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To Be *and* not to Be

The Subjectivity of Drug Taking

Summary

The paper encircles the subjectivity of drug taking as one form of contemporary practice in which fundamental theoretical issues are dealt with. In particular, following Mariana Valverde's genealogy of alcohol regulation (Valverde, 1998), the question of the free will, and the paradox of the simultaneous being and non-being of the autonomous subject, are viewed as present in various approaches to drugs. The current neo-pragmatist wave substitutes low-key practical notions of habits for a dichotomy of free will or determinism. The concept of objectification promises to overcome that dichotomy by externalizing it; in terms of this concept, we can distinguish the abstract-imagined 'fix' from a genuinely transforming realization, and suggest that ours is the age of the fix, of instrumental commodities that change us in ways we do not intend. But, it is claimed, an inescapable issue of the self-dissolution of the subject remains; perhaps in the definitive shape of a suicide, or in the minor shapes of fixes such as a tactics of feigned surrender, New Age Higher Powers, or imagined communities. Determined to realize the idea of a benevolent surrender of the subject, the paper ends in an attempt to contribute to the coming to an understanding of herself and with herself of a person who finds herself at the troublesome intersection of Narcotics Anonymous and a social work development network of Copenhagen City called Wild Learning.

En-trance

To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come?

Shakespeare: Hamlet

In that most famous line in drama history Shakespeare definitely misunderstands himself: the question is, in fact, to be *and* not to be. What Hamlet *really* speculates, is that it's our paradoxical fear of the dreams we might dream when we are no more that prevents us from wishing to die. "Thus conscience does make cowards of us all", he claims. For conscience seems to be that by which we can be when we are not: that religious phenomenon which we can project into that "undiscover'd country from whose bourn no traveller returns".

The ease with which religion stretches ethics beyond death has certainly diminished since Shakespeare, at least in the quarters of the modern world into which the networks of

Outlines reach. But the fundamental paradox inherent in Hamlet's speculations on the positive qualities of non-being, the activity of rest, and the cowardice of conscience, must not rely on religion to express itself. This paper sets out to explore the subjectivity of drug taking starting from the idea that the same paradox permeates the ways we deal with ourselves when we deal with drugs; that drug taking, for better and for worse, holds or sets in motion the contradiction of the subject's self-cancellation (and possible reemergence).

If religion plays a subordinate part in my argument, it is not because ethnographic reports of interactions between drug-taking and religious experience (interactions more intense than the case of the Christian consummation of Jesus' blood as wine) have captured my theoretical imagination. Rather, it is because if we assume that drugs are being substituted for religion as a collective technology of ourselves with which we tackle the paradoxes of being and non-being – and perhaps even with comparably gloomy implications –, then a veritable mountain of references can help us transform and understand ourselves in this respect, as producers, users, objects, regulators, victims, abstainers – in short, as subjects, of drugs.

I picture myself at the foot of that mountain of references drawing only a hazy outline of just a few of its ridges and summits before entering the murky caverns of drugs discourses and practices. With the shape of one obvious peak reversed on my retina, I bow my head and strike the first match with the exclamation: *Opium is the religion of the people*![1]

A Timely Prescription

But what am I doing? Running away into misty obscurity with a half-baked fragment of thought turned upside-down? Of course, it may be sighed, such a reversal is what one should expect from a psychologist ambitioning to grapple with big-time philosophical terms like being and non-being. OK, then, here is my excuse: it is precisely in the hope that such reversals may turn out productive that the *Health, Humanity and Culture* group over the years have arranged cross-disciplinary discussions such as the seminar on *Drugs, Health and Subjectivity* which occasioned this paper. The assumption – argued by Jensen (1999) under the call for a 'philosophy just-in-time' – is that philosophical issues and categories are worked and reworked in the 'smaller texts' of scientific as well as lay practice, so that, whether we like it or not, we are stuck with each other in activities which are philosophy, science, and everyday life at one and the same time; and whether we recognize it or not, we are assuming standpoints in practical affairs while transforming philosophical categories and vice versa. Insofar, it may be as justified for me to continue the psychological tradition of amateur philosophizing as it was for Marx to spend the second half of his philosophical career doing political economy[2].

And further justification is close at hand. Mariana Valverde's excellent contribution to that same seminar, and to our journal (Valverde, 2002), in what I consider to be very much the same vein as Jensen[3], takes up the age-old philosophical issue of truthtelling as ethics and lets us realize how it is

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1 "Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people." (Marx, 1970, 1)

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2 Another route to understanding this phenomenon of 'philosophizing' is through a reception of Gramsci and Brecht, see (Haug, 1980).

3 That is, not in the hope of guiding or being guided to a land of freedom, but in "the desire to understand just what we, in our specific historical moment, are doing." (Valverde, 1998, 21)

performed and transformed in the myriad of small texts devoted to the small-scale authenticity of today's more or less 'intoxicated autobiographies'. Similarly, what made us keen on inviting Valverde in the first place was her illuminating work on how the question of the free will – no less! – was reworked, not only in pragmatist and Foucauldian philosophies on habits and governance, but in the legal and scientific discourses, practices and regulations on alcohol throughout the 20th century (Valverde, 1998).

So: I *won't* yield in the face of the big issues, and we *will* encounter death, religion, and other monsters below, including even Marx' "sigh of the oppressed creature", don't worry!

Still, it appears safer to take off from a point closer to home. Valverde's theme of the free will may serve as a bridge between the paradox of being and non-being and the psychological issues connected with drugs. Even if the concept of 'will', and thus, the intriguing contradiction in a notion of 'diseases of the will', seems quite remote from psychological discourse, much the same problematic pops up in various (medical and) psychological guises, not only in theoretical concepts such as 'motivation', 'self-efficacy', 'ego-strength', or 'conation', but also in practical clinical questions of 'compliance', 'relapse', 'readiness for change', etc. – and, of course, above all, in the scientific or semiscientific conceptualizations of drug misuse as 'dependence'/'dependency', as well as in related diagnostic concepts such as 'psychopathy', etc. There is ample material to begin with in psychology and in the discourse of drug misuse.

The Pragmatics of Human Indulgence

But the obvious classic when it comes to paradoxes of subjectivity, willpower and drugs in psychological practice is an anthro-pologist: Gregory Bateson's famous analysis of alcoholism and the 'cybernetics of self' (Bateson, 1972). Bateson restates the ideology of the Alcoholics Anonymous as the deployment of an absolute dualism of will and determination. The paradox of choosing to surrender to fate, to "a power greater than ourselves" (and the idea of that power itself containing another paradox, the notion of "God as we – each! – understand him") is offered to counter the epistemological flaw of western man's belief in himself as the cause of events that leads him to a futile battle against forces which he does not realize to be also himself.

Bateson's rendering tended to oscillate between, on the one hand, alcoholism as a great curse of humankind, and AA as striking a fundamental epistemological chord and, on the other hand, alcoholism as a psychiatric disease, the etiology of which may now be explained in terms of communications theory, and AA as providing the suitable cure. A generation later, the ethnographic debate has shifted its focus to a slightly different pair of opposites – less foundation-seeking and far-reaching, and much more resistant to any trembling effected by deep contradictions. The choice now appears to be one of identity or habit.

