The Concept of Object

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The aim of this paper is to determine a concept of 'object' which can be used in the sense of 'the object of an activity (or project)' so that the full range of the concept of 'project' can be elaborated consistently and without ambiguity. Such a concept must be helpful in understanding the motivation of individuals participating in a project, the perception of a project from both inside and outside, how a project undergoes qualitative change as a result of experience, and how a project finally integrates itself into the community having changed the way that the community thinks and acts through realisation of its object.

The various concepts of object

The Latin *objectum* (Inwood, 1992, pp. 203ff), literally 'something thrown before or against', was first used by Duns Scotus in the 13th century as something ascribed to the 'subject'. At this time, 'subject' had the meaning of the 'subject matter of discourse', so the 'object' was what was thrown against it, i.e., what was said of the subject, the predicate.

In the 17th century, the meanings of subject and object underwent an inversion. René Descartes made *subjectum* the mind rather than what was before the mind, and Christian Wolff gave *objectum* the meaning of something thrown before the *mind*, i.e., the object of knowledge but also of striving, of desire and of action by the subject. This inversion reflected the first efforts to focus on what was in the mind as something distinct from what the mind was thinking of.

The German *Das Objekt* is derived from the Latin *objectum* in the later sense. *Das Objekt* does not have to be a real or material thing, though Kant also used it in that narrower sense, and in common speech it means just that. But *Objekt* is taken to be an 'objective' situation, though imagined or perceived and given meaning by the mind. In English, the issue has been somewhat confused by 'subject' retaining its earlier meaning of the passive subject matter of discussion or work, subject of a murder plot or of a king, alongside the usage more common in philosophy as the active agent or mind.

The native German word *Gegenwurf* – 'what is thrown against' – was synonymous with *Objekt*. From the 17th century, however, *Gegenstand* – 'what stands against' – displaced *Gegenwurf* in everyday speech and in philosophical writing, including that of Kant, while remaining synonymous with *Objekt*.

It was Hegel who introduced differences in meaning between *Gegenstand* and *Objekt*, and all the various meanings of the word 'object' were anticipated by Hegel and all point to one or another aspect of Hegel's concepts, so let's start with Hegel.

Hegel's *Objekt* and *Gegenstand*

Whilst in ordinary German speech, *Objekt* and *Gegenstand* remained synonymous, meaning something existing independently of the subject, Hegel made *Gegenstand* an object ('subject matter') of knowledge, of consciousness and intention, and in this meaning, *Gegenstand* played a key role in his *psychology*. The logical-genetic derivation of Hegel's psychology begins with an organism that simply *feels*, without any sense of an other. Through sensation, the organism becomes aware of an independent source of sensations and this is the *Gegenstand*. Later, the organism comes to know itself mediately through the *Gegenstand* and the way is opened to understanding the *Gegenstand* as

a product of its own activity bearing meaning. *Gegenstand* does not have role in his logic or social theory, however.

The *Objekt*, on the other hand, had a central place in Hegel's Logic and social theory. The *Objekt* was a real object, independent of the subject, but nevertheless the object *of* a subject, and like the subject, the *Objekt* is taken to be a system of activities and relations, somewhat consonant with the modern concept of 'The Other'. *Das Objekt* is not a psychological concept as such for Hegel, but in his *Logic*, the *Subjekt-Objekt* relation is central to the formation of a concept in the phase of ascent from abstract to concrete. Concept formation for Hegel is a first of all a cultural-historical, rather than a psychological process. The *Objekt* is not taken to be an individual person or thing. Both the subject and the *Objekt* of the subject are independent cognising, practical subjects, i.e., formations of consciousness, and the development of each involves a mutual interpenetration and transformation. It is in this sense that a social formation is a 'subject-object' – an active subject which produces and reproduces its own conditions of life.

For Hegel, the *Objekt* refers to the *other* subject, especially the dominant, universal subject in the community and its construal of the world, with its language, activities and artefacts. In this context, the *Subjekt* is some individual, social movement or new concept which likewise construes the world in its own way and consequently strives to transform the *Objekt* so as to conform to itself. Here the *Objekt* is both the object acted upon and the means used. Contrariwise, the *Objekt* obliges the *Subjekt* to act according to its norms. The rest is history.

