Routledge
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Assembling the Irreconcilable: Youth Workers, Development Policies and 'High Risk' Boys in the Netherlands

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ABSTRACT
This article demonstrates how youth workers in a Dutch city bring together seemingly irreconcilable worlds: the development policies of their organisations and the state on the one hand and the practices, needs and aspirations of young people on the other. Current policies, like much academic literature on street-level professionals, define youth workers as frontline workers, implementing policies as representatives of their organisations. We approach these workers not as representatives but as brokers. Based on detailed ethnographic research with two youth workers and their interactions with so-called high-risk boys, we demonstrate that these workers constantly negotiate boundaries, as they are positioned between the policies and the youth. On a theoretical level, employing the concept of 'correspondence', we argue that these brokers bring together different actors, institutions and resources, yet without fully integrating them and without forfeiting their own autonomous position.

Introduction

In this article we argue that youth workers in the Dutch city of Utrecht operate as brokers, mediating between social welfare policies and organisations, on the one hand, and the practices, needs and aspirations of young residents of an underprivileged neighbourhood, on the other. In line with the introduction to this special issue, we depict these brokers as assemblers, agents who actively bring together the different actors, institutions and resources that together form a youth work assemblage.

Current policies in the Netherlands aim at extending control into the territories of so-called high-risk youth (*risicojongeren*), at socialising them and steering them away from a career in delinquency. Policy documents and academic publications on this

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topic describe youth workers as 'frontline workers', a military metaphor suggesting that a war is going on. Recently, the municipality of the Dutch city of Utrecht changed its welfare policy, which impacts the job description of youth workers. The change is part of a larger shift towards neoliberal policies that prescribe that professionals teach citizens to take more responsibilities for themselves and each other and to depend less on state support (Newman & Tonkens 2011).

The activities of youth workers and other social workers, according to the new municipal social welfare policies, focus on the neighbourhood level, and consist of being visibly present in the neighbourhood, identifying the needs of its population and translating policy values such as self-dependency and integrity (in the sense of non-criminal behaviour) into the lifeworlds of residents.[1] These workers are supposed to maintain close relations with the people in the neighbourhood in order to stay well informed about their needs and concerns. Youth work is partly financed by municipal 'security budgets', intended to increase safety at the neighbourhood level. The municipality considers youth work as an instrument for the prevention of youth delinquency and nuisance (see de Koning 2015 on Amsterdam).

In our analysis, we employ an anthropological perspective on brokerage to understand the position of youth workers and their crucial act of mediating between different levels or groups in society that would otherwise have little to no (constructive) contact. Our approach diverges from that of policy makers: instead of viewing youth workers as policy implementers with a certain discretionary space, we find that they constantly negotiate between policies and organisations on the one hand and youth and their (sometimes criminal) practices and desires on the other hand. These youth workers, we argue, perform the assembling of two seemingly irreconcilable worlds with disjunctive values.

To demonstrate this, we begin by outlining the history of youth work and the notion of 'positive youth development' in the Netherlands. We then introduce two youth workers and describe two situations in which they have to cope with opposing interests and values. First, we show a situation in which some of their clients start 'shopping' – looking around for other workers who may better serve their needs. Second, we show what happens when some start 'hunting' ('jagen') – engaging in criminal practices that clash with the development policies of youth work. The research is based on 18 months of multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork, in 2012 and 2013, on the interface between youth and organisations carried out in an underprivileged neighbourhood in Utrecht.[2] Data were collected through participant observation and informal interviewing. This article focuses on the interactions between youth workers and youth through over a period of seven months.

Positive Youth Development: History and Critique

The current youth work in the Netherlands stems from an approach to community development (*opbouwwerk*) that emerged in the 1960s. Community workers engaged in social relations with residents of underprivileged neighbourhoods. These community workers were deemed to have a 'curative and preventive effect' on the disadvantaged social position of people in those neighbourhoods (Duyvendak & Uitermark 2005:

83). What made this community work innovative at the time was the active collaboration and participation of the 'target group' itself. This active collaboration is still vividly alive in youth work today where youth workers depend upon young people to voluntarily participate. Because of the voluntary participation of youth, youth workers have to rely on skills such as intuition, patience, perseverance and improvisation to connect with young people (Nolas 2014: 36).

Critics, often state representatives, argue that youth work lacks a clear approach and that it is not possible to measure its effects. They argue that it 'lack[s] … a transparent theory grounded in practice' (Coussée et al. 2009: 429). Unstructured activities such as 'hanging out' may help to relieve youth of boredom, they concede, but such activities do not seem to achieve measurable goals. State representatives' preference for structured activities that aim at clear-cut developmental goals has encouraged a philosophy of 'positive youth development'. In line with neoliberal ideas and approaches, young people are framed as human capital in need of developing their skills and resources (Sukarieh & Tannock 2011). Positive youth development describes young people as resilient, productive citizens, a view that discourages them from relying on state support (Sukarieh & Tannock 2011). This fits in the new Dutch paradigm of the 'participation society', in which the state encourages citizens to become more active and take responsibilities that were formerly the responsibility of the state, such as security, maintenance of public space and welfare (Koster 2014; Tonkens 2014). The decentralisation of responsibilities to the municipal level and severe cutbacks in the welfare budget were part of these policy changes.

