in terms of standard methods. This is directly detrimental to a cultural pedagogy because it fixes expertise and discourse, and their political and economic networks on some universal object such as 'cannabis dependence' (a 'black box' cf. (Latour, 1987). But this matches closely the wider cultural trend toward commodified instrumental self-regulation, which, among other things, assumes the form of a tangible medicalization that even goes beyond the split between the pathological and the normal. In what might be called the 'culture of the fix', the choice of a narrowly defined and copyright-protected standard method to cure cannabis addiction appears as straight-forward as the choice of Prozac to cure depression – or of cannabis to cure restlessness and boredom.

In 2004, the officials in Copenhagen City capitulated to these forces and launched a specialized treatment facility for young drug users, primarily cannabis addicts. Here the social work is mostly 'off the street' counseling, schooling, detox trips etc. A special system for standard documentation is being implemented, the so-called EuroAdAd. (Carpelan & Hermodsson, 2004; Friedman & Utada, 1989). Both the institution and the documenting system intend a broad social focus, but *within the frame* of addiction treatment. The institution is extremely popular among referring social workers, parents and drug users, and is now looking for ways to limit its target group. It forms part of the extraordinary rise in specialized treatment facilities in Denmark that is expressed in the increase in the number of people treated for addiction from 4.407 in 1996 to 12.317 in 2004 (according to the Danish National Board of Health statistics, Sundhedsstyrelsen, 2005).

In conclusion

Thus, if the turn to the street level in social work with young drug users in Copenhagen can be seen as a means to address problems of social exclusion, and thus to carry a welfare state expansion through a critical invocation of everyday life, it makes sad sense that in the increasingly adverse, neoliberal and conservative political climate, the street level is dwindling as a reference point and everyday life is put back into the form of privacy.

The contradictions which we have described proves the policy of Copenhagen City on young people's drug misuse to be like all state policies: to express a developing and shifting strategic agency of a system that embodies conflicting interests, and congeals political battles that sway back and forth.

The turn to, or from, the street level, specifically, becomes a practical vehicle for the overall clash between different political and ideological projects concerning fundamental issues such as responsibility, order, truth, and the good life – with strict (conservative) law-and-order control policy at one end, statistically validated (liberal) instrumental self-manipulation and risk management at the second, and the carefully socially engineered responsive welfare state communities at the third. As such, the investigation and transformation of street level social work, by way of research, knowledge and otherwise, belongs to the essential self-critique of a welfare state which either grows or deteriorates in different ways at the junctions they provide. These are, in other words, issues for social work and for social science, but they are also essentially political issues.

The street level is not simply an echelon in the abstract image of an organizational structure, nor is it as physical as it immediately presents itself when used as a metaphor to describe a shift of focus. It is itself a heterotopia that arrays those ideological contradictions in local practices and forces those practical problems to be handled in terms of ideological struggles.

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