

Remembering, rewriting, rearticulating, resituating motivation

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Abstract

The article attempts to explain why people should still read Ute Osterkamp's *Motivationsforschung* from 1975-6. Besides a version of the history of 'German-Scandinavian Critical Psychology', written from the standpoint of an epistemology of practice, this is contextualized in a 'diagnosis' and a rearticulation of the contemporary uses of the concept of motivation. Thus, we briefly encounter 'self-determination theory' and various cognitive motivation theories, but also practices of motivational interviewing, gamification, nudging, self-monitoring, and appreciation. These are viewed generally as versions of neo-liberal 'pragmatic' self-governance. Then theoretical sources are sought with which to articulate how they may also hold possibilities – concrete utopia - for a societalization and cultivation of self-governance. Here, Osterkamp's theory of 'productive needs' for developing agency can help point to the dynamics of co-constitution of subjects and activities – when it is read as contributing to theory that addresses the complexity of 'activities', 'practices', and 'praxis'. In the final part, implications for understanding 'life' as a project that seeks beyond 'practices' and 'praxis', are sketched and proposed as an alternative to the 'phenomenological turn' of the later Holzkamp and his followers.

Keywords

motivation, practice, praxis, activity, self, need, rearticulation, participation

Autobiographical introduction

My first serious and deep encounter with what I call "German-Scandinavian Critical Psychology" (GSCP) ¹ was in the summer of 1982 when I read Ute

¹ Some refer to 'German', others zoom in on 'Berlin', and many even limit the whole thing to 'Holzkamp'. This is a battleground. From my perspective, the connection

Osterkamp's *Motivationsforschung* (H.-Osterkamp, 1975, 1976). The book had a profound impact on me. By then, I had studied Vygotsky and Leontiev, and understood that the great project of tying subjectivity to societal matters (politics, economy, class) must be realized through activity, understood as practice: *Tätigkeit*. I was also learning this by engaging in student politics in a Leninist fraction ('Communist Students'), and through my first engagement with pedagogical and therapeutic practices in the field of social work with drug users. Various impressions from reading such authors as Bertolt Brecht and Hans Scherfig², and even fragments of Marx, such as the Feuerbach Theses - and not only the 6th to which everybody referred at the time - also contributed to my readiness.

Osterkamp's book carved my brain circuits (Luria would know what I mean) and formed my outlook to the extent that it survived as key reference through many subsequent upheavals, such as: the widespread enthusiasm with Holzkamp's *Grundlegung der Psychologie* (Holzkamp, 1983b), which we studied intensely in the middle 80s; the critique of militant Leninism which emerged also within the communist movement and, of course, culminated in 1989; and even my later interest in Foucault, Derrida and other poststructuralists.

This may appear strange, or perhaps precisely as the result of an accidental idiosyncratic path (/ -ology). I do indeed find it hard to persuade my clever students - even those very few of them who read German - to engage with the book. It is written in the cumbersome tone of the academic Marxism of the 1970s; most of volume 1 trudges through details of a natural prehistory; it seems to rest on a militant dogmatics that never stops to question vague concepts such as "the ruling" or "bourgeois society"; it does not promise the self-clarification of the subject in everyday life as a fashionably this-sided reward on the way to global revolution; and it openly declares an essence of humanity as a scientific truth which should be held against the "oppressions" of "bourgeois" psychology. Not exactly 'sexy' in the decades of the fallen Berlin Wall. Even Osterkamp herself seems to have forgotten the book; after 1995, Holzkamp is the main and sometimes the only GSCP reference, for her as for most other readers of GSCP.

between West German (although mostly West Berlin) and Scandinavian (although mostly Danish) academics is important, partly because, although the center was first in Berlin, it did spread to most of German-speaking Europe, a little to the Netherlands and Finland, and a lot to Scandinavia. The tradition is now probably stronger in Danish academia than anywhere else in the world. Quite a few Danish academics simply refer to it as 'critical psychology' (especially in Danish texts), as if this were the only kind of CP worth mentioning. Of course, I could refer to persons rather than places - except it is a main point that GSCP is a collective practice, and I suggest we question the way we have replicated patriarchal academic person-cults for the sake of (what appears to be) convenience.

² Danish fiction author 1905-1979.

This article is, in a certain sense, my attempt to explain my continued fondness for *Motivationsforschung*; to generalize that feeling and seek recognition for it as more than just a case of irrational personal history or desire. This project is also a way of presenting a version of GSCP that emphasizes rearticulation - a.k.a. immanent or affirmative critique - as a way of practicing critical psychology. For, my point is not that everything is already written in that book, and that 'we' should simply 'return' to it as a 'true' point of departure, purified of subsequent perversions. Rather, I aim to show that a 'philosophy of practice' - a trans-disciplinary work that reflexively articulates theories with practices and vice versa - suggests a way of harnessing the potentials of great works such as this, even - and perhaps especially - when they present some counterintuitive and outmoded concepts.

In the most general terms, concepts such as agency [Handlungsfähigkeit] and productive needs [produktive Bedürfnisse] amount to suggesting historicity, situatedness and deconstruction as foundational, as a paradoxically anti-essentialist essence, and participation [Teilnahme] as an anti-individualist theory of the individual; what we have here is a theory of motivation that reaches far beyond 'motivation'. This is just what we need when we try to articulate important aspects of practices that claim to deal with 'motivation'. And Osterkamp's bold project of reinterpreting Freudian psycho-dynamics can be seen as one germ cell version of the kind of critical psychology I argue for.

All this became increasingly clear to me in subsequent decades, for reasons very continuous with those that had prepared me to take the book so seriously to begin with. In the course of the 1980s and later, I could dive deeper into Activity Theory and recognize there the struggle to overcome functionalism in the works of Davidov and Ilyenkov, and later those of Lave, Stetsenko, Langemeier, and others. My enthusiasm with GSCP led me to appreciate other ways to enrich and oppose its "subject-science" with a philosophy of practice, notably those of Wolf and Frigga Haug, in projects such as PAQ, PIT³ and, not least, memory work. When I became a researcher, greatly guided and inspired by the philosopher Uffe Juul Jensen, I was introduced to historical and contemporary versions and discussions of a theory of practice, not only in Marx and many of his followers, but also in (certain readings of) French epistemology (Bachelard, Canguilhem), Wittgenstein, the science and technology studies, and, of course, Hegel. My further involvement with social work and counseling kept convincing me that a productive dialogue could and should be established, and that this dialogue must engage with political issues of social exclusion, migration, and inequality - and, perhaps first of all, with *ideology*, as the ('form-content' of the) conceptual forms in which practices such as therapy or teaching are framed and performed.

³ *Projekt Automation und Qualifikation* and *Projekt Ideologie Theorie*

This proved an important dividing line: While the GSCP mainstream, following Holzkamp, and with my previous mentor Ole Dreier (whom, of course, I owe much) as leading figure, would reduce the concept of ideology to a name for the false or inadequate (individualist, idealist) ‘traditional psychology’ that critical psychology should *replace*, the Haugs (like their sources such as Gramsci and Bloch, or Bertolt Brecht and Christa Wolf) would retain it as the perpetual starting point for the self-critique that, at once, builds understanding and subjectivity. This is also the difference between a scientific realism and an epistemology (rather than only an ontology) of practice; and it largely explains why the latter version of GSCP – which is also the version I seek to expound here – develops much more through a dialogue with versions of post-structuralism, even as it also keeps referring to what appear to be ‘scientific’ proposals of ‘human essences’ such as those of *Motivationsforschung*.

Now I am the head of a research program on “rearticulating the formation of motivation”; and I happened to be invited to this special issue. I am of course very pleased with and proud of both events, as well as with how they may converge in the writing of this article. But what finally convinced me that a revisiting of *Motivationsforschung* could be fruitful is a slightly more delicate matter. This has to do with a set of issues that are present all through *Motivationsforschung II* but were not given a systematic treatment – although Osterkamp implied that they would be dealt with in a third volume, which was planned, but never emerged: The broadly existential issues that connect subjectivity with life: Not just life processes as the object of a scientific biology (*zoë*), and not even only everyday life as heterogeneous but recurrent practices of embodied subjects, but life as the implications of finitude, of the movement of human being from birth to death (*bios*) and of vitality as opposed (and transforming itself) to the ideal, or to the transcendent objectivity, of culture.

This is delicate for two reasons. First, because it touches on the ‘phenomenological turn’ which Holzkamp took with his *Grundlegung*, referring to Karl Grauman as source – but which it is hard to avoid connecting with a Heideggerian backdrop, which was, obviously, not very *comme il faut* on the West Berlin / West German Left in the 1980s. My intention is not to prove (or disprove) that Holzkamp was a ‘closet Heideggerian’ – who could offer concepts such as ‘*Befindlichkeit*’ or ‘*Faktizität*’ trusting that his readership would never scrutinize Heidegger’s place in their legacy – nor is it to unfold a critique of the ‘social phenomenology’ of everyday life which Dreier and many of his followers have made of ‘their’ GSCP (perhaps tracing its unacknowledged roots also through Garfinkel and Schütz to Husserl). Rather, I wish to affirm the issue as one that no real theory of motivation or subjectivity can ignore.

