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0 Overall Abstract

Progressive social work today seeks to overcome the various problems associated with traditional approaches that were based on a static understanding of social norms that would be imposed on clients. In contrast, clients today are sought to be included as active subjects in the process who work alongside the professionals (e.g. Solution-Focused Brief Therapy). However, this inclusion is not always successful, despite the best intentions of the professionals. This thesis offers a theoretical account of the root causes of this problem as well as an alternative approach aimed at addressing it.

Based on six months of research at Helsingung – a facility for young drug users in Denmark – I identify the principle cause of this problem. Paradoxically, in the very effort of the professionals to avoid imposing general standards on the young clients, in order to recognize their unique way of being in the world, the professionals block the youth's possibility to be recognized.

Drawing on the work of Bauman, Hegel, Ilyenkov, Taylor, Vygotsky, and others, I identify the performance of what I have called 'liquid standards' as the source of this blocking of recognition, and point toward an alternative approach.

0.1 The Structure

This thesis is written as an article with an additional frame. The full thesis begins with a section from the frame, called 'Frame part 1'. Here I give an introduction to the problem of the thesis (section 1), and further the evolvement of the research project as a hole.

The next main section is the article, where I present the theoretical perspective, research method and the analysis of the thesis problem.

After the article I return to the frame, in what I have called 'Frame part 2'. Here I present an argumentation for my choice of a case study, and present the overall conclusion of the thesis.

Frame part 1

1 Overall Introduction

Although there can be no doubt about the fact that we are experiencing an increasing globalization (Giddens, 2007) and standardization (Timmermans & Berg, 2003; Timmermans & Epstein, 2010; Nissen, 2014a; in press) more generally in the world, we are equally experiencing a resistance to this movement of top-down governance. This resistance shows itself in an equally extensive amount of settings, and is becoming more or less globally present. In the therapeutic field, psychologists are experiencing a greater demand from clients, who ask to be respected as being knowledgeable about their own problems and equally capable of knowing what will be the right solutions for them (Anderson, 2012). In social work, professionals work for a better recognition of *'the users perspective'* (Nissen, 2013); in health care, both professionals and patients are fighting for a greater focus on patients' own voices (Greco, 2012) and choice (Mol, 2008), and the clinical practice in some cases strives to be situation-oriented (see Juul Jensen, 1987; Nissen, 2014a). In architecture firms (e.g. http://signal-arki.dk/en/process/), or actually in sales companies in general (Dahl, Fuchs & Schreier, 2014), *'user involvement'* and *'user driven design'* have become buzzwords. Even on the political scene, the resistance towards a top-down government is becoming more and more present. The popularity of the new Spanish political party 'Podemos' is one example of this movement. Here they are fighting against the dominant power and their central government, with the hope of giving back power to the people through a kind of direct democracy (http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/31/podemos-revolution-radical-academics-changed-european-politics?CMP=share_btn_fb). However, we could also turn to Greece or the U.S. and the Occupy Wall Street movement or even to Denmark and the new political party 'Alternativet' ['The Alternative'], which is promoting what we could call, 'user driven political actions' where it is the users who are living in the politically governed world, who are co-creating the politics under which they are living (http://politiken.dk/debat/kroniken/ECE2585556/alternativet-vil-forandre-danmark/).

What stands out when we compare the different approaches just listed is their shared attempt to work from what we could call *'user driven standards'* (Nissen, 2013; 2014a; 2014b; 2014c), or said in another way, we are in all these attempts witnessing *an idealization of the paradoxical act of the user's creation and use of standards with which the intention is to regulate the user itself*

(Nissen, 2014c). Simply put, we could say that the clients in therapy want to set the standards for their own lives and for what is a good path to reach the standards for a good life. The same goes for the users in social work, patients in medical health and people in the political life.

It is this trend of 'user driven standards' that I, in cooperation with Morten Nissen and Mads Bank, have studied in our research project: 'user driven standards in social work'. We have studied 'user driven standards' in the practice of social work, both because this social practice, due to its main purpose of facilitating what we could call *the user's reacceptance as subject in society* (Philp, 1979), have a longer tradition for implementing 'user driven standards' as part of their work (Nissen, 2012; 2014b), but also because social work's use of 'user driven standards' is done with the intention of producing subjectivity. It is this interaction between the foundation of subjectivity and 'user driven standards' that has been one of our main areas of focus.

In this thesis, I have narrowed this question down to focus on only one variation of 'user driven standards', which I, with inspiration from the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, have called 'liquid standards'. By way of introduction, 'liquid standards' can be described as standards that are ever changing and that prescribe activity without any transcending standards. That means that 'liquid standards' do standardize situations, and subjects who use them are aware of the standardization they bring about. However, the quality of the activities they are prescribing is understood as nothing more than empty bodies, without any reference to social objectivity. This means that individuals that use 'liquid standards' never think of the activity they produce as having a transcending objective existence or transcending meaningfulness. Instead they believe that activities are only given meaning through the local interrelation they are produced in, and would change meaning if the local structure is interrupted.

As we will see, 'liquid standards' are used with the purpose of creating space for fostering subjectivity - they are thought to produce a real user driven memento due to their lack of pre-given meaningfulness. However, what became an important lesson in relation to the practice of 'liquid standards' was Bauman's point that John Law & Annamarie Mol (2002) bring up in their work on *complexities*: interventions tend to have sides effects and sometimes even sides effects that contradict the goal of the intervention. In the case of 'liquid standards', this paradox appeared in the empirical material, namely that the practice of 'liquid standards' in many situations seemed to produce a blocking of the possibility of subjectivity to arise. It is this side effect that this thesis seeks to understand: the paradoxical phenomenon that instead of facilitating subjectivity, the practice of 'liquid standards' often tends to block its actual possibility.

1.1 The Problem for the Thesis

More specifically, the thesis will be a critical dialectical analysis of the following problem:

What impact does the performance of 'liquid standards', as facilitator for subjectivity, have on the process of recognition?

2 The Journey

In the following section, I will introduce my project more generally, and give an introduction to the process with which I evolved the article that is the main part of my thesis. I have called the section 'The Journey' to illuminate how this thesis has been a *historical process*, meaning that it has been a process where every step has fed into the next.

I did not have a plan when I started, but I was, on the other hand, not without direction. On the one hand, I was constantly placed in new situations, facing new problems and new theories. On the other hand, my previous steps on this journey informed each new situation in which I found myself. My process was irreversible and thereby never random.

The journey has in that way both been endlessly long and imperceptibly short. Long in terms of the changes my project and I have been through, short in the sense that I still see the new in relation to things that I saw back in my undergraduate years. I would not say that I am back where I started, but I am definitely neither in a totally new place with this project. It is my hope that the next section will give you as reader insight into this dialectical process I have been through, where nothing stayed the same, while everything in the same breath was remembered and present in every *'new'* that was evoked.

2.1 Resistance towards Recognition

My interest in, what I later would describe as, *the use of 'liquid standards' as facilitators for 'user driven standards'*, arose already back in my undergraduate years. Here I, in relation to an essay in development psychology, was studying recognition as a pedagogical tool in daycare and kindergarten. What I noted at that time was that even though many professionals, as well as parents, were praising a recognition approach towards children, there was also resistance towards the approach. Some parents even recounted how their children were complaining when they were met with appreciative approaches in schools.

Even though this resistance was never my focus in my undergraduate essay, the wonder of what meaningfulness was in play in the resistance toward recognition stayed with me in my later

work. Should recognition not be the very thing we all strive for? Why was it sometimes resisted? It was not until doing research for this thesis that I really started the greater work of understanding the resistance towards recognition, not because it at first was my intention to study this, but because it was exposed to me in the empirical material of our research project.

2.1.1 The original intention

The original intention of my research was to follow practices of recognition to give a microgenetic analysis (see Wagner, 2009) of the process of recognition. It was my hope to produce knowledge for professionals who wanted to work with recognition as part of their approach towards children and young people, but without falling into the neo-liberal understanding of recognition as the act of letting the individual be autonomic and self-responsible, as it is understood in traditions like Appreciative Inquiry (see Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) or Recovery (see Cornett, 2003), and as it is taken up in Danish schools (see Frederiksen, 2007) and daycares (see Ritchie, 2004). I wanted to write for professionals who were looking for an alternative to the neo-liberal understanding, but who at the same time found it hard to grasp the heavy theoretical alternatives written by e.g. Axel Honneth (see 2003) or my own supervisor Morten Nissen (see e.g. 2012; 2014a). I wanted to produce accessible and recognizable knowledge on "How to recognize?" without turning recognition in to a bare act of *letting the individual choose for themselves* or *respecting the user's voice.* I wanted to capture the complexity of recognition that Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel had pointed out by letting the formation of subjectivity be a matter of giving up your subjectivity (cf. this thesis), but in a way where professionals could use it in practice. Even though the problem of my thesis changed from producing a 'How-to guide' for professionals who wanted to perform recognition to exploring how the use of 'liquid standards' affects recognition, it is still my ambition to make this work accessible to professionals working in the field.

