Becoming a policeman

Researching police identity as lived experience

By Thomas Bille, PhD fellow, Roskilde University, Denmark

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Abstract

How do you become a policeman? With this broad question in mind I will present and discuss my work-in-progress research on the practical training program of trainee police officers engaged in and learning from police activities together with more experienced and educated police officers.

The work of the policeman is a bodily engagement to the world, and perception is a crucial matter of bringing meaning to social events and situations and acting accordingly. Therefore, I am interested in investigating how trainee police officers learn to perceive situations due to their bodily involvement in police work situations and perform actions based upon the perceived conditions of the situation, the self and the world.

From a phenomenological point of reference, how do trainee police officers perceive the world and act accordingly due to their bodily involvement and consciousness in actual police situations?

How can you investigate the lived experiences of the trainee police officer doing and learning from police work through phenomenological descriptions?

## 1.2. Introducing my research in the police

The idea of researching the police came to me while teaching a group of police officers in an in-service training program together with members of other professions such as primary school teachers and pedagogues as well as social workers. I was impressed by how these different professionals actually shared similar professional challenges and dilemmas and by the willingness of the police officers to view police work from other peoples’ perspectives than their own. I had the impression of the police being a somehow rigid and enclosed profession, but here I met representatives who were open minded and critical reflective practitioners. I decided to do a review of police research, and a few months later, I applied and was accepted as PhD fellow entering in a rural police district close to my home. Two months into my PhD program I did a four days pilot project training my skills as a researcher and getting acquainted with the field I was about to enter. Two months later, after finishing another course in the in-service training program, I began my three months of field work.

I chose to do my fieldwork as early as possible for two reasons: Firstly, the police education was a completely unknown profession to me, and I therefore I felt an urge to get acquainted to the field as early as possible. Secondly, there was a methodological point induced by the concept of *epoché* (bracketing) meaning, that the researcher investigating the world from a phenomenological point of reference should bracket past knowledge and presuppositions of the given objects, in order to be unbiased to the life-word of the other and to avoid theoretical presumptions.

The presented empirical findings and analysis are based on a first-time reading of my field notes and therefore I am not able to give a thorough and exhaustive analysis. However, before presenting my findings (see chapter 3) I will give a short account of my review so far, positioning my research accordingly.

## 1.3. A review of research in the police in Scandinavia

The notion of ‘police’ derives from the Greek word ‘polis’ meaning a (well-ordered) city or society. From the very beginning, the purpose of policing has been to preserve order in the state, to prevent civil conflicts and to protect society against criminal activities within society or between national states. In the 18th century policing was linked to the preservation of the government, in the 19th century police research became an academic discipline at several universities around Europe, and in the 20th century police research changed direction from preserving the government to focusing on criminology[[1]](#footnote-1) based on academic disciplines such as political science, sociology, psychology and forensic medicine. The purpose of criminology is effectively to prevent or suppress criminal activities by proposing new and perfected methods and theoretical understandings.

In the last 10-15 years in Scandinavia, however, there has been a growing interest to research on the police profession and the police identity by integrating more humanistic and anthropological approaches. In an extensive fieldwork in a suburb of Copenhagen, Holmberg (1999) has explored police work in real-life encounters with the public and discovered that police work is more influenced by personal and cultural values than rigidly following the legislation. In her fieldwork in Stockholm, Carlström (1999) suggests that police work is characterized by multiple realities and can be seen as an organized game between the police officers and the criminals where the police officers on the one hand tries to understand the mind of the criminals and on the other hand does not take the criminals’ reality for granted. In her fieldwork in Oslo, Finstad (2000) has explored the ‘police gaze’, the kaleidoscope by which police officers point out potential criminals or criminal activities patrolling the streets. On one hand police work is based on experiences and the training of standardized situations, on the other hand every situation is unique and defined by the unpredictable conditions of the situation. Granér (2004) has investigated the professional work culture within the Swedish police force suggesting that police work is relatively autonomous and therefore only partially under the control of the legal system. Lauritz (2009) has researched the development of professional identity during and after the educational training. His findings suggest, that police work is characterized by handling contrasting needs and expectations or dilemmas between the police profession, the police image and the cultural environment: acting according to the law vs. acting according to the conditions of the situation (the profession and culture dilemma); responding to the public’s valuations of police work vs. responding to one’s norm(the culture and image dilemma); approaching the demands and needs of the environment vs. fulfilling the requirement of the profession itself, such as the law, the resources etc. (the image and profession dilemma).