But this is the second reason that it is delicate: I can only offer some very sketchy concepts to address it. This is frustrating because of its important political implications. With a strong political vision - a utopia which could be seen as concrete in Ernst Bloch's sense - the problem of alienation can be addressed in a way that does not separate culture from human being; our hope is for a cultivated society that is, at the same time, the flourishing and realization of life as existentially meaningful. But when that vision is not clearly in sight, culture is alienated as a blind, anonymous structure, standing opposed to human being, understood both as that which grounds individual life as meaningful, and as that on which any community must rest. Perhaps parts of the increased interest in Heidegger, and parts of the emergence of neo-aristotelian approaches to practice and ethics (MacIntyre and others) and of the search for an 'inoperative community' (Nancy, Levinas) are symptoms of the present difficulties with proposing credible visions on the political and intellectual left that might reunite human life and human being with the cultural (technological, economic, governmental etc.) structures, which seem to evolve in ways that force us to either relinquish control to them, or oppose them. If that is so, the issue of 'life' speaks directly to the very urgent problem of how to grapple with the current political oscillations between neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism. It is not difficult to diagnose how this duality corresponds to two opposite concepts of practice, each of which carries important insight and real force, but is often reductively taken in abstraction to the detriment of truth and ethics: either as arbitrary structures of operations, network or discourse that can be described and deployed in a meaningless pragmatics, or as expressions of essential value deeply immanent to the given or traditional, but currently eroding, forms of human life. Nor is it hard to express a hope for the overcoming of this vicious circle. What is difficult is to offer insights and concepts that actually point a way.

I am not really equipped to suggest any general solution to this predicament. I must confine myself to working on it through articulating practices of motivation, in the hope that more will be offered by the context of the present issue of ARCP.

Motivation - then and later

Osterkamp's *Motivationsforschung* (MF) begins with a historical reconstruction of 'motivation' as a concept in theory and practice. It is not a genealogy in a strict foucauldian sense, for it explicitly traces tendencies as latent utopia, that is, as the emergent contradiction which can and should be taken up in an emancipation of 'motivation'. In other words, it is a 'rear view mirror

genealogy': What is seen as historical depends on where one is heading. Osterkamp comes up with the same basic contradiction as that which Kurt Danziger (1997) would find two decades later (without referring to Osterkamp's work): 'Motivation' is whether, how much and why people want to do what they are required to do; it is subjectivity appropriated as the object of governance, primarily in industry and education; but – as an object of a putatively neutral psychological science – it is conceptualized as if this framing power relation were irrelevant.

All through the 'short 20th century', new concepts of human needs would emerge that recognized individuals as ever more widely self-determining, in order to harness their subjectivity for purposes that were not to be questioned. Finally, the contradiction could be overcome by siding with the subjects and recognizing their need for participation in collective self-determination as true and expansive agency [verallgemeinernde Handlungsfähigkeit]; this, for Osterkamp, was the true concept of motivation, for which she reconstructed a phylogenetic and pre-historical emergence and forms of individual (more or less crippled or flourishing) development in her contemporary bourgeois society.

Before we return more to MF, let us review some tendencies in the approaches to motivation that came after it.

Almost a decade after MF, and again without referring to it, "self-determination theory" with its emphasis on "intrinsic motivation" was launched by Deci & Ryan (1985). This is currently the most widely read motivation theory that still bases on a conception of needs (we shall return to the even more dominant cognitive approach below). Intrinsic motivation is motivation directed toward aspects of the activity itself, rather than to its contingent "external" consequences such as reward or punishment. Since this internality of motives exempts them from externally modifiable incentives, it is a version of the abstract 'other' of coercion, and thus it tends towards either celebrating a purely subjective experience of freedom accessible within given activities: Flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996), or compromising by acknowledging a gradient between freedom and coercion (various levels of extrinsic motivation).

This distinction is ancient (it can be traced back to Aristotle's *praxis* vs. *poiesis*), but in Deci & Ryan's version, a modern psychology of needs explains how an activity can be intrinsically motivating: it provides self-determination and social "relatedness"; self-determination, in turn, is structured around "the activity" as whether it is chosen ("autonomy") and mastered ("competence"). As choice and mastery of pre-given, isolated and unquestioned units, conceptualized independently of the third 'factor', "relatedness", we can recognize here the liberal notion of freedom. The individual subject's desire for such freedom is abundantly confirmed in the societies and cultures where Deci & Ryan are read.

The limitations of the implied concept of activity, as opposed to a deeper concept of *Tätigkeit* or *Handlung* as mediated, and the ensuing critique of the intrinsic / extrinsic distinction (as the expression of a division of labor since Aristotle), had already been demonstrated (among others already in Holzkamp, 1973, and of course in MF); but self-determination theory resonated with a rising ideology of self-governance in education and other fields of application of psychology. As a result, any analysis which seeks to understand some human action as motivated by a need for agency must work through a critique of ‘intrinsic motivation’, either in Deci & Ryan’s explicit formulation, or in the guise of a (not uncommon) reception of the concept of agency that reduces it of societal mediation and participation. This critique must take into account how the interpretation of ‘self-determination’ is an ideological battleground, within whichever tradition. The battle rages also in texts and debates defined as “critical psychology” and even as GSCP; conversely, even ‘intrinsic motivation’ is often used with noble critical intentions that would deserve better weapons (after all, the issue of power is visible in the concept)⁴.

However, what proved at least as influential was an even more radically reduced concept of freedom, which eschews ‘needs’ altogether, and thus avoids addressing power at all, hiding it behind a ‘customer- or user-friendly’ pragmatics. This is achieved with a formalization of rational ends-means structures that starts from taking ends as given, whether chosen by the subject or simply given with managerial or institutional goals. In fact, by zooming in on the operational, it was possible to work with ends given at once by individual choice and institutional or managerial goals; whether or not the two concerns clashed or coincided outside of the pragmatically circumscribed operational field could be judged irrelevant.

Albert Bandura (1977) was for long the world’s most cited living psychologist, partly because he could describe law-like mechanisms that could be identified and operationalized within such pragmatic fields. He would ‘find’, for instance, that the more a person believed that she would be able to arrive at a goal, the more likely she would try; and that earlier experience with success or failure would impact on that belief: ‘Self-efficacy’. This is utterly banal, of course, but it is translatable to the motivational technique of retrospectively mapping achievements, and setting operational targets, as small steps on a linear path toward a goal that is carefully set as ‘realistic’. For instance, the emphasis on ‘visible learning’ in school (Hattie, 2008) transforms didactics into techniques for managing the self-management of pupils on simplified linear trajectories of

⁴ In a recent development, it is debated whether a fourth basic need should be acknowledged, the need to do good, a.k.a. ‘benificence’ (Martela & Ryan, 2016); will this break the altruism / egotism dichotomy?

learning curriculum elements that are (in the same process) reformulated as accountable knowledge or skill: Seeing one-self represented as a green needle on the chart on the classroom wall, which has already been moved toward the star representing the learning target, is ‘motivating’ (Brøgger & Staunæs, in prep.). Similarly, in the world’s most widespread method explicitly for modifying motivation, ‘Motivational Interviewing’ (MI), this work of operationalization is performed in conversations, with an arsenal of paralinguistic devices that acknowledge a client’s preferences as stated, but at the same time rephrase them into a common sense movement – at the client’s own pace – toward ‘behavior change’ (Carr & Smith, 2014; Miller & Rollnick, 1991). This ‘works if you work it’ (as the AA motto goes), that is, as long as one does not question ‘metaphysically’ the pragmatic operationalization - or, which amounts to the same thing, as long as one only questions it in the form of another pragmatic mapping of preferences⁵.

The science of motivation proceeds mostly to differentiate theories within the ‘cognitive’ range, that is, in the operational structures of ends and means stretched out between elements of perceived reality and values attached to them. Thus, the ‘expectancy value’ (Wigfield, 1994) of an activity can be seen to differ between individuals because they attribute different expectancies and value them differently. This differentiation serves to identify motivational styles that are thought to characterize individuals as part of their overall personality. It is then the task of the teacher, manager, etc., to identify and accommodate the specific style of each person: Motivation is *customized*. Further, each person becomes co-responsible for identifying his or her motivational style: Motivation becomes an object of *self-governance* (Nissen & Sørensen, 2017).

When the concepts of motivation come alive and prove relevant in practices such as ‘visible learning’ or MI, it is possible to address the ways in which they form part of wider cultural-historical transformations of knowledge and subjectivity, co-constituting subjectivities in structures of power by directing gazes and questions, providing accessible relevances, etc. - in a word, *ideology*.

