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What is This?

Youth culture as practical innovation

Turkish German youth, 'time out' and the actionisms of breakdance

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ABSTRACT   This article uses extensive qualitative research to address questions about the identifiable peculiarities of adolescence as a phase in the life course. It suggests that the perspective of action theory allows one to see how adolescence is defined through a series of search processes that follow a rationality of their own that is difficult to grasp via utilitarianism. We have called these processes 'actionisms'. They evolve within a moratorium (a 'time out' that is often initiated by the young people themselves) and are particularly important when young people find themselves deprived of (or liberated from) ties to the local milieu. We suggest that three typical forms of actionist search processes are evident empirically, including forced solidarity within an episodic community of fate, as well as two kinds of alternative milieu formation rooted in either collective or individual identities. This article illustrates the latter process – milieu formation – drawing on our research with young breakdancers of Turkish German origin.

KEYWORDS   *group discussion, migration, participant observation, qualitative methodology, sociology of knowledge, theory of action, youth*

By the end of the 20th century, theorizing the youthful or rather the *adolescent* phase within existing categories of youth research had become increasingly problematic. One reason for this is that, towards the end of the 1980s, it became widely accepted that 'youth' as a phase of life had lost its structuring relevance in the life course. The current authors confine this problem to the theoretical preconceptualizations of this phase, but contend that qualitative ethnographic or, as we put it, 'reconstructive' social research[1] is an important tool for challenging such theoretical

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preconceptualizations in favour of an empirical access to the experiences of the young people themselves. However, we suggest also that reconstructive research on youth should not be confined to the employment of a biographical method in which the individual constitutes the focus of data collection and interpretation (Bohnsack, 1998b). Such an approach conceals more subtle forms of collective cultural practices and patterns of orientation as well as the collective contexts and practices of action into which distinctively individualized youth biographies are integrated and unfold. In this article we show, first theoretically and then empirically, how this collective practice, and especially what we refer to as its 'actionist' version, constitute a central structural feature of both the contemporary adolescent life phase and of specific youth cultures. Of course, giving central status in youth culture to 'action' is not novel; such an approach can be found in both the classical youth research of the Chicago school (Thrasher, 1963) and in contemporary research (Baacke, 1987). However, by introducing the concept of 'actionism' − that is, of collective spontaneous action − it is possible to illustrate, both theoretically and empirically, how youthful actionisms have their own rationality that is inaccessible to researchers who remain bound by utilitarian action models. Actionisms are not only 'creative' in the broadest sense of the term, but provide important resolutions to the orientation problems of young people. Such problems are related to a search for orientation specific to the youth phase, but are overlaid and possibly intensified by experiences of milieu-specific 'dis-integration'. Experiences of this kind of dis-integration may be generated, for example, by migration, which is explored in some depth via the example of young breakdancers of Turkish origin in the second part of the article. Our position thus differs from previous analyses of youth cultures (such as that of the Birmingham school) that highlighted the creative character of the style-producing actionist practices of youth in that those practices were understood as merely 'magical resolutions' (Clarke, 1977: 189). In contrast, we suggest that actionist practices are biographically relevant solutions to real problems.[2]

What is actionism? The principles of action theory

The conceptualization of youthful practices of action as 'magical resolutions' is not peculiar to youth research, but the result of a part explicitly, part implicitly acknowledged model of action that underpins social scientific research more widely. As Hans Joas writes, the fixation on this model of (utilitarian) rational social action has significant consequences:

> Proponents of such conceptions are well aware that the preconditions assumed by the model of rational action are often absent from empirically

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existent action. They are compelled thus to attribute the limited validity of those preconditions not to a deficit in their theory but in the actors themselves. (Joas, 1992: 217)

In the context of the study of youthful actors, the implied 'deficits' conveniently confirm commonsense notions of competence deficits among young people and undermine attempts to employ the analytical distance of the observer's position to transcend or 'break' with common sense. Before turning to the empirical analysis of the young breakdancers' actionisms, therefore, we would like to ask readers to bear with us as we expound in more detail on the theoretical alternatives to the utilitarian model of social action.

Alternatives to the utilitarian model of action

Jürgen Habermas, through his comprehensive systematization of the types of strategic, norm-orientated and dramaturgic (that is, self-presentative, self-stylizing) action, has exposed the utilitarian structure underpinning all these types of action and, with his conception of communicative action, has indicated a way to move beyond utilitarianism (Habermas, 1984). However, Habermas's broadening of action theory works at a 'higher' level of reflexivity (that is, of conscious self-assurance of the involved actors, in the sense of a discursive explanation of the claims of validity implicated in these types of utilitarian action); in contrast, the actionisms we are interested in belong to a prereflexive level lying 'below' utilitarian action.