The research findings above suggests that police work is extremely complex and unpredictable in its nature and that police identity is an ongoing learning process perceiving the world and responding to the conditions of the situations.

## 1.4. Positioning my research in the police

The purpose of this paper and my PhD project is to apprehend a deeper understanding of how the professional identity, as a perception of the body, evolves through real-life experiences (the lived world) through a phenomenological approach especially inspired by the works of the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Identity is seen as a bodily involvement embedded in social situations. This approach is based on empirical descriptions rather than presupposed theoretical assumptions trying to grasp questions such as: How do you become police officer? How do you actually perceive the world being police officer? How do you respond to the lived situations? The point is to understand the process of being professional from their point of departure, from the inside, and from the subjects themselves.

## 1.5. Researching the life-world of the police

In the early stages of my PhD – actually in the process of applying for the PhD scholarship - a police friend of mine said “*Thomas, you have to be much clearer in your presentation of your project. Otherwise you will never stand a chance entering the police as a researcher*.” At that moment my fieldwork in the police actually began. I became aware of my own image, how I presented myself in the eyes of the other, and I began to prepare myself to the task I was about to commence. I began asking myself questions such as: how do I enter the life-world of the police officer, not being a policeman myself, but as a researcher? In my case there was an additional challenge: how do I enter the life-world of the researcher being a professional teacher of pedagogues? I began studying the personal experiences of researchers entering the field of the police. I found a ‘uniform’: a pair of dark blue jeans with pockets on the front of the thighs, a light blue shirt, black shoes and a black jacket trying to adapt to the uniform of the police. I studied and adapted to the social gestures and routines at the police station: shaking hands, making coffee, holding the door etc.

A few months later – in my pilot study - I remember being confused and overloaded by the impressions. I was feeling estranged, desperately trying to perceive the world through the eyes of a police officer. My body was in a stage of alert if not alarm. My senses were not functioning normally. I had a strange feeling in my body as if someone had wrapped a blanket around my head and thereby weakened my senses and my consciousness. I saw things through a mist and the sounds did not enter my mind properly. I was extremely sensitive to the image I presumably presented to others and reactions of the police officers towards me: what impression did I make in their eyes, was I to be accepted as part of the “team”? As the fieldwork progressed, I gradually became more and more aware, that I was not only visible in the eyes of the police officers, but of the public as well. I often felt awkward entering people’s homes. I always went in as the last person and I had to force myself to enter the space where I could see and hear things, trying to push myself closer to the action. I struggled to cross an invisible line of intimacy: on the one hand, I felt anxiety to get too close, on the other hand I felt obliged to do so being a researcher. This sense of being exposed is elaborated by van Manen making an analogy to being a new teacher in front of a class for the first time: *“This ‘feeling looked at’ may make it difficult to behave naturally and to speek freely. (The eyes) rob me of my taken-for-granted relation to my voice and my body. They force me to be aware of my experience while I am experiencing it. The result is awkwardness”* (van Manen, 1990, p. 35).