In a first approximation, ‘motivation’ can be seen to change as part of the expansion of market or market-like exchanges between providers and users. This pushes to the background the metaphysics of needs and their (evolving, contested, visibly ideological) theoretical underpinnings, and it allots another role for science. If the art of motivating consists mostly of negotiating and revising the pragmatic field of operation, a very important tool in that craft is the reference to scientific proof that it works. Empiricist knowledge, as a blend of tautologies with accountable facts (or, with Holzkamp, 1993: implicative statements disguised as empirical findings), is a key currency of any such

⁵ The collapsing of meta-motivation into motivation is a crucial issue – see below.

exchange at the level of preferences rather than needs. However, despite its ‘no-nonsense’ democratic appeal, there is a paradoxical fetishism built into this currency.

Just as in market exchanges, quantification is an important aspect of this. Even numbers that are only trusted ‘for all practical purposes’ (Garfinkel, 1984) establish social domains free of negotiation (Porter, 1995); any number can potentially be challenged, but its pragmatic use presupposes an ongoing reference to a ‘case of the real thing’ (again, Garfinkel). The number is a place-holder for an essence. We pretend, for pragmatic reasons, to refer with it to something real, so much that the pretense becomes ‘more real than reality’ (to paraphrase Žižek). The dogmatism of this place-holder function is confirmed with a symbolic gesture toward the institution of science: Knowledge as sanctioned, ‘black-boxed’ (Latour, 1987); however perpetually temporary, ‘only’ in the realm of exchange... which is becoming everything that matters, since science is itself governed as a network of exchange rather than as production⁶. Thus, for instance, in the scientific exchanges, MI becomes stabilized as a standard method, which can be said to ‘work’, by, conversely, accepting pragmatically the operational fields and preferences of clinicians and users that allow for standardization and thus reliable quantification (Björk, 2014).

When motivation is detached from struggles over ‘needs’, it is attached instead to ‘values’ and ‘beliefs; the latter have a different ontological status. You are free to believe anything in private, and even assert or flag your belief in public, but for this to be possible, that public, structured as trade, commands you to absolutely believe in pragmatics and worship the symbols with which it is held up (see also Nissen & Barington, 2016). Whichever beliefs or values you choose can be ever so dogmatic and even carry hopes for a different life, but they metamorphose into standard ‘value’ units that rest finally on an impenetrable arbitrariness (religion smoothly adapts to this purpose and is transformed radically in the process⁷), until they are somehow translated into the numbers that count for real in social exchange. The apparent rationalism of cognitive motivation theory does not deny, but simply privatizes subjectivity, albeit in the next moment to objectify it in the form of ‘hyper-real’ signs (Baudrillard, 1994): standard units of referential emptiness. This is the condition on which it is recognized, that is, sanctioned as valid and – depending blindly on external contingencies – allowed to influence exchange.

⁶ Cf. to this, Stiegler (2015)

⁷ Cf. Valverde’s analysis of how members of the Alcoholics Anonymous have translated God, the ‘higher power’ into ‘my higher power’ - this works, and it is irrelevant that one member calls it God and another calls it Allah or Buddha (Valverde, 2002).

When subjects' preferences and values are purified of any public reference or grounding, one might think that, although they may be individually accommodated, they could not be manipulated. Yet it is precisely as *pure signs of subjectivity* that they open to new motivational techniques.

First, how do we know what subjects really prefer - and do they, themselves, know? The classic problem of the incongruence of rational goals or espoused values with actual behavior can be reformulated with a science of autonomous mechanisms supposed to derive from evolution and to reside in the brain. Once the subjects of a population have espoused a preference (e.g. for healthy diet), it is considered within reasonable liberal ethics to influence their behavior through such mechanisms, so that they actually do it: Nudging. For instance, smaller plates at buffets make people eat the smaller portions they claim to prefer; removing candy from supermarket aisles where people stand in line will reduce their tendency to buy the candy they claim to not want when asked in surveys. This is called 'libertarian paternalism' (Thaler & Sunstein, 1976).

Second, governance through self-monitoring in more or less public spaces proliferates and evolves, facilitated immensely by smart-phones and social media. Just like counselling is systematically adapted to the individual user through 'feedback-informed treatment' techniques to make sure users do not drop out (Duncan, Miller, Wampold, & Hubble, 2010), countless customizable self-monitoring apps motivate users by giving them just the quantified self they want (Schüll, 2016). In pragmatic terms, it seems to matter little that the counselling institution is authoritatively predefined as working for e.g. tobacco abstinence, or that the app is made strictly to facilitate healthy eating, sports, or reading; it is the user who chooses to submit to its logic, and 'it works if you work it'.

Third, the motivation produced through monitoring devices mocks the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic when it is enhanced by *gamification* (Burke, 2012). Children are motivated to read by a nesting of their reading activity within a computer game where they gather cool features (e.g. caps, sunglasses) for their avatar (e.g. a cute dragon)⁸. Displacing motivation to the game – extrinsic to the point of parody – seems to drench it away from the authentic pleasure in reading or learning as such that we may hope for; this is cheating! But it 'works' in pragmatic terms (and this might make us wonder whether ends and means are as neatly separated as the 'intrinsic / extrinsic' duality seems to suggest).

Fourth, the emptiness of reference that can be objectified as numbers opens to intervention at the level of signs. Thus, as mentioned, with skillful use of paralinguistic devices, conversations can be modified toward confirming

⁸ See e.g. <http://maneno.dk/en/> (September, 2018).

‘behavior change’, even as users’ utterances are accepted at face value. The pragmatics of the idea that people tend to believe what they hear themselves say (attributable to Wittgenstein) can be taken as sufficient to explain the ‘behavioral’ efficacy of a kind of practice that aims to intervene only in conversations. This is a way to articulate the workings of MI (Carr, 2013; Carr & Smith, 2014), and it is the explicit methodology of ‘solution-focused brief psychotherapy’ (De Shazer, 1991), which is probably the first counselling tradition to break completely with any kind of psychological explanation.

Finally, fifth, while all of these motivational techniques in different ways presuppose and / or perform a recognition of subjects as users, consumers etc., this recognition itself can be reduced to a linguistic device and put to systematic use. Various managerial, educational, and therapeutic methods work with displays of ‘appreciation’ (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987), which are assumed to be motivating as a mixture of a vehicle for monitoring success and social relations.

Rearticulations - first level

Now, while the neoliberal expansion of market- or market-like exchanges, and the move from ‘needs’ to ‘preferences’ as objects of governance, can be said to lie behind all these developing forms of practice and conceptualizations, this does not necessarily mean that the corresponding theories are the only ways to articulate them. Rearticulation is not limited to a descriptive recapitulation of evolving mainstream discourse. It can also proceed from the hypothesis that this development may be the expression of tendencies that are contradictory and include latencies for a societalization / cultivation [Vergesellschaftung] that is more substantial and ethically and politically more sustainable.

This way of thinking can be expressed with Ernst Bloch’s concept of concrete utopia, but it can also be identified in early GSCP including MF. Osterkamp’s historical reconstruction retraced the emergence of a societalized subjectivity, which would break the chains of bourgeois motivation and motivation theory because of an objective social need for collective self-determination without which industry and technology could not evolve much further. However, like many Marxist psychologists at her time, Osterkamp was limited by a quite rudimentary social theory, which tended to absolutize an undifferentiated “bourgeois society” and to autonomize productive forces and reserve them for industry and technology, narrowly conceived. In general theoretical terms, her Marxism was not economic in the classic ‘trade-unionist’ sense or in the sense of the ‘Logic of Capital’, but, like Holzkamp and many

others, she neglected to engage with social sciences in any more than the roughest terms, mostly taken directly from Marx. As a consequence, the concrete historicity of practices, institutions and subjectivities was never much unfolded⁹. The historical emergence and evolvment of state power and politics, social regulation and the substantial provision of education, health and social welfare institutions, as cultural achievements and as arenas for socio-political struggle – unknown, of course, to Marx – such real tendencies were never within sight¹⁰. Thus, the emergence later of new public management and neoliberal governance could only be seen as the sad confirmation of a totalizing critique of bourgeois society, and in the same process, any alternatives were pushed to the realm of abstract utopia¹¹. This halted the further development of ‘immanent critique’ or reinterpretation, which Osterkamp had begun with her groundbreaking reading of Freud in MF.

Thus we must expand our articulation of tendencies in motivation. It not simply that, instead of the breakthrough of societalization which Osterkamp had hoped for, market-like exchanges returned to finally reassert the raw truth of capitalism, which Marx had already predicted. Rather, the societalized / cultivated production of individuality, subjectivity and selfhood continues to evolve in ever new contradictory forms that matter in complex and unstable ways depending on local conditions and force relations. Pragmatics can be, and often is, the main ideological form, identifiable as a dogma that rules our present post-political era and dodges any critique; which paradoxically underpins fundamentalism; and which threatens to dilute the social sciences into formalized banalities... but it can also develop into something that is better articulated as pragmatism or even as a philosophy of practice.