Joas (mainly drawing on pragmatism) characterizes the central assumptions upon which the utilitarian action model is (largely implicitly) based thus: '*first* orientations are found in the process of coming to know the world, which are only *thereafter* pursued in action' (1992: 231; emphasis in original). The associated differentiation between knowledge and action, between mind and body, is expressed concisely in Alfred Schütz's path-breaking reconstruction of Weber's utilitarian model of action (Bohnsack, 1997b). Here Schütz differentiates between action-project ('in-order-to motives'), on the one hand, and the performance of an action orientated towards this outline, on the other hand; action is 'based upon a preconceived project' (Schütz, 1971: 19ff.).

We suggest that the prereflexive practice of action, which lies, as it were, at a level below utilitarian rationality, demands a different analytical approach. Such an approach consists of 'considering perception and recognition not as prior to action but as a phase of action through which action, in its situational contexts, is led and diverted' (Joas, 1992: 232). Such a model of action is one of the preconditions for an analytical approach towards the immanent logic of *actionisms*.

Within the empirical research of the sociological department of the Chicago school, it was Howard Becker above all who took this model of

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action into account in his research practice. Implicitly contrasting it with the utilitarian model of action, Becker writes: 'instead of the deviant motives leading to the deviant behavior, it is the other way around; the deviant behavior in time produces the deviant motivation' (1966: 42). Consequently, in Becker's work, the concept of 'career' or 'natural history',[3] with its underlying structure of process, is given the status of a basic category of action theory.

In this respect, Becker stands with the tradition of pragmatism, which influenced the empirical research of the Chicago school sociologists more widely. Prior to this, John Dewey had elaborated the post-actional character of motives: 'A motive does not exist prior to an act and produce it. It is an act plus a judgment upon some element of it, the judgment being made in the light of the consequences of the act' (1980: 85). Thus, in pragmatism, it is the ongoing action itself that is the focus of attention. Dewey (1980) calls this non-reflexive, ongoing and routinized action 'habit'. A habit or, as we would like to call it, habitual action guarantees the continuity of action. Only when habitual action is no longer possible or becomes obsolete as a result of a changed situation does reflexive or explorative action take place.

Habitual action, collective representations and actionism

The structure of habitual action is not only a prerequisite of a basic (biographically-based) *continuity* of action, but also the basis for the evolution of a fundamental *sociality* (below the intersubjective negotiation of utilitarian strategies and normative expectations). In other words, it is in an agreement at the level of habitual action – a 'habitual concordance', as we have called it (Bohnsack, 1997a; Bohnsack et al., 1995) – that collectivity and belonging to a milieu are rooted.

Habitual concordance, milieu affiliation and collectivity, as well as the collective orientations connected with them, are rooted in biographical commonalities – in commonalities of the 'stratification of experience', as the sociologist of knowledge Karl Mannheim calls it (1952b: 297). The affiliation to a 'conjunctive experiential space' (Mannheim, 1982: 194) is able to connect individuals who are not necessarily personally acquainted. Mannheim suggests that the collective orientations or representations based on these commonalities have an objective character, but, in conscious opposition to Durkheim (concerning his 'Rules of Sociological Method'), he argues that they should not be treated as 'things in space' (1982: 210). Rather, these collective representations hold actors within them in the form of habitualized and incorporated stocks of knowledge.[4] In this respect, the praxeological sociology of knowledge is close to Bourdieu's cultural sociology and its central term 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1977).

Collective representations are characterized by prereflexive or   369

'atheoretical' knowledge (Mannheim, 1952a: 38). At the same time, they reach out 'beyond their actualization in individual psyches' and 'by their very nature cannot be realized by an individual' (Mannheim, 1982: 209). Such a collective representation, which transcends the individual consciousness, 'is not primarily something to be thought, but rather something to be given effect through the interplay of various individuals' (1982: 209). The unfolding of these collective representations or orientations − for they are not primarily products or objects of *reflection* − is only possible in the practical interplay of those actors who belong to the same 'conjunctive experiential space' (1982: 206). However, this cooperation should not be understood as situational, as it is based on the permanence of a 'social location' (Mannheim, 1952b).[5]

The existence of milieus in the sense of 'conjunctive experiential spaces' is bound to commonalities of experience, to a memory that was acquired in *one's own practice* and that has to be confirmed within this practice. In such a practice, we see both the limits of, but also the possibilities for, handing down milieus; that is, the stocks of knowledge and forms of habitus constitutive of them. The possibility of passing on crucially depends on whether or not the practice in question can be performed.