This leaves *Gegenstand* as the object of attention, desire, striving, etc., some problem or issue confronting a subject, rather than the entire social formation from within which both the subject (individual or collective) and object (*Gegenstand*) are constructed. For example, in the relation between the Women's Liberation Movement and the patriarchal society it seeks to transform, the Women's Liberation Movement is the *Subjekt* and patriarchal society is the *Objekt*, but the gender bias in appointments to some institution might be the *Gegenstand* a woman confronts in her career. Likewise, in the relation between Sociology and a social formation a sociologist is studying – Sociology is the *Subjekt* and the social formation (including those who study sociology) is the *Objekt*. This is not a psychological problem, but a problem which belongs to Social Theory and Logic in the expanded sense given to Logic by Hegel. If a sociologist were to study the Women's Liberation Movement, the relation is clearly a two-sided one as the 'object' has its own point of view, namely, the feminist critique of sociology.

Objective and universal

There are at least two quite distinct senses for the word 'objective'. 'Objective' has a psychological meaning indicating that state of affairs, one's objective, which the subject is striving to bring into existence, either directly or indirectly, which therefore provides an explanation for their action. The word 'object' can be used synonymously with 'objective' in this sense. It is best to avoid this usage of 'objective' as its ambiguity is unnecessary. We can say 'aim', 'goal' or 'object'.

Another sense of 'objective' describes a state of affairs whose existence is not dependent on or relative to one's point of view, in contrast to 'subjective' which describes those states of affairs whose existence or not depends on one's point of view, inclusive of states of mind. The difference between subjective and objective is relative because the boundaries of human knowledge and the scope of human activity is always subject to historical change, and what was objective at one time may turn out to be a mere appearance, or subjective, at a later time. The judge is meant to be 'objective' precisely because they do *not* have any 'objective' in the matter under discussion. Knowledge can be

said to be 'objective' because it is based on widespread experience, not just imaginings or the experiences of a few. Science is always striving for knowledge which is objective.

'Objective' is not the same as 'universal'. 'Universal' means a state of affairs applicable across an entire community, but more as way of resolving or transcending disputes than as something which is really beyond question. For example, the law of the land and the foreign policies of a nation are applicable to everyone, even those who don't agree with them, and are thereby *universal*. Whereas objective truth stands firm against subjective opinion, the universal does not abolish particular truths, but rather transcends and includes them. 'Universal' contrasts with 'particular' and 'individual'. The particular is what applies to some group of individuals, so 'particular' lies somewhere *between* the individual and the universal, and mediates between them. But there is no 'third point' between subjective and objective. Something can be *both* objective and subjective, such as a material object which has meaning for a subject: its material form is objective, but its meaning is subjective. On the other hand, an exemplar can be said to be both universal and individual.

Marx's critique of Hegel and Feuerbach

Hegel, says Marx, "does not know real, sensuous activity as such" (1845, §1), because Hegel saw cultural and historical development as arising from the production of ideas by theorists, artists, priests, generals and so on, whose ideas are in turn translated into activity and generate social progress and history. According to Marx (1857, p. 38), on the other hand, "the real subject remains outside the mind and independent of it" – social practice developing according to its own logic, the evolving social practice which provides an object for the theorist to reflect upon. So it's not the idea as such which is significant, but the social practice which gives rise to the idea.

For materialist philosophers on the other hand, Marx says, "the Object (*der Gegenstand*), actuality, sensuousness, are conceived only in the form of the object (*Objekts*), or of contemplation, but not as human sensuous activity, practice, not subjectively" (1845, §1). In this excerpt, *Gegenstand* is used in the sense of the object of attention, desire, activity, etc. and *Objekt* is used in the sense of an independently existing entity which the subject perceives. Marx's criticism was that the materialist philosophers had followed the natural scientists of the time in regarding knowledge as that of an independently existing world, be it natural or historical. On the contrary, as Hegel said, the world and our knowledge of it are products of human practical activity. So we have to treat our *Gegenstand* as something constructed by social practice, as a *Subjekt-Objekt*. This goes to show that the ambiguity is no worse in English than it is in the original German!