Evidently, any real substantiation of this claim would have to engage with practices in more specific and deeper terms than through their standard models, canonical texts, or rough descriptions. The practices should be approached as prototypes, that is, with an awareness of their situated nature and their contentious and evolving relevance (see, to this, Nissen, 2009). This is in fact an important goal of our research program, as I see it¹². Still, I may be able to sketch

⁹ Holzkamp’s way of reading Foucault in *Lernen* (1993) is a good example. Not only did he ignore Foucault’s main point of the constitution of subjectivity in power, but he also reduced Foucault’s institutions to an ‘apparatus’ and downplayed his genealogy. This reductionist reading of Foucault was and is not uncommon, even in some foucauldian circles, but the point here is that it blocked an understanding of the historicity of institutional practices.

¹⁰ Within the GSCP tradition, one exception to this rule is Haug (1977)

¹¹ To the issue of utopianism in GSCP and socio-cultural historical activity theory, see (M. Nissen, 2013)

¹² Some preliminary examples can be found in Nissen (2014), Bank & Nissen, (2018), Nissen & Sørensen (2017).

and unfold possible rearticulations enough for them to work as ‘demands’ for corresponding conditions, at least relevant in some places.

1.

Nudging as a public health approach has been rightly criticized for the idealism in presupposing benevolence on the part of those who nudge (Marteau, Ogilvie, Roland, Suhrcke, & Kelly, 2011). But this opens in a useful way to the general question of democratic control of the ways our physical environment forms our actions and lives, with or without our reflection. The struggle over motivation is in fact also a struggle about material agencies such as product design, architecture and city planning, as proponents of ‘actor-network theory’ and ‘new materialism’ never tire of arguing (Latour, 2002).

Further, while the theories of Kahneman, Sunstein and others about an autonomous, “affective” kind of brain processes should be criticized for the usual psychological naturalism, their partial coincidence with, not only certain aspects of ‘flow theory’, but, more broadly, what has been called an ‘affective turn’ in critical social theory, should also be noted (Ahmed, 2004; Greco & Stenner, 2013; Thrift, 2008). ‘Affect’ is used here (again) to emphasize bodily materiality, process and community, as opposed to a – more or less justified – critique of the privileging of language and its agents in discourse theories. As Greco & Stenner (2015), Wetherell (2012) and others demonstrate, if this tendency to dichotomize reason from its abstract ‘Other’ is overcome, the focus on (moments of) collectively emergent affectivity is fruitful as part of a reflection on practices as processes in liminal spaces, and of how motives are formed, including those motives that challenge the ways activities are constituted (cf. also Nissen & Sørensen, 2017).

2.

The pragmatic separation of linguistic signs from their material referents opens to a converse movement: toward regarding activities as inherently reflexive because they include dealing with how they are framed or defined. This we might articulate with a performative approach. Viewing social practice as performance or drama, in various contemporary theories (e.g., Butler, 1993; Martin, 2007; Mattingly, 2010; Mol, 2008), however divergent they may be in other respects, means to assert *doing* as practical, situated and embodied, as dependent on and reproducing power, resources, identities and hopes - and at the same time as contingent and emergent orderings, which can be approached as such from the point of view of their - always contingent - narrative or discursive configuration,

their framing, their citation of categories, their enactment of a concept or a logic, etc. The performance of ‘structure’ implies a situated reconfiguration of ‘structure’, and thus its potential transformation. It also means that display and reflection are immanent to the activity, so that the structural contingency and negotiability of the activity can be addressed as part of it.

From this angle, self-monitoring techniques and devices can be approached as debatable models of activity, precisely because they are developed as relatively autonomous, reflexively applied tools. For instance, the mindless being-motivated-by-monitoring (e.g. GPS watches for jogging) may ‘work’ as the consequence of a pragmatic reduction of activity, but it may also help questioning that reduction. This could, in fact, be one perspective in the “quantified self / self-tracking” movement¹³, once the hype of the new technical feasibility is over. It might also raise the question of meta-motivation: Am I motivated for being motivated (in this way)? Within a purely cognitive framework, meta-motivation simply collapses into motivation; but in a performative approach, ‘performing motivation’ becomes questionable as self-monitoring is objectified (societalized, generalized, externalized, standardized) in new ways.

Thus, for instance, the initially pragmatic ‘going-through-the-motions’ of formalized testing in schools may revert into taking seriously, and criticizing, the radical transformation of teaching and other school practices that it implies, and that is often veiled by its apparent banality. Just as Theodore Porter (1995) could show how the role of numbers in negotiations over engineering evolved differently in France and in the US, so we should keep open the question whether the standardization of ‘visible learning’ must necessarily proceed in Berlin or Copenhagen in ways that resemble American or Australian schools – or whether the stronger European traditions of cherishing ‘Bildung’, in the teaching professions and beyond, might push its concrete impact in other directions. Similarly, the above-mentioned chart with the needles represents not only each pupil, but also the class; and, like the colorful pictures often displayed on classroom walls in early school years, charts like that are likely to be visibly outgrown.

3.

Gamification shares with counselling traditions that highlight conversation per se (MI, or ‘solution-focused brief therapy’) the performative and potentially reflexive unfolding of the ‘as-if’ as a separate but connected activity. Of course,

¹³ Tracking one’s daily activities or moods by quantifiable units, mostly using smartphones. Cf. Schüll (2016)

the mainstream explanation of the link is cognitive (mental schemata are extended and modified), but let us not assume prematurely that we are obliged by that way of thinking. Instead, the ‘game’, like the ‘conversation’, can be seen as potentially motivating precisely because it is something more and something other than an inconsequential representation of the ‘gamified’ activity or the ‘issues’ spoken about.

In this, we are helped by the critiques in GSCP (Haug, 1977) of Leontiev’s (and Elkonin’s) functionalistic correction of the ‘intellectualism’ in Vygotsky’s theory of play. The reversal in play of meaning [Bedeutung] and thing, which Vygotsky noted, can only be substantial, says Leontiev, because it is a way of dealing with and appropriating culturally significant issues in practical activity (not only as a way of appropriating abstract conceptual forms); but this does not mean that play is necessarily disciplined to enact a pre-given significance. It is a drama in its own right, and it is so partly because it is semantically ambiguous. This dramatic approach to play was later unfolded in Scandinavian play studies (see, e.g. Schousboe, 2013; Winther-Lindqvist, 2009).

Another useful reference is the ‘semiotic’ emphasis in some recent social and cultural theories and philosophy. Signs are signs because they signify meaning; but signs are also artifacts with a situated thingness, so that they can, on the one hand, carry multiple meanings, and, on the other, migrate and change their meaning¹⁴. Derrida’s famous statement “There is no outside-text” (2016) may seem an exaggeration (especially when read as part of a mockery with the purpose of debunking ‘postmodernism’), but the point is valid that we cannot assume to know in advance what is the relevant ‘outside’ to any text. So, too, is the understanding that textuality drenches our culture and our lives, so that it is immanent to all of our practices even as it shapes them with a logic and power of its own¹⁵.

Thus, the game and the conversation may be motivating both because of their open semantics, and because they link to a myriad of other ‘as-if’ practices that may have little to do with what the game or the conversation were supposed to motivate for in the first place. But of course, this all depends on situated conditions and fields of forces and powers. For instance, as we have tried to show, the possibility of expanding a ‘treatment of addiction’ into practices of engaging with drug use as a *social* problem through aesthetic production depends on the counselling facility’s place in struggles over municipal and state policies - and this, in turn, circumscribes the possible implications of the ‘game’ of

¹⁴ Derrida’s discussion of textuality as “the orphanage of wandering signs” in *Plato’s Pharmacy* (Derrida, 1981) is instructive.

¹⁵ Cf. to this also Smith (2005).

‘narrative therapy’ as well as those of aesthetic practices (Nissen, 2014, Nissen & Friis, 2018).

4.

The fact that recognition can be reduced to its verbal expression and instrumentalized does not imply that such ‘appreciation’ is by definition false. Rather, these practices can often be rearticulated as attempts to engage in real struggles for recognition (cf. Nissen, 2012a). Connecting those to the idea of motivation reminds us that the social sanctioning of agency is not unrelated to its ‘actual’ unfolding, but a key aspect of it. And it impels us to engage in differential analyses of the implications of struggles for recognition other than that of the classic Marxian proletariat - such as those of women, indigenous populations, sexual minorities, and, more broadly, a citizenry that may come to include a still wider range of human beings (e.g. psychiatry users, prisoners, children, etc.). This need not imply a ‘liberal’ reduction of social justice. Each struggle is at the same time a struggle for transforming society as a whole - although each time, too, the singularity of each ‘society’, as a potentially self-reflecting agent and arena of struggles for recognition (i.e. a state), becomes visible¹⁶. Thus, an ‘appreciative / recognizing’ approach to pre-school children should be judged in the context of developments of the ‘extended family’ of the welfare state (nuclear family with an institutional network) - between concerns for parents as ‘autonomous users’ in New Public Management, and for finding new pedagogical ways to enhance agency and reflexivity (cf. Røn Larsen, 2012).

