

"om formidlingsproblemet i samfundsvidenskab"

Formidling (German: Vermittlung, English and French: Mediation) is a concept that deserves far more sustained attention than these brief remarks. That the term has appeared and re-appeared in several philosophical and social scientific contexts makes it all the more necessary to look at it closely. In this essay I shall try to show that Formidling expresses the central problem of our work as social scientists: Formidling is the heartland where theory and practise meet.

Most of us writing essays in this issue of Stofskift have had a practical, more than a theoretical interest in formidling. "e have experience with projects "in the field" which we need to share with others. We think that our experience has some theoretical relevance, but we have been shy about formulating that experience in the abstractions which are current in the university milieu. The demand for theoretical stringency which has been pressed in the past five years has indeed intimidated many of us who want to practise social science. For us the relation between theory and practise is not merely a theoretical question. Formidling is perhaps the very concept that allows us to re-enter the theoretical discussion as equals, not as "second-class citizens" in the University.

As a philosophical concept, Vermittlung has a genealogy that reaches as far back as the early Hegel, a fact that is well known to his heirs in French existentialism and the Frankfurter School. Vermittlung was Hegel's way of portraying the activity of the "subject" in "coming to consciousness". Paa dansk? Formidling er processen i bevidstgørelsen, hvor subjektet faar erkendelse af sin objektive situation i verden. Formidling desuden betyder at subjektet kan udtrykke denne erkendelse til andre.

That a single term can voice such a complex process ought not be regarded as a clumsy reductionism on Hegel's part. Quite the contrary: the term is comprehensive precisely because it expresses the totality of experience between subject (person) and the world (the historical situation). The knowledge the person makes of the world (literally videnskab) is not only intellectual, but it is active and even transformatory. Hegel's project was indeed ambitious, yet the terms he chose to express that project were never reductionistic. With a term like Vermittlung Hegel tried to grasp societal and historical totality. Surely the use which Sartre makes of "mediation" in The Critique of Dialectical Reason reveals the extent to which he shared Hegel's philosophical project. Sartre's emphasis on "situation" and on the "mediation" between person, the group, and the social world all reveal the depth of his allegiance to Hegel's phenomenology. For Sartre, as for Hegel (and some would add for

Marx) the theory of mediation places the active, conscious subject at the center of social scientific study.

Althusser's theory and his terminology are in absolute reaction to Sartre's. Instead of "situation", Althusser would shift the focus of social science to structure and to structural determinants. In some of his extreme moments, it is almost as if Althusser would eliminate historical time and dimension from social scientific work. Only with Lenin's seizure of power in October 1917 is Althusser interested in a specific historical situation. But the grandeur and uniqueness of that moment makes it the exception to Althusser's rule: purge Marxist theory of everything that tastes of "historicism". Mediation, or Formidling, is closely related to the themes which Althusser refers to as "historicism". Because the concept Formidling requires the history-making subject, we ought not expect Althusser to be sympathetic to it.

In our discussion of formidling it is important to bear in mind not only the philosophical roots of the concept, but also the intense contemporary debate that has grown up around it. This debate is best illustrated in French philosophy and social science; it is epitomized in the tension between "structure" and "situation". Formidlingsteori, if we can speak of such a thing, is clearly directed at the understanding of situations where persons arrive at consciousness and discover possibilities for emancipatory change.

There exists within the social and psychological theory of the Frankfurter School the core of radical pedagogy. This core, which sees the possibility of a social science that can serve the interests of emancipation, is shared as well by French existentialism. Paulo Friere and Oskar Negt present time and again their acknowledgement to Hegel's Vermittlung concept. Formidling as a concept is directly connected to the concept of bevidstgørelse; they are in the same family.

What is the connection between social research and radical pedagogy? What does the concept of formidling tell us about this relationship? First, social research that is grounded in formidlingsteori aims at discovering the "voice" of the persons and groups we work with. Interviews develop into dialogues. The purpose of an interview is not only data-collecting. An interview is a situation--even a historical situation-- in which the interview-subject can mediate his or her experience. Group interviews are often better for the purpose of formidling, because the members of the interview can find the shared themes in their experience. In principle the interview should be useful to the interviewees. Group interviews resemble pedagogical situations, but the social scientist is a pedagog by virtue of listening, not telling. Here is an example...I hope!

I was visiting a Yugoslav worker who lived in Vognmandsmarken in the last, long winter of its existence. He and his family (six members) were waiting to be re-housed. Rats were crawling

into the apartment day and night through the broken windows of the vacated flats. His family was the last one in the entryway to be re-housed. It was especially cold. His daughter served us coffee.

We spoke about his workplace. I asked: "Is there discrimination against foreign workers where you work?" "No," he answered, "None at all."

He went on chatting about the factory. His daughter brought more coffee. I asked about coffee breaks at the factory. He laughed and said, "If we drank coffee like the Danes, we'd all be fired."

