Experience analysis and forms of alienation

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Prologue

When working within the field of the history of ideas, alienation is a highly complex, loaded concept that is steeped in tradition. Seeking refuge in the Danish dictionary, the entry for alienation (fremmedgørelse) reads:

> *Alienation, a* condition and behaviour among individuals, institutions or entire societies whose own essential nature has become alien to them. This alienness consists of people's subordination and misinterpretation of that which they themselves have created and are part of. Use of the concept of alienation requires an understanding of what constitutes man's essential nature and existential needs, such as the opportunity to work, to be social with other people, and the opportunity for creative and cultural expression and for political participation.
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> Alienation also requires a notion of the qualities of a society that is not alienated and that allows human qualities to be expressed.

In a YouTube video (with the Danish title *Om moderne fremmedgørelse)*, the philosopher Lars Henrik Schmidt describes how the phenomenon of alienation applies today. People become appendages to a technological process. As illustrated below in an analysis of contemporary distance learning, this affects interpersonal relationships to a striking degree. It becomes clear that, with the modern form of alienation, humans experience themselves from without. We see ourselves through the eyes of others. Lars Henrik Schmidt refers to Charlie Chaplin's represents this aesthetically in his film *Modern Times*. In other words, we become reified components in a constructed reality. There are further examples of modern forms of alienation in the book *Frans Kannik* (Nagbøl, Zerlang, Berger 1991).

1 　The experience society

In *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft. Kultursoziologie der Gegenwart* (Schulze 1991), Gerhard Schulze points to a number of unique characteristics of our times. The society of work and scarcity has become a society of abundance. Everyday life has become aestheticized - a dismantling of the old society and a shift towards an experience-oriented society. This is a society no longer only determined by an economic semantics, but also by a psychophysical semantics.

The mass culture not only manifests itself in the millions of different signs and symbols, but also – and more importantly, sociologically speaking, according to Gerhard Schulze - at the level of subjective interpretation. This marks the emergence of a society that continuously produces multidimensional structures in the collective space of meaning. According to Schulze, this also leads to experiences that are directed towards the individual's subjectivity and cannot be expressed in words (Schulze, 1993).

Experience are rooted in the body and affect how we experience through our senses. This is linked to the question of what typifies the reality shaping the contexts of our lives today. There is a lot to suggest that the relationship between our interoceptive and exteroceptive senses has changed dramatically over the past 50 years (Kleinspehn 1989; Nagbøl 1994).

The way the senses are stimulated and develop in relation to each other is difficult to reconcile and connect with a holistic view of the reality that we live in. Sensory impressions, and how we relate to them, thus have consequences for the prevailing basic sentiment among people. This becomes apparent in how they behave towards each other, and in how individuals experience their life situation. A complex whole that creates for new experiences to occur at many levels. This prompts us to examine and address how we experience the reality we stage. How do we experience what we see?

We have to examine this from different perspectives, in order to highlight the various aspects and the way we connect our tactile, kinaesthetic, acoustic and visual experiences to what we become aware of and say. These experiences are rooted in the body as conflicting ways to smell, hear, feel, see and move. In short: the way the senses are evolving, right now, individually in relation to themselves and mutually in relation to each other.

As I would put it, the modern network society and the media have innumerable manifestations. They are alienating, but they can also be exploited as places where knowledge can be found and communicated in a split second.

2   Figurational sociology's critique of modern forms of alienation.

Modern forms of alienation, in which people see themselves through the eyes of others and see others as objects and things, involve a fixed reification manifested in our behaviour and ways of thinking, as well as in the ways we observe and describe others.

For more than half a century, Norbert Elias (1897-1990) researched what it means for our orientation as humans living in networks - in constantly changing figurations - that we regard ourselves and each other from without, as static entities, experiencing ourselves as surrounded by a wall against the outside world. In *Was ist Soziologie* (Elias, 1970), Elias formulates his criticism of what he calls the egocentric human image. He questions the way in which a large group of traditionalist social scientists regard themselves and the paradigm that they, as researchers, practise.