2.2 Appreciative Ceremony and Resistance towards Recognition

Through my work in the research project SUBSTANce, I was connected with the Danish drug facility, Helsingung, with whom my supervisor, Morten Nissen, and the Ph.D. student, Mads Bank, had co-worked for some years when I entered the project. Especially one of the projects that was about to start back in January 2014 seemed suitable for the above-mentioned original intention of my thesis. The project was to evaluate one of the professional's (we are going to call him Michael in this thesis) newly invented method: "Appreciative Ceremonies" [Værdsættende Ceremonier].

Very briefly, an Appreciative Ceremony is a practice where the users are given feedback on the improvements or challenges, which, from the professional's point of view, seem to have been in the users' life over the previous week. The feedback has to be positively formulated, so that it points out the user's progression or potential for progression. The idea is that this kind of appreciative narrative about the youth would help both professionals and youth to obtain a new and more productive narrative about who the youth are, and in the end help the youth to a better life (Haldberg, 2013).

To follow these processes of recognition or appreciation, Nissen and I received five video observations from the drug facility, Helsingung. They where randomly chosen by Michael himself, who had produced them for the purpose of both his own supervision, and to share them with the youth for a collective evaluation of the conversation they were having. In addition to the Appreciative Ceremonies, the video showed many different types of conversation between the professionals and the youth, such as: planning for trips, lunch planning, talks about quitting hash, conversations about rating scales, just to mention a few. Many of the conversations, like the Appreciative Ceremonies, were more or less obliviously thought to empower the youth through the cultivation of their subjectivity or we could say their *will*.

What caught my attention, however, was how the youth in many cases resisted the professionals' attempt to empower them. The resistance I had identified years back in relation to recognition in schools and day care was once again present. The resistance I saw made me change my agenda with the research project from trying to identify "how to recognize", to trying to understand what happens in the situation where the youth resisted the professionals' attempts to foster their subjectivity.

2.3 The Identification of Liquid Standards

For a long period of my writing process I had two hypotheses for why the youth resisted recognition that seemed plausible. The first was that the professionals were performing what we could call a *veiled game* –veiled for both themselves and the youth, where they were recognizing the youth only to achieve their own goal of getting the youth back on track. In this case, the youths' resistance could be seen as a reaction to this hidden agenda, where recognition was a tool to get the youth to accept the professionals' standards for a good life. As we shall see later in this thesis, I still believe that there are hidden agendas and the wish to move the youth in a pre-defined direction in play in relation to the situations where the youth practice resistance of recognition. But there is more to the story than that. However, before we turn to this *more* I would like to present the second hypothesis. From a dialectical perspective, which is the perspective I am working from in this thesis, the

process of recognition is an ambivalent affair where the subject is not only given the status of being an acting subject, but also has to give up some of its sovereignty in order to be recognized (see Nissen, 2012). I will return to this paradox later, and for now just let it stand as a statement. With this statement in mind, it does not seem that odd that the youth at Helsingung sometimes resisted recognition, because recognition costs, it is not given for free. Again, this is a hypothesis that I would claim is of relevance to our understanding of the meaningfulness in the youth's resistance towards recognition.

But in the course of my work, I realized that these two hypotheses were insufficient. If we start with the last, even though it costs you something to be recognized, and it therefore may not always be in the individual's interest to be recognized, this explanation did not help me much in understanding the difference between when the youth accepted the cost of recognition and when they did not. I still had to figure out what was special about the resistance situations that made them less attractive for the youth to participate in.

The first hypothesis persisted longer as one of my main interests, but was again and again challenged by Michael's responses to my questions in different conversations with him. What was clear was that Michael himself was aware of the problems in thinking that he could create situations where his or the institution's intentions or hopes for the youth would not be present and would not have an impact on the youth's possibility. Michael's project with the Appreciative Ceremonies is an example of this. Michael had realized that the youth's resistance in other settings could have something to do with the more general agenda of social work of not having any agendas in regards to the users' behavior. He therefore wanted to create a practice where the professionals told some of the things that they where thinking and seeing in the practice around the youth. Michael and the other professionals never made the mistake that we could accuse other performances of post-structuralism for, namely the mistake of forgetting their own creation of ideology or standards (se e.g. Nissen 2012; 2013). Michael never claimed in my co-work with him that he was without prejudices or had some kind of morals in the situation where he was interacting with the youth. However, through the whole time of our co-work, he continued to reflect on and to challenge these prejudices.

Nevertheless, what he and the other professionals did instead and, as we shall see later, what the theoretical sources they where inspired by did, was to understand the standards that were created in their work as solely locally valid. What I realized in my work with Michael was that Michael was not of the belief that his critique provided the right answers to the problem he criticized. Neither did he think that his critique could be seen as free of ideology. But he had given

up the idea of his critique as something that could be seen as valid outside the local situation in which it was given. Moreover, even in these local situations their validity was likewise questioned due to the situations' eternal changeability. With Zygmunt Bauman's terminology I identified Michael's practice as what I called *a practice of 'liquid standards'*. He was setting standards, but never with the thought of their existence outside the very individual he was, the local collective he interacted in, and the specific moment in which he operated.

If we turn to the other practices of recognition that the youth had resistance towards, like *'meeting the youth as experts on their own lives'* or *'giving the youth the right to define their own wellbeing on a scale from 1 to 10'*, a similar pattern appeared. When the youth were treated as experts, when they were placing their rates for how the week had been on a scale, they were considered as the only ones who could know what was the right thing to do. This was done because they thereby could give their own meaning to the professional, so that it became possible for the professional to adjust the treatment to fit the youth's specific needs, and so on. Here, it was just the youth's standardization that was isolated to having validity only in their local being.

It was this practice of local meaning, and at the same time the evisceration of a collective and transcending meaning that crossed local situations, which became the main interest of the rest of my project. Through my analysis of both the videos and theoretical material, I tried to understand what happens to subjects and collectives, when professionals, like Michael, practiced what I called *'liquid standards'*.

In the end, I realized that the practice of '*liquid standards'*, in spite of its intention of creating recognition, in fact blocked the possibility for performing recognition. I present this argument in the following article.

3 An Article for 'Mind, Culture, & Activity'

The article is written for submission to the journal, *Mind, Culture, & Activity*[1]. The journal is an international journal, which aims to promote a dialog between different schools of thought that have *'human activity'* as their interest. More precisely, the journal publishes "articles that examine the relationships between the human mind, the sociocultural environments they inhabit, and the way that mind and culture are constituted in a wide variety of human activities" (*MCA*, 2013, Aims and Scope). It is housed at the Laboratory for Comparative Human Cognition (LCHC) at the University of California in San Diego (UCSD). The LCHC was established in 1978, and the journal serves as

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[1] See http://lchc.ucsd.edu/mca/Journal/

an intellectual meeting place for some of the top scholars working in various disciplines at universities around the world. It is widely recognized as the premiere journal in the broad field of activity-focused research.

This journal is a particularly good fit for my article due to its theoretical focus on human activity. Understanding human activity as the condition under which subjects[2] are formed (see e.g. Holzkamp, 2013; Bang, 2009; Stetsenko, 2013) is the theoretical departure point for the journal and for my article. More specifically, my article stands to make a contribution to contemporary theoretical work on the formation of subjectivity in relation to cultural objects that I call 'liquid standards'.

This journal is also particularly appropriate due to the scope of its readership – scholars working in the field across various disciplines who nevertheless share a commitment to the central role of human activity in the development of human subjectivity. My article engages current literature that would be familiar to its readership. It offers a critical assessment of 'liquid standards', which should be of interest to readers of *MCA*, and which I expect will stimulate further dialogue in the journal and in the field more broadly.

The broad distribution of the journal will help to make my work accessible not only to scholars, but also to professionals working in the field. As one of the objectives of this work is to engage a readership beyond the academy, *MCA* is especially a good place to publish this intervention.

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[2] When I write *subjects* rather than *the subject* it is to underline that subjects can be more than individuals (e.g. Nissen (2012) argues for the *collective's* subjectivity.

Article
Liquid Standards in Social Work

When Recognition Turns in to a Black Hole

It [life] is neither what is expressed to begin with, the immediate continuity and concrete solidity of its essential nature; nor the stable, subsisting form, the discrete individual which exists on its own account; nor the bare process of this form; nor again is it the simple combination of all these moments. It is none of these; it is the whole, which develops itself, resolves its own development, and in this movement simply preserves itself. (Hegel, The Phenomenology of Spirit, §171).

6 Introduction (Article)

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus was one of the first known philosophers to describe how everything is in constant movement. 'No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man.' Most of us know this saying and it makes immediate sense. The water is running, the molecules change position, the soil and stones move, and the second time we arrive at the river bank, it is a new river and we ourselves are no longer the same.

Even though they did not refer to Heraclitus in the drug facility, Helsingund, where I co-worked in the following study, his insight of an infinite flow was very much present in the professionals' logic. This logic was not nameless, but presented with reference to writers like Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida and Ludwig Wittgenstein, and these writers' critique of what we could call the positivistic dream of a stable, objective world. Instead of a *static ontology*, what I saw at Helsingung was what we, with inspiration from Zygmunt Bauman (2000), could call *a liquid ontology*, by which I mean an ontology that emphasizes *movement* as the underlining reality behind all that we find in existence. For example, Michael, one of the professionals at Helsingung, referred to Deleuze's *nomadic theory* (Braidotti, 2011) at one of our meetings. In this reading of Nietzsche, Deleuze describes human experience in the following way:

"The state of experience is not subjective in origin, at least not inevitably so. Moreover, it is

not individual. It is a continuous flux and a disruption of flux, and each pulsional intensity

necessarily bears a relation to another intensity, a point of contact and transmission." (Deleuze,

1973, p. 146).