It was my problem to connect "No discrimination" to Danish coffee habits. "Discrimination" was an abstract term that covers many different everyday situations. I could tell my host that. I could tell how discrimination describes also coffee-drinking at the factory. But is that what formidling is really about?

As I reflect on the experience (oplevelse) it seems to me that the heart of formidling has as much to do with my own consciousness as a social researcher as with his as an immigrant worker. I am not sure I conveyed the point about discrimination to him in the interview. I have no way of knowing today, one year later, if that interview "raised" his consciousness. It raised mine. It revealed the necessity of dialogue for both 'us' and 'them'. It showed the potential significance of mediation in social research situations.

In a conventional questionnaire, "No discrimination at the workplace" might be accepted as an answer to the immigrant worker's perception of reality. To which "we" social scientists could--being better informed-- call "false consciousness". Because of the dialogue character of the interview, the subsequent remark about the Danish workers' coffee drinking showed perfectly well that the Yugoslav workers were aware of differential treatment at the work place. The immigrant worker did not suffer from a "false consciousness". His only "mistake"--if it may be regarded as a mistake-- was not connecting an abstract category with a concrete situation. It was a problem of naming, not recognizing. Consciousness has to do with recognitions. It's we academics who are experts in labelling. We are not always so expert in recognition.

Formidling research's obvious object for study is "everyday life". "Hverdagsanalyse" will soon be one of the grand abstractions in Danish social science, but before it gets too abstract and structuralistic, I think that formidling as a concept will help to keep the study of everyday life on the ground, which is its proper place. Situations are connected to structure. Some would insist that structure causes situations. Formidlingsarbejde, as I see it, is not a matter of teaching people about structure. We actually know very little about how structures and situations are connected. We have a term "sammenhaeng" and a phrase "stor sammenhaeng". These terms, however, do not go far to exploring how situations in everyday life are connected to theoretical concepts like "capitalist mode of production".

Formidlingsarbejde, as I see it, is essentially an exploration of dialogues and their potentiality. It has little or nothing to do with "our" conveying social scientific knowledge to "them". "We" cannot give people knowledge of the connection between structure and situation because we don't have that knowledge ourselves. What we have plenty of is role, status, vocabulary, time to talk, read, write, and use copy machines.

If formidlingsarbejde results in change, we have to be prepared for the harsh fact: it will be small change. Moreover, it is likely that the consciousness that is "raised" will be our own.

Jonathan Schwartz
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Partial Reading List

Herbert Marcuse, Reason and Revolution

J.P. Sartre, The Critique of Dialectical Reason

A. Schmidt, Historie og Struktur

Oskar Negt, Soziologische Phantasie und exemplarisches Lernen: zur Theorie und Praxis der Arbeiterbildung

P. Friere, Cultural Action for Freedom

C. Bloch, "Formidling af indsigt i hverdagslivet", i Kultur-Rosen, 15.2.79 (Institut for Kultursociologi)

J. Bukdahl, "Opgøret med ekspressivismen", i Esbern Krause-Jensen (red.) Omkring Althusser-skolens videnskabsteori

L. Althusser, For Marx. Reading Capital

ETNOGRAF PÅ ET KULTURHISTORISK MUSEUM .

en hund i et spil kegler?

katten om den varme grød?

eller en god arbejdshest?

Af KIRSTEN STRANDGÅRD

Det følgende bliver nogle spredte betragtninger over de erfaringer, jeg har gjort som etnografisk medarbejder på et dansk kulturhistorisk museum.

Egen baggrund.

Jeg er etnograf- fagligt præget af min studietid i Århus, men med eksamen fra København.

Mit faglige engagement er præget af nysgerrighed overfor kulturelle mangfoldigheder, og perspektivet i faget ligger for mig i etnografiens analyse af reglerne for menneskelig sameksistens i forskellige kulturer med henblik på at gøre disse kulturer - min egen inklusiv -bedre i stand til at leve videre i gensidig aksept af hinanden.

Etnografens hovedopgave ligger i beskrivelsen og analysen af ikke-europæiske samfund og kulturer. Men en væsentlig underopgave består i at berette om resultaterne for danskere i alle tænkelige sammenhænge. I tråd hermed har jeg i 3 år arbejdet som museumsinspektør på et kulturhistorisk museum i et landdistrikt på Sjælland, på Odsherreds Museum.

Her har arbejdet ikke drejet sig om at fortælle odsingerne om Vestindien, men om at undersøge egnens kultur med etnografiske metoder og inspireret af socialantropologiens teorier. På basis heraf har jeg skullet videregive materiale til nutidens odsinger i form af genstandssamlinger, registre, foredrag, udstillinger, artikler, fotografier og almindelige samtaler på kontoret eller over en kop kaffe. Jeg har valgt at opfatte mig som en decentralt placeret samfundsforsker - som Odsherreds etnograf.