In his criticism, Elias particularly highlights two fundamental inconsistencies. (1.) The language used is in itself misleading when humans and society are depicted as static entities. This is reflected in the use of the terms 'individual' 'society', and 'community', as well as concepts such as 'status' and 'role'. (2.) The individual is always depicted as facing a surrounding world, for example a school, a family, a society. In Elias' opinion, this approach conceals the fact that people, as individuals, are also part of their surroundings - their family, their school, their community. The traditional conceptualisation allows such things to appear *as if they were objects of the same category as rocks, trees or houses* (Elias 1970). This reified influence, which our language, as an inherited means of thought, exercises on our consciousness, has a strong bearing on how we perceive the relationship between individual and society. This is a false dichotomy, and the division between the outer and inner impedes *a dynamic sociology.*

3 People are themselves part of the concept

The concept of figuration distinguishes itself from many other theoretical sociological concepts by explicitly emphasising that people are involved in the formation of the concept (Elias 1986). Elias maintains that only people form figurations. Mankind's way of living together in small or large groups is unique as a species. A dissemination of knowledge occurs from one generation to the next. The human child enters at birth into a world of symbols characterised by an existing figuration of people. They are already inextricably linked through the four-dimensions of time-space, and the presence of other people adds a fifth dimension: the learned societal symbols.

That people are themselves part of the concept is reflected in the way that thought, speech and language are used. It is about a process-oriented sociology, which breaks with traditions where the researcher appears as *a thinking statue*. Process sociology helps us to comprehend the relationship between sociogenesis and psychogenesis as a prerequisite to understanding different people's psychological and physical habitus. We shift from heteronomous concepts within the realm of nominalism to other means of orientation that tend to be more autonomous.

The purpose of taking outset in Norbert Elias's civilisation theory and figuration sociology is to point out that dealing with educational practice in a sociological perspective means involving oneself in everyday contexts where things are not merely external; they form dynamic interfaces, where the prevailing power balances influence people's social existence (Elias, 1939).

Elias criticises a number of sociological theories for only concentrating on one aspect, such as actions or experiences, when addressing people's personality structures. For example, Elias mentions that behavioural sociologists consider actions in isolation, and phenomenological sociologists their experiences.

> On the other hand, figuration sociology deals with the **whole** human person. It is based on a five-dimensional model, which, in addition to the four-dimensional behavioural aspects, also includes 'experience aspects' of thought, emotion and desire. The latter are not directly available in the same way as observation of body movements, for example, but they are nevertheless traceable, for example through studies of linguistic and other symbols that transport meaningful messages from one person to another. (Elias 2003, s. 278, translation by the author).

Building a five-dimensional model enables us to gather knowledge about the way people experience, learn and remember the acquired symbols. It is a dynamic precondition for people to be able to analyse communication processes as they occur wherever people form figurations with each other. These figurations result in multi-level learning.

The task for figuration sociology is to investigate and portray the functional interdependencies within the multi-level social arenas we form with each other. These include the unplanned social processes that people form with non-human factors.

This should not be understood and perceived as the accumulation of such processes. In process sociology, the concept of figuration includes wholes, often with conflicting dynamics. This applies to the entire issue regarding drives, emotions and their regulation and includes the control mechanisms that regulate knowledge and thought.

We must therefore explore how the individual learns the codes, customs and norms that apply in order to function in different social groups and contexts. This enables us to understand how social individualisation takes place and what it means in terms of experiences, self-regulation and control over one's drives and impulses, and the sensable social conventions in the everyday contexts in a society in which increasing differentiation and complexity is a reality.

The results of the interaction between biological potentials and the social in all its diversity are the driving forces in this process. They appear in scenes and can be observed in the civilising and de-civilising processes evident in the respective social formations.

The unconscious is understood as not merely common sense, but insights that are important because society's individuals, desires, norms, passion and disgust are carriers of other tendencies. These insights are elements in processes in which changes that follow their own dynamics influence the individual's psychological and physical habitus. It is here one finds the roots of the many aspects of interdependence and complexity compulsion. The movement aspect also plays a role, and the individual has to learn to operate and navigate in a rapid flow of change. Individual functional interactions imply change and transformation of knowledge and skills, where the individual habitus grows out of the social habitus.

For Elias, it is important to stress that biology and social learning go hand in hand. Libidinous energies have an approach to the muscular system that, through social processes in the figurations in which people live, influences the human cerebral dominance.

