Recognizing Motives: The Dissensual Self

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Abstract

This article proposes to approach issues around the self and its derivate concepts such as motivation through a methodology of rearticulation. For this, we build on the idea developed in the (broadly) Vygotskian tradition of the self as mediated by cultural artifacts in activity, viewed as a transformative social process that reconfigures sense and meaning. We aim at suggesting these potentials by rearticulating activities in which people display (represent, avow, reflect, expose, externalize, etc.) their motives. Most contemporary 'motivational technologies' stage a pragmatic self-calculation. For some, these technologies confirm a common-sense, managerial self; others read them as a 'poetics of practice' that performs and produces new motives and selves in a liminal space of discursive creativity. These two readings are superseded as we – with art theory from Vygotsky through Brecht to Groys, Bourriaud and Rancière – consider drug counsellors' experiments with aesthetic practices of self-display in which sense is reconfigured as dis-sensus, as meaning deferred. Aesthetics provide a lens through which we can appreciate how an artifact-mediation can be also a struggle for recognition that reconstitutes emerging selves, senses, and motives.

Keywords: Self, aesthetics, motive, memory work, counselling

Introduction and general approach

In the summer of 2015, at a group session in a drug counselling facility, a young woman, whom we shall call Sue, says:

> But I guess, too, I sometimes experience, that, when I'm doing/feeling as bad as I can ever possibly get[1] … then I get, like, even more motivated that, "why, I can get even worse!" You know – sometimes when everything is going to hell, I think: "You know what? Fuck that!"

Sue is talking about herself – or, to put it in a slightly different way: about her self. Sue seems to address the care of her self, admitting to the counsellors and researchers that she sometimes does not care – and is even motivated for getting worse. This motive seems obviously irrational. But displaying motives as irrational is disavowing them. We might wonder, then: Is her self divided, perhaps in an accountable and responsible part and another part that is the opposite? If Dr. Jekyll (or is it Mr. Hyde pretending to be Dr. Jekyll?) thus talks about Mr. Hyde, is that still a self at all?

The example is not a philosophical thought-experiment. As we shall describe further below, the occasion was staged partly as research, but the counsellors who were present did not exactly jump in surprise: This is the kind of thing clients often do say to counsellors, who are then faced with the task of recognizing clients' rationality, or irrationally, or, somehow, both. It is a well-known quandary, but it is not an easy one. One aspect is cognitive and relates to the obvious contradictions in such utterances: What is the logic in seeking to get even worse? Another aspect is motivational: What does Sue really want?

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1 In Danish: "Når jeg har det aller-, aller-, allerværst". The verb "har det" is untranslatable. It is close to "doing" as in "how are you doing today?", but connotes more affectivity, invoking something akin to a phenomenological *Befindlichkeit*, Heidegger's term for 'finding one-self'.

Here is where we begin: in the middle of things, with problems facing real people engaged in a more or less well-known practice. The point of doing so is to suggest a way to understand the self, and its concomitant or derivative issues such as 'motives' or 'motivation', since the self is first of all practiced, made and handled. It is not an entity which we can observe on its own.

This makes for a complex form of analysis. Firstly, it requires taking seriously the traditions and conceptualizations through which such practices of the self have emerged and have been articulated. Secondly, these practices must be rearticulated theoretically as practices of the self. Thirdly, that rearticulation must proceed not as a purely theoretical writing, but in dialogue with efforts to transform practices, since these make visible the presuppositions and implications of those practices and the selves they make. Theoretically informed practice studies find their relevance in just such transformative, innovative, even 'revolutionary' attempts, where premises otherwise taken for granted are confronted (Nissen, 2013b).

We can call this a methodology of rearticulation, because it articulates anew what is already articulated. We do not cherish such complexity for its own sake, but there is no way to avoid it, if we wish to engage with real issues in real practices. The real world, its people and our doings, are always-already articulated. However, those articulations are often limited and problematic in clinical as well as other practices. It is tempting, then, to push those articulations aside as irrelevant or wrong, and begin from scratch. This is the classic impulse of Modernist scientism, which has driven most of psychology, even including some kinds of critical psychology. But the virgin soil on which such social science seeks to build its theoretical edifice is itself imagined and constructed as such. We must work critically, if we want to understand 'the self' and 'ourselves'. This approach

based on critique has its own history in critical psychologies, from the 'ideology critique' of the 1970s, through discursive psychologies of the 1990s, and to the 'second order psychology' and 'post-psychology' of today (see Nissen, 2020).

Possibly, some readers will expect that we in this text either remain within the traditions of the given – in this case, 'clinical' – practices, or discuss the self in theoretical terms, perhaps using ethnographic data, but staying safely at a distance from practitioners' own (clinical, social work) knowledge and culture. After all, these are different academic disciplines and communities, and it is easier to remain within one. But the upshot is generally either rather conservative or rather utopian. To steer clear of those temptations in the following, we aim to show rearticulation as a way forward.

Part of our agenda is to suggest that the broadly Vygotskian tradition provides resources for this project of rearticulation. Much has happened since Vygotsky, and we cherish the plurality of the contributions in this tradition, which is why we propose to call this approach socio-cultural-historical activity theory (SCHAT). Viewing the 'self' as an object in a socio-cultural-historical activity mediated with artifacts (e.g. Vygotsky, 1980) is a way to cut across disciplinary boundaries and allow (performing and reflecting) new kinds of practice under new conditions, and with new technologies. This implies understanding articulation as never merely an exchange of immaterial signs. Another part of our agenda is to point to some limits of SCHAT, when it comes to paradoxical motives such as those presented by Sue at the beginning of this text.

In particular, we will be considering aesthetic performances and productions as ways to transform and overcome clinical practice. We are not reviewing the numerous attempts to use aesthetics as means to clinical ends. Rather, we continue a range of aesthetic theorists, from Vygotsky to Groys and Rancière, and think of aesthetics as not

only independent of function (as classically proposed by Baumgarten and Kant), but as superseding function by questioning and transforming it.

Learning from the counsellors' experiments with 'aesthetic documentation', we will even try to show that utterances like Sue's above can be relevantly understood as an aesthetic performance or production, better than as psychotherapy – provided we use a wide concept of aesthetics such as Rancière's (2009). We are not claiming that aesthetics is the final and total truth about statements such as Sue's quoted above. But we are suggesting aesthetics as providing us with one truth that could be pertinent, illuminating hopeful routes that point beyond 'cure' and help us understand and care for 'the self' and 'ourselves' in new ways.

Materials

One of the most fruitful approaches to studying practices of the self is the 'memory work' methodology ('Erinnerungsarbeit') developed first by Frigga Haug and her colleagues (Haug, 1987, Haug and Blankenburg 1980, Haug 1987, 2002, 2012), and later taken up by a number of researchers, mainly in strands of Marxist or Poststructuralist Feminism (e.g. Davies et al., 2001, Gillies et al., 2005, Simovska et al., 2019, Stephenson, 2005, Widerberg, 2011). The feminist project of understanding and emancipating the self was conceived as an ideology critique, politicizing the private in a communal practice. Gendered socialization was questioned by problematizing the spontaneous ways in which the memory work participants constructed memories pertaining to various themes. The themes were considered relevant and chosen by the participants in the group, and also studied more widely by critical readings of for example fiction, women's magazines, movies as well as psychological theory. Participants wrote short stories, which they then deconstructed together. The texts were thus their immediate object of study rather than the

person 'as such'; they studied memories of a 'self' that they constructed textually and thus generalized as the third-person protagonist of its narrative. This seemingly 'indirect' approach to studying the self highlights the socio-material practices of self-construction that are often overlooked, for instance in interviews. Also, it helps to externalize and exoticize the forms of selfhood thus constructed, supporting the deconstructive discussions in memory work.