Valverde's interpretation (Valverde, 1998) is written as an alternative to the by now conventional wisdom that AA and other self-help organizations primarily provide identity through collective narratives (Rappaport, 1994; 2000) or rites de passage (Steffen, 1993). Instead, Valverde stresses the pragmatic and small-time technologies of the self provided in the organization by mundane routines, proverbs, rules, etc. Valverde does not, however, as might be expected, only construe what goes on in the AA in the contemporary Foucauldian vein as ethical work. She also appears to leap out of today's discourses by referring to the classic philosophical theme of determinism/voluntarism and
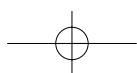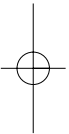
introducing early American pragmatism in the shape of the notion of 'habit' suggested by William James (James, 1950) and John Dewey as something that may mediate or at least soften that dichotomy by being in-between and both one and the other. All the same, Valverde's intervention remains a 'philosophy just-in-time'. The difficult question, then, is just how it intervenes in our practical affairs; does it reproduce or does it transform our understandings, or both?

Both identity politics and pragmatics are sides of today's drugs discourse, and they may even be combined. Consider the curious example of a Danish academic who in the 80's and the early 90's wrote two brilliant social constructionist histories of drug misuse as a social problem and of surveys about the problem (Winsløw, 1984; 1991). Recently, he announced that he had been on drugs when he wrote the books, until he joined a Minnesota treatment facility. But, at least on the face of it, the essentialist belief in the objectivity of disease is absolutely pivotal to that treatment method. So, we asked him at a seminar at our Department, had he made a U-turn? No, he replied, he had merely found that the disease model worked for him….

Such a fashionably ironic and 'postmodern', pragmatic-to-the-point-of-shamelessly-self-contradictory approach to knowledge and to one-self is perhaps not quite at a par with all contemporary ethnographic interpretations of AA; but it may provide an image of the way subjectivity is conceptualized at both ends of that specter. When the self and its ethics is reduced to its various, even local, social or cultural categories, as in the notions of identity, identity work, technologies of the self, etc., a pragmatics of identity is near at hand. These are the categories of what we can sensibly persuade ourselves to take ourselves to be.

And why not? Is there any reason to believe that the grand identity narratives of Mo-

dernity, with its silent norms and its well-described deviant Others, should be of any more a help to our dealing with drugs and addictions? Or that the strive for 'authenticity' so classic in 'intoxicated autobiographies' (Valverde, 2002) should be trusted to transcend the level of what may usefully be deployed as technique? In fact, if the conservative 'war on drugs' policy has been contrary to welfare or social approaches to addiction, it can also be considered their mirror image companion in the passionate fights over world-views and identities, just as, in practical terms, the penal and social institutions have supplemented at least as much as contrasted each other. The problem, then, is not in terms of which image of Humanity we should chase, cure, and correct the addicts, but whether that is a humane use of such images in the first place.

This line of argument would support the current move towards 'harm reduction' policies as the only way to really transcend the deadlocks into which drugs interventions have been enticed.

The pragmatics of harm reduction fits well with an equally modest view of the past and a minimalist approach to causality. Surely, if the addict can be taught to approach himself pragmatically, as the learner, user and object of tricks, tips, proverbs and mottos, and as the both detached and indulged self trying identity categories on for size, it makes sense to assume that this is only because that is what he was like all the time. And that, thus, the taking of drugs itself can be recounted in a pragmatic tone. Rather than construing a deep pathogenic biography in terms of organized crime, social exclusion, family structure or emotional strains – for a psychotherapist or police detective to dig out and challenge – we may then see the road to drugs initiation more profanely as contingent instrumental hedonism.

This is the explicit anti-war-on-drugs mes-

sage in a recent well-founded publication, even as it reports an almost epidemic spread in juvenile drug use in Britain:

> "As we have shown drugs initiation can occur at any stage of adolescence depending on a variety of factors, from availability to the impact of friendship networks, to the contingencies of a particular social scene most notably, at around age 17, being part of serious nights out in town, going out with friends in party mode. This complexity and dynamism, plus the rational, consumerist, hedonistic approach to decision making by young people are still processes which are rarely grasped in public debates about 'preventing' people taking drugs", (Parker, Aldridge, & Eggington, 2001, 78).

In texts such as this, we are persuaded into a kind of no-nonsense approach that will, hopefully, replace the ideological metaphysics of prevention, let alone of the 'war on drugs'.

The mentioning of consumerism strikes a generalizing chord. The consumer is you and me and everybody, and is easily identifiable as such. The familiarity of that concept implies that the drug taker is not after all a diabolic deviant, and that the ways in which his hedonistic indulgence both praises and denies his subjective will are as common as any commodity. The idea of the consumer, like that of habit, hits somewhere between subject and object, and stages a relation between them; the consumer adjusts his preferences to situational contingencies in order to obtain an effect, affecting himself as an object – emerging as a subject insofar as he makes of himself an object.

This is the approach of Gomart & Hennion (1999), writing from an 'actor-network-theory' perspective which in a different way lies close to pragmatism. Gomart & Hennion share the intention of getting beyond the dichotomy of subject and object, and they point a perhaps slightly more radical way out of that trap, attacking the very idea of the subject in action theories. They describe how a drug user, just as well as a music amateur, may be in fact be emerging as a contingent subject in the process of actively submitting himself to a set of constraints and passions.

> "Drugs, like music (or love, or wine tasting…) throw the user neither into social construction and 'pure' ritual nor into chemistry or aesthetics (the mechanical effects of drugs or musical pieces themselves). Skilled gestures and techniques of the body, appropriate dispositions of the mind, obsessive tidiness in installation, organizational control of time and space, quasi-scientific expertise of the objects involved and adeptness in managing their passion as a collective construction of a 'connoisseur's' practice …these practical and social modalities are necessary but do not work by themselves. Our descriptions, observations, and interviews constantly reveal a subtle interweaving between being abandoned to an external power and the virtuosity of practices, of manual, and of social skills. The user passes between active and passive. That is, between 'I am manipulated' (because I agree to it) and 'I manipulate' (an object which is stronger than myself)." (Gomart & Hennion, 1999, 243)

Gomart & Hennion take the ethnographers' typically a-normative stance towards drug use, achieving *Verfremdung* by rendering that chocking deviance mundane and everyday, implying that even if subjectivity is temporarily cancelled, we should not be alarmed since this is what any music amateur is doing on a daily basis. In that sense, they too take the low-key pragmatic route. But they deviate: with the epistemological radicalism of the actor-network theory, they take us away from smooth middle terms right back into the paradoxes of subjectivity and objectivity. And instead of resorting, as do others, to the kind of neo-positivism which shoves the problem (and the subject) out of sight by declaring all things to be simply semiotic factors ('actants') in the production of 'events' – the so-called generalized principle of symmetry – they refer to the dialectics of objectification and subjectification. Semiotics, as it were, is their scaffold, not their cage:

"Semiotics makes it possible to describe the emergence of an effect by referring not to agents but to *'that which* lets/makes happen' (*ce qui* fait faire (…)). For semioticians, this *that which* is the predicate of the sentence; for us, it is the mediating object, the dispositif."(Gomart & Hennion, 1999, 226)

Thus, here, the subject relates to herself and transforms herself, not only mediated by concepts or habits, but by objects made and used as tools. And, with an explicit reference to Gibson's concept of affordances, Gomart & Hennion expand on the idea of a reciprocal transformative relation between the subject and the object:

"Indeed, there is slow interpenetration and reciprocal enabling between procedures, skills and properties of the object on the one hand, and the ever finer capacity of the amateur to perceive them on the other. (…) Only to an expert user is there 'pure' heroin or 'pure' Bach. In competent use, the propensity of drugs and music unfolds. Expertise is not achieved, then, in spite of, or alongside, the materiality of the object". (Gomart & Hennion, 1999, 238)

The Fix

So, a second way to escape the dilemma of voluntarism and determinism in the field of drug taking may be to add the notion of objectification, or simply production. It makes a difference if we take that opposition outside of the body and the self, and we can do that if activity is more than just a movement of the body. The subject escapes the dilemma and transforms herself by producing.