5.

The range of motivational technologies we have reviewed here are all based on the pragmatic acceptance of certain signs as absolute, as referring to an unquestionable ‘subjectivity’ (and then manipulated covertly), such as users’ first person statements or numbers aggregated in surveys or ‘quantified selves’; but our rearticulation is not obliged by such absoluteness. To be sure, any attack on, or even expressions of doubt about, such signs will encounter resistance, both because of the breach with the dogma of pragmatics, and because it infringes on the hard-won rights of the subjects in question: It will be read as misrecognition. In other words, the peculiar immunity to critique built into neoliberal pragmatics (cf. Willig, 2009) is amplified by the politics of recognition. Still, such

¹⁶The state is continuously reconstituted in such moments of (struggle for) recognition. To this, cf. e.g. Balibar (2015) or Williams (1997), rather than only the ubiquitous Honneth (1995).

questioning remains a key aspect of any rearticulation. This gives us a problem that is not simply solved by the hope that people will learn from experience or from our teaching (not least since all the pragmatic techniques in different ways set out from the real problem that people would not be motivated for such experience or such teaching).

In the first instance, we might return to Marx' insight that the educator himself must be educated, rather than believing himself to be elevated from society (3rd Feuerbach thesis). Such self-education could teach us to rearticulate even the 'absoluteness' of signs of subjectivity in order to overcome it. For this, we could follow Jacques Rancière (2013, 2014) in adapting an 'aesthetic regime' as an approach to signs, artifacts and performances on the basis of a radical 'assumption of equality' between the educator and the educated: Since artifacts regarded as art objects are always *dissensual*, that is, unite conflicting regimes of sense - conflicting ways that reason is embodied in the sensuous - they break with any assumption of identity, either with the producer's or with the consumer's emotion. As a kind of "social technology of emotions" (Vygotsky, 1971), then, art accomplishes a recognition of subjective experience which is paradoxically at once absolute and critical, even heretic. For this reason, 'aesthetic documentation' could be a useful 'educational technology' in such practices of rearticulation - instead of the disciplinary links from texts in (critical) psychology to education, management, or therapy (see, to this, e.g. Nissen, 2014, Nissen & Christensen, 2018).

Theory, praxis, practices and activities

But our interest here is in the role of theory. More specifically: What does a philosophy (theory) of practice contribute when it unfolds or is implied in such rearticulations of motivation? And how may Osterkamp's theory of motivation fit into this? In the following, I will attempt to address this question. First, by sketching the conceptualization of 'practice' - praxis and practices - that is required, and then by explicating the implications for motivation.

'Practice' is a term with multiple meanings carried by many different traditions. As we have already seen, rearticulating motivation through a theory of practice means moving beyond disciplinary boundaries - into trans-disciplinary fields, or into aesthetics, politics, etc. The rearticulations we have sketched here draw on a wide range of social theory and philosophy. This should be uncontroversial from the point of view of a Marxist tradition that always had social movements (labor, socialist parties, and later feminist, peace, and green movements etc.) as vital reference points and intellectual venues outside of

university disciplines. And so, of course, the words ‘Marx’ or ‘Marxism’ should never be used as disciplinary signposts or barriers to discussions in the broad field of philosophies of practice. Allow me to set off by attempting a dialectical approach¹⁷.

Practice can figure as the Other of theory. In a dialectical approach, the proposition of a philosophy of practice implies that theory (in and for itself) develops through reflecting on its otherness, its externalization. This includes, but is not limited to, scientific procedures, empirical data etc. More generally, theory encounters itself in practice as meanings, distinctions, relations etc. with implications, relevances, etc., in short, as immanent standards (a.k.a. orderings, discourse, structures of meaning etc.). Articulating these is theorizing, but it is also itself a practice - which intervenes in practical efforts and lives and at once subsumes itself to and challenges the relevances they establish. For this reason, articulation cannot be purely descriptive. It must be regarded as normative or performative, that is, it must be judged by its possible effects - on the one hand, *within* ethical frameworks, and on the other hand, for its implied *transformation* of such frameworks. Just as ‘motivation’ constitutes subjectivities, so does our rearticulation of ‘motivation’. In other words, we engage in ideological struggles.

At a closer look, these arguments entail a distinction between the generic ‘practice’ - sometimes referred to as ‘*praxis*’ (e.g. Bernstein, 1971) - and the plural ‘practices’. This is important because it means that ‘practice’ becomes not only an ‘onto-epistemological’ category, but also a kind of objects [Gegenstände] for specific sciences [Wissenschaften] as well as for other (meta-) practices. These can then be questioned for the ways they posit or distinguish such (‘practice’-)objects, and how they deal with the specificities of their conditions, forms, etc. In this questioning, ‘praxis’ becomes a generalizing yardstick in the critical analysis of ‘practices’: How does any specific ‘practice’ contribute to ‘praxis’, to the overall production, reproduction and transformation of human life and culture?

‘Activity theory’ is one (trans-disciplinary scientific) tradition in which these questions have been raised and discussed for a century. But there are many other such ‘sciences of practices’. If we zoom out, we might mention ‘praxeology’ (Bourdieu), ‘social practice theory’ (Lave), ‘praxology’ (Mol), ‘action science’ (Argyris), etc., and of course earlier approaches such as ‘pragmatism’, ‘action research’, ‘interactionism’ etc. These are all attempts to theorize practice, both as ‘praxis’ and as ‘practices’¹⁸.

¹⁷ Again not as a circumscribed domain, but as a self-overcoming movement whose teleology only derives from reflecting its own hopes and pathways.

¹⁸ In GSCP, there was the curious example of the ‘Praxis-Portrait’ (Markard & Holzkamp, 1989), which, despite its generic name, pointed to a specific kind of

Obviously, however, the interest in objectifying ‘practices’ is not reserved for academic students of the Kantian- / Hegelian- / Marxist philosophical legacy, which can be traced in all these theories. It evolves in many forms where professional, institutional or organizational practices are designed, managed, and governed, quite pragmatically, more or less independent of theoretical articulation of ‘practices’ in general or of ‘praxis’. Each kind or cultivated tradition of practice has its own conceptualization, its own ‘methodology’, taught at various schools, institutes and colleges. Further, the recent rise in governance by standardization sets up a (more or less) specific pragmatic regime of objectifying practices independently of such particular traditions (Bowker & Star, 1999; Busch, 2011; Timmermans & Berg, 2003; Timmermans & Epstein, 2010). In this, as in most contemporary (typically, professional) conceptualizations of specific practices, the relation to ‘praxis’ as an ‘onto-epistemological’ category is missing or implicit and uncertain.

The implication is that performing ‘philosophy of practice’ means engaging in a critical dialogue with various conceptualizations of practices; that reestablishing the connection to ‘praxis’ is a key theoretical concern; and that this is itself a way to intervene practically and ideologically.

Further, it means that this dialogue must unfold at two levels, *apart from* the dialogue within academic theories of practice: At one level, it must engage with the language, the traditions, the institutions etc. of specific practices - such as those of schooling, psychotherapy, engineering, etc.. At another level, it must deal with different conceptualizations (objectifications) of ‘practices’ as such - such as ‘evidence-based practice’, ‘benchmarking’, or ‘quality management’.

Thus, it may be that e.g. psychologists have not really thought of their psychotherapy as a ‘practice’ that participates in ‘praxis’, except as the execution of their profession or as their ‘clinic’. But this may be even less the case if it is enrolled in a regime of evidence-basing ‘methods’, or, for that matter, if they are accountable for it as a ‘task’ among others within the organizational chart of a municipality.

Motivation in practice: second level of rearticulation

These are, I believe, general concerns for a philosophy of practice. But there are more specific connections to the problem of motivation. In these, we can begin to

institutionalized professional practice, mostly relevant to Western European psychologists engaged in collective self-reflection as individual ‘practitioners’.

see how Osterkamp's theory of motivation is relevant to articulating motivational (aspects of) practices.