Haug has written quite precise instructions and accounts of the experience of the memory work groups (Haug, 2012a). However, like many other followers, we have taken up these basic principles in slightly modified ways. Morten Nissen is currently using memory work fused with a supervision of forum theater in primary schools as an approach to developing teachers' capacities, as an alternative to the forms of representation that are imposed with the wave of 'visible learning'. Tine Friis is currently doing memory work in the exhibition space of Medical Museion, a museum for medical history and research unit at the University of Copenhagen. Her work addresses issues of the connection between our gut and psyche and investigates how we make sense of our microbial bodies and selves (cf. Friis, in review).

The memory work material we discuss here was a small project in collaboration with counsellors from the 'U-turn' facility for young drug users in Copenhagen. By 2015, Morten had already worked with the 'U-turn' counsellors for almost a decade, rearticulating their ways of working (Nissen, 2012, 2014, 2018, Bank and Nissen, 2016, Nissen and Barington 2016, Nissen and Solgaard, 2017, Nissen et al., 2019). The 'U-turn' counsellors were relevant partners because the institution was founded on the paradox that a specialized facility for treating the disease of 'addiction' was considered a problematic and stigmatizing approach to helping young drug users, and so, the counsellors set out to

transform the institutional framing of their work. Memory work has much in common with their version of 'narrative practice' (White, 2007), since that included as a key trope the externalization and problematization of individualizing discourse such as that which frames 'therapy', 'psychopathology' etc.

Morten had suggested that we worked on the theme of 'motivation', precisely because the counsellors were very skeptical about the issue and the concept. As we shall unfold below, their critique of 'motivation' was part of a historical transformation in these practices of the self. In their experience, the young drug users were fed up with self-reproaches for not being sufficiently 'motivated'. In this way, it seemed relevant for them to devote three of their usual Tuesday sessions (3-4 hours) to doing memory work on the theme. Along with his student intern Anne Rogne, Morten had presented the idea in a video, and the group agreed to try. Two counsellors and 7 users joined us in the experiment. We all wrote small texts under the heading: "One time I was motivated". Then we took them one by one; the author first read aloud; then we discussed the text with the author silently listening; finally, the author was invited to participate in the discussion. We recorded and transcribed the sessions, analyzed them and discussed our ideas with counsellors and those users who were interested. Tine took over as intern, and her later master's thesis work was a large part of what we presented at conferences and published on a website called STUFF as a preliminary analysis2.

Like most comparable institutions, U-turn has various 'groups' as part of its activity schedule. As is typical, this abstract concept of a 'group'3 is often performed as a

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2 See (September 2020) https://www.stuffsite.org

3 The abstractness is very characteristic (and famously rendered in Lars von Trier's (1994) The Kingdom). It is seen in the use of empty names that merely denominate place such as the 'Vestergade group' that participated in our memory work, or to times such as the 'evening group', 'Wednesday group', etc.

gathering of counsellors with young drug users to simply 'talk about' problems and hopes. But quite often, this activity of verbal exchange transgresses standard clinical practice and expands into various experiments or projects with aesthetic practices: the production of graffiti, drawings, or (more often) poems, videos, songs or music videos. Some of the counsellors are also skilled musicians or artists, and in some cases, professional or semi-professional artists and film directors have participated in creating these aesthetic documentations.

The term 'documentation' is explained by a political struggle that began around the time of the establishment of U-turn in 2004. As part of the general emergence of New Public Management, U-turn was first required to provide standard documentation of their users' drug use and other social problems to be fed into a centralized European database[4] and to prove their efficiency. This would imply standardized uptake and follow-up interviews with all new users. But the U-turn professionals – partly coming from a legacy of interactionist and systemic approaches to drug use in Copenhagen (see e.g. Nissen, 2012 b) – argued that such 'documentation' was far from innocent: The soaring numbers of clients treated for the relatively new condition 'cannabis dependence' was not a 'natural' epidemic, but rather a problematic cultural tendency to pathologize and individualize what were really social problems. In their view, the stigmatizing, degrading ritual of anamnesis was the last thing their users – who typically already had lots of case files and diagnoses to attest to their failed selves – needed. Overall, this political struggle was in fact relatively successful, and U-turn has become a state-recognized, yet non-standardized 'model' for social work with young drug users in Denmark[5] – although not

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4 See https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/
5 Thus, we have studied the 'transfer' of the U-turn model to Elsinore, see Bank and Nissen (2017), Nissen and Barington (2016).

the most dominant or widespread model. This 'model' can be said to include the use of an alternative, aesthetic documentation, which is the production of artworks that 'represent' the young users in ways that are deemed edifying rather than stigmatizing.

By discussing these carefully selected materials from memory work and aesthetic documentation, we articulate an approach to understanding the self as aesthetically produced and performed. By doing so, we also address related issues of 'motivation' and 'motives' when the self is practiced, made and handled in this way. However, before doing so, we have to revisit the 'para-clinical' history related to practices of the self as this draws out the very issues that we seek to problematize.

Practices of the Self: From Therapy through Motivational Interviewing …

Psychotherapy or counseling has been an important kind of activity in which the self has been handled. In a certain sense, it can be seen as a staging of the self *as such* rather than in specific roles, insofar as its dialogue tends to move beyond the focus on 'the self as pathological' toward a more generalized self-reflection. In a SCHAT approach, though, the 'as such' always remains historically specific; what is going on when the self is staged 'as such' is the performance of a Modern, individualized selfhood, between pathology and self-actualization.

The terms 'staging' and 'performance' are not accidental: The self is practiced in a way that emphasizes and works with different forms of *display*. Psychotherapy achieves its key mode of operation by its *framing* (Goffman, 1974), defining and delimiting itself as a special activity in time and space: *The therapeutic space*. Just by establishing that "this – what is going on here and now – is psychotherapy", a projection screen is set up for the client to display selfhood. A radical version was Bion's group therapy (1961) in which the

therapist, once the session began, would simply sit and wait for *anything* to happen, which he would then take as 'material' for clinical 'interpretation'.

The emptiness, or formalism, of this framing sets up a tension between the psychiatric structure of pathologies and cure for which psychotherapy is supposed to be a vehicle, and the joint activity of projection and interpretation that it facilitates. With this tension or rather contradiction, psychotherapy – as one of several activities within the broader fields of social work, health and education – moves toward a 'generalization', an emancipation of the client's subjectivity and self. We propose that this can either evolve into a pragmatic formalism, or overcome itself to become a more substantial transformation of the socio-cultural issues at stake.

We can trace the contradiction back to when Freud recognized patient utterances as key to the 'talking cure' that he hoped to develop. The clinical standards (concepts such as disease, disturbance, etiology, cure, crisis, and, of course, therapy) would still structure the practice of the therapist, while his patients' participation was roughly limited to exposing themselves by delivering free associations, and learning about themselves from the therapist's interpretations. But the structure of exposing and learning through dialogue about the self *as psyche* – as a new kind of thing to learn about, a new 'epistemic object' (Cetina, 2009, Miettinen & Virkkunen, 2005) — proved the most important invention. The self as 'psyche' conceives of law/desire in scientific terms as conscious/unconscious rather than as virtue/sin as did the religious precursors' notion of the self as 'soul' (cf. e.g. Taylor, 1989).