Different authors argue that the 'positive youth development' philosophy, and the neoliberal ideas framing it, actually makes it more difficult for youth workers to use more 'radical' methods in which goals remain vague, relationships are crucial and young people are more in charge and empowered (Coussée et al. 2009; Sukarieh & Tannock 2011; Nolas 2014). They also point to the fact that young people are constructed as a stereotypical group onto which simplistic expectations are projected, positive and negative: either they are seen as problematic and dangerous or they are framed as resourceful and capable of changing their neighbourhood or even society as a whole (e.g. as role models) (Sukarieh & Tannock 2011; Nolas 2014).

Youth work organisations, the national and municipal governments have often legitimised youth work with reference to its contribution to preventing youth delinquency. This view presents youth work as a means of exerting social control onto vulnerable and potentially harmful groups (Coussée et al. 2009: 421). Even though youth work also aims at the empowerment of young people, it also plays an important role in the reproduction of power relations. Local policy makers and youth workers may strive to stay in touch with vulnerable youth in order to prevent social unrest, a goal that may be in the public interest but does not necessarily advance the empowerment of these youths (Coussée et al. 2009).

An important consequence of positive youth development policies is that they tend to minimise the dynamic aspects of youth work in which young people are free to create their own relationships, lifestyles and activities, even if these are oppositional (Coussée et al. 2009; Nolas 2014). Youth work activities get reduced to practices aimed solely at

political and societal goals, such as decreasing drop-out and crime rates. This hampers youth workers' possibilities to connect with vulnerable young people (Coussée *et al.* 2009: 424) and creates a painful paradox of youth work distancing itself from those young people it means to reach (Coussée *et al.* 2009). Although these recent policies seem to have changed youth work into a one-directional implementation of development goals, our ethnographic research shows that, in practice, youth workers still act as multi-directional 'brokers', negotiating between different values, needs and aspirations.

Youth Workers as Brokers: Translation and Correspondence

Street-level professionals, such as youth workers, are known in the literature as frontline workers (Tummers *et al.* 2015). This characterisation builds on Lipsky's (1980) seminal work, which analyses these workers' discretionary practices and their performance of professionalism and autonomy. Studies of frontline workers have critically examined the role of street-level professionals in governance transitions (Bang & Sørensen 1999; Van Hulst *et al.* 2012) and in policy implementation (Morgen 2001), and have detailed the particularities of managing street-level professionals (Evans 2010). Our analysis contributes to this frontline worker literature by employing an anthropological lens on brokerage. In this perspective, street-level workers are neither primarily representatives of the state and organisations, nor implementers of youth development policies, but persons who are positioned between different groups in society, and who enable constructive interactions in multiple directions. We believe that this gives rise to a better understanding of the position of these brokers and the ways in which they negotiate their boundaries. In our theoretical framing, we turn to the concept of 'correspondence' and argue that brokers' fragile and contested positions and their incomplete translations contain the basis for their room for manoeuvre.

The notion of the broker has entered anthropology in studies of intermediaries who operated between the colonial administration and the local population. Village headmen, who spoke both their native language and the language of the colonial powers, could function as brokers between their people and the state (Gluckman 1949). In the postcolonial period, anthropologists studied brokers who connected local communities to newly emerging nation-states. Geertz (1960), in a classic study, presented the 'kijaji', local Islamic teachers in rural Indonesia who connected the rural population to the state, yet also to the larger Islamic civilisation of which these villagers aspired to be a part. Geertz (1960: 228) argues that the *kijaji* were cultural brokers, needed in the context of Indonesia's societal transformation:

> It is these groups and individuals who can 'translate' the somewhat abstract ideologies of the "New Indonesia" into one or another of the concrete idioms of rural life and can, in return, make clear to the intelligentsia the nature of the peasantry's fears and aspirations.

Likewise, in our study of youth workers, changing relations between the state's institutions and citizens are at stake. The Dutch state (re)positions the youth worker to 'the frontline', to extend state control into the life world of youngsters and 'socialise' them according to particular values. In this regard, our study resembles the work of

Mosse and Lewis (2006a) on brokers in the field of development, where mediators operate between local target populations and development organisations.