Motivation as a concept depends very much on how 'a practice' or 'an activity' is conceptualized. This is highlighted in current pragmatic technologies that deal with delineating, customizing, and monitoring activities and their goals. But it is foundational to motivation as such. The concept arose along with the emergence of industrial and institutional standardizations of activities that people could (should, must!) be motivated for. It is this standardization that would accomplish the stabilization of motivation as a scientific object, even as it pointed to a subjective aspect. In a naïve conceptualization, the contents of any specific motivation, and its operational differentiation and sequence, are defined by the standardized activities that people can be imagined to be motivated for. In Leontiev's sophisticated but functionalistic theory of the structure of activity, this is turned around into the notion that 'an activity' is defined by its motive, which, in turn, however, is always assumed to be identical to its socio-culturally defined 'object' [Gegenstand] insofar as acquisition succeeds (Leontiev, 1978) – even though the concept of 'motive' was meant to assert subjectivity and circumscribe a psychology. The theoretical aporia is then later 'solved' by redefining needs and motives as 'social' (first of all in the Engeström tradition, see Engeström, 1987; see also Nissen, 2011). Breaking with this functionalism is, in the first place, to reconnect activity to praxis by recognizing that *subjects reflect, judge, and question the constitution of activities* far beyond, not only their own organismic needs and drives, but also beyond the kind of 'self-determination' which can be regarded as choice, control, and social relatedness. This is the important place for Osterkamp's concept of 'productive needs' as the need and drive for developing agency: It conceptualizes 'joy' as *ethical* in a participatory and universalizing (Spinozist), yet historicized way (cf. Keiler, 1997).

This implies the performative self-reflexivity of activity that we mentioned above. Being motivated for something is reflecting and enjoying that 'something' as worth pursuing¹⁹. This reflexivity is an ongoing collective process of at once framing and affective tuning; it is immanent to any activity, and not reserved for or limited to individuals' thoughts or feelings. The creative accomplishments, insights, necessity or political strength (etc.) of a collective activity can be experienced as joyful and engaging (or disappointing, boring, terrifying, etc.) *before* the various individual implications are fully reflected and felt. Sometimes,

¹⁹ Not in itself or intrinsically, but as something that takes part in praxis: Even the buddhist monks who let the wind blow away the beautiful flower mosaic they have meticulously collected once it is finished seek to *make a point* about futility.

this ‘seduction’ turns out problematic or even leads to self-deceit; sometimes, it is the birth, the communal proto-form, of new individual motives²⁰.

In Osterkamp’s conceptualization, the socio-cultural production of motives is neither limited to the specific objects that satisfy genetically predefined (sensuous-vital) needs (such as wanting precisely a lager beer when thirsty etc.); nor do motives magically and uniformly internalize preexisting ‘social needs’. Rather, emergent motives that ‘subjectivize’ objects, goals and hopes based on ‘productive needs’ for agency respond to the dynamic emergence of those objects, goals and hopes through *participation* in their emergence, in the constitution of the activities defined and redefined by them. Of course, this does not deny the ‘objectivity’ of activities as performed with culturally evolved artifacts and standards, under conditions, within structures of power, etc.; they do not emerge from scratch. Still, the key concept of ‘participation’ [Teilnahme / Teilhabe] opens to grasping the processual, open-ended, dramatic reciprocity of the co-constitution of activities and motives.

This immanence of reflexivity does not rule out the possibility of its autonomization as modelling. As Goffman (1986) has shown, the ‘upkeying’ into a ‘bracket’ where attention is temporarily devoted to display or reference is an ordinary, routine occurrence in social interaction (e.g. ironic gestures etc.); and while this goes on in the flow of almost any activity, it can also be boosted and cultivated as a practice in its own right. Further, this ‘upkeying’ can be objectified into artifacts such as text, etc., which, in turn, constitute still other activities (writing, reading, filming, etc.). The general upshot is a *complex and dynamic structure of activities and artifacts that mediate and refer to each other*: The meaning and meaningfulness of one activity derives from its reference to and contribution to another activity, yet potentially also from its relevance for still other activities, present and future, and only by way of such complex (and spatio-temporally distributed) practices from its relevance for praxis and for life. This complexity and open-endedness explains the affective vagueness, ambivalence and/or volatility of proto-motives in constitutive moments, which Wetherell (2012) identifies as the rational kernel of the ‘affective turn’ in social theory. Thus, for instance, when one client cracks a joke in what is framed as a counselling activity, the laughing of the counsellor and the other clients may sanction the reconstitution (reframing) it suggests, even in a momentarily undecided direction, and partly carried by the recording of the session (we have tried to capture this in Nissen & Sørensen, 2017; see also Nissen, 2004).

²⁰ Cf. the discussions within the Vygotskian tradition about the concept of ‘perezhivanye’, which Vygotsky adapted from Stanislavsky to signify emotions that are formed in social interaction before they are individual (e.g. Cole & Gajdamschko, 2016; Fler, 2016).

Further, if performative reflexivity is immanent to dramatic constitutive moments at a collective level, this itself includes a reflection of individuals' participation, which remains a key aspect of any activity. In that sense, activities are always also, and can be cultivated and specialized as, therapeutic, pedagogical practices, and/or 'practices / technologies of the self'. A person's participation in an activity that is framed as 'something' - and for that reason appoints certain positions and locations for participation - is telling of who s/he is, to him-/herself as well as to others. This, in turn, motivates him/her to adjust, reframe, transform, exit (etc.) the activity, depending on who s/he wants to be, how s/he wants to see him-/herself (his/her narrative etc.)²¹. The specialized cultivation of this aspect has unfolded most consistently in the traditions of psycho-therapy, in which the key form-aspect is the construction of a 'therapeutic space' in which every action is reflected as 'telling': that is, as a modelling of the client in which the client him-/herself participates and to which the client reacts emotionally, in an evolving looping dynamic (Bank & Nissen, 2017; Nissen, 2012b, ch. 3). But it is an aspect of *any* activity, and a much wider range of specific activities can be seen to cultivate it more or less. This becomes clear if, for instance, one regards movements in the psychotherapy tradition to include art, music, or drama, not as means to cure, but as ways to break with the individualizing clinical framing (cf. Nissen, 2014; Nissen & Christensen, 2018).

Osterkamp never developed her theory much in the direction of articulating 'performativity', 'keying', 'positioning' etc. But she did point a way. As her discussion of the willfulness [Willentlichkeit] of action (MF II, ch. 4.3.4) reveals, her theory took the subjectivity of participation beyond the dichotomizing of authentic from calculated, or, more generally, of drive from control. For her, the true motivation that opposed coercion involved willful self-control, not the pure selfless flow of immersion in activity. This amounts to a critique of Deci & Ryan's 'intrinsic motivation', but it is even more fundamental and applies to a key discussion in the Marxist psychologies of Osterkamp's time.

Osterkamp quotes Marx' discussion of general labor in the first volume of *Capital*:

He (the worker / UO) not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realises a purpose of his own that gives the law to his modus operandi, and to which he must subordinate his will. And this subordination is no mere momentary act. Besides the exertion of the bodily organs, the process demands that, during the whole operation, the workman's will be steadily in consonance with his purpose. This means

²¹ This is particularly discussed in the tradition of 'positioning theory' (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999).

close attention. The less he is attracted by the nature of the work, and the mode in which it is carried on, and the less, therefore, he enjoys it as something which gives play to his bodily and mental powers, the more close his attention is forced to be (MEW 23, S. 193 / Marx 1867, vol. I, 127). (MF II, 89).

Osterkamp uses this quote to argue for the human universality of will - of disciplined, self-controlled action. This is remarkable, since the quote seems to end in just the opposition that she argues against, in the form of a gradient: The less the worker is attracted to the activity, the more purposeful will and self-control are required, and the less he enjoys the activity as the play of his own bodily and mental powers. Osterkamp acknowledges the problem that willfulness can be 'autonomized' under conditions of alienation, but she emphasizes the first part of the quote, which stresses willfulness as a general quality of human engagement. This reading should be seen in the context of Osterkamp's critique of Marx (MF II, 22 ff): Since Marx did not – except in glimpses – envisage 'productive needs', he could not quite arrive at the dialectic of production and consumption that he aimed for, in which production could itself be also consumption, or fulfilment of needs (just as consumption is itself the final stage in production; cf. Marx, 1986). This omission leads, at times, to a reductive approach to motives as derived from immediate bodily needs, and, at other times - as in this case - to a utopian characterization of activity as intrinsically joyful once separated from external control. This sets up the bad choice between accepting the burden of culture or enjoying an anti-social emancipation - which Osterkamp then goes on to criticize in her discussion of psychoanalysis.

As I have suggested above (and in Nissen, 2011 and 2012b), the solution for Leontiev and his followers was to stipulate an ideal identity of individual motives with social goals, as unquestioned telos of development. Osterkamp's solution was more complex and more promising, since it took off from understanding participation itself as *implying* critique. 'Productive needs' as a need for participating in preemptive collective control [Vorsorge] of life conditions, spur a development, and this includes a reflection and transformation, of the subject, of the particular practice, of the collective and of culture in general, in specific constellations. To perform critique is not to exit, to stand outside, but, on the contrary, to engage more fully in participation. This 'critical implication' of any practice or activity follows from its – always contested, contingent – meaningfulness as part of praxis. That implies, in turn, that it may be either immanent to any given activity, or it may be unfolded as a relatively autonomous activity, which is however still constituted as meaningful largely (but not exclusively) by its reference and contribution to the original activity. It is this core theorem which makes it possible to overcome the separation of

(spontaneous) drive from (cultivated) will, which otherwise results from a critical approach to motivation.