I had a strange sense of breakthrough in my fieldwork when I started to explore my own feelings and reflections in the situations and after having done so directing these experiences to the presumed sentiments of the police officers (especially the trainee police officers). An example: during a night duty I had a strong feeling of fatigue. I started to reflect upon this feeling, how it affected my being (loss of motivation, loss of self-esteem etc.) as well as my research actions (lack of concentration, unwillingness to making notes etc). The next day I turned my attention to the police officers I was studying, observing signs of fatigue and asking directly how they have slept the night before and how this affected the police work. Hollway and Jefferson puts forth the idea of ‘unconscious intersubjectivity’ proposing that the self is not a separate unit with boundaries to the external world but on the contrary come into play in relations between people: “*both (the researcher and the researched –my addition) will be subject to projections and introjections of ideas and feelings coming from the other person”.* (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p. 46). What happened with me was that I was not only intertwined in the unconscious intersubjectivity between my subjects and myself but between myself and the situations I encountered as well.

The point of bringing these points forward is to try to narrow the gap between the researcher and the subjects: *“It is to the extent that my experiences could be our experiences that the phenomenologist wants to be reflectively aware of certain experiential meanings. To be aware of the structure of one’s own experience of a phenomena may provide the researcher with clues for orienting oneself to the phenomenon and thus to all stages of phenomenological research”* (van Manen, 1990, p. 57). From one perspective, I am evidently different from my subjects, being a researcher. From another perspective, I was invited into their life-world being in the same situations at the same time. Experiencing my own state of being in the lived experiences in the police situations was the bridge to understand the becoming of police identity of the trainee police officers assuming that they were having similar, though not identical experiences, entering the professional field of the police. Striving to see the world through the eyes of the police officers, I felt getting closer to the life-worlds of the police officers.

# 2. Phenomenology: Theory, methodology and method

In the following I will present phenomenology primarily through Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), who is my main source of inspiration.

## 2.1. What is phenomenology?

The German Philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) founded phenomenology as a philosophical existential approach to understanding the being of the subject in the world. Husserl opposed to Descartes’ dualistic supposition that consciousness is separated from the experiences of the body as well as his rationalism, that the world is to be understood through reason alone not acknowledging the importance of perception and experience. Merleau-Ponty takes Husserl’s points further stating that the existence of man is grounded in the body, its senses and its experiences. And more than that: the world itself is the true source of experience and knowledge. Merleau-Ponty strongly rejects empiricism as a way of proposing universal causal explanations, as well as deductive rationalism presuming that the world can be understood by abstract theory. Both positions have an objective view of man, stating that thinking and consciousness are independent of the lived experiences and the life-world itself.

Phenomenology is the study of essences, and the phenomenological inquiry is questioning the essential nature of a lived experience as a certain way of being in the world or some experience that human being live through. As Merleau-Ponty puts it: *“We must discover the origin of the object at the very center of our experience; we must describe the emergence of being and we must understand how, paradoxically, there is for us an in-itself”* (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.70). Phenomenology is a scientific method directed towards describing (not constructing or forming) the lived experience of the subject and the phenomena presented to the subject. However, an important point must be made: objects presented to consciousness do not exist the same way they are experienced. There is a difference of perceiving the world and the life-world itself. Therefore *“one should separate the act of perceiving from the act of positing and systematically consider what is presented in the act of perceiving (…) The withholding of the positing leaves us with presences, not existences”* (Giorgi, 2009, p. 90-91).

Van Manen agrees to the point stating: *“we need to realize, of course, that experiential accounts of live-experience descriptions – whether caught in oral or in written discourse – are never identical to lived experience itself transformed at the moment it is captured”* (van Manen, 1990, p. 54)

In order to understand the world and the objects we are researching, we must realize that we are merely seeing a footprint of a giant – the footprint being our perception and the giant the world. Therefore we must be critically aware of our severely limited ability to find the truth about the world through human reason. The world *is*, and by acknowledging that, phenomenology claims that the world is not a construction of our minds. Thus, we must change direction from trying to see the world through our own perspective by means of presumptive theories to seeing the world itself in its own terms through descriptions on how it presents itself.