After more than a century of increasing recognition of patients as clients, users, and customers – and of underlying broader categories such as women, young people, and mentally ill – we can appreciate the emerging contradiction between the ends (cure – of

the irrational, pathological subject) and the means (dialogue – with the rational, learning subject) of this form of practice. On the one hand, this has evolved in a 'cunning of reason' that boosted dialogue and generalized selfhood to break through the shell of (pseudo) medical categories. This was already prefigured in many ways in Freudian theory. On the other hand, this emancipation of the self led to exacerbating the asymmetry in the therapeutic relation itself: Why would the client submit (however temporarily) to the authority of the therapist if not because of some 'disease of the self'? This would be addressed by reasserting and proliferating disease categories in ever new and ever more popularized forms[6], which on the longer term undermine diagnostic authority, and by focusing on the formal aspects of the practice (working contract, forms of linguistic exchange, etc.). Despite classifying herself in the latest fashionable diagnosis, the patient-client has now evolved into a user-customer who is no longer kept in check by the shame of mental illness or deviance. As a result, what legitimizes psychotherapy is the specialized staging of self (through the projection screen of the therapeutic space), and client retention is becoming a prime measure of success. Metaphorically, therapy is reduced to customers having conversations with salespersons who have nothing to sell apart from that conversation itself and the ways that this very emptiness works as a mirror; what matters most is to keep the customer in the shop (cf. Nissen and Barington, 2016).

However, this 'endpoint' is rarely if ever reached as such. More commonly, it keeps presenting itself anew in opposition to clinical paternalism, thus promising to paradoxically unite 'cure' with emancipation from its own institutional and discursive underpinnings.

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6 Psychiatric disease categories move toward (more visibly) becoming 'boundary objects' that accommodate lay perspectives by substituting purely empirical definitions for 'etiological', that is, those derived from the expert knowledge and explanations of the professionals (cf. Bowker and Star, 1999, Hacking, 1998).

This contradiction is at play in a range of contemporary therapies that claim to base on client recognition. As an example, the widespread 'Motivational Interviewing' - MI (cf. Miller and Rollnick, 2013) is prototypical in its pragmatic fusion of 'client-centered' and 'cognitive-behavioral' approaches. One reason for MI's spectacular global success (Björk, 2014) is the way it addresses the problem of motivation. Motivation was traditionally seen as a relatively secondary precondition for therapy, but it came to the fore as therapy evolved as something clients chose rather than had to do. MI provides a technique for handling unmotivated clients: accepting and mapping clients' motives as they state them, the therapist aligns the motives on a linear dimension of 'change' (e.g. as the pros and cons of quitting drugs), while especially prompting elaborations of motives pro 'change'. In MI, then, we have the general contradiction between the clinical normativity of 'change' and the 'emancipatory', liberal recognition of any client reasoning. An obvious critique could target this as a shallow liberalism, by revealing either the normativity (barely) hidden behind a liberal appearance, or conversely, it could reproach the normativity of that neo-liberalism itself, as the coercion to self-control (Rose, 1999). But, without refuting this form of critique, we might gain more from studying MI closer as a form of activity. For this, we can learn from the linguistic anthropology of Carr and Smith (Carr, 2013, Carr and Smith, 2014).

First, the *pragmatics* of MI (which is very far from pragmatism). MI's liberal face is conceptualized on the side of the therapist as an evidence-based anti-metaphysics (Björk, 2014). It is pragmatic because it is legitimized by 'what works' rather than by 'what is true'. 'What works' is independent of the substantial nature of the goal, and for that reason the goal is conceptualized abstractly (as 'change' of 'behavior'). Accordingly, the client is free to contemplate herself as she pleases. There is no truth to be arrived at

and enunciated[7], and this leaves any meta-reflection of MI as activity in a void.

Apparently, it 'works' to ignore the question: Am I motivated for MI? This kind of meta-motivation is achieved by simply responding to the question *with* MI, or in other words, by collapsing meta-reflection into the practice itself. This is MI's way of performing the ignorance of inter-subjectivity, which is characteristic of mainstream psychology, even as it provides a technology of dialogue (Nissen, 2020).

But, secondly, this pragmatics opens to a linguistic creativity, or what Carr and Smith call a 'poetics of practice'. In their analysis, MI works by cultivating performative speech acts that come to shape clients' beliefs and reflections. It is rendered as a "distinctly behavioral thesis" (Carr and Smith, 2014, p. 90) in MI (although with a somewhat Wittgensteinian flavor) "*that people tend to believe what they hear themselves say*" (Miller and Rollnick, 2013, p. 195). A main point is that MI has thus overcome the opposition between 'directiveness' and 'client-centeredness':

> Our analysis shows that the very hallmark of MI is borne of the disaggregation of the semantics and poetics of the therapeutic text, so that the referential and metalingual function of the therapeutic message can be purposed to the ends of 'client-centeredness', while the same message is stylized to direct clients as well (Carr and Smith, 2014, p. 107).

For example, lengthy pauses within therapists' conversation turns seem to index thoughtful doubt and openness, while at the same time they work to 'hold the floor' and direct attention to what comes after (e.g. as 'cliffhangers'). While the 'client-centered' semantics are explicitly announced in MI, the 'directive' poetics are, however, trained and learnt by the therapist through imitation and practicing. The latter must remain tacit, Car

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7 With Foucault, we could say that the *telos* of this technology of the self is (or appears to be) detached from any commitment to a communal moral framework – and in interestingly problematic ways (cf. Foucault, 1985).

and Smith suggest, both because it is *an art*, and because it seems opposed to what they describe as an (allegedly, American) ideal of 'authenticity' when explicated.

Carr and Smith reproduce and confirm MI's pragmatics by simply delegating to other sciences the question of content. The manipulative nature of MI poetics is deemed unimportant, or it is rendered as only problematic when seen from the point of view of an essentialist ideology of 'authenticity'. We would argue, against this, that MI poetics can and should be critically rearticulated with a quite different concept of authenticity – such as the one articulated by Charles Taylor (1991). This is authenticity as credible and edifying socio-cultural constructions of selfhood. These are indeed characterized by broadly aesthetic qualities, as Carr and Smith suggest, but not simply (and pragmatically) as style, as 'the how', or the way of fashioning utterances. Rather, 'authentic' aesthetics is the creation of artifacts that facilitate a reconfiguring of sense and meaning and thus 'touch and move' (see Høgsbro and Nissen, 2014). Following this track, as we shall do below, 'disaggregation' – or, in the terms of Jacques Rancière's (2009) aesthetics, *dissensus* – can indeed be noted as a key element. Thus, the carefully crafted 'poetics' of MI (as of other therapeutic traditions) may under certain circumstances render the core contradiction in psychotherapy in productive and transformative ways. Or, to be more precise, the contradiction may become productive and transformative if that rendering addresses the contradictory circumstances of psychotherapy – and in that sense, breaks with the dogma of pragmatics even if that dogma is what promises commercial success and client retention. Below, we will unfold this point by discussing U-turn's practice of aesthetic documentation.

… to Aesthetic Documentation

The movement of psychotherapy toward pragmatics and an applied linguistic 'poetics of practice' is very visible in the field of addiction counseling. MI is one of two dominant approaches – the other is the family of 12 steps fellowships and derived professional methods. At U-turn, however, other traditions are paramount, such as *Solution-Focused Brief Therapy* (De Shazer & Dolan, 2012) and *Narrative Therapy* (White, 2007). These describe themselves in ways much closer to Carr and Smith's own terms, and much further from what these authors claim is the American ideal of authenticity. The other traditions are interesting references because with them, therapists explicitly draw on a wider range of social theory and philosophy – e.g. Bruner, Wittgenstein, Foucault, Derrida – to reflect what they do as language games and narratives. Moreover, they attempt to frame their practices as no longer structured by the stigmatizing clinical standard.