The two chief tasks to which Marx devoted himself were his political economic studies culminating in *Capital* and his political work in the workers' movement. In his work on *Capital*, Marx regarded capital as subject as well as object. Capital is a social relation not simply a quantity of money. In short, capital is the capitalist class, not as a group of people, but as a subject constituted by economic activity and relations. Its units are companies, each commanding a share of social labour according to its capital value. Each company is a project with its own means of decision-making constituting it as an individual within the larger 'runaway' project of global capital. Decisions are made in the economy, always by human beings, but usually via aggregates of independent subjective decisions, rather than by design or consensus. The resulting movement of capital looks from one side like a force of nature but from the other side like a broad social movement. Capital is a Subject in its own right.

At the same time capital has the distinction of also being an object, in the sense that it creates the conditions of its own existence. As such, it is a 'self-contained' social formation, like the various forms of social life which have gone before it and will come after it. Marx's work in writing *Capital*

entailed studying this subject-object, exhaustively studying all the 'objective thinking' of capitalists in the form of their theoretical productions, political economy, and the actual movement of capital, available through the economic data. Capital as Marx saw it was not an *identical* subject-object (c.f. Postone, 1993) because thinking and behaviour, needs and their means of satisfaction, were always at odds with one another.

In the case of his political work, his starting point was an historical subject which was only just beginning to become self-conscious – the working class. In this context, Hegel's *Subjekt-Objekt* has the *Subjekt* as the emergent workers' movement and the *Objekt* as the modern, capitalist world which had given birth to the proletariat and which the workers' movement was destined to overturn.

Marx patiently studied the actual strivings of the workers' movement, contributed to them on the occasions when this was possible, and gave voice to the most far-reaching aspirations of the movement, astutely noted every new form of resistance, every new development in the labour processes, and particularly new forms of revolutionary activity, and only rarely went beyond what was already emerging within the movement itself.

In both his political and his economic studies, Marx took Hegel at his word and conceptualised subject and object at the broadest possible historical level. Mostly we tackle more modest tasks, and our concepts of subject and object have been tailored accordingly.

Arbeitsgegenstand – the object to be worked upon

In his discussion of the labour process in *Capital*, Marx says:

> The elementary factors of the labour-process are 1, the personal activity of man, *i.e.*, work itself, 2, the subject of that work, and 3, its instruments.
> 1867, §7.1

In German, these three factors are: "*die zweckmäßige Tätigkeit, … ihr Gegenstand und ihr Mittel*," or literally purposive activity, its object and its means. Later, Marx introduces the term *Arbeitsgegenstand*, or work-object to unambiguously indicate what in English is translated as "subject (*sic*) of labour", and I will use *Arbeitsgegenstand* in the same sense. Marx goes on to demonstrate that there is no essential difference between the material worked upon and transformed by the labour process and the instruments (means), which are also consumed in the same labour process (an observation with which Hegel agrees). He remarks:

> He makes use of the mechanical, physical, and chemical properties of some substances in order to make other substances subservient to his aims.
> 1867, p. 189

and in a footnote quotes Hegel:

> Reason is just as cunning as she is powerful. Her cunning consists principally in her mediating activity, which, by causing objects to act and re-act on each other in accordance with their own nature, in this way, without any direct interference in the process, carries out Reason's intentions.
> Hegel, 1831, §209n.

Hegel and Marx remind us that while we focus on our own *Arbeitsgegenstand*, our intentions and our instruments, these are 'borrowed' from the world we live in and more often than not we find

ourselves merely acting as agents of great social forces, and the changes we make will survive or not according to circumstances beyond our control.