Deleuze captures well the break with static understandings of the isolated subject's private mind,

and pictures the experience as a complexity of mutually interacting intensities.

This insight – that reality is constructed – is more broadly taken up by a number of traditions

(like Social Constructionism (see Gergen, 2008), Narrative Theory (see White, 2007), and

Feminism (see Braidotti, 2011)) within the field of service professions (see e.g. Anderson, 2012; de

Shazer, 1991; Duncan, Miller & Sparks, 2007; Juelskjær & Staunæs, 2015). In social work in

particular, constructionism is becoming a dominant ontology (Bell, 2012).

However, there is more to my notion of 'liquid ontology' than constructionism, namely a

rejection of any form of *materialism* within social construction. This is well illustrated, for example,

in Deleuze & Guattari's (1987, p. 4) *'bodies without organs'*, which refer to the lack of any

representation within the produced meanings that are to be found in social objects. However, this

does not mean that theorists who practice 'liquid ontology' see themselves as idealist. Rather, they

reject the idea of a dichotomy between the material and the ideal, which, they believe, both end up

in some kind of realism. In contrast, they place an immediacy of nothingness as reality[3] with an

empty core.

This rejection of materiality is indirectly present in Helsingung through the literature that

inspires their work (see Duncan, Miller & Sparks, 2007; Miller & Duncan, 2008; de Shazer, 1991;

de Shazer & Dolan, 2007), and becomes visible in the professionals' performance of these theories

(see case study below). The institution, therefore, offered an opportunity to study the implication of

'liquid ontology' in practice, and this article offers a case study, where it is my claim that there is a

performance what I call 'liquid standards'.

'Liquid standards' can be seen as a necessary consequence of a 'liquid ontology'. The logic

within 'liquid standards' is that because in social reality there is only non-mediated immediacy,

standards can only be formed with a local validity. 'Liquid standards' thereby prescribe

performances that enable the subjects and the collective they are applied in to form local standards

that build on the specific situation rather than given values outside of the specific situation. In fact,

'liquid standards' can hardly be called standards due to their limited application across time and

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[3] See in relation to this, Nissen's discussion of 'negative philosophy' (2012; 2013).

space (cf. Timmermann & Berg, 2003). However, we have to keep in mind that what cuts across time and space is a set of procedures that are repeatedly performed. These procedures I call 'liquid standards'.

The motivation for the performance of 'liquid standards' at Helsingung is to make room for the youth's own standards for what would be a good life, a good treatment, a good definition of their problem, a good solution for their problems and so on, rather than to have the professionals' standards imposed as ruling standards (Helsingung, 2013). What I, however, identified in this study was that the performance of 'liquid standards' was met with resistance from the youth.

It is my claim in this article that this resistance results from a hidden liberal understanding of the subject's freedom within 'liquid standards'. When I write 'hidden' it is due to the 'liquid ontology's' clear understanding of the subject as relationally constituted and relationally acting. However, what we are going to see is that this relational understanding is turned into a very private and abstract understanding of the subject's freedom or ability to work from a free will. I will claim from a dialectical perspective that this liberal understanding arises when the objectivity of the formation of the subject's freedom is rejected. With the use of Hegel's *dialectic of recognition*, this article aims to argue that the resistance toward the liberal understanding of the subject's freedom becomes meaningful in the way that the rejection of objectivity, in fact, blocks the very possibility for the subject to obtain freedom.

7 A case study

The case study presented in this article is done in a close co-work with the Danish drug facility Helsingung[4]. Helsinung is a progressive institution for young drug users, who have fallen out of the school system. The institution is publicly funded, and its goal is to help young drug users get back into either school or work. The goal is not necessary to make the youth quit their drug use, but rather to help them to find solutions to the problems they experience, which prevent them from living a 'normal' life.

What became clear very early in my co-work with the professionals in Helsingung (already in February 2014) was the high level of self-reflection over their own practice among the professionals. For this reason, it has been a pleasure to do research at the institution with professionals who have been as excited as myself in the process of studying the practices that were performed within the institution.

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[4] For the Danish readers: http://www.helsingung.nu/site/Helsingung/Start/

This does not, however, mean that the analysis in this article is the voice of the professionals or the youth that I co-worked with; rather, it is my voice (that, however, is never isolated cf. e.g. Bakhtin's dialogism (1986; 1988)) in the ongoing dialog I have had, and still have, with the people I met at Helsingung. The article is one part of the *'creative chain',* as the Brazilian linguist Fernanda Liberali (2009) puts it, that arose between the professionals and myself, where every formulated *'standpoint'* (see Jensen, 1999; Nissen, in press) in our dialog was moving the others' standpoint in the direction of new collective meanings. Of even larger importance, the article is an embodiment of a hope of producing cutting edge knowledge (see Jensen, 1999; Nissen, in press) within how present philosophies in the Western world impact the opportunities for subjects as well as collectives to arise.

This means that when I bring in a case as the basis for my analysis, it is not the professionals or the youth as specific individuals, that is the object of my interest. Rather it is the *generality* that is to be found within the particular interaction (cf. Ilyenkov, 1960/2008), the *'fossils'* of the human culture and history, as the Danish philosopher Uffe Juul Jensen (1999) pictures it. We could say that I'm looking for what the case can teach us about the more general question of which conditions and which possibilities for action are provided for both subject and collective within the current moment (cf. Jensen, T. B., 1992; Holzkamp, 2005; Nissen, 2012). I'm doing this on the basis of the Marxist tradition's view that *it is only within the particular situations that the human generality is lived* (Wagoner, 2009; Jensen, 1999; Ilyenkov 1960/2008; 1974/1977).

7.1 The New Girl

The following case study is the basis for my analysis. In the case below, we are going to meet the psychologist Michael, who together with his colleague, Mavi, talks with the two young users, Emily and Christian, about how to welcome a new girl to the institution. This act of including the youth's point of view in relation to everyday practices is common at Helsingung. In this case, the inclusion is framed as an invitation to the youth to take the role as experts. The professionals' approach to interpellate the youth as experts is motivated by both social constructionism and Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) (see Anderson, 2005; Anderson & Goolishian, 1992; de Shazer, 1991; de Shazer & Dolan, 2007), and is done with the intention of recognizing the youth's own expertise on their own life, and hence to empower them. The professionals' role is thereby not to tell the youth how to welcome a new girl, but to show a curiosity towards the youth's thoughts on the matter. This curiosity from the professionals side is thought to bring in a general curiosity in the situations, where it becomes possible for the youth to explore new and unknown potential in their lives (cf. Anderson, 2005; de Shazer, 1991). Rather than trying to make the youth give them clear and given

answers to the question they formulate, it is the professionals' intention to create spaces where the youth can explore new thoughts and new possibilities (cf. SFBT). So when Michael asks the youth how to welcome a new girl, his intention is not to seek specific answers (as we see below).

1 Michael: But listen to this, what we would like to just spend 5 minutes on is this. So, she starts after the winter break, uh.. and we would like, you've all tried this with starting here etc. When it's the winter break Mavi and I are trying to plan a little bit, how we're going to best greet Jenny when she's starting etc.

2 Emily: Then we'll bake a cake (E interrupts M's speech. M looks at E, but keeps on talking the way he started).

3 M: Uh… Could you just give us some ideas about what it was like when you started, what was really important to you, in terms of being new and starting here, being accepted in a good way.

4 E: I don't have much to say, because I was the first.

5 M: You were first and…

6 E: I was the first, I was all alone.

7 M: But how… What happened that made you feel like you were welcomed?

8 E: Eh… People talked to me, I think (E yawns) yeah (M nods) basically or I don't know.

9 (C drums on the table, moves his body and looks at M)

10 M: What about you Christian?

11 Christian: Hmm..

12 M: How can we..

13 C: I don't really know either (C rubs his eyes) Hmm..

14 M: How can we best make it so that when Jenny starts here Monday after the break, so she feels it's okay to come here and…

15 C: Make her a good breakfast and say welcome.

16 E: We should probably check if she's vegetarian or not.

17 M: Ok..

18 E: WE'VE MADE YOU FRENCH TOAST

19 (M smiles)

20 E: I don't like that (E says this dramatically)

21 M: Yeah, so of course make sure that…

22 (C interrupts M)

23 C: Not a lot of young people are vegetarians.

24 E: Ron was!

25 C: Oh.

26 E: At least I know about four or five

27 M: Mm

28 M: But of course make sure that we cook her something she likes and…

29 M: What do you think about being.. Now you know… You two know each other pretty well, and eh, have talked…

30 (C and E say something to each other that I can't hear)

31 M: What do you two think that we should to do sort of make her feel like one of the crew here?

32 E: We could invite her out to have a cigarette (E says this in caricature)

33 (Pause)

34 M: Mm (M nods)

35 M: What else? (M looks at C)

36 C: We can talk to her (C shakes her head slightly, leans back and rubs her head)

37 C: Just like normally. Yeah, I don't know (C leans forward and is a bit uneasy while saying this)

38 E: I think we should just pretend like she's not there, she'll probably like that.

39 C: Yes (C looks attentively to M)

40 E: Yes (M looks puzzled at E)

41 M: Mm

42 C: We could also throw her a big welcoming party with flags all over the house and…

43 E: SURPRISE

44 C: Yeah

45 E: WELCOME TO HELSINGUUUNG

46 M: Do you think, uh… like, I get a feeling that that's you find it a bit not serious to talk about it. We feel, I mean we think it's really important because we want to welcome her in the right way, but do you think it's silly that we ask you? (M looks puzzled)

47 E: Yeah yeah (again in caricature)

48 C: No, not really, (C is rubbing he's eyes) I just don't know what would help.

49 M: Well (M open up his arms and looks strait up in the room), the reason we're asking you is that you've tried this, you're young and you've tried starting here, and everything you can tell us about what's important when starting here we can bring with us when we think about what to do with Jenny.