The main question, however, is whether these language games and narratives perform the formalism of a pragmatic psychotherapy, or whether in fact they address and transform social circumstances that are problematic because they make it tempting to do 'therapy'. We have discussed this question with the counsellors at U-turn in numerous forms and instances as this question is also the specific contribution of SCHAT as a kind of critical psychology. SCHAT is not the only theoretical approach that would point to material and political, socio-cultural conditions underlying framings, narratives and discourses as practices. But, coming from SCHAT, we are inclined to appreciate that this awareness is present also in Goffman, Foucault, Derrida, Wittgenstein, Bruner etc. – even if it is not often highlighted in the readings of those theorists as presented by some of the main protagonists of those therapies (e.g. de Shazer) that partly survive as cultural forms because they can be also read as pragmatic. In particular, the tradition of 'narrative

practice' is situated at that junction (witnessed also by the references to Vygotsky in its canonical literature such as White (2007).

As mentioned above, the counsellors at U-turn have developed a practice of aesthetic documentation that expands narrative practice into, at certain times, a full-blown practice of creating aesthetic artefacts. What difference does that make?

In a first approximation, we can point to the *objectification* that takes place with the artworks. The title for U-turn's *Give a Story* project, for instance, was no coincidence. One of the videos[8] in this project gives away Sebastian's 'story' to his family and friends, to staff and users at U-turn, to other professionals, to us researchers, and to the unlimited audience of the internet. This 'giving away' is achieved with the materiality of the video. It is a recognition of Sebastian's motives and feelings in a context that is quite different from that of diagnosing dependency. The constraints of that materiality, and the goal of that recognition, in turn, were what required the production team to work on Sebastian's story as an artifact, to dwell on its qualities and possible meanings and implications. In Ilyenkov's term (1977), the video objectified certain aspects of (our ways of approaching) Sebastian's situation as an 'ideal artifact'. It amplified the socio-cultural mediation of his self as something to be reworked critically, and something that was neither to be taken for granted, nor to be trusted to a clinical profession as the signs of a pathology or a cure. With the distinction that Vygotsky took up from Frege, Sebastian's experience was taken seriously and developed from sense to meaning, from merely sensed to also meaningful – that is, the making of sense was objectified and generalized.

This potential of art was already noted in Vygotsky's psychology of art:

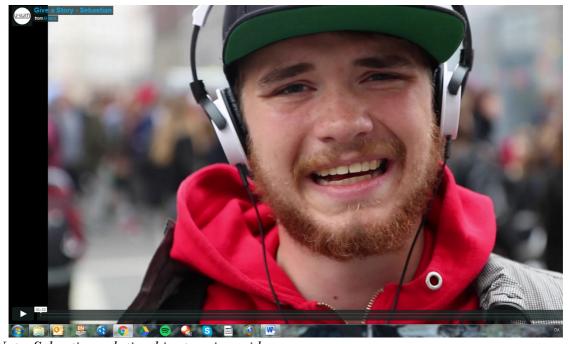8 See (September 2020) http://player.vimeo.com/video/98728123

The melting of feelings outside us is performed by the strength of social feeling, which is objectivized, materialized, and projected outside of us, then fixed in external objects of art, which have become the tools of society. Art is the social technique of emotion, a tool of society which brings the most intimate and personal aspects of our being into the circle of social life (Vygotsky, 1974, p. 78).

An old idea, then. But for this to take place in the practice of aesthetic documentation, a century later, two cultural developments must have occurred, both of which are facilitated and prompted greatly by the recent revolution of media and information technologies. For one thing, the public/private division is changing, so that people tend to make public much of what was once reserved for the private sphere, or at least they construct parts of their front-stage selves (Goffman, 1956) by 'coming out' and 'giving away' versions of what is presented as back-stage selves (Illouz, 2003). Not least, 'shameful' conditions of suffering or deviance are now often publicized in specific claims for recognition; and many figures of the contemporary 'art scene' are prominent in this tendency – along with the 'auto-fiction' trend in literature. For another, there have been persistent attempts in the art world to break down the art/life distinction (e.g. situationism, socialist realism, pop art, etc.). According to Boris Groys (2016), these have been much accentuated by the involvement of the masses, not only (as in the 20th century) in consumption, but now also in the production of artworks, as is now technically possible. Thus, we can no longer dismiss such artworks as Sebastian's as amateur self-expressions used as tools for a private therapeutic process. They are objectified, brought into the circle of social life.

This 'objectivity' of the artwork is much strengthened also by its simultaneous place in U-turn's ongoing experiments with counseling, and thus in research, and in political struggles. This could lead to the worry that such 'external' concerns might

undermine its aesthetic qualities; '*l'art pour l'art*' (art for the sake of art) could be degenerated to kitch instrumentalized in propaganda. That dichotomy is unsatisfying (cf. Groys, 2008), but in fact, one obvious pitfall is to substitute the thin narrative of a positive psychology for the expected classic stigma.

Figure 1

U -turn: Give a Story – Sebastian. Reprinted with permission

Note. Sebastian relating his story in a video

But this suspicion is dispelled once we take a closer look at Sebastian's video. After a black screen with the words (in Danish, that translate as:) "*To Louis and Frey / to fire and smoke / in a sea of people*", we see him close up, a young man with a beard and a cap, pocketing his smartphone and, with a shy smile, putting on his headphones, then singing 'karaoke' along with what he (alone) hears (in English): "*I was fine / I pulled myself together / just in time / to throw myself away*". His trembling voice fills the audio, except we can also hear the muted beats of a lively street festival visibly going on around him.

"*Now I can't think / who I was before / You ruined everything / in the nicest way*", he ends.

The story Sebastian gives us is far from simple. In fact, it is not even easily classified as a 'story'. But the tensions between his timid voice and his courage facing us with it, the privacy of the commercially published song he hears and sings[9], in a foreign language, lonely in a crowd dancing to other tunes and rhythms, are palpable and inviting. The meaning created does not replace and annul sense; it reconfigures it, even reawakens it as open questions to what we thought it meant.

The U-turn counsellors have taken inspiration from Nicolas Bourriaud's 'relational aesthetics' (2002) that emphasize the social aspects of the artwork's "proposal of a shared world" of sense (ibid, p. 9). If meaning is brought back to, and perhaps disturbed by, the sensual, then this sense is relational, so that the sense Sebastian makes of his world is made common, his idiosyncrasy partly overcome. Yet what emerges is not 'common sense'. Far from it, community is proposed anew precisely by dissociating the sense we expected to make of it.

If we want to recognize Sebastian's story, Bourriaud's focus on creating community can thus be expanded by Rancière's (2009) theory of aesthetics as dissensus. For Rancière, crafting dissensus is to "stage a conflict between two regimes of sense" (Rancière, 2009, p. 128).