'Object' is often used in the sense of *Arbeitsgegenstand*. For example, in this outline of Engeström's approach:

> The object refers to the 'raw material' or 'problem space' at which the activity is directed and which is molded and transformed into outcomes with the help of physical and symbolic, external and internal mediating instruments, including both tools and signs.
> CAT&DWR, 2003

Here 'object' is defined as the *Arbeitsgegenstand*, but further qualified as not only the 'raw material' but also the 'problem space', meaning that the ideal form into which the *Arbeitsgegenstand* is to be transformed is *implicit in the object*, as for example a patient with an illness or a child who has not learnt what was on the curriculum. This conception takes it that it is given that there is a problem, but does not presuppose any image of how the problem is to be resolved. It is a very 'objective' approach in this sense. However, the activity itself is surely not to be characterised by the problem it addresses but the solution it seeks. Otherwise, we would have the Conservative Party and the Labour Party as engaged in the same project because they share the same *Arbeitsgegenstand*.

In the reduction of the object to a problem space much is lost because the problem space is the entire social formation, the *Objekt* – the social conditions which have produced the problem and are the source of solutions. Restricting the conception of the object to an *Arbeitsgegenstand* understood as a 'problem space' is sufficient only on the condition that conception of the ideal to which the object must conform is unproblematic. But for example, if a patient presents to a doctor complaining of pain, then solving the problem, i.e., administering the right painkiller, is not necessarily what should be done. Perhaps how the patient sustained the injuries needs to be looked at, or perhaps the child's dislike of school is the issue, or perhaps the girl needs to be taught about menstruation, or why did a minor scratch warranted a visit to the doctor? In any case, the situation needs to be solved in collaboration with the 'patient' which presupposes not treating them as a 'problem'.

The imagined and desired state of the world

Let us expand the scope and consider the normal situation of work activity in which the worker has before them some material which is just as it should be: a well-equipped industrial chemistry lab, the usual contents of a commercial kitchen, or a classroom full of lively, interested children. What to do? Even though the subject may be aware of social norms, there is nothing emanating either from the object itself or from elsewhere which tells the subject what is to be done. The *Arbeitsgegenstand* itself does not contain the motivation or explanation for the subject's actions – it is not in itself a 'problem space'. Not every patient is really ill and the curriculum is not always as it should be.

Most work activity takes place within a social and economic formation in which every activity makes sense only within a vast network of interconnected activities, each pursuing its own aims. Some other process organises affairs so that the whole somehow reproduces itself. In capitalist countries – almost any country today – this process is capital accumulation in a regulated market, including a labour market.

In reality, the objects of the various activities are multifarious. They could be expansion of the capital value of a company or other types of profiteering, the performance of some public good, the pursuit of sectional interest, raising a family or the furthering of some social practice for its own sake. Whichever the case, the only meaningful answer to the question: "What is the object of this activity?" is whatever change in social conditions the activity 'aims' to bring about. 'Aims' is in inverted

commas because prima facie activities are not beings which can have aims. Formally, 'aims' and 'motives' are psychological categories and 'activities' is a social category.

The problem of 'objective motives'

Having clarified the difference between the work-object and its desired state, the problem of giving meaning to the concept of the 'object of activity' reduces to the problem of imputing motives and intentions to activities on the understanding that activities are objectively existing social entities not the subjective projects of individuals.

In A.N. Leontyev's genetic derivation of the concept of 'activity', activities originate as chains of actions which are executed by a single individual, achieving intermediate goals towards gaining an object which is the motive for all the actions along the way, rather than the intermediate goals in themselves. Here, the concepts of 'motive' and 'goal' are unproblematically psychological. The activity, in which all the composite actions are those of the same individual, is the *germ cell* of a collaborative project, containing in embryo the essential characteristics of the mature form of activity which entails a social division of labour. A collaborative activity is formed by dividing up the actions among a number of participants each of whom takes responsibility for an intermediate goal, while sharing in the consumption of the object by means of some system of distribution and exchange. In this specific sense then a project is an extension of a natural person.

As a first approximation, it is not difficult to discern the object of a collaborative project, as activities are not purely objective processes (such as an increase in unemployment, a road accident or a pandemic), they are *organised*, and so usually have documented aims, leaders and spokespeople, and in general everyone knows what those involved in a social practice are trying to achieve. As I said, a first approximation.