Practice, therefore, is the central medium for handing down milieu-specific knowledge and habitus forms, but also for their new constitution and emergence in those areas, in which habitualized collective knowledge is disrupted. Such disruptions and the biographical discontinuities involved are usually described as social or milieu-specific dis-integration. Such disruptions and discontinuities manifest themselves where the ritual confirmation of milieu-specific and collective knowledge and habitus forms in a common practice of action does not quite succeed. Where this occurs, we witness the emergence of an experimental search for affiliation and commonality, for *habitual concordance*. The latter cannot fall back upon habitual routine-like action, but unfolds in the spontaneity of action, in 'actionism', as we have called it. Young people mutually check out how far a collective intensification, enlargement and elevation in the sense of processes of 'effervescence' are possible.[6] Here lies the central importance of *actionisms*. Actionisms can be understood as specific forms of action that are not aimed at the confirmation and reorganization of collective stocks of knowledge, but at their emergence. In this sense, their outcome is to a large degree uncertain, as are the opportunities and risks involved. Thus, actionisms are not based on handed down stocks of knowledge, but are of a specific reflexivity where this is understood not as a *theoretical* consideration, but as being embedded in *practical* processes (in the sense of the term 'practical consciousness'; see Giddens, 1984) of exploration and experiment on the base of actionisms.[7]

Adolescence and actionism

The analysis of the adolescent phase, its action structure and developmental stages (its 'natural history') has been the central focus of three successive research projects undertaken by the authors.[8] This research has also taken close account of specific youth cultures and milieus; the milieus examined include a northern Bavarian town and its surrounding villages (see Bohnsack, 1989), the metropolis of Berlin (see, for example, Bohnsack, 1997a; Bohnsack and Nohl, 1998; Bohnsack et al., 1995; Nohl, 1996; Schäffer, 1996) and the cities of Ankara (see Nohl, 2001) and São Paulo (see Weller, 2003). In Berlin, the groups studied include the violent actionist practices of hooligans and the aesthetic practices of rock bands in the eastern part of the city as well as the practical actions of youth (mainly breakdancers) of Turkish origin in its western part (Gaffer, 2001; Nohl, 2001; Weller, 2003). Non-spectacular youth groups were also studied (Nohl, 2001; Wild, 1996).

These studies are connected methodologically and theoretically in their common employment of the *documentary method* (see Bohnsack, 2000a: Ch. 3.2; Bohnsack et al., 2001, 2002: 175–81), which has its historical roots in Mannheim's sociology of knowledge (1952a). The documentary method allows the observer to develop a systematic understanding of the structure of meaning beyond the subjectively intended meaning of the actors, while retaining an empirical and analytical focus on the *knowledge of the actors themselves*. Thus, access to more profound underlying structures is not dependent upon accrediting the observer with a perspective that is more or less absolute because it is based on 'objective' structures and in this way denying the fact that the observer's perspective is also 'bound up with' a 'concrete position' (Mannheim, 1952c: 70).

One of the prerequisites of the 'observer' within the documentary method is the differentiation between a reflexive or theoretical knowledge of the actors and a practical, action-guiding or incorporated knowledge of them. The latter was referred to as 'atheoretical' knowledge by Mannheim (1952a). Atheoretical knowledge constitutes a structural context that guides action relatively independently of the subjectively intended meaning and is, in regard to the latter, in a certain sense 'objective'. But the structural context is simultaneously a shared cognitive or 'mental' construct. Hence Mannheim also speaks of an 'objective-mental structural context' (1984: 94).

Another important prerequisite of the observer within the documentary method is comparative analysis.[9] The 'use of a differentiation' (Luhmann, 1990: 91) – necessary for every observation – needs horizons of comparison that are, at the time, bound to the (milieu-specific) prior knowledge of the observer. The more such horizons of comparison can be substituted by empirical horizons (different case studies), the better the observer's 'positional bonds' (Mannheim, 1952c: 70) can be controlled.

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In our own research, the wide range of comparative analysis made possible by our previous studies allows not only control for prior positioning of the observer, but also for a high degree of generalization regarding the action orientations and developmental stages of the young people. It should be noted, however, that the Berlin studies focus predominantly on young *males* who are less integrated in the formal education system; young women and their actionist practices are incorporated in the analysis primarily in a comparative sense (Bohnsack et al., 2002).[10]

Even where young people are not confronted with the problem of searching new commonalities and milieu affiliations in the face of the loss of traditional milieu ties (be it in the context of societal dis-integration or of migration), their position within the lifecycle means that they must nonetheless find ways of accessing social institutions such as professions and the family and of developing corresponding bio-graphically-relevant orientations. In the context of traditional milieus, adolescence is reduced to acting as a 'transitional moratorium'. A transitional moratorium concerns the relation of the adolescent to institutions, especially those that handle and define the course of the lifecycle and adult status.[11] From a cultural anthropological or comparative cultural perspective, it appears as an initiation phase. Drawing on Victor Turner's work, youth can be characterized as a 'liminal phase' that is defined by the 'analysis of culture into factors and their free or "ludic" recombination in any and every possible pattern, however weird' (1982: 28). The liminal phase is marked by the paradox that 'the *breaking* of rules *has* to be done during initiation' (1982: 42) when young people are not only allowed to 'get carried away' or, as it is known in Turkish, to be of 'wild blood' ('*delikanli*'), but are expected or demanded to do so.