Classically, brokers are known to control a resource flow between clients and patrons or patron organisations. They try to monopolise this resource flow and, in so doing, are involved in 'gatekeeping'. According to Auyero (2000: 11), brokers are constantly 'pursuing the core of brokerage: setting themselves up as the (only) channels that facilitate transactions or resource flows'. To ensure their gatekeeping position, brokers may manipulate their clients into believing they are dependent on them in order to get access to resources. While youth workers also occupy a gate-keeper position, this position is challenged by the young people they work with and by their co-workers. We show that it is difficult for youth workers to monopolise resource flows, which contributes to their vulnerability. As such, the broker–client relationship may be of a fragile nature. When a broker is not able to meet their needs, clients may start looking for other brokers who can serve them better (Koster 2012). As a result, brokers need to constantly negotiate the boundaries between them and competing brokers.

Contributing to their vulnerable position is the fact that many of their clients perceive them as ambiguous figures (James 2011: 319). Brokers are situated between different groups that may have conflicting values and interests, and group members may see the broker as someone who does not fully subscribe to their values. Indeed, 'apparently unlike moral qualities' coexist in the person of the broker, which may give rise to distrust (James 2011: 335). Brokers may even be thought of as 'amoral, in the sense that they are inadequately embedded in a moral community' (Stovel & Shaw 2012: 144).

In the practice of brokerage, translation is crucial. James (2011: 334), in a study of land brokers in South Africa, focuses on the brokers' capacity to translate and create a 'synthesis between divergent and apparently irreconcilable positions'. The brokers she presents do not only mediate between state and local populations, they also blend the hierarchy of traditional authority and the egalitarianism of South Africa's post-liberation society. Like James, we show how brokers translate seemingly opposing values and interests without necessarily integrating these values. Opposing values may indeed converge in the person of the broker, yet remain disintegrated (Koster & van Dijk 2013). In other words, in line with the introduction to this special issue, assembling different components does not result in a harmonious whole, as assemblages are always incoherent, unstable and contingent (Collier & Ong 2005). Instead, some components of the assemblage – specific actors, groups or frameworks – will never understand each other or be 'on speaking terms' with each other. Even so, without fully integrating the different elements, brokers forge a productive connection between them.

Connecting different groups implies an act of translation between distinct worlds, discourses or realities (Mosse & Lewis 2006a, 2006b). Translation, as we see it, is about establishing a connection against the backdrop of competing interests or values that are potentially irreconcilable. As Latour (2005: 39) argues, 'mediators trans-form, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry'. Indeed, the act of mediating, of translating, does not erase difference; it re-emphasises difference. Translation theorist and historian Venuti (1995: 306) writes:

> Translation is a process that involves looking for similarities between languages and cultures (…) but it does this only because it is constantly confronting dissimilarities. It can never and should never aim to remove these dissimilarities entirely. A translated text should be the site where a different culture emerges, where a reader gets a glimpse of a cultural other.

Venuti (1995) moves away from harmonious understandings of translation – in which differences disappear in the formation of an integrated whole – when he compares translation to a battleground on which different worldviews and hegemonic forces combat each other. Indeed, the metaphor of the battleground is present in youth work, as those who are involved in translation – the youth workers – are described as 'frontline' workers, sent into the hostile territory of allegedly criminal youths.

The use of this military metaphor suggests that policies see translation as a one-way process. Frontline workers are to impose the interests and values of their organisations and the state on the life worlds of their clients. Contrasting this point of view, we argue that translation is a two-way process in which parties simultaneously respond to each other's interpretations and actions. To explain this further, we use Ingold's (2013) concept of 'correspondence', which he distinguishes from interaction. In his view, interaction presupposes that the interacting parties involved 'are closed to one another, as if they could only be connected through some kind of bridging operation' (Ingold 2013: 107). Our ethnography demonstrates, on the contrary, that the youth workers move along with the youngsters: they inhabit the same space, they spend time together and they experience the same events. Their (mutual) way of acting and going along is a form of correspondence, as they 'continually answer to one another' (Ingold 2014: 389). Correspondence 'is not a relation *between* one subject (…) and others, as the prefix *inter-* [in interaction] indicates, but one that carries on or unfolds along concurrent paths' (Ingold 2014). The youth workers work *with* the youths; they continuously act, intervene, question and respond. They are 'tuned in' and acting 'by living through a vivid present together' (Schütz 1951: 96).

This view on translation and correspondence has three implications for our argument about youth workers. First, while policies may expect youth workers to socialise youth in unidirectional processes, the notion of correspondence allows us to see multidirectional processes that give rise to a mutual socialisation. Youth workers do not work with passive subjects; they work with youth who exert influence on the worker by expressing their aspirations and asserting their needs, being 'tuned in' to them. Second, translation and correspondence leave open the possibility of connecting without integrating. The youths' practices and needs may, as we will show, collide with the 'positive youth development' policies. In our case, we show how seemingly irreconcilable worlds are pulled into an assemblage without erasing their differences. Finally, this brings us to understand how these youth workers are constantly negotiating their own position, challenging its boundaries and their room for manoeuvre.