The *uncommon sense* of the young client turned into an artist quoting lyrics, dedicating his work to named people unknown to us and then to "fire and smoke" (is that cannabis?), is like a Brechtian estrangement (*Verfremdung*). It allows us to meet Sebastian in other ways than with the sensual registers suggested by the structures of meaning that

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9 Jonathan Coulton: You ruined everything, 2006

we unknowingly had in common. For a start, the young social misfit, whom perhaps we imagined as lacking in knowledge, taste, and motivation, meets us eye to eye; instead of planning how to educate or activate him, we are encouraged to assume what Rancière calls an 'equality of intelligence', of curiosity and search for poetry and beauty. To Rancière, a key aspect of the modern 'aesthetic regime' is this kind of dissensus, this clash of different 'regimes of sense', which

> ...means that every situation can be cracked open from the inside, reconfigured in a different regime of perception and signification. To reconfigure the landscape of what can be seen and what can be thought is to alter the field of the possible and the distributions of capacities and incapacities (Rancière, 2009, p. 60).

Far from reduced to an instrument of predefined politics or ethics, or simply resting in an unconnected sphere of art for art's sake, the artwork contributes to their reorientation.

Thus, we can note how Sebastian's video re-articulates public space. Within the video, the spaces of the headphones, the close-up, and the street festival make us aware of spatial boundaries. Zooming out, the public space of the municipal facility, and its website, are turned into *liminal* spaces of complex becoming and social transformation (Turner, 1969, Greco and Stenner, 2017, Stenner, 2018). We are encouraged to ask: can the welfare state transform from a domain of expertise in pathology into an agora of re-identification with, and of, social problems? (see also Bank and Nissen, 2017). This is precisely what might mark a difference to the New Public Management vision of overcoming paternalism through consumer choice, which fits smoothly with pragmatic versions of counseling.

The concept of dissensus comes from Rancière, but it has a history also in SCHAT. In his psychology of art, Vygotsky (1974) worked to re-articulate the Aristotelian theory of catharsis into his emerging theory of activity:

> A work of art (such as a fable, a short story, a tragedy), always includes an affective contradiction, causes conflicting feelings, and leads to the short-circuiting and destruction of these emotions. This is the true effect of a work of art. (...) Aesthetic reaction as such is nothing but catharsis, that is, a complex transformation of feelings (Vygotsky, 1974, p. 69).

Vygotsky's take on catharsis, however, does not imply a harmonious conclusion or synthesis. Great art, such as Shakespeare's Hamlet, which Vygotsky analyzes in the quoted work, does not restore an easy common sense. Rather, that "complex transformation of feelings," as a "social technique of emotion" (Vygotsky, 1974, p. 78), is a construction of paradoxes that is eminently political. When we read Vygotsky thus as an earlier version of Brecht's estrangement and Rancière's dissensus, his revolutionary social engineering – implied in his 'experimental-genetic method' of studying the higher mental functions by creating them – is restored, but also democratized[10]. Artists such as Shakespeare or Sebastian (and his counsellors) do push issues and open questions, but they do not know in advance how feelings should and will be shaped or what to make of it when we are touched and moved by their art. Rather, they 'know with us', just-in-time, as we contemplate the shared but dissensual world of the artwork together.

This shared and complex world is touching, here and now, but also moving (cf. Høgsbro and Nissen, 2014). Without subsuming perceptions and affects as functions to a program or a future state of affairs claimed to derive from God or Science, art anticipates, it shapes fears and hopes by creating and demonstrating them as prototypes, or, with Ernst

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10 This reading is similar to Jameson's (1998) affirmative reading of Brecht's 'Lehrtheater' as opposed to the doctrinarian pedagogics that Rancière (2014), with good reason, criticizes.

Bloch (1995), as real possibilities, concrete utopias. The video shows us in glimpses how Sebastian can be, and how we can relate to him. It imagines what can lie beyond our present life, not by authority, but by authoring, by inscribing hopes into the sensuous yet transcendent presence of ideal artifacts. Or, again with Vygotsky:

> Art is the organization of our future behavior. It is a requirement that may never be fulfilled but that forces us to strive beyond our life toward all that lies beyond it (Vygotsky, 1974, p. 81).

The Art of Overcoming Therapy

How does our analysis of Sebastian's video, then, relate to the "social techniques of the self", which we have traced in the history of psychotherapy? To demonstrate this, we will return to the question of how art and aesthetics are more than just a style of doing therapy and illustrate this by drawing in material from our previously mentioned memory work on motivation in relation to aesthetic documentation.

At first, taking off from Sue's initially quoted statement about her motives, we might wonder whatever happened to affect or emotion in psychotherapy. The project of verbally rationalizing and normalizing affect seems to unite currently hegemonic cognitivist pragmatics, not only with its psychoanalytic ancestors, but also with its contemporary narrative and solution-focused opponents[11]. As we discussed above, today's client-centeredness seems aligned with a manipulative directiveness articulated either with a pragmatics of effect or with a seemingly radical constructionist idea of shaping motives by naming them (as in solution-focused therapy). In either case, the disturbing, disconcerting, or emancipating ways in which affect points beyond the projection screen of the therapeutic space are ignored. This indicates the limitations of psychotherapy as

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11 A study of the inverse tradition, prominently psycho-drama and the Gestalt therapy of Perls and his successors, from the point of view of SCHAT – but beyond the mere identification of the obvious shortcomings of their notion of emotional release – would be an interesting future project, since Gestalt in so many ways is directly complementary to Narrative therapy.

such. Neither clinical paternalism nor the more recent pragmatic formalism can harness the potentials of art as a 'social technique of emotions', since these potentials are indissociable from its dissensus and its radical assumption of equality (Rancière, 2009). At the end of the day, recognizing emotions is like all other kinds of recognition (Taylor, 1995): A humanism that cultivates others only by also cultivating ourselves. In order to do this, we must, in other words, *overcome the standard of psychotherapy* as a tool for reflecting and organizing practice.

Dissensus implies breaking with any assumption of identity between an utterance, its motive, and its (emotional) impact on the receiver. The reflexivity performed with the projection screen of the counselling activity itself is in fact never fully understandable in diagnostic terms, neither as directive or client-centered. These conceptualizations are straightjackets. The problem is not so much whether reflection is accurate; rather, it is what comes of it – and what comes of it is never just cure, nor just the private self-reflection of a customer.

Allow us to illustrate our point further with another artwork. In Louise Bourgeois' installation "In and Out" depicted here below[12], even a 'cell' full of mirrors can do little more about hysteria than name it (and thus cage it). Meanwhile, life seems to escape, to flow and grow as the absurd alien pink substance outside the cage.

Figure 2
A woman is looks at artwork

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12 This image was purchased by the author from https://www.gettyimages.dk/detail/news-photo/woman-is-looks-at-artwork-room-9-in-and-out-at-the-louise-news-photo/464483822

Note: Munich, Germany – February 26: A woman is looks at artwork 'Room 9 In and Out' (1995) at the 'Louise Bourgeois. Strukturen des Daseins: Die Zellen' exhibition preview at Haus der Kunst on February 26, 2015 in Munich, Germany. (Photo by Joerg Koch/Getty Images)

In this way, performing the self mediated by aesthetic documentation is recreating and developing it – not just caging, picturing, curing or manipulating it. Returning to the activity of talking about one's motives, it becomes relevant to examine what happens if we *impose the standard of aesthetic documentation* rather than the standard of psychotherapy. In other words, if we take that activity as a 'ready-made' that becomes a work of art by being framed as such 'at an exhibition', like Duchamp's famous pissoir named "Fountain"[13].

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13 Whether or not that was really the work of Elsa Von Freytag-Loringhoven, as recently claimed by, among others, Siri Hustvedt.