Such experimental cultural practices (actionisms) may be creative as well as destructive and are connected with a more or less distinct crisis. We have termed this adolescent crisis a phase of 'negation' which arises from the experience of young people of the previously practically un-known everyday life of labour or, indeed, of the futile search for a job. In such cases, actionist practices provide situational release from the every-day life (of labour). This is evident in the drinking sessions of young people fully integrated in the rural milieu in northern Bavaria (Bohn-sack, 1989: 106ff.) as well as in the practices of Berlin hooligans. The following excerpt from a group discussion is taken from the latter:[12]

Christian: That's just it. You're out working all week and you've just gotta switch off somewhere. So when you see your mates at the weekend, that's it.

Bero: And you really just switch off from that totally normal, silent stupid life, that you have during the week . . . and there you are totally out of it, you don't have those normal thoughts which you

> have at work, you just say to yourself: okay now I'm going to
> switch off from that certain, normal, stupid life, just switch off.

We have described such attempts to 'switch off from life', to 'break the
rhythm', to catapult oneself (so to speak) out of the 'normal, stupid life',
at least at the weekends, as an 'episodic negation of everyday existence'.
This negation is as much a manifestation of the adolescent crisis as it is
an attempt to cope with it via *collective and spontaneous cultural prac-
tices.* This is also evident in a group discussion with young people of
Turkish origin in which Deniz, to whom we will return in greater depth
below, states: 'Well right now I'm unemployed, because I couldn't find a
job. Well I was too lazy to write applications too ... and when you're
dancing you just forget everything. You are concentrating on the dancing,
you are somehow in another dimension.' This basic function of young
people's actionist practices, connected as it is with problems of entry into
institutionalized patterns of grown-up lives, thus becomes overlaid with a
second function which relates to the search for (new) forms of com-
monality, for habitual concordance and collective orientations and
becomes increasingly important as inherited ties are lost. We refer to this
as a *moratorium of milieu-specific self-positioning* which relates to young
people's engagement with milieus and lifestyles. This moratorium is
connected with a process of 'formation', understood in a very broad sense
as in the German term 'Bildung'. Formation in this sense refers not only
to the respective organization (for example, the school), but also implies
the broad processes through which 'world- and self-reference points
become qualitatively changed' (Marotzki, 1990: 52). In the context of
modernity, therefore, formation must be understood as a 'search' fuelled
by 'the play with uncertainties' (1990: 154).

In our conception of the formational moratorium of milieu-specific
self-positioning and of Bildung, therefore, institutionalized arrangements
for a moratorium appear unnecessary; these arrangements, as will be
shown in our empirical analysis, are generated by the young people
themselves. The peer group, indeed, provides the social space for the
search for and articulation of the orientations of young people. In this
second function, adolescence appears as a liminal phase, in Turner's
sense, to an even greater degree.[13]

One can find this second function of actionist practices – that found in
the context of the formational moratorium – in a particularly radical (and
exceptional) form in the constitution of an 'episodic community of fate' by
the hooligans in our study (Bohnsack et al., 1995). This constitutes a radical
form because the personal identity of the individuals (including their
physical integrity) is subordinated to the collective practice of 'fighting', to
the actions compelled by the uncontrollable, dramaturgical development
of the fight. The resulting mutual dependence constitutes or rather pro-
duces an elemental collectivity; that is, this episodic community of fate:

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And then they came, with a hundred and fifty blokes. So I couldn't leg it. Then we had a right scrap and copped a fair few ourselves. Every once in a while the fuzz tried to break it up, but we just kept going back for more. And so I am dead sure that I can depend on my people. (Arno, during discussion with hooligans in Berlin)

If the hooligans' search for affiliation is an ideal type based on unity forced by mutual dependency, then rock and hip-hop bands represent a contrasting ideal type in which the search for affiliation begins with the individual and his or her personal identity, individual biography and perspective. Affiliations develop around biographical commonalities that include – and this is significant – the common experience of biographical *dis*continuity (for example, experiences of migration or of the transformation of eastern Germany). The collective production of music and text requires a harmonization that is only gradually acquired in a 'process of finding style' (Schäffer, 1996, 1999). Thus, in the beginning, 'nobody listened to anybody, but somehow it worked' (cited in Bohnsack et al., 1995: 330), and only gradually do the participants develop the skills and disciplines necessary to listen and play together to form a band. But, even then, the activities are not first and foremost about self-presentation (the production of a 'show'), but about the initiation of habitual concordance; this fact is reflected also in the way that the band interacts with its audience.