50 E: But it's just because you don't think that much about it, because normally when someone new starts in your class or whatever, you're just more like, more open and nice right, instead of just being closed off and acting like you'd normally do, if you (inaudible) about how you would feel.

51 M: Yes. But, is it that you in a way would want when you start somewhere new, that people are open and nice, like open as, I mean it could be that you said it sort of sarcastically, but…

52 E: No, I'd really like that everyone in a new class where I start just ignore me….

53 M: Mm..

54 E: Exactly!

55 M: Mm

56 E: You've got that just right!

57 M: Mm, are you being sarcastic with me now?

58 E: I was being serious at first

      59 M: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

The conversation ends with Michael telling the youth that he expects them to take good care of Jenny when she starts, and both youth promise to do that.

7.2 The Professionals' Interpretation

After I showed the professionals the video of the case, they interpreted the youth's resistance in two ways. First, they believed that the youth were resisting Michael's attempt to include them in the conversation due to their (the youth) perception that Michael was imposing implicit standards on them. Second, they believed that Michael was not adequately including their views, which prevented them from participating.

However, it is my contention that there is an additional factor that was not identified: Michael's attempt to include the youth as the experts on how to greet a new girl at the institution, was, in fact, itself another reason for their resistance. Far from including the youth, their interpellation as experts, in fact, produced a certain type of exclusion, as we shall see below.

8 No Standard Approach

In his work *Liquid Modernity*, the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2000) states that in contemporary society we experience a kind of anarchism, an anarchism that once was performed in critical theories, fighting the power that oppressed the individual, fighting for the right to be included and for a cultural space for diversity. The paradox today, Bauman states, is that this anarchism has become mainstream. This leaves critical theory a new task, the task of articulating a critique of the

current celebration of the individual's freedom and the quiet decomposition of the collectives (see e.g. Nissen, 2015). We need to address the complex, and not at all times pretty, reality produced with this worship of the individual's freedom from the collective (Mol & Law, 2002).

Michael Foucault and later Nicolas Rose have, with concepts like *'governmentality'*, *'bio-power'* and *'discipline'*, made us aware of the, often implicit, power that is to be found in liberal management (see e.g. Foucault, 1979, Foucault, 2006 and Rose 1998). Their critique will be relevant to the following study in its relation to the problem that Bauman (2000) illuminates when he calls the current society *'liquid'*. Bauman brings in the term liquid from the physical world, to place its quality of being non-stable, not formable and not forming itself, as a metaphor for the extraordinary mobility in today's everyday life. Bauman acknowledges the freedom that current liberal society seems to give individuals; however, what he is questioning is if this freedom places us in a desirable position? For Bauman it seems that this freedom comes with the abandonment of the possibility of creating common and transcending meaning in the collective. "Abandon all hope of totality, future as well as past, you who enter the world of fluid modernity," (Bauman, 2000:22), is the text on the sign over the entrance to the liquid modernity. We could call this tendency in the liquid modernity a 'no standard approach', meaning that it is an attempt to erase collective standards from human life.

Charles Taylor already noticed the tendency toward standardization of *the no standard* back in 1991. In his work *The Malaise of Modernity*, he argued that in modern times it had become an ideal in itself to be *authentic*, meaning that it had become an ideal to *'be true to one self'* rather than to some collective authority. Previously, authenticity, or recognition as a subject, was given through a fulfilment of a pre-given role, but in modern times this relation was turned up-side-down, and it was the movement of finding oneself as a unique person which was seen as an authentic human being (Taylor, 1991). Taylor highlights, what he calls *'liberalism of neutrality'* as an essential side effect of an authentic culture, and elaborates with the following:

"One of its basic tenets is that liberal society must be neutral on questions of what constitutes a good life. The good life is what each individual seeks, in his or her own way, and government would be lacking in impartiality, and thus in equal respect for all citizens, if it took sides on this question." (Taylor, 1991:17-18).

The neutrality of society towards the subject becomes a necessary gesture in the authentic culture, if we as society want to form authentic subjects, because a standpoint from the collective, would be a suppression of the very basis of the human's subjectivity, namely their right to choose and their free enactment of *'what constitutes a good life'*.

Drawing on Bauman, I claim that this liberal neutrality places the subject in a precarious position, where collective meaning, like a common understanding of *'Who am I?'* or *'What will be accepted in a given situation?'* is neglected in order to recognize the individual as an authentic subject, who has the right and the capacity to form itself as disconnected from the collective. It is my further claim that the liberalism of neutrality leaves "men and women to be constantly on the move and promise no 'fulfilment', no rest and no satisfaction of 'arriving', of reaching the final destination, where one can disarm, relax and stop worrying," (Bauman, 2000:33-34). Through trial and error, the individual can try to form a meaningful life, but little help is given from others, because it is he alone who can tell the *true* reality from his point of view. Said in another way, the side effects of an authentic culture seem to be the tendency to worship potentials in movement and devalue fixed or solid phenomena like norms, rituals or collective meaning, in relation to development. Devalue, in the sense that the solid phenomena are seen as blocking the process of development, rather than as a part of the process of development, and further, that solid phenomena are seen as suppressive of the subject, and not involved in the process of creating subjective freedom (see e.g. Braidotti, 2011).

Bauman's diagnosis of our current modernity offers   an understanding of the youth's resistance to participate in the situations presented above as a reaction to the self-responsibility that the 'liquid modernity' imposes on the subject (see also Bauman, 2003). The youth are left alone by the professionals to be the ones to define what is a good way to welcome a new girl in Helsingung, and they are given no help in relation to what the professionals would accept as good answers. That creates a dynamic between Emily and Michael, for instance, where Emily keeps on giving examples of what to do, and Michael keeps rejecting these answers – we are in the trial and error situation, that Bauman identifies. As once identified in Kierkegaard's *Sickness Unto Death* (1849/2011), this situation is not only unpleasant due to the fact that the individual is left completely alone, but also because the individual has to live with the awareness that they have presented views that could not be accepted as valid in the collective, as we see in the case with Emily. This explanation partly accounts for Emily's hurt feelings and subsequent sarcasm after Michael rejects her genuine attempt to answer his question.

However, it is my claim that there is more to this situation than the problem with the subject's self-responsibility and the risk of non-acceptance that this brings with it. Using a dialectical perspective, I will claim that the possibility for the subject to act as a free subject is blocked by the ideology of the 'liquid modernity'. This blockage happens due to the need for what I

have called 'liquid standards', which emerge as a result of the 'liquid modernity's' view that practices have only local validity.

8.1 Liquid standards – the abstraction of the concrete itself

One way to define 'liquid standards' is to compare them with *'traditional'* or *'classical'* standards. Standardization is, in general, a matter of ideology and regulation in the sense that standards are ideals to which concrete activities are being adjusted (Timmermann & Berg, 2003; Nissen, 2014b; in press). Standards are in that sense never neutral, but always a critique of, but also a hope for, the activities to which they are applied (cf. Nissen, in press). The absurd (but also interesting) thing about 'liquid standards' is their *'idealization of no idealization'*. They fulfill the 'liquid modernity's' liberal neutrality in the way that they abandon normativity. Whereas classical standards regulate activity so they get as close as they can to *one* specific value, 'liquid standards' prescribe activity to have no pre-given value, and instead to have an ever changing number of possible values that are always open for negotiation. 'Liquid standards' are thereby paradoxical: *they prescribe no standards as the standard for the activities they regulate*.

The logic of 'liquid standards' recalls what I observed in the approach of the professionals at Helsingung, namely, Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT), as I describe below. As we saw in the case study (and as I explain below), Michael insisted on eschewing all standards in his dialog with Emily. Instead, he sought to create a space free of standards, including his own implicit standards, as a way to help the youth to become active subjects (with the exact opposite result). This logic of 'liquid standards' can be located in the theoretical foundation of SBFT (as I demonstrate below), which is based on a rejection of historically produced general meanings, the conditions under which new, local meanings are created. Consequently, from this perspective, meaning appears as always in the process of movement or change, and as nothing but changing.

However, from a dialectical perspective, 'liquid standards' appear as *abstractions of this movement from the concrete itself*. Here I am drawing on the work of the Soviet philosopher, Evald Ilyenkov, as he defines *concrete* and *abstract* in his work *The Dialectics of the Abstract & the Concrete in Marx's Capital* (1960/2008). Ilyenkov contrasts the dialectical meaning of these terms with how they typically appear from the perspective of Formal Logic (which is the logic that dominates their understanding in everyday life), as I explain below.