Elias's work, like that of others from the circle in Frankfurt (Institut für Sozialforschung), breaks with logical positivism and the form of philosophical meta-science (subjective idealism) where a recognised approach is to construct theoretical components - the hypotheses – based directly on the material (Horkheimer and Adorno 1947). The research process is based upon a method in which observations proceed in a singular cognitive process. Elias speaks of the a posteriori application of concepts, where concepts are imposed on the material retrospectively as tautological laws (Elias 1987).

Sociological research requires experience from academic knowledge, as well as adeptness at building models. These models should clarify the methodological approaches that show the path to the significance of symbolic representations for people's everyday lives. As part of this process, they should also draw attention to the methodological approaches' diversity and varying strengths. Elias speaks of an emancipation of sociology - where people become part of the concept.

As such, when we engage with *civilising, socialising and individualising*, these are different names for the same process that can be analysed on multiple levels.

4   On reification, socialisation and the unconscious

In order to be able to differentiate between the various layers and levels of integration in this essay, and to state my reasons why I consider experience analysis relevant to my discussion of contemporary forms of alienation, I refer to Martina Löw's distinction between the concepts of *Bildung* and socialisation. In the book *Einführung in der Soziologie der Bildung und Erziehung* (2006), she writes.

> "If we compare the classic concept of Bildung with the concept of socialisation, there
> are several parallels. While Bildung is achieved in an active and reflective break with

the opportunities offered by cultural phenomena, socialisation involves the process that takes place with active acquisition of the existing material dimensions of sociality, followed by the reflection and the effect that follow from realisation of actions. Both processes involve the break with the social environment, with the difference that the concept of Bildung is directed more towards processes of academic consciousness, whereas the concept of socialisation focuses on any form of unconscious acquisition of the social. The concept of Bildung in its classic form, however, implies a normative element; i.e. Bildung should take place, but it is not a prerequisite for existence. Socialisation, on the other hand, is unavoidable" (Löw 2006 p. 23, translated by the author).

It is worth noting that, in Löw's interpretation, the concept of socialisation involves any form of unconscious acquisition of the featured social material, and socialisation is unavoidable.

The emphasis on the importance of unconscious processes for the lives of one and all, whereby the psychophysical dominance is directed towards the individual's subjectivity in the experience society, makes demands on the means of orientation and the melodic initiatives that are staged at the level of subjective interpretation.

The thematisation of the (materialistic) theoretical concept of socialisation concerns a sixth dimension, where we investigate linguistic and other symbols as transformers of meaningful messages from one person to another. This symbolised diversity is an expression of a practice that not only manifests itself in the thousands of signs that, as carriers of meaning, transport social codes. These codes also impose themselves in the individual's subjective structure, directing actions, both manifest at the conscious level and latent at the unconscious level. Patterns of experience are communicated through the surroundings and are embedded in our physical and psychological habitus in the form of outlines and expectations of life (Elias, 1969; Lorenzer, 1981). In this way, social staging is transformed into internalised interaction figures that are personality-forming, and that are in constant activity beside and behind the verbal understanding (Lorenzer, 1986). These figures appear in scenes and in reactions that may be felt, but are not consciously recognised.

5   The legacy of the Frankfurt School of critical theory

The so-called Frankfurt School is characterised by a sociological tradition that builds on the steps towards a critical theory that Horkheimer, head of the Department of Social Research, compiled for his staff in the 1930s.

Upon their post-war return from exile in the USA, Horkheimer and Adorno were both very active in the reconstruction of the Sigmund Freud Institute in Frankfurt. It was important to have a psychoanalytical institute at which they, as partners, could conduct analysis, teach graduates and carry out research in a social-science context. The intention was to avoid philosophy becoming a science that lost its understanding of the formation of subjectivity (Adorno 1971, Nagbøl 1992, 2002).

From here, a direct line can be traced to Alfred Lorenzer's (1922-2002) appointment to a chair in sociology at the Fachbereich/Gesellschaftwissenschaft in 1973. Here, Lorenzer was addressed the theme of the unconscious and its significance as a layer that generates meaning and activity and has its own particular needs, emotions and desires. This layer lies beneath the rational and linguistic context that governs human behaviour and thought; a second layer within humans, where unconscious impulses and drives reign and have a behaviour-

determining influence on human actions and emotions. It comprises an unconscious life draft that exists as a counterweight to conscious thought.