By turning to the phenomena themselves we will be able to understand the connection of the subject and the object with the *body* as the mediating factor:*”The body is the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature, to be intervolved in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and be continually committed to them”* (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 82). It is through the body and the bodily involvement in the world that the subject identifies itself by experiencing the world in space and time.

# 3. Investigating the life-world of the trainee police officers

I will now turn to the main question in my abstract: How do the trainee police officers perceive the world and act according to their perception of the world? The question does not have one simple answer since every police situation is unique and must be handled as such.

## 3.1. The intentionality of the body: Being in the world

The police situations frame the bodily involvement. Some situations call for an immediate and offensive action such as domestic disputes and fights in the nightlife such as nightclubs and discotheques. In these situations police work is taking place as a “live action” where the ‘scene’ is constantly changing, the injured party might be difficult to distinguish from the violator and the tensions of the involved are high. In such situations, the police officers adjust their bodily involvement to the conditions of the situation and to the reactions of the people involved. However, there is always a past situation leading up to the present live action scene, which the police also have to handle. There has been an initial spark that ignited the combination of circumstances leading up to the moment the police arrived to the scene. Finally, future is a means of adjusting to the situation and being alert on the potentiality of the event and positioning the body accordingly. An example is to limit the movements of the riots by blocking a road or barring an entrance to a building.

Other situations such as *“death findings”* and *traffic accidents* imply a different bodily involvement. In these incidents, the past becomes the focal point. The police officers are investigating various signs connected to the incidence. They gather information and evidence using different methods: they observe, note and interrogate, they do technical investigations such as fingerprints, DNA samples and various measurements of relevant objects. The police also use their sensitivity and creative imagination visualizing the situation having taken place. This method of investigation is often called the common sense.

Concerning death findings, the police investigation is about perceiving the intentionality of death. Death *is* a state of being. Death is not the end of a life, but a subject to be understood. What makes the dead body different from the living body is the fact that it cannot participate actively in resolving the circumstances leading to its state of being. However, it shows signs of its state of being: whether death happened naturally, accidentally or purposely. By carefully examining the signs on the body as well as the objects on the scene (positive as well as negative information), the police officers look for the intentional relation between the subject (the dead) and the object(s). What is the “imprint” resulting in death? In a strange way, death is communicating using a language of signs and hints only perceivable by the focused attention of the trained perception of a police officer.

Normally investigation is describing what is actually perceived, however, an interesting yet sometimes very important method is describing what is not perceived. The police has a notion, *negative information*, meaning things that should have been on the place but is not found, things that have left important yet invisible signs, and under all circumstances have had a great influence on the events leading to the actual state of being. I will give a concrete example of describing negative information in the police reports. A senior police officer explains: *“As we have discussed a few times, we normally report what we see, sense and investigate at the place. Sometimes it is REALLY important to describe what we do NOT find.* The officer gives an example from the report of a traffic accident:*”… there was not found any skid- or brake marks at the place of the accident”.* The officer explains: *this being the case tells us that the party in question did NOT* *make a heavy brake. That could indicate, that the breaks did not function properly, that the party did not react (apathetic by alcohol, narcotics or lack of sleep) or something third”.*

The bodily involvement of the police officers implies changing direction and attitude according to the conditions of the situation transcending time and place. Another important point must be made concerning the police identity: the appearance and latent power of the uniform. The police uniform itself is the symbolic representation of the police *force* indicating authority, control and power as well as giving the police officer an important feeling of “being on top of the situation”. In some incidents the mere presence of the uniform is enough to gain control of the situation, in other incidents the use of power is exercised either through a direct physical contact with the public (pushing, wrestling etc.) or by indicating or actually using weapons as extensions of the uniformed body.