8.1.1 Abstract and Concrete in Dialectical Logic

In Formal Logic, Ilyenkov (1960/2008) explains, the two concepts *concrete* and *abstract* are used to distinguish between things in themselves, like a physical chair, which is seen as being in the world

previous to the individual's perception, and the properties or (secondary) qualities of the thing, like the chair's shape, color, texture or cultural meaning, which arise in the human's perception and cognitive processing of the physical thing (think of e.g. a throne, it is not only a chair). According to Formal Logic, the *concrete* thereby refers to physical objects and the *abstract* to the representation of the physical object.

In Dialectical Logic, however, the two terms have, as already mentioned, notably different meanings. Here, concrete and abstract refer to the distinction between *interrelations* and *isolation*. This use and understanding of the terms is already to be found in the etymology of the two terms, as Ilyenkov explains:

"In Latin 'concretus' means simply 'mixed', 'fused', 'composite', compound; while the Latin word 'abstractus' means 'withdrawn', 'taken out of', 'extracted' (or 'isolated'), or & estranged'." (Ilyenkov, 1960/2008:13-14).

In this sense, Ilyenkov continues, now drawing on Marx, the abstract refers to a "one-sided, incomplete, lopsided reflection of the object in consciousness" as "opposed to concrete knowledge which is well developed, all-round, comprehensive knowledge" (Ilyenkov, 1960/2008:36-37). Concrete knowledge is thereby knowledge that captures the whole or the complex interrelatedness of the object of interest.

So when I define 'liquid standards' as abstractions of the movement (the ever-changing flow of locally produced meaning) from the concrete itself, it means that 'liquid standards' are activities that isolate these constantly changing local standards from the whole or the complex interrelatedness (which is itself in the process of change, but which nevertheless has a certain historical durability).[5] As you recall, what we classically do when we standardize is to isolate one aspect of the concrete, idealize it as the essential to take with us from the concrete, and then apply it in a new concrete situation as its ideal (cf. Timmermann & Berg, 2003). However, with 'liquid standards' what is idealized is the movement itself, which occludes the concrete, and stands in for it appearing as its limit, as the concrete itself.

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[5] As Marx famously put it in the *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonapart*, "People make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under conditions of their own choosing, but under conditions existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living" (Marx, 1852).

The interesting thing with this theoretical move is that whereas in classical standardization there remains a separation between the concrete and the abstract (it is an abstraction of a part of the concrete), with 'liquid standards', this separation collapses, and we are left with the abstract alone. In the idealization of the movement all relations that cross time and space are abandoned and thereby what is abandoned is the concrete itself. All that is left is the ever-changing movement.

This point is illustrated within the practice of 'liquid standards'. We now therefore turn to an analysis of the *'non-theoretical'* approach in the therapeutic tradition Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT), where it is my claim that 'liquid standards' are performed.

8.2 A Practical Example of Liquid Standards

I have chosen SFBT as the empirical field for the analysis of 'liquid standards', both because the professionals with whom I have co-worked themselves refer to SFBT as a good ground for understanding their practice, but also because this tradition offers insight into the rationales that are to be found in the work with 'liquid standards'. Said in another way, I see the tradition as a suitable prototype (cf. Nissen, 2015; 2009) for the performance of 'liquid standards'.

Very briefly, SFBT as a therapeutic tradition was founded in the early 1980s (de Shazer & Dolan, 2007) as a radicalization of Brief Therapy, which, from the perspective of Steve de Shazer (1991), one of the founders of SFBT, did not seem to overcome the structuralism that had made Brief Therapy split up with Family Therapy in the first place[6]. SFBT seeks to break with structuralism fully. This is done through the tradition's showdown with previous tradition's problem-focus, and the rise of what SFBT calls *'a solution focus'*. A solution focus is an approach where the therapist, instead of identifying problems and trying to eliminate them, tries, in cooperation with the client, to identify solutions that the client is already performing in their everyday life, in an attempt to make the client do more of the solution behavior rather then the problem behavior (ibid.). The intention with this work is to construct a new and *progressive* narrative about the client, which eventually will make the client live a better life[7]. One of the aspects of the tradition that is thought to help produce this solution with focus and progression in the client's life is SFBTs *non-theoretical approach* to both reality in general and to the client in particular. As we shall see, this approach is a variation of 'liquid standards' due to the approach's prescription of practices that meet the coreless reality that we found in 'liquid ontology'.

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[6] See de Shazer, 1991, for an expression of this issue.

[7] For a fuller introduction to SFBT see de Shazer 1991, ch. 4 & 5 and de Shazer & Dolan, 2007, ch. 1.

8.2.1 Non-theory

De Shazer declared SFBT to be non-theoretical (de Shazer & Dolan, 2007), meaning that the tradition does not form or is based on one grand theory. When de Shazer uses the term *theory*, he mostly refers to attempts of theory to give global or universal explanations to events or areas of knowledge. It is this thought of the possibility to make universal or transcending theories that de Shazer criticizes with his non-theory approach. This critique is important for de Shazer, both because he sees it as a false belief that there should be some kind of larger universal structure behind the language-games we engage in, but also because this false belief is more inhibitory than liberating when it comes to individuals' ability to develop (de Shazer, 1991).

The main inspiration for the non-theoretical approach is Wittgenstein and his philosophical critique of essentialism in the philosophical understanding of the meaning of words. From this critique de Shazer identifies that "difficulty arises when we start to think that words carry their meaning around with them rather than seeing that meaning arises out of use," (de Shazer & Dolan, 2007, p. 100). To de Shazer, a word's meaning is nothing more than an arbitrary construction, without any connection to some kind of material objectivity.

But de Shazer does not stop with words; he brings this understanding of a not exciting objectivity in meaning itself into the matter of *intersubjectivity*. This is done with his claim that we can never strive to more than *misunderstand* each other (de Shazer, 1991). Shared meaning is an *illusion* or *a speculation* to use de Shazer's term and what we can only hope for when we meet the Other is a creative misunderstanding, which hopefully will bring us both a step further. For de Shazer, it is impossible that we ever will know what others have meant with the things they say or do, because we will never know what others have brought with them into their meaning construction. Not even our own meaning can be understood by us. We stand as readers of our own activity like every one else, and it is from our reading that the meaning arises. We can give our best guess, de Shazer claims, but we can never know what was the right meaning in a situation or an expression, basically because it does not exist, according to de Shazer. All we are left with, all that there *is* is this now – the endless relations between an endless number of relationships. The only practice we can do is the practice of non-theory, which for de Shazer means the practice of staying on the surface and never trying to find reasons or explanations, never looking for objective interpretations, because they do not exist (de Shazer & Dolan, 2007).

What we are left with is the local situation; the universal is simply weeded out in SFBT. But that is not the only thing we are losing in this never ending relatedness (or hyper acceleration of the concrete itself). What we also lose is the *relation*. The only thing we can know something about is

the isolated situation, even though it also crumbles in our hands, because the situation in itself is also just another surface, another bare *language game* (de Shazer, 1991; de Shazer & Dolan, 2007) whose meaning is only stretched out between the local circumstances. Nothing more, nothing less than *the now* that we are experiencing.

In Cultural-Historical terms, we could say that what happens in SFBT is that the ever continuous interrelation between meaning and sense (see Nissen, 2012; Liberali, 2009) that is present in the concrete, is reduced to only *sense*, to the private experience of the present; there is no collective *meaning*. This also means that there is no concrete if you interpret the non-theory from a dialectical perspective, because the concrete is the relatedness, the connection, not the isolated or the private, which was referred to as the abstract. What we could say is that non-theory teaches us the lesson in one of the possible consequences of practicing 'liquid standards'; with 'liquids standards' idealization of movement we in fact eliminate our possibility to work concretely, to understand ourselves and others as concrete human beings. What we instead become is in fact very abstract and private; we become a group of individuals rather than a collective.

8.3 Liquid Standards Within The Case

For the individual, non-theory must appear like a perfect situation. Non-theory's abstraction of the local meaning sets the individual totally free to define the standards they want to perform in a given moment. However, this did not appear to be the case within the situation in Helsingung. Rather, the practice of pure movement or autonomic freedom seemed to be resisted by the youth.

For example, when Michael was interpellating the youth as knowledgeable in Statement (St.) 1: 'you've all tried this with starting here', and further in St. 3 by asking what they find important based on their experience, Emily's reaction eventually becomes: *'I don't have much to say,'* (St. 4). As we see throughout the case, this is not true. Emily does have something to say on the matter, she even has so much to say that she interrupts Michael before he finishes his first statement (St. 2). If we focus on the difference between Michael's two statements (St. 1 and st. 3), we may be able to account for the discrepancy between Emily's statement of 'not having much to say' and the fact that she actually has much to say. In St.1 Michael invites the youth to be part of the planning of how they are going to greet Jenny when she starts in Helsingung. Emily immediately answers that they can 'bake a cake' (St. 2), which, in the context of Helsingung, is quite a common practice if you are greeting somebody new to the institution. However, Michael is not interested in common sense. What we see in St. 3 is that he is interested in a much more reflexive practice where the youth shall reflect on 'what it was like' for them to start in Helsingung or 'what was really important' for them in relation to feeling that they were welcome. He is

interested in creating this space where uncertainty is allowed, or as he formulated it after we had seen the video together, he is trying to be *'not-knowing',* which refers to the practice of letting his prejudices and his expertise rest for a moment, and let the youth be the ones to formulate their own standards (cf. Anderson & Goolishian, 1992; Anderson, 2005). But of even more importance, without formulating any standards himself, he is inviting the youth to do the same, and rather than work within common sense, where there is a right answer to his question, he works for a transcendence of common sense. Rather than seeking answers to his specific questions, his main goal is to have the youth reflect on their own experiences. Recognizing that he is not actually interested in her answers, but is rather focused on having her reflect on her experiences, Emily no longer provides genuine answers, but instead becomes sarcastic in her response.