Above all, perhaps, it may be that introducing a third term to mediate the subject's struggle with herself reduces the risk of handling the dilemma by inventing what we might call a *'fix'*.

A fix is a 'thing' defined simply and exclusively as 'that which solves the problem'. I have borrowed the concept from political critiques directed at simple instrumental solutions to complex social problems such as the drug problem – and these critics, of course, borrowed from the poetic slang of addicts who used it to express the most instrumental moment of their selves. In between those spheres, the professional history of dealing with drugs and substances misuse is full of fixes too. Such as the cocaine which was believed to fix the problem identified, in the second half of the 19th century, as morphinism, or methadone a hundred years later, or Antabuse in between [4].

A fix is different from a real tool in that it is nothing more than the negative image of the problem. It remains purely abstract, imagined; or, to be more precise, it is only a fix so long as it does. When it is realized – when it becomes a real tool, an instrument, a technology – it does a lot more, and much else, than solve the problem. It creates new perspectives and new problems. In the drugs field, of course, that lesson has been taught many times, by the unintended social consequences of policies, as well as by the misery in which so many addicts have found themselves when they had believed to be merely having a fix or perhaps just developing a habit[5].

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4 The world of theory is no less familiar with fixes. Regarding the theoretical problem of freedom of the will, such a fix could be James' concept of 'habit' (1950), or Bourdieu's of 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1977). These are concepts with barely any content apart from being designed to solve the problem. What is extra is the displacement of the problem into the body, that is, into a substance which is nondescript with regard to the subject-object distinction, and which is, above all, never unfolded or articulated any further, except in terms of its empty cyclic reproduction over time. Thus, if we interpret Valverde's neo-pragmatism too narrowly and literally as a modest introduction of a middle term of a kind everybody believes to know – since she does not, as did James, envision a development of the idea of habit in neuro-psychological science – her philosophical intervention should be criticized as a fix.

5 The desperate-euphoric connotations of the word, far beyond its instrumentalist etymology, convey this point nicely .

What has also been taught, though, is how far teaching is from learning. Ignoring, and thus confirming, for now, this last lesson, allow me to lecture on about how objectification might do more than fix things.

Here I suggest we learn from Elaine Scarry's (1985) account of objectification. To Scarry, the social world we experience is made in a process of objectification, a building of culture. Historically, this is a progressive process that is constantly opposed by a regressive counterpart: the 'unmaking of the world' toward a purely negative existence of the body in pain which characterizes torture and war; the meaning of the latter being to substantiate the corporeal reality of a powerful ideology.

In what she calls the *arc of creation* – which consists in the projection of human needs into the creation of imagined objects and the reciprocal working of the artifact to recreate its maker – reciprocation exceeds projection:

> "An existing object, by recreating the maker, itself necessitates a new act of objectified projection: the human being, troubled by weight, creates a chair; the chair recreates him to be weightless; and now he projects this new weightless self into new objects, the image of an angel, the design for a flying machine". (Scarry, 1985, 321)
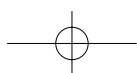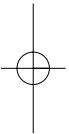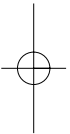
In that sense, drugs are real tools that transform us and the problems we take ourselves to have. Drugs lead us on from a 'negative power' onto a 'positive power' over ourselves; drugs mediate and thus recreate the relation of the self to the self. Drugs, as 'immutable mobiles'(Latour, 1987), seem to be the ultimately material tools for a technology of the self, and they seem to be always projected as fixes but always realized unexpectedly as reciprocating objects.

And no doubt, if we are, in general, to understand how we currently perform and transform ourselves through both ethical practices and objectifications, through creat-

ing and being recreated by material and socio-cultural 'dispositifs', the industrial production and mass consumption of various drugs is an inescapable factor. Drug use is a pervasive cultural fact, not merely, as suggested by O'Malley & Mugford (1991), because its hedonism provides the flip side of a protestant work ethics run amok, or because its dependencies protest the vanity of our belief in autonomy, as its sedations and depressions mock our ravings about an active society, but also, more simply, because the chemically regulated body has become the norm. The vast increase in the prescription of medicine, psychotropic and otherwise, is accompanied by a gradual transformation of foods and drinks into 'functional' instruments of health, and of sports into the engineered building of bodies. The process of medicalization is quite tangible; we have become medicated medicators.

This is why it may make some sense to turn Marx' phrase on religion on its back. Marx used the metaphor of the very simple mechanism of sedation to point to the material workings of that very complicated phenomenon of religion. As his early writings and his critique of Feuerbach's materialist analysis of religion testify, this was not the result of a simple reductionism; but it was probably out of a wish to 'cut the crap' and return to the brutal basics as an approach to 'spiritual' matters. If we can now say that opium is the religion of the people, it is because those same brutal basics, in the shape of simple commodities providing instrumental fixes for the needs they engender, have come to rule the secularized world of the New World Order.

Scarry interprets (following the dialectical tradition) religion as the ultimate artifact, alienated, we might say, as the hidden opposite of the fix: in religion, God is no longer created by humans, God only creates. The fix and the deity, the profane and the sacred, are the two sides of the cycle (or rather: the spi-

ral) of reciprocating objectification, broken apart into a dichotomy in the process of alienation. Perhaps we have taken a turn in that cycle since Marx, so that the created Fix has replaced God the creator on the throne of ideology (an idea not far from what Marx actually predicted in the Communist Manifesto (Marx, 1848)).

Outsiders or Insiders?

But – one could ask, of course – is the use of drugs really something external? Drugs are not only put back into the body, but also thereby reconstitute the psychic functional basis of the subject itself.

Again, medicalization is tangible, perhaps as tangible as one can get. We can reply, with the cannabis smokers who were once asked to comment on Howard Becker's famous thesis in his "How to become a marihuana user" (Becker, 1963) that the high was not an effect of the drug itself, but of learning cultural cues and symbols – that maybe he should consider finding himself another pusher (Hall et al., 1977). It may be that those effects have to be felt, and that their perception is culturally formed and learnt, but that does not mean that they are necessarily mastered, nor that they would be absent in other cultural contexts. The drugs enter the blood stream, affect the brain, and directly change experience.

What could be more internal than that?

This is where it becomes necessary to distinguish conceptually between body, psyche, and subject. As Butler argues, along a curious mixture of psychoanalytic and Foucauldian lines of thought, if the subject is seen to be formed in a process of subjection, then the individual must be more than the subject, there must be an original entity and a residual. The psyche is the totality of the subject and its dark side together (Butler, 1997). If we, on the other hand, as I prefer myself, follow the tradition of cultural historical activity theory,

according to which subjectivity is developed in ontogeny through participation, we reach the same conclusion: the subject is a contingent quality of the human individual who was born with a body that carries a natural history of a billion years of psychic life. The concepts of body and psyche extend beyond that of the subject as features of individuality. I even believe (as will be developed further below) that we can qualify these approaches further by understanding subjectivity to also extend beyond the individual, and by thus exploring the consequences of the fact that the constitution of the human individual as participant-subject in a collective subjectivity presupposes its bodily existence and death, its limited scope and time, the urgency of its needs.