In line with the Frankfurt tradition (Horkheimer and Adorno 1947), Lorenzer is interested in understanding the damaged life. This is a theoretical and practical project, both designing theoretical means of orientation and an interpretation practice, the scenic understanding, where people themselves become part of the concept and where *Bildung* and socialisation are integrated in the analytical process. In teaching where mimetic learning processes and performative activities apply, the individual's life draft has a practical application (Nagbøl & Flensburg, 2015). This occurs when, in the interpretation process, the interpreter involves himself in various types of life context; in figurations where people are mutually dependent on each other. In this way, objects and social fields and their *Bildung*-related meaning become interrelated. Through participation in different stagings and in the activities taking place, it is possible to gain insight into how life forms emerge and change.

In the context of experience analysis, scenic understanding involves the production of scenic descriptions of social arenas by means of various techniques. Scenic understanding requires scenic commitment; it is not enough to perceive the surrounding world as a scenic whole that exists parallel to, and in spite of, the normative meaning of words. Scenic understanding is a life-practical mode of understanding that requires the interpreter's direct and sensable involvement in the situations he or she wants to understand through experience analysis. The interpreter has to learn to exploit the sensable potentials, which can be attributed to one's own experiences of time, movement, body and space in the different life situations one is seeking to understand. It is important not to act like the audience in a theatre, who merely observe the play from their seats, but instead to see oneself as involved in the staging, to play along and open up for the emotions, associations, functions and images that are awakened in the encounter with the surrounding world. Scenic understanding entails a scenic totality where the analyst and the analysand are actors in their own drama. It is important to note that understanding does not shape the interplay; it is the reality in the scenic interplay that shapes understanding. Through the involvement of the interpreter in tangible stagings, the body becomes an epistemological body. The surrounding world thereby becomes real because things acquire their meaning through our shared practice. With the situated and the embodied, we transcend the randomness of individuality, because being able to do something is to fulfil a social meaning.

Through scenic descriptions, the experience figures that emerge in the interpretation process are symbolised by means of the language. The interplay with the interpreted material is neither a subjective narrative nor an objective registration; it is an intersubjective experience of a sensable account. It is through language that the sensed experience gets its value. It is not a question of an assessment, but of a sensable bodily experience that must be made available to the community using language and images. (Nagbøl 2002)

In the interpretation process where the enquiring cultural analyst tests his or her own interaction experiences and life-practical assumptions, the distance between the unfamiliar experience and one's own understanding of life must be eliminated. It is at the interface between individuality and sociality - where bodily experiences are experienced as behavioural formulas and presented in a scenic whole; where irritations and contradictions between our own life draft and a staging that manifestly directs our actions are translated as part of a *latent* play of situation and movement - that an iconographic, situative understanding must be applied. In the play with the situational images, the existing difference must be processed, and

so pervasively that the structure in the scenes portrayed can be spelt out and combined to form a structured scenic statement. It is essential to communicate, through the hermeneutic effort, a mode of observation and understanding that is neither psychological nor logical, but scenic - in which the interpretation figures become visible as a structured construction of meaning figures.

Via theoretical processing, the social conditions and sociological prerequisites unfolding in time and place become apparent. The process first and foremost occurs by communicating how the scenic descriptions are understood and how they are handled using the selected themes. This is followed by a final analysis, which brings the descriptions of the scenes and other statements together in a theoretical epistemological mode. The two epistemological steps thus form a double perspective, including both a sensable immediacy and a theoretical distance, that are not exercised simultaneously, but rather in continuation of each other (Heidi Meldgaard Henriksen, 2018).

With the themes and traditions outlined above as its jumping-off point, I have organised an elective course at Aarhus University for a number of years. This course is advertised in the AU course catalogue and is open to all students.