This dialog illustrates the 'liquid standards' approach. First, Michael insists on staying in the not-knowing position. Second, he is not interested in their actual answers based on their experience, but instead seeks to engage the youth in reflecting on their experience as an end in itself. His objective is to foster this movement of reflection rather than to find actual solutions to the problem of greeting Jenny. Third, his approach seeks to eschew the socially produced general meanings that are actually present in their dialog.

This last point occurs in three ways. First, he does not accept the youth's answers that are based on common ways of greeting at Helsingung. For example, when the youth suggest to bake a cake or to go for a cigarette (both common ways of greeting at the institution), he does not appear interested in these answers. Second, he does not appear interested when the youth draw on ways of greeting that are common in broader society. For instance, when Emily states that the youth must ask if they are vegetarian, he dismisses her answer as something obvious and moves on. Third, he insists on questioning obvious points of connection between them that are based on common sense. For example, when Emily obviously stops being sarcastic, he nevertheless underlines the possibility that she may still be sarcastic, noting the possibility that he may be misunderstanding her, which SFBT claims is always the case.

This approach results in blocking the very possibility of the youth from becoming active subjects in this dialog. When the socially produced general meanings are removed from the dialog, the youth refuse to genuinely participate in the activity. And with good reason! In order to become active subjects, the youth require the general meanings that are no longer present. Instead, Michael and the youth find themselves at an impasse, and the dialog decomposes into separate individuals that are not able to meet, as we identified in the analysis of SFBT above. I explore this phenomenon below with a detailed reading of Hegel's master-slave dialectic.

9 Subjectivity and Relatedness to the Other

In his work *The Phenomenology of Spirit*[8] (Phänomenologie des Geistes), Hegel opposes the understanding of the subject's freedom, as the dissolution of all relatedness between the subject and the Other – which is the bare negative understanding of freedom we find in 'liquid standards'. In fact, Hegel places the *'relatedness to the Other'* as the medium through which the subject can gain its freedom from the Other. It is, of course, Hegel's parable about the slave and the master, and with it the process of recognition, I am referring to here. Readers who are familiar with the parable, will know that what happens is that two equal beings meet, struggle, one wins and becomes the master, the other loses and becomes the slave, but in the end winner and loser switch positions and the slave becomes the final winner of his freedom.

The important thing Hegel saw in the slave-master relationship was the slave's labor (see also Bernild, 2001), or his activity, as a subject who with his *will* and *intentionality* could solve problems for his master. He writes:

"(...) albeit the fear of the lord is the beginning of wisdom, consciousness is not therein aware of being self-existent. Through work and labour, however, this consciousness of the bondsman comes to itself." (The Phenomenology of Spirit, §195).

The slave is truly objectified as the master's tool to gain his desire, but he is not just any tool or any object he is a *subject-object* (Nissen, 2012:171). It is his quality as a subject, as a human[9], that is cultivated in his role as a slave. Due to his status as a worker for the master, the slave's *will* or *subjectivity*, his unique transformation of the objectivity he is engaged in through this work, is recognized and in the end becomes visible for both the master and the slave himself through the products of the slave's production. The slave will be able to say:

"Yes, this is my work – yes, this *I* am: besides being my master's slave, I am also the craftsman, the producer who can make this piece, I am master of this work." (My translations of Bernild, 2001: 9).

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[8] Also called The Phenomenology of Mind. I prefer 'Spirit' to avoid the mistake of linking the book to solely be working with cognitive processes.

[9] In dialectical logic as it is presented by e.g. Marx, it is precisely the intentional use of tools in the production of value, that makes a human as *a human* and not just an animal.

Through his work, the subject (the slave in Hegel's parable) *externalizes* himself, he embodies his activity (his transformation of objectivity), in the objects that he produces (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:129).

Lev Vygotsky and Alexander Luria (1994) identify a similar process in their experiments with children and their linguistic development. They write:

"Words directed toward the solution of the problem pertain not only to objects belonging to the external world, but also to the child's own behavior, to its actions and intentions. With the aid of speech the child for the first time proves able to the mastering of his own behavior relating to itself as to another being, regarding itself as an object. Speech helps the child to master this object through the preliminary organization and planning of his own acts of behavior. Those objects which were beyond the limits of accessible operations, now, thanks to speech, become accessible to the activities of the child." (Vygotsky & Luria, 1994:111).

When the child, through the mastering of language, can objectify its own activity, it becomes possible for it to regulate its own activity intentionally. Similarly, for the slave or any other subject; in the objectification of the subject, the subject can evolve a self-relationship that brings in *intentionality* or *will* in the subject's activity.

The subject's will does not arise outside of the collective, but through the collective. For example, in order to be able to do the work, the slave would have to submit himself to the meaning that is embedded in the *means* available for him to do the work (e.g. the production of a house would require him to adapt to the hammer, the saw and the bucket standards). He will thereby not only have to let himself be objectified in order to be realized, but also make the culturally produced objectivity in the tools meaningful to him. He must attune his own understanding, his sense of the objectivity to the collective meaning that the tools provide him. If we turn to the language and its meaning that the children in Vygotsky and Luria's example were learning, we see that it is not given to them passively, but through the interaction with the more knowledgeable helpers (cf. the zone of proximal development, Vygotsky, 1934). Further, the very meaning in the language is culturally founded by previous generations, and transcends the subject's local activity (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Or as Nissen (2014a:66) writes:

"In the Vygotskian tradition, we might come to think of Leontiev's example with the child for whom the spoon, as an objectified meaning, is a not just an immediate instrument, but prototypical of the cultural standards for eating that the child is learning (...)"

The meaning of words, a spoon or any other artifact, is not just subjectivity constructed, it is culturally founded. So that even though the means we work with can appear neutral, in terms of the effect they have when we use them, these means are indeed standardized and they standardize the activity and further transcend their local use.

We must be careful, however, to not fall to the other extreme and neglect the subject's own activity in the process of forming its subjective freedom, because even though the collective is ever present it is exactly the subject's activity, its work, which Hegel identifies as the crucial point in the formation of subjectivity. To capture the process of recognition we have to understand it dialectically: in its existence as simultaneously a movement of the subject by the collective (remember that the subject has to let its sense be transformed by the collective meaning in order to be able to take part or work on the collective meaning) and a movement of the collective by the subject (it is in the subject's transformation of the collective that his will arises). In this sense, both subject and collective mutually constitute each other.

Hegel's dialectic of recognition teaches us that the subject's freedom does not come with autonomy or elimination of the Other, but rather with *its participation in the collective*, as the Danish psychologist Morten Nissen would frame it (see Nissen, 2009; 2012). It is in the subject's simultaneous existence as part of and Other to the collective, as both one who is changed by and is changing the objectivity it is related to, that the freedom to act, the will of the subject, arises. It is in the subject's relatedness to the Other that it becomes free.

10 Recognition and Liquid Standards

What becomes clear after this reading of Hegel is that it is not without cost when 'liquid standards' idealize only the *'immediate continuity'* in human life, as Hegel termed it in the quote in the very beginning of this article. Rather than saving the subject from being absorbed by the dominant standards, it seems that the subject's possibility to interact in the world is jeopardized.

In the case study, the youth never really arrive at a position from where they can objectify themselves and become self-reflexive, and thereby free to act of their own will. The objectification or the fixing of a standpoint would simply break the flow that the 'liquid standards' was supposed to secure. It is, from this perspective, not surprising that the youth resist participating in the practice

that is standardized by 'liquid standards', as their participation would mean that they would have to accept not being recognized as *participating subjects*. We could further ask if the resistance thereby can be considered a choice from the youth's side? What Michael is asking of them is to be active in the performance of only liquidity (he does not accept their attempt to participate under other terms), but active participation under these terms is simply not possible.

The practice of 'liquid standards' is thereby paradoxical. It was enacted to bring more freedom to the subject, but in the end, what the subject is left with is a vacuum without much to grasp on to. From Emily's indignant reaction at the end of the case (St. 52-56), this vacuum seems frustrating and difficult to navigate. It is in one way obvious for her, and for the rest of us, that her active participation is wanted, on the other hand is it impossible for her to meet the criteria for what will be recognized as a subject within the collective. In fact, what would constitute recognition in the collective is a 'liquid being', it would be the performance of an isolated local meaning, but the practice of this would never be something the collective could recognize, due to its local validity.

11 Conclusion (Article)

We can conclude that from a dialectical perspective the practice of 'liquid standards' is difficult to reconcile with the process of recognition. Rather than produce space for subjectivity, this practice appears to confuse and pacify subjects. It is my claim in this article that to produce a situation where recognition can evolve, we would have to include the socially produced objectivity, rather than reject it in the name of the subject's freedom.