A deeper analysis, however, always reveals a gap between intentions voiced by rank-and-file members and leaders or written in statutes and rulebooks, on one hand, and objective tendencies on the other hand. Even objective tendencies which superficially confirm stated aims can mask the real fate of an activity as it evolves, and which generally cannot be foreseen.

The determination of the *immanent tendency* of an activity or project begins from a study of the evolution of the component actions. Actions are purposive, so a study of actions implies an indirect study of the consciousness behind each action. Hegel's *Logic*, what Hegel calls 'speculative logic', aims to determine the direction of movement and immanent tendency of an activity, by disclosing immanent contradictions within a formation. *The immanent tendency* or apparent motive or aim of a project is scientifically determinable and may be set alongside the stated aims of the project, disclosing internal contradictions at work within the project.

So, we can talk about the object of an activity as its motive or aim in this sense. This does *not* mean taking the consciousness of actors at face value, however. The manager of a business says he is there to provide a service, but if he doesn't make a profit, he will go out of business. Schools educate children to give them a better future, but find themselves helping to rank young people for their place in a hierarchical social system. Determination of the immanent tendency of an activity is a process of critical interpretation, of practical hermeneutics, so to speak.

The object is consumed and reproduced

If instead of approaching activities, as above, in terms of the "change in social conditions the activity 'aims' to bring about," let us make the opposite assumption. Let us presume that we have a world in dynamic equilibrium, and consequently a world in which all its inhabitants are perfectly adapted to the world in which they live and whose aim is simply to participate in reproduction of this or that component of the social formation in the course of reproducing their own life and that of their family. As A.N. Leontyev put it:

> In reality, however, we have to deal with *concrete, specific activities*, each of which satisfies a definite need of the subject, is oriented towards the object of this need, disappears as a result of its satisfaction and is reproduced perhaps in different conditions and in relation to a changed object.
> Leontyev, 1977, p. 399

In this view, the difference between the two limited definitions of 'object' we considered above disappears – the *Arbeitsgegenstand* becomes identical with the *motive* – the object is a kind of flux. The way an activity changes the world is incorporated within a conception of the world in which a subject has a need and this need finds its object in the objective world, and this object consequently functions as the motive for the activity, and the need is satisfied by the production and consumption of the object. The cycle is then repeated under formally changed conditions. This conception allows room for the conception of the object as an *already-existing object* which meets an *already-existing need* of the subject. The object therefore constitutes a problem space (how to acquire and get hold of it), the *motive* for the activity (the subject needs to consume the object), *and* the *Arbeitsgegenstand* (the object must be worked upon in order to satisfy the subject's need).

This approach provides a satisfactorily objective framework that absolves us of the troublesome idea of activities having subjective and possibly misguided intentions. Here the motive is objective. It allows for social change only as an unintended by-product of human activity, because of the constant need for reproduction, reminding us of Hegel's maxim cited by Marx above, leaving individuals and states "all the time the unconscious tools of the world spirit at work within them" (Hegel, 1821).

Object-concept

Objects don't 'attract' human activities. Activities are driven by purposive, motivated actions, actions that are done 'for a reason', so to speak. The object does not in itself motivate actions, although the object *mediates* the formation of motivations directed at the object.

Conceiving the *Arbeitsgegenstand* as a 'problem space' presumed that it was obvious what the problem was, and only the solution was problematic. But we have not yet touched upon the problem of how and when the subject determines what the problem is. It is only by reference to the wider social formation that we can understand the ideal to which the object is expected to conform. The subject will act on the object according to their concept of the ideal object, an ideal formulated in the broader culture.

Vygotsky showed that concepts are formed by identifying a problem and finding a solution to it. If the same need is to be constantly reproduced, this leaves us with an impoverished view of social life. Further, different solutions may be formed for one and the same problem, depending on how the problem is conceived, and different solutions are constituted by different activities and represented by different concepts of the object:

> Concepts are always formed during a process of finding a solution to some problem facing the adolescent's thinking process. The creation of the concept is dependent on a solution to this problem being found.
> Vygotsky, 1931, p. 257-8; see also Vygotsky, 1934, p. 123-4

When we talk of the object being an "imagined and desired state of the world," it is not suggested that we need to read minds. There will be *objective* indications of what a person's actions are working towards, their immanent tendency, but we do not thereby know whether this activity, the

activity implicit in the collaboration being observed, is the *really effective motivation* for the action, or some other activity (what the individual plans to do with their wages) or what the individual's concept is of the project(s) their action is furthering.