For one thing, it would help us appreciate art in forms that appear sometimes unnoticed in everyday life. Thus, in the memory work session prior to the one quoted in the beginning of our text, Eric recapitulates Morten's initial explanation about our research theme, *motivation*:

> Okay. An example: So, Trine (counsellor) asked me this same thing, and then she went on to ask directly, too: "What might motivate *you* to stop smoking grass?" And my answer was this: "We-ell, a trip to Africa wouldn't be too bad!" (laughter).

Learning from (among others) Paul Willis (2001), we can regard Eric's joke as a work of art. The joke has specific genre conventions that we all recognize and which Eric uses in a visibly stylized way in order to create a paradox. The counsellor's client-centered talk of 'motivation' is deconstructed by Eric's absurd exaggeration, yet precisely this presents us with the 'blues hope' utopia (Mattingly, 2010) of a 'change' that would be radical enough to actually help him form new motives. Sadly, it is this deep truth that is absurd enough for us to laugh about.

Similarly, we can return to Sue's statement:

> But I guess, too, I sometimes experience, that, when I'm doing/feeling as bad as I can ever possibly get … then I get, like, even more motivated that, "why, I can get even worse!" You know – sometimes when everything is going to hell, I think: "You know what? Fuck that!"

This is not so easily recognized as art. But we can begin by assuming (with Rancière) an equality of intelligence in this 'poetics of practice'. Sue has not attended MI training, but she has trained in verbal self-report most of her life (cf. Billig, 1999); she seems able to deploy that feigned uncertainty, the within-turn pauses, and the cliff-hanger effect that Carr and Smith identify, just the same. And she does accomplish a 'complex transformation of feeling': We are baffled by her dissensus, by the way that what she says does not make sense at all, yet is immediately recognizable, sensuously felt as a credible expression. She seems

to insist that 'we know' how it feels to address one's sensible self aggressively. But do we? The assumption that we *would* know is built into the framing of this 'group session' long before she mocks it to make us doubt it, to make us question what it is we feel when we identify. Moreover, even if the ensuing conversation proceeded to suggest various reasons for such self-harm to be after all reasonable – e.g. 'she gains control of her misery' – these attempts capitulate in the face of the glaring contradiction that forces us to paradoxically recognize Sue's self-cancellation as reasonable subject. Her utterance insists on pointing to the limits of this whole project of self-learning, by metaphorically crafting the 'absurd alien substance' of her ugly motive that takes shape outside it.

But are Sue's motives and feelings objectified into socially recognized artworks? This question is crucial for any reflection of art that does not wish to achieve its universality at the price of dissolving it (cf. Groys, 2008). In the example with Eric's joke, we can still point to his orchestration of a special event using genre conventions that we share – thus, to 'ritualized' aspects of practice that may be unnoticed, but which serve to objectify the joke nonetheless. At the very least, our laughing recognizes Eric's utterance as a joke, no matter how routinely.

With Sue's utterance, it seems less obvious. But this may be because it is even closer to us. The objectification and recognition of her utterance is in fact going on *right here, in this very text*. More generally, it takes place in the infrastructure of artifacts and communities Sue entered when she participated in the memory work sessions, and which we enter by writing and reading this. The performativity of our research is realized as we, mediated by artifacts such as this text, engage in the politics of those infrastructures.

In Louise Bourgeois' work, our own non-reciprocated gaze into that porous space of the cage is perhaps what is most troubling; is this, our complicity, what she helps us see?

We might compare this to the tradition in psychotherapy of recording sessions for training purposes, that is, for audiences into which clients are never invited. Such redcordings seem directly continuous with the practice of displaying patients with pathologies in psychiatry lectures that was common until the middle 20ᵗʰ century.

But in the systemic-constructionist and narrative traditions, these recordings can be said to emphasize and actualize (rather than invent or create) the general structure of professional objectification into which sessions are inscribed. In this way, they have actually helped problematize this asymmetry by encouraging therapists' self-reflection. In 'narrative practice', this movement toward equality is furthered by the practice of orchestrating 'outsider witnessing', by poetic recapitulation, and by various methods of inscription such as writing on whiteboards of which clients take snapshots with their smartphones, writing letters to clients, using those letters as institutional case files etc. (Bank and Nissen, 2017, Nissen and Barington, 2016). The counsellors at U-turn have worked in many ways with such 'recognition' of what clients say by recording, objectifying, modelling, recreating it, including as artworks. As an example, the first version of Sebastian's *Give a Story* video was when he, in a group session, overwhelmed everyone by suddenly standing up and singing those lines. This event inspired the subsequent creation of his art video.

In that sense, our imposition of the standard of aesthetic documentation is itself performed as artwork, in that it recreates Sue's utterance as a dissensual artifact. From this point of view, we can hypothesize that Sue's words were never intended as a clear and unequivocal statement of motive. Rather, perhaps, it was the *motif* of ambivalence in regard to taking care of herself, which, with this statement and with its inscription here, was given a form. Our text then becomes what we call a *catalogue text*; a text that achieves its purposes in a dialogic relation to artworks, a relation of mutual recognition and co-construction. At

the same time, it troubles the neat distinction between art and theory because it cannot but create metaphorical *double entendre* even as it attempts to deconstruct or reflect contradictions[14].

Finally: Death strolls between letters...

But watch out! There is one 'ugly pink substance' that seems about to escape from the cage of mirrors into which we have attempted to lock us up in this text. We may be recognizing Sue as an artist, but how do we grasp her self-destructive 'motivation' for 'getting even worse'? Have we overcome therapy to the extent that we are now happy with poetic renderings of self-destruction, with such marvelous artistic sacrifices as those of Jim Morrison, Kurt Cobain, or Amy Winehouse in the back of our minds? We hope not.

Overcoming is sublating, superseding, not simply substituting. Aesthetic documentation is still committed to human growth and flourishing, to expanding agency, even if it does not take the form of 'cure'; and so must we be, with our performative texts that rearticulate it. We might take solace in the idea that Louise Bourgeois and many other artists probably nourished from their aesthetic work; but we would not truly recognize Sue's utterance if we were only to take it seriously with the shudder of an art consumer. More generally, Rancière's concept of dissensus is unhelpful if it is simply read negatively, as a refusal of any positive ethics; rather, it is part of a political philosophy (Rancière, 1999) that can be said to rely on and unfold an ethics of expanding agency as communal production and control of our forms and conditions of life[15].

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14 This idea is developed from Boris Groys' (2008; 2016) analysis of the mutual infusion of theory and art, as well as Rancière's notion of a 'poetics of knowledge'.

15 This way of rendering an ethics of agency – or action potence – was developed in the German-Scandinavian branch of SCHAT and critical psychology, cf. Osterkamp (1976).

But recognizing Sue's motive requires that we recognize the *motif* of ambivalence toward her self. This implies that we must move beyond the functionalist presuppositions on which the concept of motivation is typically premised, even in its SCHAT versions (cf. Nissen, 2019).

We should perhaps warn the reader, at this point, that such a move beyond the presuppositions of functionalist realism that typically frame psychological articles on motivation expands the range of concepts and the complexity of the argument.

At the memory work sessions, we overstepped the boundaries of 'motivation' a number of times. Thus, Lucy had written her text under her (slightly altered) headline "I was once motivated". It began like this:

Today, I am not sure what motivation is.

It's a lie.

Today, motivation feels like emptiness. It is gone.

Or, not quite. I am motivated for other things

A healthy lifestyle w. exercise and good food

Going out to get fresh air

To quit smoking

Putting structure to my life

Remembering to be myself and "do-me"

Taking care of my family

That people are happy and feel comfortable

To gain respect for myself

To breathe

How can you be motivated to move on if you can't stand the place you are at now?