Frame part 2

12 Methodological Decisions

In the following section, I argue for the methodological decisions I have made throughout the research project. I have framed the argumentation around three themes. First, I explore the nature of the research project's object of interest. I identify that 'liquid standards' is a dynamic object that we have to study in its relationship to the subject. Second, I argue that theory is always theory about *something*, and that this *something* refers to the objective material world whose transformation through human activity gives rise to and is informed by social constructions. From this perspective, the goal of theory is to understand the complex specificities of this dynamic in relation to the object of interest. Third, I use Uffe Juul Jensens' work as inspiration for how we can explore dynamic objects like 'liquid standards' through case studies.

12.1 Liquid Standard as Dynamic Objects

The standards phenomenon is often only understood as static phenomenon, due to standards' function as mediator of values that cross situations and time. However, standards as performed phenomena are more than just static; they are transformative. They are not only transformative in the situations to which they are applied, but are also themselves transformed (Timmermann & Epstein, 2010). In concrete situations, standards are taken up by subjects in meaningful ways, and are thereby slightly changed. However, they never change so much that they stop being recognizable. Said in an other way, even though I write my thesis one way, for it to be recognized as an academic thesis I have to fulfil the standards for academic argumentations, the formulas for the thesis length, font and so on, for what I'm writing to be accepted as being within what is considered a thesis.

We could even say that standards first become standards in the moment that they are being performed. The prescriptions for how to behave are in themselves not a guarantee that they will be performed over time and space, and thereby become a standard for a certain way of doing something (Timmermann & Epstein, 2010).

Standards are thereby not isolated and static phenomena, like a billiard ball or the resistance within a cord. They are dynamic phenomena in that sense that they are first of all produced, further

because they themselves produce, and then again are they transformed through their own transformation of individuals, collectives, physical things, ideal things, and so on. Standards are thereby complex phenomena that are in a constant state of development, not an arbitrary development, but rather a development that is meaningful within the objectivity the standard is performed, as I explain below.

In relation to the question of how to study dynamic phenomena like standards, the Danish developmental psychologist Jytte Bang (2009) brings in an important and often neglected point, namely that what in many cases is done, when it is realised that the object one is studying is acting in a dynamic and complex way is an increase in the amount of quantitative complexity, (like adding more factors to one's analysis or studying a variation of the type of object you are researching). However, this increase in complexity does not necessarily save the object of interest from being studied as if it were a static and isolated phenomenon. To meet the dynamic object, Bang continues, one will have to face the mechanic understanding of the object, rather than the scope of other objects that the object is affected by. Because the problem is not only that in most 'traditional' research neglect that the object they are studying stands in an endless field of relations to other objects, but also that they understand the object as passive and static in the world (like the billiard ball). Standards are certainly not passive or static, as was just argued above, and we therefore have to look for other methods to study them than what 'traditional' research offers.

In this regard, Bang turns to the dialectical perspective, where objects are understood to be formed in relation to the subjects who use them, and where it becomes necessary to study the object-subject rather than the object in isolation. She writes:

"(...) the 'dialectical' end of the scale proposes 'everyday life' to be greatly dynamic suggesting that no single part can be studied in isolation from other parts or be fixed in time and space. 'Everyday life' has systemic properties and in her studies the researcher should expect to find ways in which people co-constitute and change conditions of life in meaningful ways rather that any simple cause-effect relation." (Bang, 2009, p. 569).

We could still talk about an increased complexity, but rather than in quantity it is a qualitative change, which is brought in. The object itself is perceived as standing in an *'intra-action'* (Barad, 1998) with the subjects who, through their use of the object, also produces it. The relationship between the object and the subject is thereby more than a bare *interaction*, meaning that the object and subject are more than just stimulating each other. In fact, they are co-

constructing each other. If we want to study social objects like *'liquid standards'*, we will have to think beyond the mechanical perspective's understanding of them as isolated and passive units and meet the objects in their dialectical relations with the subjects who use them.

This means that, rather than having an abstract definition of 'liquid standards' as our unit of analysis, we must have 'liquid standards' in their intra-relation with the concrete situations where they are performed. This realization was one of the motivations behind my choice of a case study. To really understand 'liquid standards' I had to observe them as they arose in the intra-action with subjects, because it was in fact only here they existed as real concrete objects, rather then bare abstract ones.

However, this does not mean that we can never formulate any theories or general knowledge about 'liquid standards', and that my case study thereby is only of interest for Helsingung, as I explain below.

12.2 Understanding a Dialectical Object's Generality

Naïve realism is near non-existent within postmodern research (Christensen, 2002), and it can seem a dangerous affair when we start to talk about producing general knowledge or understanding of phenomena. If the object we are studying is dynamic and in an intra-relation to the subjects that are using them, would it then not be an obvious mistake to think that we can produce anything else than local knowledge?

We have already met this claim in relation to the logic behind 'liquid standards'. Like in the article it will still be my view that there is an alternative to the dichotomy between naïve realism and radical relativism, and this alternative is dialectical materialism[10].

What is special about Marx's philosophy is its understanding of the objective world as socially constructed and dynamic, while at the same time it insists on its materiality (Bang, 2009), including the materiality of 'ideal' objects (thoughts, customs, mathematical truths, standards etc.) (cf. Ilyenkov, 2014).

For example, a standard for how to proceed in an emergency situation on an airplane is not made up in an arbitrary fashion. The standard refers back to physical relations like the airplane's construction, what is the fastest way to access an emergency exit, and so on. It refers back to established customs in the culture: we are e.g. always told that we should start with providing ourselves with oxygen and then our children, and that this is at all necessary to say bears witness to

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[10] 'Dialectical materialism' is not referring to the Soviet regime's political system, but to the philosophy of Marx. I have chosen this term because of its clear reference to how the object of interest is both produced and real.

the social norms of always saving your children before yourself. The fact that we at all need an instruction from the stewardess reflects that airplanes sometimes crash or, even more basically, that we as humans are flying. We could continue because a standard's relation to human practice and the material world are complex. The point is that social objects are produced but not arbitrary, and that they have an objective existence.

Social objects thereby have a dialectical character in terms of both change and rigidity. They are not only fluid, as they are perceived in the performance of 'liquid standards', but also static (have a temporal durability). This dialectic is well formulated by Bang (2009) who states that from dialectical perspective, the performance of social objects always brings in an 'absent present' of the "intentions of humans across generations" (p. 589). We could say that the human transformation and reproduction of objects bear in them an indexicality of human history through which human practices are formed (Jensen, 2009; Nissen, 2012). The 'intentions of humans' are not nature-given, but they are still objective in that sense that they have taken form within the world. For example, the form of the hammer is not given by nature (but it is neither arbitrary, rather it evolved in relation to a need for hammering things together), but after it is formed, it forms further standards for how tools, working habits, house building, nails and so on, are performed. What we as researchers can study and find an understanding of is this produced g*enerality* that crosses time and place, and directs (without determining) the potential within present performance that that we as researchers experience (cf. Ilyenkov, 1960/2008; 1974/1977). This is important not only for the purpose of understanding the past we came from, but also to understand what opportunities are embodied in the present performance (Bang, 2008; 2009).

So when I met the young users' resistance to the practice of 'liquid standards' in given situations, there was more to look for than the bare surface that was the only reality in the performance of 'liquid standards'. There was the human practice that the youth's resistance was taking part in – a human practice with *a history* or *a generality* that I could try to understand.

I could ask, like the Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman (1974) did in his studies, "What is going on in this situation?" in relation to the case study, without becoming essentialist. Because when I was asking it was with an awareness of the answer's dynamic quality, and again, not dynamic in the sense that it was without reality or a historicity, but in the sense that it was produced in the humans' intentions over generations, like Bang (2009) formulated it.

What I found to be a part of the historicity in the youth's resistance, was the use of what I called 'liquid standards'. With the performance of 'liquid standards' in mind, the youth's resistance became meaningful much broader than as an immediate *'lack of desire to participate in the*

situation'. Their resistance became meaningful on a general level, as one possible reaction to a more general tendency.

However, the analysis did not stop with the bare identification of the use of 'liquid standards' or the effect they seemed to have (the youth stopped participating when 'liquid standards' where performed by the professionals). Rather it became the purpose of the analysis to understand what was fundamental mechanism within the performance of 'liquid standards' that created the effects I had identified. The problem for the project became thereby to understand, not only *what* impact the performance of 'liquid standards' had on the subjects and the collective they were performed in[11], but also *how* the impact was crated. In the following section, I reflect on how researchers can study both the generality within particular situations and how to study the creation of effect rather than the effect alone.

12.3 A Case Study 'Just-In-Time'

The Danish philosopher Uffe Juul Jensen's (1999, p. 81) concept *'philosophy just-in-time'* was a great inspiration in relation to the question on how to do research in a way, where you can produce general knowledge, without reducing the object of interest to a static and isolated object. The concept illuminates how researchers[12] can transcend what Nissen (2009, p. 68) calls *'the dilemma of rigor or relevance'*. The dilemma covers the dichotomy you could draw between, first, research that attempts to find clean objectivity, "outside the turmoil of practice and historical change" (Jensen, 1999, p. 81) and, second, research that in order to produce relevant knowledge never transcends local knowledge. What Jensen (1999) identifies is that the first will always be *ahead* of it's time, in that sense that it only can bring in corrections or alternatives to the current practice, but without ever knowing the practices it is correcting. This of course is a practice that is in danger of producing research that is not relevant to the practices on which it is supposed to have an effect, and may thereby turn out to be ineffective research (Nissen, 2009). The second, however, is always behind the practice to which it is thought to be bringing new and relevant knowledge. It is

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[11] This would be a reverse research process, because it was the effect of liquid standards (the youth's lack of participation) that lead me to the identification of 'liquid standards' in the first place.