Drug taking explores the relations between the subject and the body. Intoxication is a kind of experience that draws attention to the fragility of human bodily existence as a mode of realization of subjectivity. On the other hand, drugs facilitate and shape our ways of transforming or even avoiding that human condition of pain, exhaustion and gradual clouding of the senses which we have for so long thought that we must be ready to face, in the end if not before. With drugs, the individual subject regulates its bodily ability and propensity for participation or separation. With drugs, communities regulate the shape of their participants, enhancing, inhibiting or forming their participation.

And with drugs, the human individual subject sometimes willfully *surrenders*, to the effect of the drug in her bodily processes, and perhaps thereby to other processes, agents or collectives.

Feigned surrender

Surrender tactics is another classical systemic idea expressed in another specimen of that combination of systemic and religious texts, Jay Haley's essay *The Power Tactics of*

Jesus Christ (Haley, 1986). Let us see where such a bold juxtaposition of profane tactics and the Almighty will take us.

Haley uses the Bible to speak for a notion of a surrender tactics, a 'negative' form of power. He argues that Jesus' tactics of turning the other cheek is similar to a client performing illness to control the behavior of her family and others. And facing an overwhelming super-power like the Romans, surrender tactics was probably the only feasible way.

According to Haley, though Jesus was the most successful political leader in history, he miscalculated the events of his last days. He did not really believe that he would actually be crucified. Hence his final bitter remark about God having left him. But with religious terrorists' Kamikaze tactics freshly in mind after September 11th 2001, it becomes strange that Haley wouldn't even let Jesus Christ die of his own will. The contrast is obvious and also makes one think of the fact that in modern warfare even a handful of dead Westerners is politically disastrous even to the point of ending war: it may be that the secularization of western cultures has finally led us to give up the idea of the ultimate sacrifice. Regrettably, the political predicament resulting from this state of affairs seems to be handled with the fix of a technological shield to make sure that all the victims remain non-Westerners; it would seem that even after September 11th 2001, the purging of death from western self-consciousness continues.

The way Haley's Jesus, like some of his clients, (ideally) escapes death in the last minute and thereby achieves power, makes surrender strangely calculated and paradoxical, if not feigned. The really intriguing idea in the systemic theory of the individual subject's constitution, as a contingent element in the social system of a family, seems to lead Haley on the track to understanding self-sacrifice; but just before he turns around the corner to the most revealing implications, he halts and leaves it open as a paradox which then (contrary to Bateson's paradox) collapses as he retreats to the traditional autonomous individual subjectivity of calculated "power tactics". To Haley, the temporary self-cancellation of agency is really only the intentional self-creation of the powerful subject.

Maybe Haley could have learnt something if he had not, like so many prominent therapists, decided that his therapeutic ideas do not fit cases of drug addiction. If we enter that area of the field where hard-core heroin users are treated, we soon encounter the drug scene's proximity to death, and it seems quite reasonable to ask, with Hamlet: why not take the full step towards a notion of the subject that allows it, not only to exercise freedom working on habits, or to emerge while submitting to constraints, to be actively passive, or to recreate itself in an arc of creation, or to gain power by surrendering, – but actually to dissolve, to die?

Allow me a small anecdotal diversion. As a young psychologist working with drug addicts in the 1980's, I was attracted to systemic psychotherapy as an approach to subjectivity that did not rely solely on the subject's own dilemmas of habit and self-control. One client's death, in particular, impressed me as understandable in a systemic mode. She was a bright 23-years-old who since the age of 15 had indulged completely in alcohol and later heroin. She appeared very masculine and spoke a distinct working-class dialect. But it turned out, not only that she was from a high bourgeois family, but also that she basically thought of her life as part of that family from which she had practically been absent for the last third of her life. The more she, reluctantly, engaged in the business of her own life, the more did her parents seem to emerge as *the* important people to her, and the more did her blue-collar masculinity appear to be an accurately performed counter-image to the family's self-conception. Just before she left our institution for a deliberately staged lethal accident –

taking an over-dose in a public toilet that would *usually* be overseen by a guard who would *usually* interrupt whenever cubicles were occupied for too long – we had managed, with some difficulty, to persuade her and her parents to have a painful conversation. It became perhaps evident to her, once again but more definitely this time, that the only way to influence that family (i.e. her real life) was from far away. And it dawned on me too late that she had in fact been serious when she had explained to me that giving up her own life was an option.

This paradoxical phenomenon of a deliberately planned accident appears to suggest another way in which Haley is rather advanced and trendy: he allows for the subject's skillful mastery, not only of influences and passions, but also of *risk*. As in the cases of the young woman and Jesus, it *may* end in disaster. The image of a risk-calculating, rather than simply intentional, subject makes a genealogical difference on account of the actuarial technologies that can be deployed in prevention campaigns, counseling, security measures etc., and the way these match social and life sciences increasingly based epistemologically on population averages, and increasingly tuned to managing specific contingencies of ever finer-grained sub-populations (Rose, 1999; 2001). It may also make an ideological difference by providing a way of masking the ultimately existential fact of death with the radically anonymous play of numbers.

But there is a 'rub', as Hamlet says: when risks and stakes become as high as with this young woman, or with Jesus, the image of the competent risk calculator breaks down. That is perhaps why the scenes in the film *Deer Hunter* where the Vietnam veteran hero prefers to make a living by playing Russian roulette for bets, rather than going back to his safe but meaningless USA, make such an impression. It is 'risk society' taken to such an absurd extreme that it reveals our struggle to avoid facing our mortality just behind the screen of controlled eventualities.

At this point, there is a need to probe just a level deeper.

Resurrection

The dialectics in the systemic notion of paradoxes is a weak or incomplete version of the dialectics of the subject coming from Hegel (1968; 1988). In the Hegelian account of subjectivity, according to Taylor (1975), the myth of Jesus is the story of subjectivity, but it is quite the opposite story of Haley's. The necessary incarnation of infinite Spirit in finite subjects places the equally unavoidable death at the core of what it means to be a subject, and resurrection is the imaginary form of this re-realization of the unity and resolution of the contradiction of mortal spiritual life. Thus, the idea of resurrection, of reuniting through dissolution, is a fix, in the sense that it is directly identical with the empty negative abstractness of death; it is not the transformation of death, but death seen from another angle. The true transformation of death lies in the self-unfolding of Spirit for which it is the vehicle, not in the image of some eternal ecstasy in Paradise for the individual.

According to Zizek (1993), this is closely connected to Hegel's and his dialectical followers' understanding that freedom is not, after all, opposed to determination, but already implied in it, and vice versa. This, to Zizek (and to Butler, 1997, both based on Lacan), is not only a 'logical', but a profoundly 'existential' point: it is the double bind that constitutes the subject. The subject must set herself against the dependency that founded her, thereby denying her constitution, desperately resisting – while at the same time unconsciously pursuing – her own dissolution. From this angle, some kinds of drug use may be seen as yielding to that drive towards a dissolution that promises the fix of resurrection.

But if the addict's fix is another, curiously commodified, form of the fix of resurrection – an imaginary reunification with Spirit through the dissolution of subjectivity – what exactly is Spirit, in this context, in the age of the Fix, of the brutal basics that Marx substituted for Hegel's idealism? Even if Spirit is in a sense as imaginary as resurrection, that does not mean that it is simply non-existent and should be banned from our texts, but, rather, that it is, at least potentially, as real as the *Realabstraktion* of money value (as in Marx' anticipation of the so-called 'Thomas Theorem'[6] with his emphasis on the social reality of imagined values and imagined Gods alike (cf. Ilyenkov, 1977, ch. 7). And, further, it leads to the idea that, after all, there may be a fourth kind of escape from the dilemma of freedom and determination – beside habits, objectifications, and death: that of the subject's dissolving, not in the negative sense of giving up, but in the positive sense of merging into something larger which must not necessarily remain imaginary, something which may emerge from and transform the fix of resurrection, returning to reconstitute the subject in an *arc of creation* in Scarry's sense.