6   Power relations - experience analysis and sensual orientation

The elective course takes an in-depth look at the relationship between material staging, experience, socialisation, learning, education and didactics. In this context, cultural analysis initiatives and process-sociological models are introduced that can explain how the participating students can be qualified to unite and connect the material life with knowledge from socialisation theory and bodily-anthropological practice. These cross-disciplinary means of orientation are used to probe into and demonstrate human cultural and learning potentials, both individually and in groups. We investigate and document how humans can meaningfully frame their life contexts in a complex (global) and rapidly changing world. This applies to the impact of the city and its institutions (museums, playgrounds, schools, kindergartens, hospitals, nursing homes, sports facilities, open spaces, etc.) on children's identity formation, young people's life contexts, and elderly people's recreation. We explore the diversity of potentials in modern landscape and urban planning for innovative and creative activities, as well as their impact on well-being, health and welfare for everyone. The course includes study trips. Based on real-world observations, the course is about learning how to trace and analyse the impact of social arenas on human socialisation and self-cultivation in modern and late-modern societies.

The module is structured as a combination of an introductory lecture, workshops and study trips. Seminars are organised as blocks and each begins with an introduction to various themes. This is intended to help the students home in on a topic of their choosing that they will work with in the subsequent workshops, run and supervised by Søren Nagbøl. During the workshops, the students and supervisor present theories and, in cooperation with the other students, qualify them for use in later written work. This connects theory and the dissemination of knowledge with regard to the students' chosen topics and also involves the conducting of literature searches, to ensure familiarity with current knowledge in the various interdisciplinary fields.

Students taking part in the elective course in autumn 2017 were interested in the consequences of the study progress reform for students at AU. The Danish study progress reform is a political initiative from 2013 aiming to reduce the time students take to complete

higher education programmes by changing the rules for teaching, and through annual 2% cuts in university budgets.

The Department of Educational Sociology at AU is divided between Aarhus and Emdrup (Copenhagen). One student, Line Borum Vesterheim, decided to write about how the reform affected distance learning at the university. Her term project evolved into a Master's thesis. *En oplevelsesanalyse af fjerne og nære forbindelser på Aarhus Universitet* (an experience analysis of distant and proximal connections at Aarhus University). Below is an extract from this thesis (author's translation).

Distance learning in a university context

In 2015, the Danish School of Education (DPU) at Aarhus University published Strategy 2015-2020, which was intended to improve the quality of master's degree programmes on the basis of educational research, "but it also means ensuring that programmes are organised on the basis of well-founded didactic and pedagogical methods that support coherent courses of teaching" (p. 8). The strategy adds that DPU will: "Develop forms of instruction, including forms of supervision and feedback, Master's thesis processes and IT-supported teaching activities, based on more innovative didactic and pedagogical forms and methods of learning" (p. 9).

At the end of August 2017, we began the third semester of the Master's programme in educational sociology in Aarhus and Copenhagen. Although there may generally be a delay in relation to when courses start up at the two locations, the teaching in social inequality in education had to take place at the same time as it was conducted as distance learning.

During the first session, my attention was focused on an unusual visual effect on the big screen upon which the two classrooms were projected via video streaming - a large projection of the room in Emdrup (Copenhagen) and a small projection of us here in Aarhus, which we could see on the big screen (see figure 1). On discovering how the two rooms were brought together using multiple screens and projections, my attention was directed more towards the staging of the teaching than towards the actual content. This developed gradually into more and more interesting aspects concerning our functions as students and lecturers, the form of instruction, us as human beings in a high-tech era, our presence as individuals and as groups, the furnishing of the rooms, senses - especially in relation to our interoceptive and exteroceptive senses - and concerning how we communicated with each other via video streaming.... ….

First scenic description of distance learning at AU

Our lecturer is in Emdrup and can be seen on the screen by us in Aarhus, as can three of the students in Emdrup. A small thumbnail image of our group is visible in the left corner of the screen, where we see ourselves from the front. Now and then, a camera function is activated changing the perspective and filming us from behind. From this angle, I notice my long curls on the screen. Daylight coming in from the windows at the back of the

Photo Line Vesterheim ©

room makes us more visually distinct when we are filmed from behind. From this angle, the camera also films its own screen as projected on the big screen at the front of the room. In addition to the thumbnail of us, a projection from the classroom in Emdrup is also displayed. The camera perspective results in an "infinity effect" on the thumbnail, so that the camera projections from Emdrup and Aarhus are alternately reproduced in smaller and smaller images until you cannot see them anymore.

Each room has two cameras installed - one at the front and one at the back of the room.