## 3.2. Transcendence of time and place

Police officers are living *real time* but experiencing *transcendent time.* The police officers have to respond to the fact that they often arrive to a police situation after the events leading to the present situation. They often find themselves in the midst of a temporal sequence with no clear division of past, present and future. Their job is to turn back time investigating what happened when and why, who were involved and distinguish their roles of involvement: who is the violator and who is the injured party, were there witnesses, and perhaps even signs and clues on objects. Simultaneously they try to preserve order and thus prevent things to escalate. They also have to assess the potential risk of their own safety in the situation and be attentive to the spatial position of their bodies to the objects in the situation. Merleau-Ponty explains how the past, the present and the future are interconnected: *“the present still holds on to the immediate past (…) past time is wholly collected up and grasped in the present (…) But with my immediate past I have also the horizon of futurity which surrounded it, and this I have my actual present seen as the future of the past”* (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 69) The police officers actively engage in the conditions of the present situation. However, there is an immediate past directing their attention to the causes leading up to the present situation as well as future directing their attention to the decisions and actions to be made, e.g. raising charges and making notes to the subsequent report to the prosecutor.

Likewise is the case of responding to the meaning of the place. The place is not only the present state of location; actually the real importance of the place is often not the “now” but the “then”. The police officers often enter a particular place from different directions in body and mind. Investigating a burgled house, they move their bodies through the rooms visualizing the entry, the exit, the movements and clues[[2]](#footnote-2) of the offender. They are simultaneously looking for signs on objects that stick out from normality, e.g. shattered glass from a window, a pressed in door frame, a destroyed lock of the front door etc. It is as if they are dismantling their uniform entering the body of the offender pretending to be the other doing the act of crime. They visualize the changing appearance of the objects being touched, broken or removed as if they had be present in the situation.

Some well-known places of the police such as rocker-mansions and spaces for dealing drugs draw a special attention to the police and the movement of the police. Several times, I have witnessed the police passing important places and returning to them, sometimes several times during a night duty. Sometimes they physically leave the patrol cars to search the area on foot to get information of the places e.g. the hiding places, the exits, the potential dangerous places for an ambush etc. The purpose is to be bodily familiar with the places in much the same way as a blind person knows his whereabouts in his home.

## 3.3. Interrelation with the other

Gesture is an important aspect of communication. Merleau-Ponty states that the sense of the gesture is not given, but understood. Likewise, gesture is not due to an act of cognitive operation or an intelligent interpretation. Rather understanding comes forth through the *reciprocity* of my intentions and the gestures of others and vice versa: *“It is as if the other person’s intention inhabited my body and mine his* (…) *It is through my body that I understand other people, just as it is through my body that I perceive ‘things’. The meaning of a gesture thus ‘understood’ is not behind it, it is intermingled with the structure of the world outlined by the gesture, and which I take up on my own account” (Ibid, p. 185-186)*.

I will give an example of the reciprocity observing the nightlife from the patrol car: *01.00*. It is Friday night and we are patrolling the center of the city, parking by the “corner” where we can see 3-4 bars and discotheques. A police officer from the other patrol car is coming up to us saying: “*keep an eye on that one over there wearing a black jacket and a white stripe. He is quite tempered. He interfered in the interrogation. We will probably have problems with him later on.* The police officer turns to the trainee police officer saying: *“if we know he is going to explode then we bring him in and puts him in the detention”. 01.48.* We are returning to the corner parking the usual place. The police officer: *“You can almost see who is making trouble. They are restless, excited (indebrændte) and wear “big bread loafs” in between their armpits.* The trainee police officer: *“they are walking on their toes having air under their heals”.* (Field notes, 4/3-2011)

## 3.4. Perception of the world: The suspicious gaze

The police work is indeed the search of essences, investigating the meaning of things, places, episodes and happenings trying to solve what happened, who did what and why. One essential aspect of being and becoming a policeman in regards to perception is *the suspicious gaze*, indicated by the example below:

*02.49.* The police officer says: “*Why are the two young men walking out of the dark parking area walking towards the train station when there are no trains, however there might be night busses – should we check them out?” Suddenly I realize that the purpose of patrolling the streets is to spot what sticks out from the scene of the street as well as interpreting potential acts to be.* *It is about interpreting suspicious signs and behavior of the people in the streets, and when something sticks out it is checked up.* (Field notes, 3/12-2011)

Being suspicious is a core competence of perceiving the world as a police officer and a matter being taught and learned in the life-world of the police work. It is about finding the meaning underneath the surface objects, relations and situations. Doing so they acknowledge that what is seen is not always real and what is real is not always seen. I have witnessed several situations and will give a string of examples below.