Lucy's initial despair seems released by a list of motivations as "other things", a list that moves in the general discourse of lifestyle and self-improvement. But the lists ends with a bridge: In the ensuing discussion, Lucy first explains that "To breathe" is about remembering to inhale deeply rather than hyperventilate, as a physio-therapist has taught her; but, as it turns out eventually, it has a double sense. It also means *to live*. Lucy is still, two years after her brother's death by heroin overdose, not sure that she wants to live. This is why the paradox of the following final line makes sense.

Lucy had taken us beyond those "other things" that we are busy with while life happens to us (to paraphrase John Lennon). Outside of, and prefiguring, the rational standards of motives structured as ends and means, there is life as opposed to death. It did not surprise us much, then, that Lucy would secund Sue's initially quoted "Fuck that!"-utterance thus:

Lucy: That's where I'm at, too

Sue: Yeah?

Lucy: When I, when I am already half-way into disaster, then I might as well…

Sue: Then I might as well push it all the way to where it no longer holds, like…

Lucy: Out where one thinks, "okay, that was..." (laughs)

Sue: Precisely

Lucy Yes. Then you might as well.... really, you know… *now* we're living! Like ...

"*Now* we're living!" connotes to the concept of 'bare life' (Agamben, 1998); the reduction to mere survival is what highlights 'life', as opposed to 'death'. This almost a vitalist move is a strong way of problematizing 'motivation', and it seems to also pose a problem to any articulation based on a theory of practice or activity.

We can find the same problem in Schüll's (2012) wonderful ethnography of machine gambling in Las Vegas. Schüll finds circuits of control that encompass socio-technical arrangements, including both the gambling machines now psychologically designed, optimized for 'keeping the customer in the shop', and the Gamblers Anonymous sessions. The gamblers are often both providers and users in both places. These circuits are upheld by strong forces, including economic interest, but also by a paradoxical desire of the gamblers to be and to remain in a 'zone' of non-subjectivity, free of any responsibility, choice or action. Characteristically, Schüll looks to Freud's 'death drive' for analytic resource; and, just as expectedly, that leads to little more than a way of naming the issue (not unlike Louise Bourgeois' strange pink substance). Freud's wish to overcome clinical functionalism should certainly be acknowledged, but we may hope to do more than repeat such an abstract negation.

In our dialogues with U-turn, we have suggested a way to move it further that is informed by philosophies of the self that highlight moments of self-overcoming. This approach takes the self to be – in Søren Kierkegaard's words –

> ...a derived, constituted, relation (...) a relation which relates itself to its own self, and in relating itself to its own self relates itself to another. (...) The self cannot of itself attain and remain in equilibrium and rest by itself, but only by relating itself to that Power which constituted the whole relation (Kierkegaard, 1980, p. 14).

We propose, though, to remain atheists and take Kierkegaard's "Power" (a.k.a. God) to be an alienated rendering of human community – like Bateson does in his famous analysis of the 'Higher Power' of Alcoholics Anonymous, with reference to Durkheim (Bateson, 1972). But let us remain respectful, too. As such, it is more than simply a way of stating the general socio-cultural mediatedness and contextuality of the self. This takes us beyond the

reach of most of the SCHAT tradition (cf. Nissen, 2012 a, 2013 a). The subject is *constituted* in reciprocal (but not symmetrical) power relations, relations of recognition. When selves are performed, they are not only *constructed* (as if by some preexisting constructing meta-subjective agency of the individual), but continuously re-*constituted* in these relations[16].

As it is mythically represented by Kierkegaard – and retained in Althusser's concept of interpellation (1994), even if not in most receptions of it – it is the singular or individual collective, which recognizes the equally singular person as subject.

However, in contrast to the idea of God, the collective is itself not something pre-given, but co-constituted. It is the simultaneous individuation of the person and the collective (cf. Simondon, 1989). As it is clearly visible in the relations between the (democratic nation) state and its citizen-subjects, I's and We's constitute each other continuously (cf. also Stiegler, 2010). This implies *transcendence*. In the moment of constitution, we must refer beyond ourselves for the meaning with which 'we' can make sense. We always constitute ourselves on a horizon of hope, as an "imagined" or "coming community" (Nissen, 2012 a, Anderson, 1991, Agamben, 1993, Esposito, 2010, Mattingly, 2010, Bloch, 1995)[17]. Finally, it implies *submission*: At the moment of reconstitution, the agent-subject is subjected, surrenders her self to the Other, to the collective that is in the same moment reconstituted. The self that she surrenders is, at this moment, stripped of her agency, exposing the 'bare life' of human being.

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16 These processes of constitution are key to a practice-based reinterpretation of much of the mystery of the unconscious, the oedipal conflicts, etc., as the best contemporary readings of psychoanalysis confirm, e.g. Balibar, 2017, Stiegler, 2010; Zizek, 1999.

17 "Community" is the right term here, rather than "collective", not only with reference to these theories, but also because it is proto-collective, not yet constituted.

This 'passive' aspect of subjectivity has not been easy to integrate into SCHAT, perhaps because it has been articulated so much with religious and psychoanalytic mythology, and appears antithetical to agency. It is here that we must keep in mind the dialectical legacy that connects us through Hegel with Kierkegaard, Mead, Kojève, Lacan, Derrida, and others. Not least, it is indispensable when we approach the issue of addiction, for many reasons, including the world-wide prominence of the 12 step fellowships, which, directly opposing pragmatic psychotherapy, emphasize submission as the 'cure of the self' (Keis, Nielsen and Nissen, 2016).

On this background, Sue's and Lucy's invocation of self-destruction can be articulated as aesthetic invitations to reconstitution by and of emergent collectives. In common sense words, these are cries for help and care – but precisely cries for help and care that are radically different from those which we know about in our common sense. This difference is crucial. It is at first an abstract negation of common sense as they construct a 'liminal zone', a zone of indecision, of ambiguity (cf. Stenner, 2016, 2018). Is this 'zone', like the gamblers' zone in Schüll's (2012) description, an antechamber to death? Perhaps it is! Or, perhaps it is a 'zone' of metamorphosis, of a 'blues hope' of rebirth, indeed of a 'proximal development' that is not to be domesticated into a linear developmental teleology by a 'know-it-all' schoolmaster.

Note, however, that this reading of liminality is dialectical: It does not reduce the indecision of the zone to a mere hybridity, but engages with its contradiction. The pivotal moment that frames the zone can only be grasped in a normative and performative approach that itself co-constructs the hopes of reconstitution. The recognition of the art in Sue's and Lucy's utterances that took place in many ways at U-turn, and takes place here in this text, can only include a recognition of the dramatic and real possibility of death by also invoking the 'we'

who interpellates them as participants in projects that negate the present situation by unfolding life as more than mere survival (see also Nissen, 2013 a, 2014).