In this way, you could say that the screen image with the two geographically distant locations merges together and becomes one - where you cannot see further into the picture as it has become too small for the eye to be able to register it.

The infinity effect goes from being a purely external image on the screen to an imaginary form - the idea of the infinite - an inner image. Catching sight of an infinite mirror reflection resulting from the dual camera system in the two rooms leads me to think about intimacy and distance in relation to the apposite term "distance learning", because we are in direct and intimate contact with each other in the room and with the screen in front of us where those who are geographically remote from us appear to be close to us. We cannot see the majority of the students in Emdrup; they are not present visually. However, they are present audibly and we hear coughing, sneezing, laughing, talking and general rummaging around. One of the students in Emdrup is choking on something, which can be heard in how she is coughing: violently and persistently, albeit for a relatively short period of time. This results in a powerful sound effect through the speakers in our room. Now we hear someone sneezing over there. The person sitting next to me jumps at these sudden sounds. I imagine the large vibrations and reactions in my own sensitive hearing organs. I think about a TV programme I once saw on the ear. I wonder if this form of instruction could cause tinnitus in the long term?

On the visual side, our lecturer almost disappears from the picture when he stands next to the PowerPoint presentation in order to explain some of the terms used in one of his slides.

When the transmission started, we briefly saw the lecturer filmed from the back while we were trying to fix the camera angle. This meant we saw the majority of the group from Emdrup, who were sitting right at the back of the room. It seems as if they have sat there in order to avoid being in the eye of the camera, up front close to the screens where our lecturer is standing. If a technical error had not given us this "reality insight" into who is in the Emdrup group, we could have been misinformed visually and believed that there were only three students and a lecturer present.

Break in distance learning
Now we're on a break with the students in Emdrup, even though, in reality, we're not together during our break. We can observe the students in Emdrup on the screen taking a break, although we learn most about what they're doing over there through the sound, as only a few of them are visible to us. We hear coughing and laughing from there.

I imagine what would happen if I wanted to ask our lecturer about something during the break. What would I do? He is sitting right there on the screen and eating his packed lunch. If I got up close to the camera and called him over to the image of me on the screen in Emdrup, then we'd both be standing there as two-dimensional screen images, perhaps with a sense of being closer to each other so that we can lead a one-to-one conversation. We'd be no closer to each other audibly, and we'd have no possibility of having a hushed conversation between the two of us, as our conversation would be transmitted through the speakers mounted on the walls at both places in order to reach everyone in both Aarhus and Emdrup. If we turned down the volume for a more intimate conversation, it wouldn't be possible for us to hear each other. It would probably be best to turn off the sound and call each other on our mobile phones. Then we could stand close to each other's screen images while we talked to each other over the telephone. The closest we could come to having eye contact in a dialogue-based staging such as this would be to pretend that we have eye contact - by looking directly into the camera. In reality, such eye contact would only be with the technological eye of the camera.

After the class
The class is over. Our lecturer has left without saying goodbye. A fellow student and I agree that he's probably forgotten us here in Aarhus. I guess he just left as he usually does when a lecture is over. People don't usually have to take notice of a projection screen when they say goodbye.

Most of us have left the classroom now, also in Emdrup. The cameras are still running, although the speakers have been switched off - at least at our end. We don't know whether they can hear us over there. I stand in front of the screen to photograph my first point of interest: the infinity image that initiated my choice of topic and the writing process for this assignment. I think that it's OK to take photographs now, but it also feels a bit forward and invasive, as there are still people present in both places, although only a few.

Now there's only two of us left, me and a student in Emdrup. She walks over and adjusts something on the equipment. I wave to her. She waves back and turns on the audio equipment so we can talk. She asks me what I'm taking photographs of. I point to the vanishing point, and briefly explain one of my elective courses in which I have to do

an experience analysis and that this will probably be about distance learning. She tells me that she had chosen the same course, but that not enough people had signed up for it, so it had been cancelled.

It's funny that we suddenly have contact with each other because otherwise we don't really have much to do with each other at the two locations. Even though today is the fifth time we've had distance learning, this is the first time I've said hello to one of the students from Emdrup.

Only after we've taken leave of each other does it strike me that she probably couldn't understand when I pointed to the infinity picture, because she couldn't see the same projection as I could. It's interesting how a projection of another person can seem so close and alive. The sound certainly added some intimacy. It was good to have more direct personal contact with someone from Emdrup.