It also gives us an approach to the emotional valence of ‘practices of the self’ and their model artifacts. These are the practices in which, and the tools with which, willful selfhood is developed, cultivated, and acquired through participation. In a consistent practice approach, the motivated subsumption of acts to collective goals, and the reflexive ‘distance’ to immediate affects and feelings – as *Befindlichkeit*, in Holzkamp’s adaptation of Heidegger’s concept (Holzkamp, 1983b) – do not result automatically from participating, nor do they unfold as a separate process of ‘inner’ calculation of personal ends and means (which can then be verbalized or otherwise expressed directly as ‘reasons’ in a ‘first person perspective’). Rather, the more or less immanent and / or autonomous-but-related practices of the self are social productions of selfhood that are reflected in their implications in relation to the activity. ‘Productive needs’ make me ask “is this activity worth our efforts?”, and “is my participation worth my efforts (and the efforts of those who help me)?” - but also “is this who I want to be?” In all these aspects, our ways of asking and answering are developed in socio-cultural forms.

Thus, for instance, when Nissen²², the professor at the Danish School of Education, engages in marking scores of student papers, he has to discipline himself. He engages with mixed feelings and keeps looking for ways to change these practices to make them more meaningful. Part of why he engages in and tries to transform the activity is about the collective meaningfulness of university practices, as this is conceptualized and debated in various legal, organizational, ideological forms etc. Part of it is also the meaningfulness of his life and identity as professor. For instance, he often has to mark student papers in ‘human resource management’, but he is more attracted to an identity defined by such projects as ‘rearticulating motivation’, and ‘collective subjectivity’. Since he also wants to be a responsible colleague, however, he goes through with the activity, interrupted by renewed thoughts about how to change the syllabus and / or how to establish or shift to other teaching courses. The partly contradictory hopes of being a ‘professor in rearticulating motivation’ and ‘a responsible colleague’ are narrative constructions that do not simply reside within him. They are constructed in various conversations, through his writings and teachings, his ways of arranging his office, his lunch habits etc. etc., and of course (or so he hopes) through the recognition by relevant others through accepting his texts for publication, through collaborating on developing the research program of which

²² I shift here to the third person to avoid and ‘exoticize’ the illusion of immediate authenticity, which often comes with the use of ‘first person’ accounts in theoretical arguments.

he is member, etc. Sometimes, they are even the object of specialized activities such as the annual ‘employee development conversation’ with his head of department.

The general point is that *these activities and artifacts provide the standards with which he can relate willfully to his actions*. Certainly, his standpoint in relation to those standards (cf. Nissen, 2016) is itself emergent as a situated and singular, embodied complex-qualitative emotional form of affect, dependent on their relevance and implications in terms of developing his agency as participant in praxis. But it is not an either-or, or running in parallel tracks. Rather, it is a looping dynamics. Identity narratives judged to be attractive are taken to ‘motivate’ willful action, and developing such narratives is itself motivating etc., in an ongoing process.

Thus the mediatedness of selfhood, which is emphasized in a performative theory of practice, does not annul its affectivity, nor does it require us to revise Osterkamp’s key concepts of agency, productive needs, or motivation. But it does open to further issues that Osterkamp could only hint at.

First, the relative and mutable autonomy of reflexive actions, activities and artifacts. Since full participation is reflexive and critical, motivation must unfold in continuous movements of engagement and reserve (cf. Duchinsky, Reisel & Nissen, 2018). To put it in a slogan, the highest form of motivation is necessarily fluctuating and ambivalent. Further, to the extent that reflexive or critical aspects of an activity are developed and cultivated as autonomous, they are motivated in ways that are not simply expressions of the motives of the original activity. Ugly representations of beautiful activities can be attractive because they help to reflect them critically. Further still, the set of implications and references that spurred or originally defined an activity as a reflexive contribution to a given set of activities can be altogether opened, as in aesthetics. Aesthetic representations can be attractive precisely because of their open semantics. For instance, Sieland (2015) reports of a young drug user who was attracted to the image of ‘romantic self-destruction’; he had certain literary works in mind, but he was not able to explain why or how they seemed attractive as a way of imagining himself, of attributing meaning to his drug habits. Being a ‘romantic self-destroyer’ may not have been attractive, but creating and contemplating *the image* was – perhaps because of its inherent useful information, too, but probably more because those latter actions implied potentials that pointed in many other directions (some of which were connected with the study of English literature, which he embarked on at the time).

What emerges, in general, is a more complex theory of why self-monitoring devices and gamification can be ‘motivating’. It is not simply that targeted information is provided to feed into internal cost-benefit ‘calculations’ of

‘expectancy values’, nor that intrinsically motivating add-on activities fool the individual into wanting to do what she otherwise would hate. Rather, it is that new, more complex activities are built, along with new forms of selfhood, and that the implications of both are relatively open.

The second set of issues concern the ‘anchoring’ of motivation: The complexities and potentialities of reflexive and multi-layered activities are important reminders of the socio-cultural mutability and formability of motives and motivation; yet in all such re-constellations and transformations, individuals retain or develop *criteria* for engaging. This remains the key to why we bother discuss ‘motivation’ in the first place. We have based those (mostly) on the concept of ‘productive needs’ for developing agency. This anchors motivation in some kind of ethics that is implied, emergent, reflected etc. as an aspect of the collective activity as contributing to praxis, and more or less adopted by the individual as standpoint. As I have mentioned in the introduction, this ‘anchoring’ is far from essentialist, since motivation then becomes an emotional aspect of the social production of hope. In fact, individuals are ‘interpellated’ as participants of ideologically defined projects, emergent communities of hope²³.

The affectivity mobilized in this process corresponds in many ways to the novelty and the openness of such hopes, and, on the other hand, their credibility spurs this affect further, yet also forms it in distinct motives. This idea may appear to suggest yet another kind of malleability of motivation as ‘social construction’; it might indeed, but that depends on how such ideological projects are established, nourished, and how they develop, transform, etc. This is, of course, historically variable, but in general terms, some such ideological projects are very overarching and stable, for instance if they are attached to professions, nation states, social movements, or (e.g. religious, pedagogical etc.) institutions of everyday life, and insofar as they deal with pervasive material constraints that appear in different ways through economy, health, military, climate, etc.

Further, however, for such projects to be motivating, be they ever so convincing on the collective level, they must also offer - at least potentially - meaningful participation for the person motivated. To some extent, this can be conceptualized, still, with reference to the internal ‘intentional’ structure of the project itself (e.g. as ‘legitimate peripheral participation’, as its ‘demands’, its ‘trajectories of participation’ etc.; cf. Nissen, 2012b, ch. 5). But this must be connected to overarching cultural narratives of identity (e.g. as professor, as Danish, as socialist, as grandfather etc.), as these are cultivated in (more or less) specialized practices of the self (counselling, autobiography, anniversaries etc.)

²³ To the reinterpretation of Althusser’s concept of interpellation, see Nissen (2012b), ch. 8.

to approach, finally, the question of the individual's motives for participation on the basis (also) of how it is 'anchored' as part of the person's *life*.

Again, even if embodiment, the sustenance of everyday life, and the movement from birth to death, are (as yet) quite inevitable conditions of life, this 'anchoring' does not amount to an unquestionable essence. 'Life' is always mediated by concepts, narratives, techniques, habits and projects that make sense of, and address the constraints of, everyday life and life course, of finitude and embodiment etc. 'Bare life' is not an authentic substance beneath our imagined selves, but a specific socio-cultural form in which 'life' is addressed, conducted, handled (Agamben, 1998). This does not, however, imply that 'life' is irrelevant or infinitely relativizable. For instance, in Nissen (2012a), I show how the news about the pregnancy of a drug-using 17-years-old client in a street-level social work facility in Copenhagen, 1995, would change priorities, hopes, demands, subject-positions, ethics etc. for her as well as for the people and institutions around her.

However, the claim that the anchoring of motivation in collective projects and in individual life are intertwined deeply does not imply that they are necessarily commensurable; nor should we suppose that they must be 'ethical' in a simple or positive sense. In a nutshell, we need these considerations in order to approach deeply questions such as: How can anyone be motivated to perform a terrorist suicide bombing?

Human needs and lives

The case of suicide bombing is useful here for two reasons. First, it confronts us with a radical and urgent counterimage to pragmatics, revealing the deep dichotomy of the ideology of 'motivation' that we engage with. But secondly, it also helps us assess what it takes for praxis-based theories to really be able to overcome that dichotomy.