The Youth Workers: Joost and Nathan

We followed two youth workers and their interactions with youth in one particular neighbourhood. The first, Joost,[3] is a 57-year-old man who works for a local community

welfare organisation (CWO) that operates in a disadvantaged neighbourhood in Utrecht. The organisation has one of its buildings in the neighbourhood. The second worker, Nathan, in his late twenties, is employed at a youth work organisation (YWO) and active in the same neighbourhood.

Joost has been doing this work for more than 20 years. His organisation, funded by the municipality, provides various services and activities for both young people and adults in the neighbourhood. For example, they offer sport activities for (elderly) women aimed at improving their health, they provide young and disadvantaged children with toys and organise play sessions in public spaces and they facilitate indoor football for adolescent boys.

When Joost walks through the neighbourhood, he talks to all youth he meets. He seems to know them all and they all know him. The encounters with youth are opportunities for Joost to attract boys towards his activities. Often these encounters involve negotiations between Joost and the young people. For example, when younger boys try to persuade Joost to allow them to participate in activities for older boys because they hang out with these older boys. Joost, as we will show, is constantly balancing the rules of his organisation and the needs that boys express to him.

The CWO's main aim is to improve the neighbourhood by increasing its social cohesion and encouraging residents to participate in wider society. Of late, the latter has become more important due to the new emphasis on self-reliance, as discussed above. When the fieldwork for this study was carried out, municipal social welfare policies had just gone through several major changes, following the national neoliberal governance transition. The new welfare policies impacted the role and the activities of the CWO, prescribing that it should enable citizens to become autonomous and depend less on state support. The CWO workers were instructed to encourage 'clients' to organise activities for themselves, preferably with private instead of public means. In general, the CWO budget decreased and fewer expenditures were allowed. In order to get subsidies, youth work activities now had to be clearly 'educational'; they had to contribute to making youth self-dependent.

Under this neoliberal framework, youth workers like Joost are supposed to immerse themselves in the neighbourhood and develop close relations with its residents to stay well informed about their needs and concerns. According to municipal social welfare policies, they are expected to bring people together and make them help each other with a variety of problems.[4] Only if necessary are they allowed to connect residents to their organisation or other relevant institutions for assistance. A youth worker is, as policy makers would argue, supposed to be 'up and about', moving through the neighbourhood to meet and catch up with their 'target group'.

Municipal policies define the neighbourhood in which Joost and Nathan work as a problematic neighbourhood. In the recent past, it was labelled a 'powerful neighbourhood' (*krachtwijk*), a status applied by national and local government to particular areas with relative socioeconomic underdevelopment, which are targeted by policies to develop their powerful potential. As such, the label is intended to shift the focus from socioeconomic problems and deficiencies to the strength of and resources available to the people in that neighbourhood (Nolas 2014). The labelling of the

neighbourhood enabled the municipality to invest more in the neighbourhood and develop policies aimed at improving its performance in specific measures, such as unemployment rate, educational attainment, feelings of insecurity and youth nuisance (Gemeente Utrecht 2013). The majority of the inhabitants in this part of the neighbourhood are Dutch people of Moroccan descent. Most of the boys Joost and Nathan work with are born and raised in the Netherlands and have parents that migrated to the Netherlands from Morocco. In both current policies and public opinion, these boys are defined as problematic (de Jong 2007; de Koning 2015).

Joost primarily works with youth and their parents. He organises various activities for youth, ranging from providing young children (4–12 years old) opportunities to play together in public spaces under his supervision to organising indoor football matches in a sports centre for adolescent boys. Joost and his co-workers provide the resources needed for this: they lend toys and equipment to the children to play with and rent the room in the sports centre. Another activity they organise is the 'teen living room', an indoor hangout space for boys.

The YWO carries out programmes focused on the socialisation of youth and the prevention of crime. It works mostly with youth who are second generation migrants and sets out to achieve positive youth development by enhancing the integration of these youth in Dutch society. Its policies aim at encouraging young people to invest in their future so they can become self-reliant adults. They aim specifically at young people who are identified as 'high risk', meaning they have a significant chance of missing out on connections to important institutions such as school and work.[5] The YWO collaborates with a variety of organisations and institutions, varying from the police to the CWO Joost works for. Like the CWO, it is funded by the municipality. Due to their emphasis on deterring youth delinquency, parts of their work are funded by so-called security budgets, which are financial resources reserved for crime prevention.

The YWO organises many kinds of activities for adolescents, such as girls-only groups and indoor hangout spaces for boys. One of the activities that Nathan is involved in is called 'the bus'. It is a mobile space, a bus, for boys to hang out. The location of the bus varies, in accordance with the needs and wants of the police and the municipality. When complaints of youth nuisance arise in a certain part of the neighbourhood, the youth workers consult with the police and municipal officials who may decide to strategically position the bus in that area. That way the boys can still hang out, yet in an indoor space under the supervision of youth workers. In so doing, the boys are less visible to other residents who might feel bothered or intimidated by their presence.