In the distance learning, we did not see didactically or pedagogically innovative forms and methods of teaching, only projections of each other and ourselves through an online connection that more resembled an easy and efficient solution whereby one teacher can deal with two classes at the same time. The argument can be made that this is a result of cutbacks, as Aarhus University had implemented a 2013-2020 strategy at university level, focused on improving the university's ranking on the list of the world's best universities from being among the top 100 to being among the top 50 (p. 12). To this end, the university is investing more money on research and talent development to give better opportunities for new research breakthroughs that attract more international interest and, in turn, make the university more prestigious: "Consequently, Aarhus University will: Increase the resources available for research support" (p. 33). This has to mean savings in other areas, such as by offering distance learning as an alternative to ordinary classroom teaching. (Line Borum Vesterheim, 2018 p. 33-37.)

7   Changes in the balance of power over time

Based on my experiences, from my time as a student from 1973 to 1980 at the Department of Philosophy and the History of Ideas at Aarhus University, and from 1976 to 1979 at the Department of Fachbereich Philosophie and Gesellschaftswissenschaft at Goethe University Frankfurt until the present day, I can see that the imbalance of power between government control and life at universities has become greater. During the same period, inequalities between men and women and between adults and children have decreased

That students' and staff's influence and autonomy concerning their own everyday lives at the university has been reduced and is to a greater extent characterised by measures linked to the study progress reforms and other politically governed interventions is more symptomatically extensive than Line Vesterheim's description of distance learning at Aarhus University.

The impact of the prevailing power dynamics on people's lives in teaching contexts is convincingly described in articles such as *Fremdrift og fremsyn. Kampen om de studerendes tid* (Gritt B. Nielsen & Laura Louise Sarauw, 2014) and *Det transparente barn i det transparente institutionsbyggeri. Om oplevelsesanalyse i og af institutionsarkitektur og institutionsliv* (Jens Kampmann & Kim Rasmussen 2018).

As mentioned, the consequences of the study progress reform are very apparent in the organisation in time and space of people's everyday lives, where they become visible in the behavioural codes and forms of interaction that apply in the different stagings. But these are only manifestations of more fundamental decivilising trends in everyday life that are seriously

affecting contemporary spiritual life (Schanz 2017). This is also evident in the reification of language, whereby language loses its poetic dimension and becomes vapid. It loses the impact and coherence that are necessary to portray everyday situations in relation to a series of cultural phenomena.

In this context, I would also like to quote the words of Hans-Jørgen Schanz. At the end of his book, *Ånd* (spirit), he writes.

> Finally, I would like to mention a point that I think has been overlooked, namely what has happened to language or how language is used. I mentioned at the beginning that, back when it was still intact, Bildung represented a house that could become a home; among other things, through a language that could carry experiences that were deeply existential and, yes, let's just say human. Moreover, a language that allowed for the fact that not everything in life can be mastered or governed. It was also a language that had space for the spirit - and incidentally, if there's no space for the spirit in the language, there's no Bildung; at most competencies. The language spoken in everyday life and public life today is virtually purged of these "tributaries" and detours. Language has been influenced by a mixture of scientific-'light' terminology, business speak and sports jargon. Perhaps with a dash of wellness when it needs to be gentler. Pathos has either been eliminated or is noisily false. Slap-dash English is endemic. And it is not just the words, but also, indeed especially, the elasticity of language that seems to be disappearing to be replaced by a substandard plastic. One of the ways in which this is apparent is the notion that sentences should always be short. But incessant short sentences are testament to a way of thinking that allows nothing other than motorways and monotonous vegetation.
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> As is clear from the above reflections, things look bleak. And I believe they are. And to point to a solution or counter-strategy in this situation seems to me just as impossible as when Horkheimer and Adorno, at the end of Dialectic of Enlightenment [first published in German in 1944], asked themselves the question: Who is this book really for? Their response was very pessimistic; neither for individuals, who had been eradicated, nor the masses, who had been manipulated. Instead, the book was like a message in a bottle that had been thrown into the sea. You just have to wait and see what happens (Hans-Jørgen Schanz, 2017, pages 148 to 150).