When Holzkamp in 1983 reintroduced phenomenology into 'his' critical psychology renamed as "subject-science", this can be acknowledged as the intuition that this work somehow had to be done. Recognizing individual subjects must imply recognizing the life that circumscribes and indexes their constitution as individuals [Einzelne]: their embodiment, their finitude, and (in the Holzkampian tradition, above all) their immersion in everyday life. This claim seemed a scientifically rigorous assertion of the reality of human experience which had been neglected in the rush to overcome individualism in the 1970s.

But it was precisely this ethos of scientific realism which seduced Holzkamp and his many followers to articulate the phenomenological legacy in a

paradoxically psychologistic, individualistic and rationalistic way (as personal function, as an inner monitoring of feelings, as an a priori self-interest, as the absolute status of the first person perspective, as the hollowing-out of ‘everyday life’ to become a mantra). This is what led to the endlessly repeated issue of how exactly to relate these ‘inner’ realities with social practice; and which in many cases, eventually, tends to reduce the whole issue of historically situated social practice, struggles and contradictions, to empty catchphrases. The idea that ‘psychology’ should be founded in a new and better way to ‘grasp’ the essential reality of a given subject-matter is taken as an unquestioned premise. When ‘subjectivity’ or ‘the subject’ is then held up as the true object, the social process of objectification is ignored or rejected. The agent-subject [Subjekt] of research becomes (individualized and) identical with her subject-matter, ‘the subject’, in so far as *Verständigung* overcomes the error of the ‘third person perspective’, and re-presents the ‘reality’ of introspection. Objectification, in this view, equals suppression, whereas, in the practice of subject-science, it is supposed to diminish, if not premised as absent from the beginning. Ultimately, this implies that this practice cannot reflect itself except in an idealized, abstract-utopian form. I have discussed this problem in various ways through the past decades (e.g. Nissen, 2012b, chapters 2 and 8), especially as a critique of the utopianism that results from claiming a realist ‘subject-science’.

But how could this set of issues be approached, instead, in an epistemology of practice?

Attempting a dialectical reflection of the ‘kernel of truth’ in Holzkamp’s and his followers’ movement away from practice, we should grant that life is not only the object of practices, but also in a certain sense the Other to any practice as well as to praxis. An epistemology of practice must overcome itself to address life. Still, we should be clear that we who write always do it on behalf of practices and (so we hope, of) praxis. Writing and reading research and theory are practices. The self-overcoming we seek does not magically result from the textual construction of a ‘first person perspective’, which remains in any case the product of a collective practice. The ambition must be precisely to reach beyond the simple *assertion* of mortality, embodiment or everyday life as abstract representations of the will to transcend practice toward life - representations that are so easily misread as universals suggesting a transcendence already accomplished and static. The greatest danger lies in an abstract negation of practice.

Instead, as any self-overcoming, it should be understood as substantiated in a process of cultivation, or, in the terms of Bernard Stiegler (whose philosophy I partly draw on in this final part), of trans-individuation (Stiegler, 2013). Evolving practices with evolving technologies that constitute subjectivities anew must be

continuously expanded to face the challenges of existence in new ways. Conversely, existing human beings must always appropriate (learn, conquer and transform) new practices and technologies as new ways precisely of living. In other words, life must continuously be *reconstructed* as meaningful, just as meaning must be incessantly *cultivated* to make sense existentially²⁴. These processes of cultivation are themselves practical, even if they are also transcendent. It is not merely a contemplative matter of interpreting, or even just a matter of deciding (of forming a will). Cultivation is at once productive and reproductive work²⁵, which continuously forms the situated societal-cultural totalities within which innovation and political transformation matter and should be evaluated, even if this resituating invariably happens after the fact.

An obvious example can be found at the intersection of life sciences with politics, social work, health and psychology: *Pharmacology*. The history of addictions is one of efforts to regain control of lives that had been ‘*improved*’ by mind-altering drugs, from alcohol and opium and on to the newest medicine. Even before it formed motives that people realized were destructive, each drug had posed the question of life anew, beyond its effects and side-effects as a tool in practices. What kind of an everyday life is structured by the working-class pattern of weekend binges? What is it to grow old when hormones can prolong sexual activity? How is emotion embodied if you are chronically on tranquilizers? Etc.

But Derrida (1981) famously demonstrated that this kind of process was at play already at the cradle of philosophy, when Plato *wrote* Socrates’ complaint that writing and reading text (as any artificial work on language) may improve thought, memory, rhetoric etc., but also corrupted them. Plato’s abstract utopia of pure thought and pure dialogue, pure life (which has survived until today), was itself an aspect and an outcome – and testimony to the irreversibility – of the impure practice of writing philosophy. This generalizes the relevance of the ‘pharmacological’ problem: If text itself is such a *pharmakon*, a double-edged sword and a game-changer, this is true of all inventions. So, for instance, kids enjoy TV, computer games, smartphones and tablets, and we are then challenged to build new kinds of childhood; here, Derrida helps us realize that our urge to throw away or contain those *hypomnemonic* tools (or ‘tertiary artifacts’, Wartofsky, 1979) to secure a pure childhood is itself *already formed by them*. In Stiegler’s words, the pharmacological problem cannot be dissolved, “there is no

²⁴ I have discussed this also as the dialectics of standard and standpoint, see Nissen (2016), and as relations of reciprocal concern between subject-position and existence, see Nissen (2012b), ch. 8. To the reinterpretation of Vygotsky’s and Leontiev’s meaning/sense distinction, see Nissen (2012b), ch. 5.

²⁵ A theoretical side-gain here is that the production / reproduction dichotomy is left far behind.

final synthesis, but a *savoir-vivre-with-its-dependencies*" (Stiegler, 2015, 130), and thus, an ongoing process of cultivation.

What incites praxis to overcome itself and deal with life is the contradiction that praxis keeps transforming and challenging the life that it cannot but reassert repeatedly as its core concern. But each time, this is a wager. There is no guarantee that evolving practices can be resituated in life as meaningful, and there is no standpoint of 'bare life' outside praxis from which we can judge them.

Holzkamp once illustrated the concept of "dual possibility" with the example that, facing the execution squad, one can always shout "Long live freedom!" (Holzkamp, 1983a). Did he understand that perhaps being executed might constitute a meaningful conclusion to a life as revolutionary - even if this contradicted his a priori against deliberate self-harm? Or did he realize that it could also symbolize the absurdity of some of the ways those revolutionary practices had thwarted their existential sense (learning from e.g. Christa Wolf's *Kassandra*)? Could it be both?

Like the addict, the suicide bomber is a radicalized example of a more general phenomenon, at two levels. In the first instance, the radicalized islamist is perhaps a 'pharmacological being', the subjectivity of a hybrid of simplified religious dogma with Hollywood action drama, whose life has come to finally make sense as a movement toward an imminent martyrdom in which earthly concerns (e.g. for the lives of others) lose their relevance. But are we so sure it *makes sense*, at all? At another level, this can be an absolute dissolution of sense into meaning (of life into standards) which may be the symptom of a loss, of an inability (with those cultural repertoires) to find ways to participate in practices that might be creatively reconfigured and resituated in a life that makes sense.

Of course, this latter interpretation is normative through and through. Such interpretations are themselves performative and should be judged by their ethical implications. While the first level warns against a premature pathologization, the second maintains the task of reconstructing ethics by resituating practices and their motives, of regaining health by collectively inventing normativities in Canguilhem's sense (Canguilhem, 1991).

I wish to suggest, in conclusion, that this set of issues, which is becoming ever more pertinent, can be addressed by a development of Osterkamp's theory of productive needs, if this development advances and supersedes, rather than abandons, the general epistemology of practice in order to address life and existence. Basically, at issue is the further deepening and unfolding of the concept of "productive" as what shapes the need for participatory agency – as immanently critical, performative, and continuously reconfiguring meaning and sense, as grounded in and, in turn, transforming an ethics of meaning as praxis and sense as existential.

The rearticulations of current motivational practices sketched above need only be slightly expanded to demonstrate and unfold this. They are already written as immanent critiques that attempt to reconnect them with praxis by uncovering the concrete utopia of a societalization / cultivation of selfhood, which can be served if pragmatics is reinterpreted and expanded as performance - as practices that immanently include, yet may autonomize, critical reflection and display. In the self-overcoming of praxis, then, the only question that remains is how a life thus nudged, self-monitored, gamified, re-narrated and appreciated is - no more? still? again?, or finally? - a life worth living.

This, ultimately, is the deep question of meta-motivation - not as a level in formal logic, disposable in a pragmatics of affects and signs, nor as the individualized first person perspective that believes itself to be authentic, but as participating in the care of the self that is potentially societalized at a new level, as it resituates such practices of the self.

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