The most disturbing lesson to be had from Sue's and Lucy's self-destructive zones reminds us that dialectics should not be reduced to the consolation of a messianic teleology in which we can, after all, endow them with function. That would be just the kind of 'functionalistic dialectics' that Derrida, Ranciere and others (including many Vygotskians) struggle to overcome. Rather, dialectics is 'just in time' (Jensen, 1999). It emerges here with us. It may be that the liminal zone is later to be reconstructed as a germ cell, a zone of proximal development, but first we must live up to the reality, the drama, of indecision. In order to do this, it is not sufficient to simply invoke an abstract notion of temporality or process. At the heart of a cultural-historical approach lies a dialectics that recognizes paradox and contradiction as constitutive also of the artifacts with which we deal with such moments and processes, when they are long passed or repeated – the text in which they become theory and the works in which we see them as art. When we recognize and co-construct Sue's and Lucy's texts and utterances as works of art – with this and other catalogue texts – the paradoxes and ambiguities they perform are recreated. Any interesting work of art would create dissensus, a clash of senses. And any truly relevant analysis would reconstruct them with theoretical concepts that are themselves evolving in contradictions[18].

But perhaps the most basic contradiction is implied already in objectification as such. As it has been discussed by Derrida (1981), Butler (2005), Balibar (2017) and others, the very externalization of the self into (written) language or material art is a self-effacing surrender

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18 Thus, for instance, the rearticulation of the Freudian death drive which is attempted here contains the contradiction that subjectivity is at once self-reproduction and self-overcoming. Or, we could move further into other theorems such as (diffuse) affectivity versus (focused) emotion as moments that presuppose and oppose each other in emerging practices and their motives (cf. Whetherell, 2012, Nissen and Sørensen, 2017).

to a cultural continuity that stretches far beyond any human life. According to Taylor (1975), this is already the main point in Hegel's rearticulation of the Christian myth of resurrection. In that sense, "death strolls between letters" (Derrida, 1978, p. 87) of any text. Death, as a reduction of the living to the static, the frozen, the (for all practical purposes) eternal; but also as a resurrection. Through different types of art, the estrangement of our selves as dead objects – in libraries, museums and on internet sites – is what may emancipate us:

> In fact, total aestheticization does not block, but rather enhances, political action. Total aestheticization means that we see the present status quo as already dead, already abolished (Groys, 2016, p. 110).

Aestheticization may in this way enable a reflexive distance which emphasizes the social and historical situatedness of our selves. Emancipation affects and engages us as a 'coming community' imagined with these artifacts. However, the 'we' who now, hopefully, is a part of this is itself dissensual, contradictory, as will be its eventual constitution as collective. Utopias as imagined possible collectives are vital, but the future is only present as imagination carried by artifacts with contradictory meanings and dissensual experiences. It is with such artifacts that we negotiate who we are, as who and what we may become[19]. We should not fool ourselves – or oppress each other – by imagining a return, nor even a turn, to a collective of common sense that does not arise from or evolve into deferred meaning (cf. Lave, 2008). Rather, the community of any collective worth wanting to constitute is achieved precisely by struggling with inequalities and 'dissensuses' constituted by some kind of diversity; and by, in the same movement, learning to transform its defining categories and senses. What unites and defines us is the "politics inherent in" an art that "has broken the rules which make definite forms of feeling and expression correspond to

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19 We can always imagine something beyond those singular, earthly artifacts, but then precisely as pure transcendence, as that which is to come, as *l'avenir* (Derrida, 2005).

specific characters or subject matters" (Rancière, 2009, p. 87). Such, we believe, are the collectives that we keep struggling to constitute (our selves with) in and around U-turn, its 'groups', and its aesthetic documentation practices.

Conclusion

Attempting to write dialectics in this text, let us conclude with ourselves: We who write and read this article. Any writing on selfhood is self-refuting if it remains 'about', if it does not proceed to perform and self-reflect on its performativity. This makes it just as impossible to arrive at closure as Hegel famously claimed it was to establish a firm point of departure.

Following the suggestions from our artist-counsellor collaborators, we have proposed aesthetic documentation as a way to understand and articulate – and thus to transform – practices of the self that would usually be regarded as psycho-therapy, counselling, or social work. To this end, reflections on art by theorists such as Vygotsky, Groys, Bourriaud, and first of all Rancière, have seemed useful. Here, aesthetics is a "specific regime for identifying and reflecting on the arts", as "modes of doing and making" with "corresponding forms of visibility" (Rancière, 2004, p. 10). We have given hints to suggest that the 'poetics' or 'style' of conversation is thus not only highlighted and affirmed as such, as Carr and Smith seem content with achieving, but also criticized and rearticulated. This is what opens to an unfolding of aesthetic documentation beyond the confines of therapy. For this, aesthetics employs a deeper conceptualization of the arts as practices, one that appreciates mediation, objectification, and socio-cultural transformation.

On the one hand, we are familiar with this already from the Vygotskian tradition. But as the radical equality and the dissensus created with artworks achieve prominence, we are forced to consider anew some existential dimensions of the self that we Vygotskians have mostly ignored: The self as relating to ourselves as living and dying; but also as self-

overcoming, constituted in dramas of recognition that co-constitute community as collectives. For these aspects of the concept of the self, we have referred to philosophers such as Hegel, Kierkegaard, Derrida, and Butler. Their work may appear far-fetched and in some ways alien to us Vygotskians with our focus on agency. However, doing so seemed the only way to address the problematizations of agency that Sue and Lucy performed so convincingly. They reminded us how deep we must dig if we are to rearticulate the contemporary ideology of 'motivation'. Our claim is that this 'post-Vygotskian' move is required if critical practice studies want to engage in the relations of recognition that constitute collectives to include people who are currently marginalized by the contemporary motivation ideology. On the other hand, at this point, if not before, the question arises whether *you,* dear reader, are still with us. Are we overstepping or pushing the boundaries of what can be recognized in academia as Critical Practice Studies?

 Of course, academia is founded on the hope of constituting more enduring communities. It is a vital quality of research that its writing constructs a perspective on situated historical practices *sub speciae aeternitatis*. This seems to invoke the problematic image of an eternal community, a City of God modernized as a World of Science, emancipated from the burden of any earthly politics[20]. We cannot reflect ourselves except through a critical rearticulation of this image. This rearticulation begins with the contradiction inherent in the historicity of precisely that construction of eternity. Not, however, in the shape of a global critique of Modernity, to which the hidden dream of a post-modern, radically emancipated "community of those without community" (Derrida 2005) would remain constitutive. We must affirm the flip side of the paradox, too, that it is only by transcending historical singularity that

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20 Or at least of all politics except the totalitarianism of The One and Only Politics to Finish all Politics – that which Rancière calls 'meta-politics' (1999)

historicity can be reflected as such, in science as in aesthetics[21]. We cannot but keep trying to transcend the situated, even if in situated ways.

If the aesthetic regime discerns new distributions of the sensible, new makings of sense, the theoretical regime constructs new accountabilities, new ways to think and argue meaning. In the Novum, the moment of newness as such, the two overlap. But we enter into it with an awareness of the great continuities that any one person or collective can only slightly modify. A socio-cultural-historical approach recognizes cultural tradition – aesthetic, scientific, theoretical, etc. – as practices, artefacts and societies with deep roots still alive, yet subject to radical transformations. This suggests a more modest reflection on our motives for writing and reading articles like this. With the exponential growth in text and archives, our surrender to the transcendence of cyberspace will not be easily sublated in the form of our resurrection as founding fathers or mothers, nor as legitimate heirs, or even as torch-bearers, of a (Vygotskian, Marxist, Hegelian etc.) dynasty.

We must face the contemporaneity of our hopes for the future. It is these we construct here. The future is present. By evoking the imagined future reader and the world in which she may find our arguments persuasive and relevant, these hopes defer meaning and remake sense as ways to act, to practice, to live, as human beings.

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21 Cf. to this Derrida's critique of Foucault in "Cogito and the history of madness", Derrida, 1978

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