In general, to understand a person's motivation we need to know the concept the person has of the object of activity. This is the *object-concept*. It is possible to surmise the object-concept behind a person's actions in the same way that it is possible to surmise the object of an activity by observation of the component actions. This is a problem of hermeneutics. This is what Vygotsky was doing in the experiments described in Chapter 5 of *Thinking and Speech*. Materialistically speaking, an object-concept is *nothing other than* the aggregate of all the actions serving to realise that activity, expressed in ideal form.

In fact, *only* the object-concept can elucidate human action. In ideologically homogeneous conditions this requirement is null because to all concerned there is no meaningful distinction between the object and the object-concept (recalling the situation prior to the inversion of the meaning of 'subject' in the 17th century). But under conditions of cultural and ideological diversity and change, the difference is by no means null. What the object-concept implicates is the *Subjekt-Objekt* relation implicit in the interactions between individuals. Differences in object-concept are not arbitrary, individual differences, but differences arising from differences in social position.

To say that it is only the object-concept which motivates human action is not to *intellectualise* human motivation, unless you were to take concepts to be mere psychic formations. However, concepts are a mode of human action.

Boundary objects

The fact that objects (here we have in mind institutions and artefacts) are not unproblematic but are carriers of social and cultural difference is highlighted in the idea of 'boundary objects'. This term was originally coined by Susan Leigh Star in 1989 as an "arrangement that allow[s] different groups to work together without consensus" (Star, 2010, p. 602). Star had in mind shared instruments rather than shared *Arbeitsgegenstände*, but she has explicitly consented to the range of uses the term has been subsequently given and two such usages are significant here.

In social theory, a 'boundary object' would mean the judicial, political, administrative, educational and welfare infrastructure and systems in a country. The concept of boundary object expresses the social theorist's conviction that such infrastructure is never 'neutral'. They are social arrangements put in place to settle past struggles, and like all peace treaties they tend to reflect the interests of the victorious party. Having the same issue in mind, researchers in 'socio-technical theory' ascribe agency to artefacts.

But just as we found in considering the concept of 'object', the research questions which Star had in mind are of a narrower scope. It is easy to overlook apparently neutral and peripheral objects in the research environment which carry the hidden signs of dominant social subjects sedimented in routines, institutional practices, design of databases, styles of writing, norms of work, etc., even furniture design. It is these apparently neutral elements of infrastructure which facilitate collaboration between different social and cultural groups, and which have built into them presuppositions about how they will be used which are not at all neutral. Here the question is always to recognise that any activity takes place within a cultural and historical environment in the aftermath of past and continuing struggles on a wider arena.

The concept of 'boundary object' is also used when the concept of object in play is the *Arbeitsgegenstand* rather than apparently neutral instruments. The scenario here is an institution or social situation in which more than one project is at work. This is a more or less universal scenario.

For example, it could be a community suffering from social disadvantage with half a dozen NGOs trying to ameliorate the situation according to their own lights. The issue of the problematic character of the *Arbeitsgegenstand* is highlighted, not so much because the *Arbeitsgegenstand* harbours undisclosed presuppositions but because each of the collaborating subjects have different presuppositions. The supposedly unproblematic nature of the ideal to which the *Arbeitsgegenstand* needs to be brought harbours potential conflicts between the subjects.

It is important to note that it is *only* through a shared *Arbeitsgegenstand* that collaboration (including both conflict and cooperation) takes place at all. At the same time, the very idea of collaboration is meaningful only to the extent that the various collaborating parties (I am referring to NGOs, for example, not individuals) find some different ideal implicit in the *Arbeitsgegenstand*. Collaboration is ubiquitous wherever an 'intervention' is under consideration, because in such cases there are always at least two parties collaborating – the *Arbeitsgegenstand* itself and the intervening party.