Breakdance: actionist practices and the formation of style among young people of Turkish origin

The breakdancers in our study engaged with actionist practices of dancing alongside other (partially 'deviant') actionist practices in an unsystematic and disorganized way:

Cengiz: I started pinching at 11 years of age. That was when the Crazy Tigers were founded – they were founded maybe eight or nine years before but I was with them – when I was 11, with the smaller ones and at that time I . . .

[Despite being interrupted by the others, who don't want to listen to 'the same old story' of the Crazy Tigers again, Cengiz nevertheless continues his narration.]

Cengiz: Until I was 14 I only pinched things, at 15 I started, well hip-hop was 'in' at that time and I started to dance. Then I stopped pinching a little bit, did it less and less, and then I really started up, really concentrated on dancing . . .

Biniz: And then it started again, pinching really big things.

Deniz: Really. After that he only broke into construction sites, stole drills and sold them.

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These practical actions function as an episodic negation of everyday existence, but also share with the 'fighting' of the hooligans elements of the creation of mutual dependence which constitute 'episodic communities of fate' (see also Gaffer, 2001: 151).

Within this same group, whose members were 17 years of age at the time of the group discussion cited, the situation changed once its members turned 19 or 20 years of age. From this point onwards, their dancing practices became the central and only relevant activity of the group and were increasingly integrated into the organization of everyday life. The focus was no longer practices of mutual dependence, but the development and perfection of individual elements of style within the context of habitual concordance. In the field of intimate relations, any actionist involvement (involving the danger of 'breaking hearts') is rejected, as Deniz explains:

> This job suits me fine; for five hours I get DM1400. We also have girls in the class, but I personally don't think much about girls because, I don't know, they think, well the times have changed a lot. And when, if we find a girl like, then it won't be love, like, we've had enough of all that ... any relationship we have will be purely about sex, if you want to, then do it, if you [Laughter] don't want to, then you go. That way you don't break any hearts either. Because we have a whole lot of other things to do besides that, like dancing for example.

That, for the breakdancers, the cultural practice essentially provides a means to perfect personal style is particularly evident when Deniz' friends differentiate between the technical skills ('power moves') and the 'style' involved in dancing:

> Tim: Everybody can do power moves ... everybody can learn the headspin [Pause] it is only a question of time if you really get into it. But style, for example, that is so [Pause] there ... you can really make out what is your style, what is his style or what he has pinched from the other dancers.
> Jim: You really can.
> Tim: The style just can't be learned so easily. That is the most difficult part of dancing I would say. To get a really great style.
> Jim: Style is difficult.
> Tim: Yes.
> Jim: Style is, it is the character of the person you know, because if you are aggressive you go into the steps aggressively dumm-dumm-kre-de-kre. But if you are a softy you go into it softly like shet-da-da you do it like this. When you watch a dancer and his styles then you already recognize 30 to 40 percent of what he's like.

In contrast to the technical skills of dancing, which 'everybody' can learn, style indicates either the authentic expression of the 'character of a   375

person' or is 'pinched'. In the course of the collective practice, personal styles are developed and condensed within the framework set by habitual concordance. However, in contrast to the hip-hop bands and rappers, be they of Turkish (Weller, 2003) or East German (Schäffer, 1996) origin or be they black youths in São Paulo (Weller, 2003), the breakdancers do not give centrality to collective identity. This fact is also evident in public contests between breakdance teams (known by the English term 'battle'), where individuals try to outdo each other first of all:

> After a Treffer member has performed, a dancer from the other team steps up, dances along the floor indicating to the audience to make more space for him. Then he does a backspin but finishes without a 'freeze' or any other move at the end. He retreats to his friends' applause and shouts.