*04.30*. The patrol car is given an assignment from the police radio: “woman claiming to be assaulted”. Getting there, however, it is not obvious whether the woman has been assaulted or not. On the one hand she is bleeding from her lip, she is in a state of despair, and she is talking about a violent situation at a bar where an unknown person suddenly slaps her. However, her explanation does not make sense. Several times her boyfriend whispers to the police officers: “*that is not correct*”, “*that did not happen for sure*” etc. After a few minutes the senior police officer states: “*I think she is fantasizing. her speech is incoherent. I am sure she hit her head at some point and has got a concussion”.* After a while, the paramedics arrive agreeing with the police officers. Suddenly her boyfriend recalls, that her lip was covered with mud and grass when she came home, and that he jokingly had asked if she had been slapped by somebody. Since then, he told us, she stubbornly held on to that story. (Field notes, 19/3-2011)

This example shows that a physical or mental injury concealed what really happened, even though the person involved was convinced of the opposite. Another example:

*01.25*. The patrol is called to an assignment with a young drunk man at a private party with some friends in an apartment. As we stepped into the flat, I see a young man is lying still on the floor, presumably unconscious. A young girl says to the officers: *“I think he’s faking”.* The trainee police officer tries to wake him up talking to him. After a while two ambulance men arrive. One of them sits down next to the young man slapping him gently on the chin. The reaction comes immediately: the young man starts crying and mourning: *“My life is a mess, I feel so bad”.* (Field notes, 19/3-2011)

The point I wish to make is that trusting the first impression of one’s senses might be erroneous: the young man lying on the floor was not a reflection of an actual state of being. The true state of being is hidden in the young man’s “faking” unconsciousness. However, as the ambulance man showed, there are different ways of finding the concealed nature of being as the physical condition of the young man is concerned. In this example exposing the young man to pain is an effective way of assessing the physical condition of the young man.

The next example concerns a domestic dispute where a man has called for police assistance accusing his wife for vandalizing his office at work.

*13.35.* Arriving at the scene neither of the parties admitted having done anything wrong. The trainee police officer interrogated the woman but even though her version of what happened was erroneous she refused having done anything. At some time, the senior officer takes over the interrogation of the woman and a few minutes later he returns saying to the trainee police officer that she has changed her statement. Later he told me: *”It was like a bit ‘good cop – bad coop’. At first, I was very hard on her, saying ‘you have an untruthful explanation’. Then, after a while, I came back, sat down and talked, engaging her sympathy.* *I tried to reach her emotionally saying that her children would be involved and that it would not be beneficial to her divorce case. After a while she admitted to it”.* (Field notes, 10/3-2011)

Even though the woman confessed, she persistently maintained a picture of being the victim of an unhappy marriage. This might actually have affected the sense of meaning from her point of view. As another senior police officer explains regarding domestic disputes: “*You need to get the two stories, and then try to figure out where the truth is (…) usually they are completely different (…) and it is not because one of them are necessarily lying, they just have very different perceptions of what happened (…) they might have forgotten what they have said, and you do not hear things when you are infuriated, so the stories can be very, very different (…) as if they have not been in the same house”* (interview, 4/5-2011, p. 17-18).

The next example is about unraveling a lie or at least challenging a strangely selected perspective of reality.

