

Editorial

It is with considerable satisfaction that we have been able, finally, to continue the publishing of the *Outlines*. We must haste to excuse the delay of almost half a year in the publishing of this issue, and express our hope that our readership have been, if concerned, then not entirely put off.

From this issue on, the *Outlines* is produced and issued by the *University Press of Southern Denmark*. We are greatly enthused by this, since we are confident that this publisher is better able to handle an international and interdisciplinary journal such as ours.

This issue is a lot about science, artifacts, and discourse as constituents of human subjectivity. One might say that, in continuity with earlier materials, and even with whole issues on technology and social practice, we attempt to close the gap after our temporary absence with flashing one of our strong points. As Ernst Schraube has pointed out, mainstream psychology's attempts to model human thinking on machines has long kept it from the question of what matters about machines in people's lives (Schraube, 2003). This is one area, then, where off-mainstream approaches such as cultural-historical activity theory and critical psychology, social practice theory, actor-network-theory, and foucauldian genealogy – approaches all represented in this issue – have a head start.

Of course, the first thing one needs to realize is that “artifacts”, “machines” etc. must be considered in broad terms if it is to be reflected how we shape our lives with them. Terminological questions aside, it is advisable to em-

brace the possibility of viewing forms of coercion in prisons as technologies of subjectivity, as well as seeing complex machineries as embodying relations in acts and practices. Some of that range is represented in this issue, and we do not at all suggest that we know where or whether to find some organizing principle that will make it all fit nicely together. Neither do we imply that any range of artifactualities or any structure of objectified knowledge should be regarded as sufficient representations, or complete regulations, of the everyday lives of living humans, nor can we be sure, for that matter, that it would be possible or desirable to draw a definite line of distinction between what is artificial and what is human. As Michael Cole puts it, human thinking *is* artificial.

Michael Cole, whom we are pleased to welcome back on the pages of the *Outlines* (his last appearance was in our ancestor *Udkast* 15 years ago), takes on the dazzling challenge of addressing equally audiences of activity theory and cognitive science. So he traces cognitive science as an endeavor which originally included the kind of cultural aspects which are at the center of activity theory, and which might do it again; he suggests that “the topic of culture as conceived of by cultural-historical approaches and in cognitive science is worthy of consideration in thinking about the development of both disciplines”. This presupposes precisely a cognitive science which no longer confuses the properties of the socio-cultural system with those of the person. Thus, in order to map out those socio-cultural systems, we need clear conceptual distinctions between human and artifact.

Even our past may be artificial. We can learn from Middleton & Murakami's paper on remembering and reconciliation that memory isn't at all a mechanism-object located in someone's skull. When we remember, when we deal with the past, we create and deal with objects that constitute communities and vice versa. This, of course, is no news for those who have known about the work of Middleton and colleagues on collective remembering. What is particular, here, is more the way in which that theoretical proposal is developed with the help of actor-network theory as well as veteran prisoners of war. What emerges is an account that is opposite Cole's in that it deliberately blurs the distinction between human and non-human elements, and then must set out in search for other ways to achieve closure and establish discrete entities for analysis. Dave Middleton presented their paper at a guest lecture in Copenhagen in April, and we are happy to pass it on to our readers.

Erik Axel takes us in another direction. His theoretical deliberations were first performed at the defense of his doctoral dissertation "Regulation as productive tool use" in the summer of 2002 in Roskilde, Denmark. Axel stays firmly within an account of human agents who use machines, however complex, as tools. The empirically grounded reworking of socio-cultural and critical psychology which his dissertation reflects is first and foremost situated. It is a call for concreteness, and, as such, pitted against any attempt at a scientific formalization of human activity which does not recognize its limits as tools that will always enter into a concrete, manysided praxis and negotiation. This argument is taken into even the tiniest details of regulation in the control room of a district heating system in order to demonstrate the general impact of everyday activity.

Huniche's paper also presents her doctoral thesis which is as loyal to theoretical humanism as is Axel's in seeking out the ways in which medical genetic knowledge form part, and only that, of how people with a disposition

for Huntington's disease deal with genetic risk in their conduct of everyday life. The critical aim is directed at not only the formalisms of the rationalism which underlies most genetic counseling, but also the ways in which its inherent individualism keeps us from facing major practical and ethical issues that surface once we simply start talking with people about how they collectively or individually get along with their histories, their daily lives, and their prospects with a hereditary disease as part of the landscape.

Jefferson, finally, opens the venue of an approach to activity which is a good deal less tied up in humanism, but in dealing with issues that are most often conceived as social relations, as therapeutic discourses and practices in a British prison are discussed with reference to Foucauldian conceptions of power. Yet as is the case with all the papers in this issue, even though they seem to point in quite divergent – even opposite – directions in some regards, the general theoretical backdrop (or network, or community ...) which co-constructs the Outlines as a sense-making forum of debate, shines through. Perhaps, in particular, in the not-quite-so-anti-humanist way in which Foucault is appropriated into the fragile hope "that sites of therapeutic discipline might actually be "visionary spaces" and sites of genuine struggle both for prison staff and prisoners where change for the better both for individuals, organisational/relational structures and society might be facilitated".

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References

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