On its website, the YWO claims that it is able to reach and connect to youth because its youth workers relate to the lives and experiences of young people. They engage in what they refer to as a 'pedagogical relationship' with young people.[6] As in the community work of the past, the pedagogical relationships that youth workers maintain with young people rely on the latter's voluntary participation. To build strong relationships that can last, youth workers need to invest in them by building trust, offering activities that fit the interests and needs of youth, and engaging in continuous negotiations with them.

The youth workers see the pedagogical relationship as a means to achieve positive youth development. Contrary to the unidirectional understanding of recent policies, youth workers explained to us that within pedagogical relationships youth exert influence and retain their freedom. Like in any relationship, continuous negotiation between values and expectations is an important aspect. The pedagogical relationship is characterised by specific tensions, as adults often regard young people's desires and ambitions as problematic or in need of adjustment (Valentine 1996; Skott-Myhre 2006). The pedagogical relationship thus contains conflicts between the needs and values of the adult world on the one hand and those of the youth world on the other (de Winter 2011).

Once every week, for a couple of hours, Joost and Nathan use a room in one of the buildings of Joost's CWO to host the 'teen living room'. The room is equipped with a football table, a table tennis table and a television with a PlayStation to play video games. During the teen living room, Joost and Nathan interact with the boys, mainly through joining in their play.

Below we zoom in on the interaction between Joost, Nathan and the boys who visit the teen living room. This interaction shows the complex situation in which the workers try to maintain their positions, while these are challenged by the boys through 'shopping' and 'hunting'. Youth workers describe 'shopping' as the ways that youth aim at finding a youth worker who can arrange the best deals or organise the finest activities. 'Hunting' is a word youth workers use to refer to the practices of youth who are attempting to steal something from the organisation.

Shopping: Looking for Another Broker

In winter, the teen living room was always filled with youth. In the summer, however, it attracted fewer youth. Especially during school holidays, many boys played outside or spent time out of the city with their families. Also this year, Joost and Nathan saw a decline in the early summer in the number of boys participating in the activity. They would at times find themselves alone – with the researcher – in an otherwise empty room. If boys occasionally arrived, they would quickly leave because there were no peers. In other years, when no boys came to the living room, Joost and Nathan ventured out into the neighbourhood to find the boys, talk to them and hang out with them. This time, Nathan expressed his doubts about the necessity of the teen living room during the summer. He recalled how in wintertime he could 'easily fill up the living room'. Joost emphasised the importance of keeping in contact with the boys the whole year through. The present break, he argued, provided them with the opportunity to re-organise the activity, making it possible to give more attention to specific boys. Following up on this, Joost and Nathan considered organising activities for a smaller group of boys or even for specific individuals that they identified as high risk. Joost said that having serious talks with these boys was difficult in larger groups, because there would always be 'someone who cracks a joke' or ridicules another's story. Joost said that this summer he wanted to spend some 'quality time' with certain boys.

With this goal in mind, they entertained the idea of going sailing with a small group of boys. One afternoon Joost and Nathan presented the sailing idea to Anouar, the only boy present in the teen living room. Anouar dismissed the idea immediately. He frowned and said that none of the boys would join. And, he added, 'I cannot swim'.

Then Adil, a 13-year-old boy, short for his age, entered the room. He was wearing bright blue Nike sneakers, jeans, a Lacoste shirt and a small leather bag worn sideways across his torso. When the workers told Adil of their idea to go sailing, he reacted in a dismissive way. Agitatedly, he blurted out:

> Sailing? Do you know how lame that is? We are going to go sailing. I have never heard of sailing! What is that: sailing? I would rather just play football on the local court. Why don't we go water-skiing? That's fun. Up in North they're going to Walibi [an amusement park]. Let's go to Walibi!

Joost responded:	'Then we wouldn't see you all day'.
Anouar slyly commented:	'That's the whole idea!'
Joost replied with a joke:	'Well, you can go alone. I am more than willing to sponsor you'.
Adil looked at him and asked:	'For how much?'
Joost, joking:	'€1.50. Something like that'.
Adil frowned:	'The ticket alone costs around €30'. He then started smiling and reminiscing about the time he went on a trip with several other boys. He had had the best time, he said. He talked about how he had shared a room with another boy and they had gone swimming and had visited a nearby town.

Nathan, referring to the new 'educational' constraints of their budget, asked: 'But what did you learn? Nowadays you only get money if you learn something'. Adil lashed out in an angry voice: 'What did I learn? Nothing! But you guys are just sitting around over here, just chilling, doing nothing! You're like this – ' He imitated the posture of the workers, sitting, slouched with an arched back, and continued:

> Whullah [I swear], Rachid up in North is busting his ass off for us, trying to get the money for us to go to Walibi. Walibi is fun! Something to remember. In Walibi you can check out chicks. See, this is why people go to North, it is boring over here!