> The music continues uninterruptedly, there is no break. Now a dancer from Treffer steps forward, another one tries to hold him back but doesn't succeed. The first one is successful and starts dancing. But he stops for a second, turns around to his team, and invites them to applaud by holding his hands above his head. His team at once starts applauding. In this way the two teams continue to take turns again and again. Finally somebody from Treffer performs a neverending headspin which probably lasts a whole minute. His team draws the swaying dancer from the floor amid great applause. (Nohl, 2001: 202–3)

The battle is based on a crescendo of performance, both in the group and in the contest between them. The individual dancer is directly challenged to at least equal his predecessor from the opposing team. The collective, and the collective effort, unfold as the individual and his or her personal style are recognized and integrated into the collective build-up within a more or less explicitly choreographed whole. The collective intensification or crescendo in this instance is not achieved by subordinating the individuals. Rather the personal elements of style and the collective frame of habitual concordance are mutually dependent and intensify one another. Thus, evidence from observation of breakdancing provides a clear example of how even personal elements of style need to be integrated into collective or milieu-specific contexts in order to be fully expressed. Yet analysis rooted within individualization theory rarely pays attention to the significance of collective action in constituting individual identities.

The battle presents a specific form of actionist practices, since their organizational context means that they do not serve the function of a search for orientation in the sense of a formational moratorium. The practice found in the battle is characterized rather as an event (see, for example, Bohnsack and Nohl, 2000; Gebhardt, 2000) that is a 'liminoid' phenomenon (Turner, 1982: 52). Battles are examples of organizationally elevated cultural practices, characterized by commercial conditions

including the possibility of the professionalization of the actors (as, for example, in the distinctive case of the Love Parade, a well-known Berlin-based parade of techno and hip-hop fans).

Biographical and milieu-specific backgrounds of Turkish youth

The Berlin-based breakdancing group referred to here as 'Katze', of which Deniz is a key member, has become nationally and internationally known and its members have begun to earn money from presenting their sets at large-scale events. One specific element of the group's performances is described in a biographical interview we conducted with Deniz, who mentions how he performed conjuring tricks early in his school life:

> Deniz: And [Pause] well at that time, if I think about it now, at that time I had gathered some *experience* that comes in useful now. Even as a little boy. Every morning [Pause] I was always buying these Milka chocolate bars for kids and in them there were written conjuring tricks, things to perform. And sometimes, when I was in the mood, I used them to collect 'brownie points' from the teacher. I would perform *conjuring tricks* in front of the class. [Pause] Yes! [Laughter] And then, from the sixth class onwards, I got a recommendation for the secondary school diploma [Pause] then I went on to comprehensive school, did my secondary diploma [Pause] and of course kept on dancing all the while like. [Long pause] I don't know ... [Laughter]
>
> Interviewer: Yes carry on.
>
> Deniz: Yes. Yeah and at the comprehensive school I also did drama lessons. But I could never be bothered there because they did such funny things. I was always the dancer there, as it were. Drama and dance. [Long pause] What else? [Long pause] Then I had a little brother, and another older brother and it was via my older brother that I got involved in the scene. As a small boy, he always took me to the hip-hop parties and such like and *there* I realized that I wanted to do something different from the [Pause] *other* foreigners in Berlin. Or rather from other young people, maybe it has nothing to do with being a foreigner, I don't know. I wanted to express something different from other people. [Pause] Even back then. But I didn't know how to. I guess I had always asked myself [Pause] what, em, the meaning of our lives was. I did that a lot. Now I don't ask myself things like that, but before I did. [Pause] Well. [Pause, laughter, long pause] And *then* I realized that I could do this by using myself, my own body and by generally being what I am. [Pause]

Deniz succeeds in collecting 'brownie points' outside the normal achieve-   377

ment criteria and gains bonuses that he sees as essential for his school career (i.e. the recommendation for secondary school). Through his own creativity, Deniz shapes a *sphere* quite separate from the handicaps or objectives of the school as an institution, but also from those of his family. It becomes clear that thereafter he continued to fashion his life not in terms of a future professional career or forming his own family, but sought to answer the question of the 'meaning of life' in quite a different way. He self-reflexively finds the answer in the structure of process, in the logic of the motion, in the modus operandi of his life history. This modus operandi was essentially developed in an unpremeditated fashion and thus in an actionist way. The guiding force in this unfolding modus operandi is the sense of 'being what I am' which becomes the biographical link ('I have always been the dancer really'), a link that is ensured neither by an orientation towards institutionalized patterns of the life course nor by family traditions.

This indicates a fundamental problem of the migratory location (Nohl, 1996, 2001); that is, of the specific socialization and development of young people of the *second* migrant generation from Turkey. This issue is treated in more detail in Bohnsack and Nohl (1998) and Nohl (2001), where we conceptualize it as a *difference of spheres*, a disjuncture between the *inner* sphere of the family and the ethnic origin community, on the one hand, and the *outer* public sphere and its institutions, on the other hand.