[12] I'm aware that Jensen is explicitly writing about different forms of *'philosophies'*, and not different forms of *'research'*. It is, however, my claim that Jensen never sees philosophy as a discipline that is isolated from research, but rather that philosophy and research are interrelated, and that to work with a 'just-in-time' philosophy also means to do research 'just-in-time' (see Jensen, 1999).

reflective in the sense of *mirroring* the practice it is studying, but in its attempt to be true to the practice it is researching it never transcends what is already known (Jensen, 1999).

For Jensen, the dialectical synthesis to this dichotomy is philosophy (or research) that is *'just-in-time'*. Jensen elaborates the concept in the following way:

"That is, a philosophy that can simultaneously (or maybe concurrently) play a constructive role in science and practice and be a critical reflection of actual science and practice, a philosophy that changes through its participation in changing science and practice." (Jensen, 1999, p. 81).

The 'just-in-time' does not refer to being *on* time, but, as we see in this quote, to be *in* time. It means that research "takes part in current and actual struggles and debates, rather than having once and for all stipulated a metaphysics or only being able to look back on development as accomplished" (Nissen, in press, p. 9). One may ask: How do you both place yourself within and at the same time critical to a practice, as it is asked of you to do in a 'just-in-time' perspective? To illustrate how to work 'just-in-time' Jensen (1999) brings in Marx, through an analysis of how Marx transcended *the standpoint of 'civil society*[13]*'* through his studies of classical political economy and his proposal of *the standpoint of the 'human society'*.

Very briefly, the standpoint of 'civil society' refers to an understanding of society as being composed of isolated individuals, with only their own gain as motivation for participating in the society. From the standpoint of 'human society' the individual is considered as in an interrelation with other individuals and the social objectivity, and thereby never active in isolation, and never active with only one's own gain in mind. One's own gain becomes also a part of the collective gain because the borders between individuals and others/objectivity are permeable. What is important for now, however, is not the precise meaning of these concepts, but how Marx related to them.

Marx did not understand 'civil society' as "an ontological entity that completely permeates what we, for short, call 'members of civil society,'" (Jensen, 1999, p. 94); instead, he saw it as a standpoint from which a particular human practice was given meaning, a meaning that had an impact on how the particular practice was performed. This means that "[i]n discussing the standpoint of civil society we specify norms, standards and ideals governing a particular (complex,

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[13] Jensen (1999, p. 88) offers the following definition of 'civil society': "Civil society, as introduced by Adam Ferguson and adopted by Hegel, refers to the social, economic and judicial relations in which we take part to satisfy our needs. The relations in which individuals participate become the means for individuals to realize their ends."

often contradictory) human practice considered from a particular standpoint." (Jensen, 1999:94). This discussion of standpoints was exactly what Marx did. Rather than just reject the existence of 'civil society', he acknowledged its existence as a mediator for *how* society functioned, and he engaged himself in its logic, to be able to show how it affected the objective world as well as subjectivity.

This process of getting to know a standpoint is a slow and complex matter, Jensen continues. For example, Marx used ten years studying classical political economy at the British Museum, to form his understanding of concepts like 'civil society' and, more generally, his development of 'the labour theory of value'. In these studies he searched for concrete examples in history of *how* economics had been done, and *how* this performance had formed the economic system and the broader society that was evolving around the economy in his time. In gaining this understanding it became possible for Marx to challenge the constraints the standpoint provided by bringing up relevant alternatives (Jensen, 1999). The alternatives gain their relevance due to their inherent heritage from the standpoint Marx was critical towards.

Nissen (in press; see also 2012 and 2014c) use Ernst Bloch's concept *'concrete utopia'* about the critical movement that Jensen is trying to capture here. The alternatives is *utopian* in that sense that they are *hope* for another development than the one it is criticizing, but the hope is not *abstractly* formulated, it is formulated on the foundation of what is actually a potential possibility for development in the concrete situation it is studying. Nissen (in press: 8) writes: these are "real possibilities to guide struggles for their realization." To create these *real possibilities* one would have to look very close (as Marx did) into the standpoint or object one is studying. One would have to understand the dynamic that the standpoint or object is produced by and produces to see what other potential could be inherent within the standpoint. One would have to *understand* the practices of the standpoint or object; one would have to draw out the concrete (the whole) of what one is critical towards.

However, this does not mean that the alternatives themselves as phenomena are concrete, neither does it mean that the picture Marx drew of the standpoint he criticized is concrete. Every description or alternative will be an abstraction, but the point is that these abstractions can be made on a different foundation. Ilyenkov (2008) writes:

"Dialectical logic does not at all reject the truth of the proposition that a universal concept is an abstraction expressing the 'general nature', the 'mean type' of the separate cases, individual things, phenomena, events, yet it goes further and deeper, and therein lies the difference

between its conceptions and those of old logic [metaphysical]. A dialectical conception of the universal assumes the transformation of the individual into the universal and transformation of the universal into the individual, a transformation continually going on in any actual development". (p. 87)

We are back to the question of understanding. In the dialectical tradition, the abstraction in itself is not problematic, actually it is seen as a part of the development of the social world. The problem arises when abstractions are made without understanding. To gain understanding we have to place ourselves in the standpoint we are studying, rather than outside of it, as it is proposed in Science (Jensen, 1999).

To meet this insight of the need for studying the particular, in order to understand the general (the cultural-historical guidance of human practice) I chose to let my project evolve around five video observations, as previously mentioned. The videos allowed me to study the different cases where the youth's resistance appeared in detail to see what norms and dynamics there seemed to be leading the performance that took place in the cases. Rather than just find an effect (the youth's resistance), the case study allowed me to understand *how* the resistance was developed and because the videos allowed me to follow the microgenetic movement or "intermediate stages" (Wagoner, 2009:101) in the performance of 'liquid standards'.

To study and understand the particular situation, however, was also to understand the context in which the situation was happening (cf. this section). In my project, this contextualization was provided through a line of different acts. First, I interviewed Emily and Michael about their understanding of the situations where they were involved, to get a better understanding of the meanings they brought into the situations. Second, I read literature that Michael found inspiring in relation to his work (see de Shazer, 1991; de Shazer & Dolan, 2007; Anderson, 2005; 2012; Anderson & Goolishian; 1992; Deleuze, 1973; Ducan, Miller & Sparks, 2007). Third, I oriented myself on the institutions webpage (http://www.helsingung.nu/) and in the different productions from the institution (videos and literature) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uznxmIHvc5s; Halberg, 2013; Helsingung, 2013). Fourth, I had meetings and more informal dialogs with the professionals at Helsingung. These meetings (together with the interviews that were located at the institution) provided me with a more coherent understanding of Helsingung as institution than the videos and interviews. Finally, it can be mentioned that I am still presently co-working with Michael and my supervisor Nissen in a further exploration of the work with 'user driven standards' at Helsingung.

I conducted this research (which I continue at the present time) to get a better understanding of the historicity that was embodied in the videos and the specific case that I choose for the article. I was trying to understand the concrete wholeness of the youths' resistance, with its complexity of relations and its transformation.

In my understanding of how the youth's resistance evolved and how the performance of 'liquid standards' could block the process of recognition it became possible for me to come up with a *concrete utopia* for how the subject's freedom could be performed *through* the relation to the Other, rather than through the disconnection with the Other (cf. Hegel).

13 Overall Conclusion

What I have identified in this thesis is that the performance of 'liquid standards' has a noticeable impact on the process of recognition. By rejecting social objectivity, 'liquid standards' reject the foundation on which subjectivity can arise.

Rather than a finished theory, the thesis is the stating point for further work on both producing a deeper understanding of 'liquid standards' and a better understanding of alternative ways of producing subjectivity through recognition.

What stands out in the thesis as important in relation to the production of recognition is that objectivity and objectification do not necessarily have to produce suppression of the subject, as it is often thought in progressive social work.

14 Reflections

If we should criticize this thesis, it would be my claim that it is weak in its formulation of an alternative to 'liquid standards'. Thereby it does not live up to its agenda of not only formulating a critique but also a standpoint on how to address the problems identified in 'liquid standards'. This work of articulating an alternative would be an obvious follow up to the article.

Further, the article's narrow identification of 'liquid standards' a weakness. It had been my hope with the article to place my critique within post-structuralist theory more broadly. This does not mean that I do not recognize the validity of the knowledge I have produced in my analysis at Helsingung, but researching 'liquid standards' in other settings than only at Helsingung would have strengthened my analysis. However, I believe that we have learned a lot about 'liquid standards'

from the case study I have provided. Again it is my hope to get more time to unfold these first insights this article provides. 'Liquid standards' are more complex than it has been possible for me to capture in the article.

15 Reference

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