*05.15.* The patrol car is send to an assignment: robbery at a bar. Arriving to the place a young agitated woman in tears is begging the police officers to find her mobile phone. Shortly after two young men are arrested and placed in two separate patrol cars having their hands cuffed. The senior police officer walks back and forth interrogating the two arrested men and the presumably harassed young woman. One of the arrested men has been seen walking to a car and the senior police officer knowing the area well quickly finds the car. The officer urges the suspect to admit owning the car, searching for at way to get to the keys of the car in order to examine it for stolen goods. The young man, however, refuses to admit being the owner of the car. After a while the senior police officer telephones the young man’s father who informs having lent out his car to his son, the young suspect. The police officer finds the mobile phone together with other stolen goods in the car. The young man is charged for the robbery and taken to the police station. However, the young man triumphantly declares, that he *was right*: it was not *his* car but his *father’s* car. (Field notes, 4/3-2011)

This episode shows another level of disguising and unraveling the true nature of the story. As well as the former example, it shows that different perspectives can be taken. Even what can be interpreted as an obvious lie can be concealed through a veil of truth.

To sum up: In these incidents the police officers were skeptical to how the world was presented by the parties involved. This skepticism led them to investigate the true nature of what *actually* happened by means of searching for missing or contradictory pieces of evidence in their explanations as well as comparing the explanations to the perceived objects in the place looking for signs of plausible and erroneous accounts of what has happened. The perceived reality of the police seem to differ from the perceived reality of the public indicating that there are many different and often opposing perspectives of the world.

# 4. Conclusion: Perceiving the situation with the body

The object of the paper has been to give a first time analysis of police identity from a phenomenological point of reference. I will now summarize the preliminary findings with a few additional remarks.

Perceiving the world the police have to be critical aware of how the world is presented to the senses and understood by consciousness. I have especially pointed out the hidden or concealed meaning of things, actions or situations investigated. However, I wish to emphasize that the meaning of the world is not always concealed to the police. People *do* tell the truth, things *do* present themselves in a straightforward and easily understood fashion, and situations might not be difficult to understand.

The suspicious gaze is an important part of police identity to be learned and taught. It implies looking for actions or objects that sticks out from the normal. I wish to make a further point. Being suspicious is not automatically expecting others of having dubious motives. It is way of looking at the world presented to the police. The critical stance is not only directed to the other but also to their own perception. In some cases even their own senses might hinder the understanding of the true nature of a particular matter or not be reliable, since the world might present itself in ways that perception cannot catch, as for instance ‘negative information’. The world of the police is based on the very task of fighting and preventing crime, restoring order and preserving the values of the state based upon the law. The suspicious gaze is therefore a particular way of being sensitive to the world and critical of how it is perceived. Sensations due to intuitions and feelings, for instance the mood of the people in the streets at night and the atmosphere of the places are considered valid sources of information by the police in order to be the right place at the right time when something critical is going on.

The uniform is a symbol of the bodily involvement and being in the world. On the one hand, it signals authority, power and strength, on the other hand it gives the police officer a sense of confidence in handling police situations.

Being and becoming a policeman is a way of perceiving and acting in a ‘police like’ manner that often differ from the perceptions and actions of the other. I will give a last example of a trainee officer starting to perceive the world as an educated police officer:

*01.20.* The senior police officer is driving the patrol car following a car. In the darkness I can see a burning object, presumably a cigarette being thrown out of the front passenger’s side of the car ahead of us. The senior officer says: *“There are..”* The trainee police officer fulfills the sentence: “*… two persons in the car”.* (Field notes, 4/5-2011)

A few days later, the senior officer explained that this episode was a sign of the trainee police officer adjusting to a police way of thinking: what mattered was not the cigarette itself, but the information revealed by it being thrown out of the window from the passenger’s seat indicating that there were more than one person in the car. This piece of information gave the police officers a clue of what to expect and consequently how to handle in the situation to come.

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1. *Criminology* refers to the theories of causes, effects and expansion of crime. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Actually the police have a rhyme or abbreviation for this called IFUS (Indgang=entrance, Færden=movement, Udgang=exit, Spor=clues) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)