Young people envisage this disjuncture between spheres as being the result of the 'old way of thinking' on the part of their parents who seek to live Turkish village life in a German city, but also of the lack of understanding and ethnic discrimination on the part of German society. A common example relates to the lack of police neutrality with regard to their religious and ethnic ties. This disjuncture is not only due to the different expectations of normal behaviour in the 'inner' and 'outer' spheres. When young people talk about being 'totally different at home and outside', they also reveal the disparate forms of sociality that they experience in the inner and outer spheres. The inner sphere includes a kind of sociality that has been (sometimes directly) handed down from their parents' country of origin and that is referred to by young people using metaphors of 'love' and 'respect'. The outer sphere is characterized by social relations that emanate from young people's experience of the institutionalized stages of professional biography (school, professional training), but also from the experience of ethnic discrimination. This break with the assumptions of their parents' generation as well as of German society as a whole lies at the heart of young migrants' experiences of biographical discontinuity.[14]

The fallout from this disjuncture is to be seen above all in the fact that neither parents nor institutions contribute to the mediation of the inner and outer spheres. Deniz, who at first tries to exclude the inner familial

sphere from his biographical narrative, finds himself nevertheless led there indirectly by further questions:

> Oh, well I can remember nursery school, yes. . . . My parents, they had *never* shown me anything, how to write or anything, how to count this and that [Pause] and when I was in the kindergarten the kids could already do all that, I don't know, they knew what was going on and so on. And I never had any pencil case, I had only a pen with me sometimes, and every once in a while when I was in the mood I had a mate there also [Pause] a Turk and he always wanted *pencil cases*, so we pinched pencil cases, from the others. [Laughter] I don't know why, just so we had something to draw with, like.

When he began nursery school, Deniz was not only on his own with regard to the learning of pre-school basic skills ('how to write or anything') and general social preparation (knowing 'what was going on and so on'), but also in the provision of material or technical equipment (the pencil case). Handling this discrepancy in the end is up to Deniz himself. We want to illustrate this with an excerpt from a transcript of a group discussion with Deniz's peer group Katze:

> Deniz: At home, they haven't got a clue really.
> Aziz: Yes.
> Deniz: They think, 'my son goes out a bit, gets some fresh air and comes back'.
> Aziz: [Laughter]
> Deniz: The rice is ready on the table. [Laughter] They really think like that − they still have the old way of thinking.

Despite distancing himself from the cluelessness of his parents here, Deniz had earlier expressed his closeness to them: 'I'm always thinking about my family. It is not like that I slag my family off or don't care about them or anything. Although, some Germans are like that, because they come from a different culture.' In stark contrast, these young people treat the events and expectations of the outer sphere in a morally indifferent way. When confronted by representatives of the organs of social control, for example interference from the police, they adopt the attitude of distant observers. They take a similar stance when faced by skinheads, potential employers or disco owners who treat them with overt racist hostility. Potential conflicts between the spheres or between their different moral codes are thus avoided or skirted around. This was also manifest in the way that the young people treated the researchers, both male and female. As members of the outer sphere, they were not given any access to or deeper information on their families or the cultural practices within their inner spheres.

The problems associated with the disjuncture between the two spheres (sketched only briefly here) are handled by young people of the second migrant generation in different ways (Nohl, 2001). Some retreat to the

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inner sphere, some seek to fuse the spheres (Bohnsack and Nohl, 1998). Those like Deniz who immerse themselves in practices such as break-dancing and thereby in new forms of collectivity and milieu formation form a third group who are able to shape a space beyond the inner and outer spheres and thus create a 'third sphere'.

Summary

What can be considered specific to the youth or adolescent phase today? Our empirical analysis has pointed to one such factor by exploring the structure of social action in specific youth cultures and suggests that it is characterized by youthful actionisms or practical actions that articulate a peculiarly undirected search in a clearly definable phase of adolescent action. These actionisms are in a cultural anthropological sense characteristic of the youth phase, where the latter is understood as a transitional moratorium or liminal phase. As inherited milieu-specific ties decrease and thus social dis-integration, mobility and migration increase, however, this function is increasingly overlaid by the search for affiliation and commonality, for habitual concordance. This search takes place in the context of a moratorium of milieu-specific self-positioning, which we understand in a very broad sense. This moratorium is not only institutionally secured, but is produced by young people (partly in conflict with society). This was illustrated through the striking example of Deniz who, in the practice of breakdance, has developed his own sphere beyond family and public institutions.

In theoretical terms, the category of habitual concordance or of habitual action refers to a level beneath utilitarian action. Milieu-specific affiliations and securities are found through commonalities of habitual practice of action and habitual concordance. This specific collective practice of action, which bears a ritual character, is an important medium for handing down and mediating milieu-specific forms of knowledge and habitus. However, where this process is interrupted, this practice of action may also be a medium for the constitution of new habitual styles. This process comes about as young people seek and experiment with new affiliations and commonalities (habitual concordance) which grow and intensify. Such experimental processes take the form of actionisms, but these are open to commercial and organizational shaping as 'events'. In this sense, youthful actionisms are simultaneously a mode of being as well as a mode of representation.