The High and the Power

As I already mentioned above, that idea is not far from the drugs discourse. Bateson's (1972) analysis explicitly refers to a process of surrendering to a Higher Power. While fighting the bottle means a false autonomy, the subject is reborn, so to speak, through dissolution into the Higher Power of the AA community – a surrender that may be at first feigned, but is subsequently realized: "fake it till you make it". Probing into this notion of a Higher Power may lead us further in our search for a better understanding of the subjectivity of drug taking.

6 "What men perceive as real is real in its consequences"

The AA was the first great self-help movement of the 20th century, clearly based on the confessional ethics of the Oxford movement, but equally clearly distancing itself from religious temperance movements. It can be placed at an intersection as both very modern and rather antiquated, in fact even ancient.

In Bateson's version, it strikes us as modern. At about the time when Bateson's work was published, the idea of a surrender that was neither feigned nor lethal was curiously fashionable. This was when the late George Harrison sang: "Turn off your mind, relax and float downstream – it is not dying". This was at the time when Paul Willis reported young cannabis and psychedelic drug users' philosophy to be that real independence lies in realizing that one is absolutely un-free (Willis, 1976). There is a distinct New Age tone to this indistinct Higher Power, and we may thus suggest that it is something to do with the (late, radical, post-) modern condition.

On the other hand, we can trace these figures of thought a long way back into religious philosophy. A suitable reference here could be Søren Kierkegaard (Kierkegaard, 1980). He will help us locate our discussion both in the continuity of theological thought, and, as a student of Hegel, in contrast to the dialectical philosophy of the subject that was to be taken in other directions by Marx and others.

Kierkegaard's idea of the self is of a relationship that relates to itself and, in relating to itself, relates to Another. That idea is explicitly normative, as Kierkegaard discusses the forms of sinful deviance, the so-called 'despair', against the ideal as a clear formula:

> "The formula that describes the state of the self when despair is completely rooted out is this: in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it." (Ibid, 14)

So, to Kierkegaard, one can – and should – rest, or base oneself, visibly and clearly in the

positing, or foundational, power in order to be realized as oneself. And if one form of despair, or sin, lies in wanting to be oneself in a false way, another form of despair is not wanting to be oneself. On this latter form, the so-called feminine form (ibid., 49), which, when self-conscious, is the form of weakness that comes closest to suicide, Kierkegaard gives us what almost amounts to a psychological description of drug dependence, and *ex negativo* we even get the prescription of a kind of surrender:

> "In despair it cannot forget this weakness; it hates itself in a way, will not in faith humble itself under its weakness in order thereby to recover itself – no, in despair it does not wish, so to speak, to hear anything about itself, does not itself know anything to say. Nor is there any question of being helped by forgetting, or of slipping, by means of forgetting, into the category of the spiritless." (Ibid, 62)

It seems that Kierkegaard, a century before the AA and Bateson, struck the idea of recovery through self-humiliation to weakness and thereby to a Higher Power.

But this is not all. We can trace similar ideas much further back in religious history: Foucault found the idea that false autonomy engenders loss of self-control already in Augustine's (354-430) writing on the problem of lust:

> "He (Adam) rose up against God with his first sin; he tried to escape God's will and to acquire a will of his own, ignoring the fact that the existence of his own will depended entirely on the will of God. As a punishment for this revolt, and as a consequence of this will to will independently from God, Adam lost control of himself. He wanted to acquire an autonomous will and lost the ontological support for that will."(Foucault, 1997, 181)

Drug dependence, seen from that angle, is one form of Nemesis, one logical consequence of the sin of autonomy that has worried spiritual thinkers for two millennia. And it makes sense that dependencies abound when the cultural ideal is autonomy, as in the late Roman Empire and in Modernity.

Should we conclude that *all this time* religion is still religion, even if in this New Age it is mixed with a certain alcoholics' sobriety or a certain hippie high?

I suggest there is a huge difference. Phrasing it as a sin is very different from talking of paradoxes, epistemological flaws or square western values. And it would be a grave mistake – in fact, Kierkegaard would probably consider it a sin – to read Kierkegaard as just an early form of the psychology we know today, with its free-standing individuals, interpersonal problems and interventions.

When we travel from Bateson to Kierkegaard, we disembark into the times of Marx, approaching, in his words, "the heart of the heartless world", while it was still beating.

Now, in the New Age of the Fix, this hardly seems appropriate. The Higher Power Bateson encountered in the AA, the "God as we understand Him", was far from Hegel's all-embracing Spirit or Kierkegaard's Power that posits selves. As Valverde (1998) notes, this is a very individualistic notion of some guardian angel, often referred to as "my Higher Power". The inconsistency of surrendering to something one has simply invented to suit one's purposes can be seen as pragmatically suitable to avoid the struggles that would immediately ensue and split the organization if God were still something much more binding and encompassing, something over which participants could therefore disagree (in the extreme, something they might die for).

But if the AA epitomizes the "power of powerlessness", as Valverde claims, this paradox is precisely the point where it goes beyond the pragmatic spirit in which one might be able to live with such contradictions. The powerful surrender to a Higher
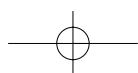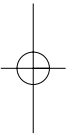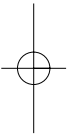
Power cannot be merely the 'small' ethical practices, the 'tips and the tricks' that oppose monolithic notions of power with atomized applications of serially generalized technologies of the self. If the Higher Power is disallowed any unifying communal subjectivity, both the surrender and its powerfulness are reduced to instrumental acts and their effects in readily commodified technological fixes. And this is definitely not the whole story.

Even if the pulse of truly foundational religious powers has faded long ago, it seems we still have a hard time escaping from the older religious forms of understanding when we dig into the dilemmas of freedom and subjectivity deep enough to lay bare the question of being and not being and its possible relation to some kind of Spiritual Power.

Imagined Communities

If there is, indeed, a need to follow through, not just downstream with George Harrison and the other New Age prophets, but on into the much deeper tunnels of our foundations, how do we deal with it? Faced with those traditional religious accounts of subjectivity, we might, as we have seen, simply leave the issue be and reject such idealist and fundamentalist notions of Spirit and God, like Haley rejects the resurrection of Jesus, or like Bateson and associates neglect to mention their dialectical and religious forerunners. That would be the sensible, pragmatic, modern thing to do in a new age. That "pie in the sky when you die" was a fix and may it rest in peace.

If only it didn't keep resurrecting and haunting us.

But there is also the option of following a different path from Hegel – that of a materialist dialectics that does not, as is common, read Marxism as an early sociology of agency, taking subjectivity for granted as given with the individual's body, but rather as

an attempt to approach the enigma of subjectivity in an epistemology of collective practice. In that approach, the religious monster can be seen as an alienated form of society or community. Thus, rather than merely removing the third term in Kierkegaard's relations of the self, we could suppose that some community of human beings is really the Higher Power which posited the self. Or we could, in Althusser's (1983) terms, understand the 'Ideological State Apparatus' as the Subject with a capital S who interpellates the small subject in ideology.