Consequently, to define the object as the *Arbeitsgegenstand* is always naïve – it is always the *concept* of the object drawn from cognition of the *Arbeitsgegenstand* which motivates the activity and gives meaning to all the actions composing it. This raises a further difficulty. Just as imputing motives and intentions to an activity is problematic (because 'activity' is a social category), we now have to justify imputing cognition, that is, learning, concept formation and ethical qualities, to an activity. From the point of view of both psychology and sociology social formations which have motives and ideas is outlandish. However, I put it that such a view is essential for an interdisciplinary theory of activity. Projects (activities) are learning processes. They also have what could be called 'personalities' and exhibit all the characteristics of personalities, including ethical characteristics.

The object of a project

Given the spectrum of meanings of the word 'object' in connection with activity theory, an interdisciplinary theory of activity requires a concept of 'object' which is unambiguous and clear, and from which the more specialised meanings can be made transparent.

One of the upshots of this will be that an activity to some extent appears as a quasi-personality, and I will henceforth refer to an activity as a *project*. As in Leontyev's original implementation of activity theory, a project is defined by its object, but more particularly, by the concept it forms of its object, that is, what it is 'trying' to do, its object-concept, the ideal of the *Arbeitsgegenstand*, which it is realising. *A project is defined by its object-concept*, not its *Arbeitsgegenstand*.

A project is just like a project carried out by a single person, guided by their conception of the object throughout, except that the actions are carried out by many people who self-evidently share a concept of what the project is about.

A project has an object-concept, i.e., the concept of an imagined and desired (ideal) state of the world, and therefore a *motive*. This concept is explicable in terms of the intermediate goals towards which individual actors strive, just as the object-concept functions as a source and explanation for the motives of individual actors. That is, the determination of the object-concept entails a *hermeneutic circle*. This is not a novel concept, but is well established in literary theory (see Gadamer, 1960).

This means that at any given moment, any individual actor in a project may ascribe a different *meaning* to the object of the project, manifested in the individual actions and their place in realising the object. The meaning the object has for them is realised in the goal of their actions. This appears to create a quandary in that if there is an object-concept, surely this concept must be apprehended in

someone's mind, presumably identically the minds of *all* the participants in a project. But this is not the case. It is normal that each participant in a project has their own distinct conception of it, realised in the meaning of their actions in pursuit of the object. But does that make it meaningless to speak of the concept of the project altogether? Surely not.

The problem before us is this: how can we determine a universal concept given a number of diverse individual meanings for one and the same entity? This entity is the "imagined and desired outcome" of collaborative actions. So, it is always provisional, and only ever has an implicit existence. But a project is distinct from an arbitrary collection of actions in two respects: (1) All actions bear on the same *Arbeitsgegenstand* and (2), all the actions form part of a *coherent form of collaboration* through the achievement of intermediate goals. The object-concept is constituted in the system of meanings of individual actors, manifested in the coherence of their collaboration.

On this basis, a universal concept of a project is formed by its object-concept. Such a universal concept is expressed symbolically by a word or name or some icon or symbol, behind which a coherent combination of collaborative actions is deliberatively organised.

Among the factors which are involved in considering the concept an individual actor has of a project in which they are participating is that people are commonly participating in more than one project and any individual action may be motivated by one or another or a combination of motives (i.e., projects). People 'have their own reasons', as it is said.

Conclusion

The suggestion is that the *Arbeitsgegenstand* be clearly distinguished by whatever word you like from the object-concept, or the ideal *Arbeitsgegenstand*. Further, it is this ideal, the *object-concept*, by which a project is recognised both by participants and others as identifying the project as a coherent social practice. That is what is meant by the object of a project. This ideal has a different meaning for every individual, but the ideal itself remains also objective, constituted by the immanent tendency of the activity. The project *produces* this concept and by realising it, forms a concrete and realistic concept of its ideal, and changes the way that community thinks and acts.

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