In this article, we have outlined three ideal types of actionist practices. Type one is the episodic community of fate, which is found not only among the hooligans studied, but also within other peer groups in the early adolescent phase. In this type, unity is a product of mutual dependence, and the individual, with his or her personal identity and individual biography, retreats behind this. The affiliation is episodic, and

collective and personal identities remain precarious.[15] In types two and three, represented here in the rock and hip-hop bands, on the one hand, and the breakdancers of Turkish origin, on the other, young people are able to form new affiliations and collective elements of style based on common experiences of socialization (mostly related to biographical discontinuity) through the medium of actionisms. In type two, we see milieu formation in the frame of collective identity; practical actions work primarily to form a collective identity inclusive of each individual perspective and biographical development. In type three, milieu formation is achieved via the formation of individual personal identities; actionist practices mainly serve to enable the unfolding of the personal authentic style of the individual. However, as is evident from the empirical analysis of breakdance, even this highly individualized biographical orientation requires a collective frame of habitual concordance; that is, a milieu formation.

Notes

1. Reconstruction in this sense refers to the scientist's interpretations or secondary constructions based on the primary constructions of the actor observed. The researcher is thus an observer of the second order.
2. The work of Willis (1978a, b), who keeps his interpretations confined to the constructions of the observed actors and thus adopts a reconstructive approach, is the exception here.
3. This concept was first developed by the early Chicago school (see, for example, Cressey, 1969).
4. The concept of 'habitual concordance' relates to (in conventional terminology) the reconstruction of the communal sociality of 'Gemeinschaft' as contrasted with the 'societal' sociality which is, in a utilitarian way, based on institutionalized 'mutual expectation' (the expectation that something is expected from you). This analogy is limited, however, since habitual concordance is not bound to group-like interactions rooted in face-to-face-relations.
5. In this regard, parallels with the primary or primordial level of sociality in the work of George Herbert Mead (that is, the level of the 'social act') can be seen, as well as with the religious-sociological works of Durkheim, who writes, 'In the midst of an assembly animated by a common passion, we become susceptible of acts and sentiments of which we are incapable when reduced to our own forces' (1947: 209–10). These are situations of 'effervescence', of the 'effervescent social environments' or milieus (1947: 218–19). An analysis of such collective action is able to transcend the aporia of 'subjective experience' and 'objective structure' (see, for example, Bohnsack, 1998a).
6. For an explanation of the term 'effervescence', see Note 5.
7. John Dewey (1986) has conceptualized the search for innovation mainly as a theoretical reflection. However, in his theory of art (1987), one can find at least the starting points of a theory of action which (through the term 'impulsion') pays attention to the spontaneity of action.

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8. The research projects were financed by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) during the period 1985–99 under the leadership of Ralf Bohnsack. Numerous postgraduate theses and dissertations have also been theoretically and methodologically linked to the projects. Most data collection was done by research teams including both male and female researchers.

9. In this respect, the documentary method is close to the 'constant comparative analysis' of the work of Glaser and Strauss (1969).

10. The actionist practices of female youth (of Turkish origin) analysed centred around clashes over potential male partners. For more on girls' practices and for the search for habitual concordance in the field of intimate personal relations, see Breitenbach (2000) and Bohnsack (1989). On the intellectual spontaneous actions of young people who are well integrated in the formal education system, see Nohl (2001).

11. The term 'transitional moratorium' refers to the works of Erikson (1994) and Eisenstadt (1964), for whom it serves as a framework to analyse the access of youth to the institutions and roles of the adult's life. However, their analyses stress different aspects of the process. Whereas Erikson's 'psychosocial moratorium' (1994) and the implicated 'free experiment of roles' refer to the function of the moratorium in the formation of the self, Eisenstadt's (1964) notion of 'transitional situation' focuses on its function in societal integration.

12. For the source and context of this and the following transcripts, see Bohnsack et al. (1995) and Nohl (1996, 2001). The transcripts have been simplified considerably.

13. The analytical access to both kinds or functions of actionist practices is also essential for an adequate comprehension of juvenile criminality (see Bohnsack, 2000b).

14. This experience of discontinuity is also reflected in the young people's narrations of their familial migration biography (see Nohl, 2000).

15. The precarious character of collective identity finds its expression in the sketching of fictitious collective identities, including national and masculine identities (see Bohnsack, 1997a).

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