Nathan and Joost silently listened to Adil's rant. Then Nathan replied that he knew Rachid, a colleague of Joost at the CWO, who worked together with Nathan's YWO colleagues in organising activities similar to the 'teen living room' in the northern part of the neighbourhood. Nathan said that he did not believe that Rachid would take the boys to Walibi. Joost looked at Adil and said in a calm voice: 'Yeah, I think they just messed with your head a little bit'. As he left, Adil said: 'Don't go ruin it for us by telling him he should not help us out'.

Safeguarding Their Position

The above exchange demonstrated the vulnerability of the youth workers' position. It also showed how negotiations were part of the relationship between the workers and the youth. To maintain the pedagogical relationship it was crucial that the boys

remain convinced that keeping contact with the workers would be valuable. If the boys started to believe that the workers were unable to organise nice activities, while other youth workers were able to do so, they would no longer come to them. Adil described the other youth worker, Rachid, as a better option because he was organising an expensive activity for the boys. Rachid might therefore fulfil a function that Nathan and Joost could not, and the boys might decide to turn to Rachid and leave Joost and Nathan. The youth workers referred to these practices as 'shopping', looking around for others to fulfil their needs.

In an attempt to strengthen their position, Joost and Nathan immediately contacted Rachid to set up a meeting. At the meeting, Joost, Nathan, Rachid and some of Rachid's colleagues were present. Nathan explained why he had requested this meeting. He explained that some of the boys were 'shopping' and that they had accused him and Joost of not doing their jobs properly: 'They tell us, 'You are just sitting on your asses and you do not do anything for us while other workers are making plans to take us to Walibi''. Nathan continued, explaining that Rachid offering the Walibi activity was causing problems for Joost and him. He said that Rachid could do as he pleased, but that he wanted him to know what kind of problems they experienced because of his actions. 'It is not easy nowadays to get funding for activities, with all the budget cuts in social work', Nathan continued. He explained how, recently, he had been creative himself: he had won four admission tickets for the swimming pool through a campaign on Twitter. In this way, he argued, he had collected the necessary resources to organise nice – and not necessarily educational – activities for the boys without applying for funding.

Rachid responded, 'For the record, I did not promise anything'. He emphasised that he had only said that he would see what he could do. He had also told the boys that he would expect a financial contribution of €10 each. He explained how he thought about going canoeing, but that the boys had expressed their preference for going to the amusement park. Emphasising that he did not come up with the idea for Walibi, he added: 'I do not even like it! Do you think it is fun going to an amusement park with a group of boys? I am going to go nuts!'

The workers continued talking for a while. They discussed how 'you need money for everything' nowadays and 'you need a good story' in order to get money from the municipality. Joost explained that a good story should refer to crime prevention. He said that maintaining contact with specific boys over summer was important, because these boys were 'high risk' and needed to be continually engaged in order to ensure that they would keep coming to activities after summer instead of participating in criminal activities.

Nathan described how he and Joost had suggested sailing and how the boys had dismissed this idea. One of Rachid's colleagues responded enthusiastically to the idea: 'That could be fun! Probably, most of the boys have never done that before!' Encouraged by Rachid's colleague's enthusiasm for the sailing activity, Nathan summed up the educational effects of the sailing activity; this was, as we understand it, a subtle attempt to discourage Rachid from organising a trip to Walibi. Nathan explained that the workers 'have a choice between introducing [these boys] to activities that they are unfamiliar with and that broaden their horizons and the activities they

already know and like'. Rachid smiled, but then positioned himself clearly as a competing broker by saying determinedly: 'All right, but if we *want* to go to Walibi, we are going to go'.

Hunting: Between Being 'Street Wise' and Crime Prevention Policies

Shortly after this round of 'shopping', the youth workers faced another challenge that demonstrated the irreconcilability of the 'worlds' that they were connecting. This happened when they found out that Adil and two other boys had stolen money from the YWO.

During the summer, Adil did not join in the regular activities like the teen living room, yet he frequently visited the organisation's buildings, both in his neighbourhood and in other neighbourhoods. Shortly before summer, Nathan had noticed that some of the boys behaved in an odd manner. They would linger in the hallway instead of entering the living room. It bothered Nathan and it gave him an uncomfortable feeling, he recalled, but he could not quite put his finger on it. 'It was as if they were checking it out', he said. Joost recalled that they had confronted two boys who had acted suspiciously in the hallway. He had told the boys that he was keeping an eye on them, and said: 'If you are planning to do something, don't do it'.

A couple of days later, the organisation's mailbox, a large metal box opened with a key, was demolished. The mailbox was often used to transfer cash for activities in envelopes from one worker to another. This time, the box had been empty, so nothing was stolen. Shortly after the incident with the mailbox, there was another incident. One of Nathan's colleagues said that some boys were coming around, asking if they could use the restroom or saying they were looking for Nathan, while, according to the worker, they were well aware of the fact that Nathan did not work there. Shortly after, money was stolen from that location. The workers at that location pressed charges and passed on descriptions of the three boys to the police. So far, the police have not found anyone to match the descriptions. Nathan and Joost said that, based on the descriptions and their detailed knowledge of the boys, they were sure the three boys were Adil and his friends.