The problem, of course, is that it is not altogether obvious that some abstract idea of a community, or an Ideological State Apparatus, for that matter, is any less of a fix than that of a "God as we understand him", or any less a child of its time. Reviewing my arguments so far, I am aware that I can be read as building an argument for the kind of modernity theory that laments the loss of foundations and value-based communities and criticizes the rise of a system world of instrumental reason. The feeble call for a 'community' just-like-the-ones-we-used-to-know may be construed as just the abstract negation of instrumental individualism, to the point of horror where it converges with the addict's appeal, with religious suffering and charity, and with Bateson's and AA's "God as we understand him" to reveal themselves as manifestations of the evil Fix they were meant to exorcise (see Bauman, 2001; Rose, 1999).

This seems the inevitable consequence of pressing beyond pragmatics, in particular, perhaps, in a time when 'communitarianism' and its operationalization as 'community psychology', 'community work' etc. have replaced labor movements, world revolution, and even welfare states as the discursive counter-image to individualism. Community programs may not quite be what we had in mind to carry the *real* Higher Power, but it seems to be all we have got.

Radical Reality

Instead of accepting that we are stuck in that dichotomy, condemned to alternate between individualism and abstract communitarianism, and arrange what Gergen calls 'inhabitable intelligibilities' for ourselves in it – perhaps retaining memory traces of the greater communities that we once wanted to wither away – why not try, to break the vicious circle, the way of the 'radical evil' suggested by Slavoj Zizek (1993)? The radical evil is what most disturbs the ideologically ordered community; it is the *never-ever* that lies hidden behind the *always-already*. Zizek's method (if we can call it that) is to set out from the 'shadow' side of each of the poles of an ideological dichotomy and proceed to reconceptualize their interrelations in a transformation of their presupposed common framework.

Pointing to the radical evil, Zizek appears utopian. He starts off from the counterfactuality of the Lacanian barred subject, and even refers to early Christian utopianism and mentions its contemporary radical realizations in sects such as the 'Sendero Luminoso' as starting points for reflection. Nevertheless, it is my suggestion that this method can in fact be understood as compatible with Valverde's and Jensen's anti-utopian philosophies just-in-time. The 'radical evil' function of the Sendero Luminoso, for instance, is not the utopian image of a universalization of its sectarian principles, but what might be learnt from its reality in the middle of a New World Order. According to Zizek, it embodies a combination of modern and pre-modern that reverses the western combination of family and market, making visible the disturbing fact that the 'modern' logic of the market presupposes the 'pre-modern' family and thus cannot be universalized.

The really provocative hypothesis is not that a certain utopia can be realized if we turn the world on its head, but that this is just what we are already doing if we turn our image of

ourselves and our world, in certain respects, on its feet again.

Theoretically, this would imply to follow through the whole arc of creation to see in the concrete how objectified communities of realized power and instrumental pragmatism might already be returning to remake us as subjects, and how we may already be in the process of recreating them. If this is viable, we might identify a way of being and non-being, a form of self-transcendence which can be seen to match, and deployed to replace, or construed to interact with that involved in the subjectivity of drug taking.

A Bracketed Experience: The Case of Anna, NA, and Wild Learning

In order to make that point, or, perhaps more realistically, to provisionally outline its features, I need to interrupt my philosophical speculations and return to my own business. Among other things, it has been my business to interview "Anna" in the course of my investigations on the interventions in young people's drug misuse in Copenhagen in May 2002. And I believe Anna can help us on the way here (at least she helped me), since a practical-empirical reference, even if it can only be sketched in the framework of this argument, seems the only way to substantiate the idea of a community as the reality of the Higher Power.

Anna and I both take part in the Wild Learning network in Copenhagen which is organized to enhance and reform the city's provision of services to young socially excluded, criminals, drug misusers, etc.[7] Anna works as a photographer and has done jobs

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7 For more extensive descriptions and discussions of Wild Learning and some of its predecessors, see (Mørck, 2000; Nissen, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2002 a, 2002 b, in press a, in press b).

for the Wild Learning, among other things, the photos at the website www.vildelaere-processer.dk. She has also done odd un-skilled jobs in educational and social work, and increasingly she has been involved in project activities with the social workers and young people of the Wild Learning network, often taking advantage of her skills, work-shop facilities, and network as a photograph-er. She considers herself an absolute amateur in the field of social work and was surprised and flattered to be invited to the monthly meetings of one central network body in Wild Learning called the 'Lodge' where around 30-40 participants meet to discuss various general or specific issues relevant to this social work. But there is a part of Anna's background which both makes her more qualified and, nonetheless, in a certain way makes it more necessary for her to stop and reflect before she thinks of herself as partici-pant in the Wild Learning community of so-cial workers: she is also an addict and a long-time and very enthusiastic member of the Narcotics Anonymous (NA), and she has been doing a lot of 'Service', i.e. organiza-tional work there. When at one of those Lodge meetings Anna announced that her en-counter with the Wild Learning network and the young hash smoking people in and around it had made her rethink the NA dog-ma that there is no way to beat dependence if you haven't 'hit the bottom' yet (and young people often haven't), I leaped to arrange an interview.

Anna approaches me as an interlocutor with just the kind of theoretical interest that I have documented above; following the nec-essary reservations that she does not repre-sent the NA (since nobody does), she en-gages readily in considerations on general ethics, politics, methods – and art.

Art is relevant here because what she tries to do in her art photography is to provide a provoking alternative to the prevailing artifi-ciality of people's self-presentation. Nude

pictures that are neither aesthetic nor porno-graphic but aim to reveal a human being be-hind the veil of self-presentation; a 'scrap-book' of close-up images of her own skin documenting her history with scars, burns and marks; and everyday life pictures from just before and during the first months of her *clean time*. This is one kind of 'truth-telling' technology, then, which she brings with her to the Wild Learning. Not that she thinks that precisely the trope of 'facing one-self' through documentary photography is some-thing a 16-years old confused hash-misusing girl should be persuaded to do, any more than engage in a 12-steps program. In Anna's mind, her art photography is special in that it has no purpose outside of itself, and it is strictly separated from her engagement in Wild Learning. But we can identify a general 'philosophy' in it which also serves as an in-terpretation of the NA experience and a bridge to the Wild Learning.

"Interpretation" it is, for she is certainly not simply constituting herself in the 'NA discourse'. She is that, but she is more, and what is more is being produced in the inter-view (among other places). I would say that with this interview, she is coming to an un-derstand of herself and with herself – this is a process of *Verständigung* (see Dreier, 1999; Holzkamp, 1983). Not because this interview is very important in itself, but it takes part at an important junction in her practices. I shall return to that below.