8   Looking back

In a previous essay (Nagbøl 2014), I outlined how mutually dependent we are on the cultural climate and the specific individuals whose support we experience when we are formed, educated and brought up as people who are taught, who research, and who teach. In this essay, I looked back and described the environments, encounters, situations and people that were crucial in enabling me - with no formal qualifications - to realise the dream of being able to work with the areas of life that I found meaningful.

It is about understanding the meaning of memory as a psychological and social process. History cannot be reduced to either objective data or personal narrative accounts. In this context, history is perceived as social memory. Memories are flexible and we have to seek to understand and grasp *how* and by *whom* they are shaped. It is also a narrative about how the zeitgeist, such as it is organised within the educational system today, is by no means a law of nature. That *Bildung* is possible under completely different conditions thus helps protect against the collapse of our society's social cohesion (Nagbøl 2014).

I remember clearly when, in 1976, I approached Alfred Lorenzer during an open session with a project about critical theory that my teachers, Hans-Jørgen Schanz and Mihail Larsen, had helped me with. I stood there in my work clothes, while he sat in his stylish grey corduroy suit: an elegant middle-aged man. I handed him my one-page project description. He read it and then looked up and smiled, saying with a twinkle in his eye, "You're just the man I've spent the past 18 years looking for; a very warm welcome to you". Another scene I clearly remember is from a symposium with Norbert Elias. A group of about 15 of us sat in a small room at the Faculty of Law in Frankfurt. We were a mixed group of students, locals from the city, and university professors, including Alfred Lorenzer. The proposed theme was symbol theory. At some point, a student took the floor to make a short presentation. When he had finished, Elias replied, "My dear fellow student, many thanks for your contribution. It has pushed things forward." I had not expected to hear such a positive tone. I was both surprised and inspired.

When we left the room, I happened to accompany Elias down some stairs. He asked where I came from and I replied that I was from Aarhus in Denmark. He asked how I had made my way down there and I replied: on a motorbike. "Did you drive all the way from Aarhus to Frankfurt to study?" "Yes," I replied. "Then, if you're interested, I'd like to offer my services as your supervisor." Just by turning up, I had become a part of the academic scene in Frankfurt.

As a student from provincial Denmark, this was an overwhelming reception. When I got to know Alf and Elias better, I asked each of them independently why they spent so much of their time caring for and talking to us students. *"It's because you young people and your inspiration is what keeps us alive so that we don't stagnate in everyday routines, hierarchies and the prevailing power struggles between colleagues for prestige and fame"*, they replied.

When I saw that the implementation of the study progress reform at Danish universities meant the abolishment of one-to-one supervision; the cutting of elective courses from 30 to 10 ECTS; and the reduction of the time allowed to write a Master's thesis to about four months, I realised that not only the students were affected. We are all affected when we and the students no longer have the opportunity to be present as a creative part of the conceptual development process at universities.

Epilogue
At the beginning of this essay, I cited the following passage:

> Alienation also requires a notion of the qualities of a society that is not alienated and that allows human qualities to be expressed.

This is where we start from when we grapple with deciphering, analysing and conceptualising prevailing forms of alienation.

It is also important that we draw upon the knowledge that shows what the issues are in the time in which we live. It is therefore important to home in on the problem of alienation with a contemporary understanding of the effects of the phenomena concerned. We must be aware of the current social dynamics and processes that characterise our everyday lives. We need to identify suitable theories and means of orientation so that our notions of practice are relevant to others. It is a matter of using and exploiting knowledge that can be transformed so as to be

meaningful for our life situation, while constantly aware that Karl Marx's great work is there to help us understand alienation and reification.

> We have to be aware of our own position of power and avoid transferring ideologies and myths that fascinate us to what we are analysing. We must not impose political ideologies and norms on other contexts of life. We must constantly be aware that it is hard to find the right path in this damaged life, as Adorno put it. Our analyses must identify the different types of linguistic damage surrounding us - both in our immediate day-to-day life, and via the media, institutions and professional politicians. We must constantly be aware that we live in a global world, with shifting norms that must be debated. We have to try to involve ourselves in and understand the practices of others. It is important to take up the struggle against the abuse of power and the many faces of alienation. And we must put all this into words, because we, as humans, are ourselves part of the concept.

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