Joost said about the boys: 'They are hunting'. He explained that, not too long ago, the boys had gone to another location of the CWO. In that location, called The Playground, children under 12 and their parents visit to meet and play. The boys had tried to get inside the building, saying that they came to look for Joost. Joost, who had happened to be there as well, recalled that the boys had been startled when he showed up. Then, recovering from their surprise, they had asked Joost if they could borrow a bicycle pump. Joost had gone inside to get it, but by the time he returned they had left. He said that the boys had used all kind of 'shitty excuses' to get inside the building, but he had told his co-workers at the Playground to keep them out. He argued that they were not allowed to enter because it was against the rules since the Playground was only open to children up to 12 years old. Still, Joost did not want to forsake his relationship with Adil. He pondered getting a free-of-charge mobile number, especially for Adil, so that the boy would

always be able to reach him but would no longer be able to use him as an excuse to enter the organisation's buildings.

Contemplating the Dilemma: Negotiating Boundaries

Although Joost and Nathan were convinced that Adil and his friends were involved in the theft, they had not told anyone. They had only discussed the issue with each other, several times. Joost understood the theft from the boys' point of view, saying that the boys were trying to develop a 'street identity', and were using the organisation for this purpose. He surmised that Adil's involvement in the crime could be understood as 'a 13-year-old young boy who is practicing his "stealing skills"'.

In their discussions about the issue, they were constantly negotiating the boundaries of their position: would they act to enforce their organisations' crime prevention policies? Then they would have to report the boys. If they did, their relation with the boys would be at stake. Still, they wanted to let the boys know that their practices were unacceptable; they wanted to teach the boys that this was not the way forward for them. During one of their talks they sketched several scenarios, weighing the risks of their actions and trying to figure out the best way to handle the situation.

They discussed approaching the boys' parents. They wanted to tell the parents what they knew, they said, but they did not want the parents to tell the boys. Nathan wondered if the parents would be able to keep the information to themselves and if they could even ask such a thing from them. Nathan said he could not imagine that the parents would be able to keep it to themselves: 'If he were my son, I would talk to him and say: 'Listen, what did you do?''

Joost argued that he could talk to the boys' parents and explain the dilemma they were facing. He suggested that they could say: 'Listen, there's something I want to talk to you about but I am not sure if I should because I do not know if you can keep it to yourself and not tell your son about it'. Both workers were standing outside the room used for teen living room gatherings, close to the entrance to the building. While talking, Joost paced from one side to the other. After some time he stopped. Leaning on a fence opposite Nathan, he said:

> We can tell their parents, but urge them not to tell their sons because that would bring us into trouble, because we have a relationship with the boys based on trust. If they do decide to tell the boys then we will never tell them anything like this again.

They discussed one scenario after another. Joost said: 'We're still polishing, it is not polished yet. We keep inventing one thing after another'. They laughed and Nathan joked: 'By the time we have decided what to do, they will already have been arrested by the police'.

Joost responded briefly:	'Let's hope so'.
Immediately, they looked at each other and simultaneously blurted out:	'No, not really, actually'.

There was a silence and they looked at each other again. Joost said that they did not have complete certainty that the boys did it. Nathan replied: 'Come on, Joost, one and one is two!' Joost said: 'Well, if that is true, then why don't we press charges?' Nathan argued that he is not going to go to the police. Joost challenged him: 'Why not? You just said one and one is two'.

Nathan repeated that he would not call the police. Getting a record, the youth workers knew well, would have long lasting consequences for the boys, not in the least in terms of finding internships and employment. He mentioned the community officer (*wijkagent*) who also knew many youngsters in the neighbourhood. Nathan argued that he did not want to call the police but proposed that he might 'whisper something into the community officer's ear'. However, Nathan said, he would not press charges. If anything, he would talk to the boys first and give them the opportunity to go to the police themselves.

After some silence, Nathan proposed another alternative: 'How about approaching the boys and telling them to give the money back, and saying that if they don't, we will talk to their parents?' Joost wondered if it would not a bit too late to do that, since the theft had already taken place almost a week ago. Nathan replied that the boys did not know when they had been informed about the theft. He presented yet another alternative: calling the parents and saying that they had received 'signs from the neighbourhood' that their sons were misbehaving, and asking them to keep an eye on their sons. Since they could not decide on a scenario they agreed to discuss the matter again soon.