First, I should let Anna speak for herself. Explaining her more general ethical and po-litical stance, she introduces a moral dilem-ma of community care vs. self-responsibility and concludes that she is perhaps a bit utopi-an; when I then suggest there is a fundamen-tal paradox in the AA/NA philosophy be-tween surrender and choice, she protests that conscience is not about substituting some ab-stractly deduced principles for knowing by yourself what is right:

So in a way it's quite natural. That is, in the way that – maybe I'm a bit Kharma-like, but it's like, if I do well, it must go well, it's very simplified, but there it is. Or Kharma-like: like doing things in the right spirit, maybe there is not always a quick benefit, but then on the other hand it's done the good way, and one can't always see the result, you have to have confidence that it's all right. So, this way one can make it, I can boil it all down to such quite ordinary basic principles, because in fact I also think that in our society one of the problems is that people have to get quick results. Instead of thinking what are the principles in what I do, or what is the idea behind it, they must have results kind of in a hurry. I tried it often in Service, every time someone would come in and say NOW we must do a lot and ta-ta-ta. They come, and then they stay for 6 months at the most, and then some of us are left to sweep up all the broken glass after them, because that's not what it's about. It's about making good- to build a good foundation, make some good decisions and be persistent. And it's often like that, when people make a one-off project, OK, cool, and then they just skate away, but if it's about building a society or building things in one's life, or building this organization to work well etc., it is then that we must have confidence. We need to do things the good way, and it will end up all right. And in... that way you can transfer it, that's how I see the thing with the Higher Power, to hand it over; – it's that confidence which I hand over. But the action I still have to do myself. So I don't see any paradox! (Laughs)

But that aspect about the free choice, that one has to make a choice etc., is often the easiest to understand, or that which matches the contemporary spirit, or something, while the other side about some basic values and a Higher Power etc., runs against the tide, so to say?

Well, not the thing with the Higher Power, because there is so much New Age

Oh, yes, that's right. There is. Yes

But the problem is that, – listen: I have my **own** views on this, OK?

Yes, yes, OK (laughs), I get it!

It is not – perhaps sometimes I've been – sometimes I'm angry about things that I think are wrong or something. But it's still only my opinions, mind you, because it's about what other people do, and it's not always very cool to be wise about that. But it's like – now that you're asking, and I do think this is extremely interesting to talk

about, because I'm never allowed, in particular, unless I complain to some of my friends. But the things that are easy to grasp, it's the thing about the choice, and that with some kind of – the self-realization and the Higher Power and so on. And that's because you can buy a Life in the Light, you can buy 10.000 tons of self-enhancement, or "let's-", "new-age-let's-realize-ourselves"-books, and in – I think in most of them there's a – again, going back to what's behind – there's an egoistic or ego-centered relation to the world, and that is what the NA is **not**. Actually, if you read those principles, it's a humility towards the world, and that is what I **really** love about this program, that it's a community, and it may be that it is more likely a spiritual community than one of those old socialist communities or something. But that humility is important. We can only do it if we do it together.

But what is a spiritual community, here? Certainly not any kind of New Age fix. Not even a community that is limited to dealing with spiritual matters. Rather, it is to do with NA's *form* of engagement with real life issues. It is about life or death, but it is designed to remain precisely 'about' – strictly and purely representational. In the NA itself, it is an important principle that collective decisions exceeding the founding principles should not develop and cumulate, and that even the sponsor's advice remain just that. Beside the organizational pragmatics, this is also out of a pedagogical idea that people only change of their own choice. But Anna insists that all that does not or should not reduce collectivity, as it does not make truly political considerations irrelevant. And that leaves her with a problem.

Anna's problem lies at the intersection between the NA and everyday life as a whole. Seeing clearly that a certain purism is the only way to avoid the organization being instrumentalized or flooded by the kinds of cultures that nurture drugs, how can she stretch the 'Kharma-like' utopian approach to life into the places and communities that matter precisely because they are *not* as inconse-

quential, and which constitute that life which is dealt with representationally in the NA? Among those are, of course, the manifold communities of the surrounding society in which NA members gain recognition for the self-control they exemplify. Also, and more directly, there is the way the NA itself functions to facilitate an informal 'lodge' or network that distributes not only advice, but also resources such as jobs. Thus, Anna's network connections through the NA and through Wild Learning significantly helped her on the way to her current way of earning a living. A third kind of community is even closer to the NA, and as such problematic: a group of NA members have organized a local drop-in center that Anna once attended. But, as might be expected, that place is filled with idle hanging-out, careless flirtation, self-centeredness and occasional dirty language. Anna is very keen to establish, and works hard to maintain, that this place has nothing whatsoever to do with NA. The NA, with its strict ethical principles, is, and must remain, "just a kind of meetings", as Anna says.

Thus, the spirituality of the community lies in the ways in which its foundational distinctness, its specialization, is established and sustained with a specific kind of relation and tension to the comprehensiveness of everyday life. It is an example of the kind of institutions that embody specialized principles which Agnes Heller – in my opinion mistakenly, as we shall see below – takes as characteristic of the state (Heller, 1981; 1985). In Heller's terms, the specialized principles, the so-called 'objectivations-for-itself', are distinguished from the heterogeneous 'objectivations-in-itself' of everyday life, the productive use of tools, norms and rules, and language of the 'human-being-as-a-whole'. Objectivations-for-itself are specialized 'human wholenesses' made according to a definite standard, which may then again return to 'discipline' everyday life as 'objectivations-for-and-in-itself'. In this lat-

ter sense, the way the NA is 'just some meetings' is connected to the way in which it rests on Basic Texts and limits the identity it provides strictly to the category of addiction.

But as we learnt from Scarry's discussion of objectification above, in the 'arc of creation' reciprocation (the reciprocal working of the object to recreate the subject) exceeds creation. When distinct principles are realized in everyday life, a 'cultural surplus' is continuously made which is troubling, and even threatening, yet which also makes any community that defines itself by those principles work in the first place.

It may be that its proverbs and tips and routine actions, which Valverde highlights, insofar as this ethics is not confined to dependency, also belong to that which reaches beyond and objectifies the more general spirit of humble Kharma that Anna is so fond of. But the 'cultural surplus' itself produces much more of the powerful kind of community that one can surrender to, – even if Anna, follower of the Basic Texts principles, refrains from seeing it: the low profile of Anna and her fellow faithful contrasts and obscures the Higher Power. And on purpose. The Higher Power rises in its might from the persistent earthliness of its creators who fix their gaze to the ground in order not to be blinded by its light that lures into identification and breeds a megalomania that destroys it.

In other words, my suggestion is that what Anna refers to as the humble Kharma, the handing over of confidence, that is, the idea of a Higher Power itself, points outside of the NA to the concrete forms of community that already exist to recreate and sustain the ethics of the NA. Maybe Anna thinks of herself as utopian, but that community which she calls for, in a certain way, is already there. And she is probably right – if I am right in re-/producing her thus – that the question is whether and how that community is strong enough to contain us if we face it and recreate ourselves in its image. If we self-consciously assume the

power it wields, where can we be trusted to take it?

This could be a reason for Anna to resist seeing herself as a social worker. One of the most intriguing features of her account is the way she pictures herself just at the barely legitimate periphery of the Wild Learning community. But when I probe into it, it turns out that she is already deeply involved, both as a photographer and as a social worker, and has been so for a couple of years. She recounts a dozen current or recent jobs and project activities of various sorts that contribute substantially to the ways she earns a living. Viewed as what one could call 'local cultures' (Nissen, 1997), realized and materially reproduced in varieties of groups, places, activities and embodying a loosely circumscribed ethics, the NA 'cultural surplus' and the Wild Learning overlap so that it makes sense that Anna can be part of Wild Learning without really knowing it.

The Wild Learning is interesting here for two reasons (besides the fact that it is my approach to Anna).

First, Wild Learning is contrary to NA in one important respect: it is social work of the prototypical kind that deserves its name by always transcending method by moving into everyday life and by subjectifying (cf. Nissen, in press b). Short of being a case of sheer opportunism, it is as far as one can get from basing on a Book and from the purism with which Anna serves the survival and usefulness of the NA. The everyday cultural surplus that NA had to always shove off is the principle of Wild Learning. Still, Wild Learning embodies much the same basic humanistic values that purport to combine liberal respect for individual autonomy and self-responsibility with solidarity. Like the NA, it often performs them in dialogical interpersonal relationships based on experience and mutuality, and, perhaps above all, on the idea that its pedagogical aims are embodied in persons who combine the insight

from 'having been there themselves' with the power of the example.