Discussion and Conclusions: Assembling the Irreconcilable

In both the shopping and the hunting situations we see how the youth workers are being confronted with challenges that the youths impose on them and that strain their relations with the boys. In their attempts to form relationships with boys like Adil we see how Joost and Nathan experience the restraints of the current policy on youth work they are supposed to implement. Recreational activities are only financed if they have a clear educational purpose; going to an amusement park is not seen as such. The activities that the youth workers have to offer do not meet the needs of Adil. Consequently, Adil distances himself from the youth workers while exploring the opportunities offered by others such as Rachid. For Nathan and Joost it becomes challenging to remain connected with Adil without being able to offer activities that attract him. These shopping practices show that Joost and Nathan are unable to monopolise resource flows in the way described by studies of 'classic' brokerage. Instead, they must negotiate with their 'clients' what kind of resources they would have to provide to be considered good brokers. Also, they must negotiate their boundaries with other brokers, as if they were competitors. In light of the boys' hunting practices Joost and Nathan had to reflect on their position and its boundaries: on whose side were they? Did they have to report the boys to the police or not? Their reflections showed how they did not merely represent their organisation or the state, as frontline workers would. Instead, as brokers, positioned in the middle, they exerted more

autonomy in how they might manoeuvre. They did not extend the state's control into the territory of 'high-risk' youth, nor did they socialise youth in a one-way relationship. Instead, they explored possible scenarios that would stop the criminal behaviour of the boys, whilst not jeopardising their relationships with them.

Looking at both situations from the perspective of correspondence, we are able to characterise youth work along two lines. First, we see it as relational in the sense that the youth workers are constantly negotiating their position vis-à-vis the boys and their fellow youth workers. In the shopping story, they engage with the boys and with their colleagues. In the hunting case, they deal with the boys and with each other. In all their engagements, they are navigating between the demands and policies of their organisations and the state on the one hand and the practices and desires of the youth on the other. They do not force the policies upon the youths. Neither do they integrate the two 'worlds'. Rather, they correspond to the youth and the events in their lives. Indeed, as anthropologists Otto and Smith aptly argue, 'correspondence refers to being in accordance with the flow of events, to moving forward with people in the pursuit of their dreams and aspirations' (2013: 17). Their relationship with the boys is vital to their ability to do their work in a meaningful way.

Second, youth work is an ongoing process of correspondence, as seen in youth workers' struggles with the demands and policies they are enjoined to implement. The boys' criminal activities clashed with the developmental policies Joost and Nathan are employed to implement. Joost and Nathan are supposed to teach the boys to participate in society and to refrain from crime, but they also must maintain a relationship with the boys as a trusted adult. Facing this dilemma, Joost and Nathan chose to act in a highly deliberative and cautious manner, seeking out a position that would indeed correspond to both the policy values and the values of the youth. Correspondence, we argue, is not the enactment of previously defined structures or meanings, but is, as Ingold (2013) states, constantly in the making. Correspondence is improvisation (Otto & Smith 2013: 18). The hunting case demonstrates the improvisational character of the brokering done by youth workers, where Joost and Nathan contemplate their possible lines of action. This puts them in a rather autonomous position regarding their organisations. Later, in an interview, Joost's superior told us that he found Joost very hard to manage, as he did not stick to the rules. Joost, in turn, complained to us that he felt hampered by the rules of his organisation.

These brokers assemble the irreconcilable: youth socialisation and crime prevention policies and the (sometimes criminal) practices of youth. In so doing, two different 'worlds' converge through the practice of brokerage, yet without becoming fully integrated; the assemblage is always incoherent, unstable and incomplete (Collier & Ong 2005). We have demonstrated how the youth workers' practices resonate with the development goals of their organisation on the one hand and the practices, needs and aspiration of youth on the other. In so doing, they create and reproduce their own position with a certain level of autonomy and room for manoeuvre.

While the policies portray the youth workers as frontline workers, implementing policy at the street level, our study demonstrates how they constantly correspond to ongoing events, actions and aspirations. They engage with the world in which they

work, without integrating all its elements into a harmonious whole. Corresponding with the youth on the one hand and their organisation on the other hand, they connect the different components of the youth work assemblage that is made up of multiple actors, institutions and resources at different levels and scales. The youth workers, as brokers, play a crucial role in bringing together the many elements of such assemblages.

Notes

1. Interestingly, as a part of their new policy, the Utrecht municipality has given youth workers the job title of 'youth social broker' (*sociaal makelaar jeugd*). It is framed instrumentally, implying that the 'youth social broker' should operate as an intermediary between their organisation and the 'target group', with the purpose of educating and socialising the latter. In order to avoid confusion between this term and our analytical use of the concept of brokerage, we have not used the policy term in our article. For the policy term, see: http://www.utrecht.nl/images/DMO/ontwikkeling/PDF/PDC_ontwikkeling/subsidieuitvraag_sociaal_makelaarschap.pdf
2. The first author of this article conducted the fieldwork.
3. All names are pseudonyms.
4. Source: http://www.utrecht.nl/images/DMO/ontwikkeling/PDF/PDC_ontwikkeling/subsidieuitvraag_sociaal_makelaarschap.pdf
5. Source: http://www.jou-utrecht.nl/media/files/141217-not-joujaarplan2015.pdf
6. Source: http://www.jou-utrecht.nl/media/files/141217-not-joujaarplan2015.pdf

Acknowledgements

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

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