Second, this feature of the Wild Learning is possible because it is powerful. Unlike the NA, it establishes a field of power and mediates the ways in which social workers and socially excluded youngsters are subjected to and participate in a power that continuously shapes the life conditions of its members and those nearby. The ways in which it subjectifies by interpellation are relatively transparent. In the final analysis, this is intimately connected to the fact that it forms part of that self-conscious powerful community par excellence, the state[8]. True, even here the mediation of 'doing good' with the way it 'ends up all right' always transcends what any of its participants can penetrate, and it always rejects any simple instrumentalization to serve narrow purposes. But that does not mean it rests on innocent confidence or blind Kharma. In fact it is imbued with strategy.

The strategies in Wild Learning are of a political kind. It is about reforming institutions, services and provisions, forging alliances, opposing detrimental forces and overcoming congealed structures, reaching into both networks of social workers and of young people at 'street level', working at intersections where power is always precarious. What emerges is a self-transforming welfare service. The political strategies are never simply 'power politics', or to be more precise, abstract and self-sufficient power politics is a pitfall that is repeatedly discussed and constantly worked over to avoid

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8 That statement, of course, is a debatable point. The concept of state is currently under revision under the impression of recent economical, political and military changes. Knowing that I am here, once again, on foreign ground, I have sought to develop my analysis of the Wild Learning community through taking part in an interdisciplinary research project about "Life modes and welfare state at a cross-roads?" (see http://www.hum.ku.dk/lov/). I have discussed a few of its arguments and implications in (Nissen, in press a).

or confront. There is always an ethics that points beyond. Political strategy makes sense in terms of a generalizing recreation, not just of certain distinct institutions, but, in the end, of everyday life. This, too, is a feature not only of Wild Learning as a kind of curiously 'radical' corner of the municipal administration in Copenhagen, but in fact, of the welfare state itself: the welfare state being that unstable kind of state that keeps transforming itself to achieve social improvements, that is, improvements in society as a whole (cf. Nissen, in press b). When those social workers in Wild Learning conceive of themselves as critical toward the 'system', they can only do so with a reference beyond the system itself; yet this is the rule rather than the exception in a welfare state.

Finally, as Anna herself so graphically testifies on Wild Learning's website, there is a long tradition here of 'cultural pedagogy', an ongoing and intended collective production of objectified subjectivity, which, like art in general, never quite leaves the participants or the community be as they are. Juxtaposed to the ways we thought we knew ourselves, cultural artifacts perform and produce us anew, just as critical and thus artificial as Anna's art photo that forces us to share her deviant history of misery, or with their insisting nakedness achieves a *Verfremdung* of the staging of ourselves that we had long considered natural. In this respect, the Wild Learning website to which Anna contributes is much like the numerous music festivals, street/theatre performances, newsletters, conferences, TV-programs, media events, etc. etc. which those social workers over the years have successfully launched and made with the help or participation of street kids/socially excluded youngsters, bureaucrats, politicians, various professionals, and researchers (including myself), and which both have served to define and transform the identity of the community and its participants.

To generalize: I have tried to convey the idea that the self-transforming surrender to a Higher Power may actually be done self-consciously, but only in a roundabout way, as a critical process of sustaining and developing a powerful community. This indirectness, in my view, is the key to a reinterpretation of the idea that the subject itself is essentially counterfactual and self-dissolving, what Zizek calls a 'radical void'. In the mediation through the inter-subjectivity of the community and through the objectivity of its reciprocating artifacts and of its societal embeddedness, the self-transforming subject passes an impasse, a point that is logically incomprehensible and out of control when viewed from below, from the participant subject who is thereby reconstituted; and it is just that point which makes it wise to substitute humble confidence for instrumental goal-directedness[9].

Return of the drug

And drugs? Have we only achieved this understanding at the price of leaving the troublesome issue of drug taking behind? Actually, this would not necessarily be such a bad idea. Perhaps the pair of networks or organizations that we have briefly considered here only combine so well because they remain complementary in what they focus on or avoid. It is a characteristic feature of the

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9   At this point, I dare to digress to an interpretation of another contemporary artifact: the film *Dancer in the Dark* by Lars von Trier (who is, by the way, himself both permanently on anti-depressive drugs and a converted Catholic). The absolutely revolting lack of any kind of welfare state to mediate our compassion with the tragic heroine Selma creates the stark dichotomy between the at once contingent and preordained track of grim 'real' events that lead to her self-inflicted death and the beautiful musical scenes in which, as Selma sings "You will always be there to catch me, when I fall". The death sentence which is both entirely unfair and totally asked for is here the direct opposite of NA's hidden substantial solidarity.

Copenhagen social system (the 'Family and Labor Market Administration') that its policy on young people's drug use particularly emphasizes not at all to focus on the drugs, but on the whole social situation of the youngsters. Sometimes this approach tends toward a Kharma-like confidence that any drug problems will evaporate of themselves if only one 'does good' on the social situation. 'Tends toward', because as a generalizing description it would fail to do justice to the dialectics of City's social policy which results either simply from internal contradictions and adverse political forces, or from that combined with a truly dialectically reflected strategy (cf. Vinum & Nissen, in press).

But if we do, on this basis, approach drugs, not merely as a symptom or a symbol, but as an actual chemical technology of the self that can be used instrumentally and has a potential for recreating us as passionately dependent, is there a way in which we can reconcile Anna's Kharma-like confidence with the letting-go involved in drug taking itself (like when we confidently undergo anesthetics for surgery in the clinic)?

One way could be to suggest that it is precisely as socially produced technologies of the self that the drugs and the NA's adversary to dependence, the repeatedly ritually confirmed abstinence, are comparable. The lesson from the NA is the opposite of the temperance movements in that the NA accepts that we have lost our innocence forever. Whether we, the dependent, are clean or dirty, we are living with one carefully controlled social technology of the self or another, objectified in and reciprocating from one sort of cultural objects or the other, with chemical instruments playing one or the other leading role. The 'radical reality', that 'radical evil' which is already the pattern on

every wall-paper, is that the carefully controlled bodily regime of chemistry symbolized so acutely by the NA's meticulous clean time is even more pervasive than the simple facts of literal medicalization, wet (alcoholic) culture, or hedonistic youth; and that, as a technology of selves, it is far from confined to lone-standing individuals – it builds communities and it is deployed by communities to recreate participants.

This 'radical reality' could be the key to the paradox that the ethics underlying NA's strict but precarious restraint seems to match well with that of Wild Learning's perpetual and often even intoxicated confusion on this matter. Both ethics audaciously generalize it as a feature of *our* culture normally pushed to the shadows by the 'drug problem'. This is far from a colorful ethnography of some exotic subculture, or a utopian image of a 'drug-free (or drug-regulated) society'; it is what we are already doing. If we want to not only understand, and not even just invent, ourselves, but to truly transform ourselves critically as subjects of drug-taking, we need both to be *and* not to be what we have long since become: communities who produce our participants and non-participants by regulating their chemical states over times and places; and persons who build societies strong enough to embrace our self-transformations, even when they are chemically mediated.

The objectification of ourselves with drugs, dependencies, abstinences, treatments, institutions, and theories, are our contingent instruments to do and to be just that, and, with them or without them, we are likely to "take arms against a sea of troubles" and still "suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune".

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