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Exhibitions of the Stereotype in Kara Walker's A Subtlety

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ABSTRACT

In 2014, Kara Walker opened the controversial exhibition 'A Subtlety' in the soon-to-be demolished Domino Sugar Factory. The centrepiece was an enormous sugar-coated sphinx whose face resembled the stereotypical Mammy. Unlike in the classic Oedipus tale, this sphinx did not speak or pose riddles in a literal sense. Rather, she embodied a riddle herself by bearing features of the deliberately desexualised Mammy that contradicted her explicit sexuality. Mirroring the bourgeois confection from the Middle-Ages, the sphinx indeed resembled a giant dessert, waiting passively to be enjoyed by the visitors. However, the scope of this exhibition extended far beyond the walls of the factory. Within days after the opening, the sphinx's enormous breasts, prominent buttocks and brazenly displayed labia became the object of thousands of pictures on social media. Visitors uploaded selfies in which they sexualised and fetishized the sphinx, posing as though licking, pinching or touching her breasts and genitals. Unknowingly, the audience was captured on film by Walker. The after-movie, titled An Audience, worked as a mirror to reveal the audience's reactions to the stereotypical and sexualised imagery. In analysing how this exhibition functioned to challenge notions of the stereotype, I have taken the question posed by Mitchell as point of departure: "what if the materials of memory are overwhelming, so traumatic that the remembering of them threatens identity rather than reconstituting it?" These 'materials of memory' could be interpreted as stereotypical imagery, confirming the notion that the reductive qualities of the stereotype are sustained by iterating them. Re-examining Bhabha's, Hall's, and Rosello's notions of the stereotype, I argue that this exhibition invokes a reconfiguration of these 'materials of memory', putting into effect processes of reconsideration and overcoming. In conclusion, A Subtlety marks the difference between the impossible stereotype and the fluidity of individual identity.

Keywords: exhibition, stereotype, curatorial practice, Kara Walker

INTRODUCTION

A large white sphinx looms out of the dark in the colossal warehouse. The walls are dripping with solidified molasses. Frozen in their oozing shapes, they serve as semi-permanent reminders of decades of non-stop sugar production. The sphinx's raised head almost touches the high ceiling. In response to the breathing of the hundreds of people around her, her sugary skin starts dripping, mirroring the walls of the refinery. Her large breasts, exaggeratedly thick lips, enormous rear end, and brazenly displayed labia light up as phone cameras flash. A critical and multidimensional commentary on the historical relationships between capital, sexuality and race, the sphinx sits proudly as a young man takes a comical selfie, pretending to stick his tongue into her exposed vulva.[1]

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[1] Description based on several photographs and videos of the exhibition found on Instagram and YouTube.

Kara Walker's exhibition took place in 2014 at the Domino Sugar Refinery in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. It was titled *A Subtlety, or The Marvelous Sugar Baby: an Homage to the unpaid and overworked Artisans who have refined our Sweet tastes from the cane fields to the Kitchens of the New World on the Occasion of the demolition of the Domino Sugar Refining Plan.* According to Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw, Walker's fame can largely be attributed to her wall-installations featuring elegant black silhouettes frozen in nightmarish scenes of antebellum plantation life. Through these anonymized figures rendered in black cardboard, Walker represents and challenges racist stereotypes, such as the 'Mammy', the 'Uncle Tom' and the 'nigger wench' (Shaw, 2007, p. 18). For *A Subtlety*, Walker lifted her figures off the wall, making them enticingly three-dimensional. The sphinx's body bears enormous breasts, her buttocks are pushed upwards in a cat-like gesture, and her labia protrude from between her rounded thighs. The thumb on her left hand is pushed suggestively through her fingers, reminiscent of the Afro-Brazilian *figa* gesture: a protective talisman symbol, also applied as a symbol of fertility (Sikkema et al., 2014). Her face is that of the stereotypical Mammy, including plump cheeks, large lips, and a flattened nose, topped with a head kerchief. However, despite her explicit features, immense size, and prominent placement, I would like to argue that, ultimately, the sphinx was not the main spectacle of the exhibition.

The sphinx's stereotypical face demands a brief venture into the concept of the stereotype. Bhabha (2003) has defined the concept of the stereotype in his canonical text 'The Other Question' as follows:

> The stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference (that the negation through the Other permits), constitutes a problem for the representation of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations (p. 27).

I would also like to refer to Bhabha's description of the stereotype as a 'fixed reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible' (p. 23). According to Bhabha, the stereotype works to simplify the 'colonised' in order to reduce this other to a comprehensible and closed reality. In the eyes of the 'coloniser', individual differentials must be ignored or rejected in order to maintain these stereotypical notions. Departing from this definition of the stereotype, I will explore how the inclusion of stereotypical imagery into *A Subtlety* works to challenge the concept of the stereotype.

Moving beyond her face, the sphinx's exaggerated nudity also demands attention. The black body has been an object of peculiar fascination from the period of slavery until today. Although representations of black bodies, both male and female, have become abundant in contemporary mainstream culture over the last few decades, their imagery and presence very rarely challenge or subvert the stereotypical or racist notions that emanated from the period of slavery and 19th century imperialist culture. Fanon (1952) described these processes of racial objectification in his canonical work *Black Skin, White Masks*. Through personal experiences in which he felt objectified because of his skin colour, Fanon draws from Marx's *Das Kapital* in describing racial objectification as the reduction of social relations to things (p. 95). In his key text 'The Spectacle of the Other' (1997), Stuart Hall explores these ideas further through historical and contemporary examples that all demonstrate an ongoing practice of the stereotyping of people of colour. He draws from Kobena Mercer in explaining how black bodies can be 'looked down upon and despised' yet also function as an object of 'awe and envy as the black subject is idealized as the embodiment of its aesthetic ideal' (Hall, 1997, p. 276). Mercer (2013) himself has described the process of racial objectification as 'a deconstructive strategy which begins to lay bare the psychic and social relations of ambivalence at play in cultural representations of race and sexuality' (p. 199).

The black female body in particular has been - and continues to be - subjected to racist and explicitly sexualising or de-sexualising stereotypes such as the 'Jezebel' and the Mammy, respectively. Hall (1997) calls upon the famous 19th century 'case' of Saartjie Baartman, perhaps the most well-known and disturbing example of racial fetishism (pp. 265-66). Baartman was a South-African woman who was brought to England in 1810 and became a sensation in London. She was dubbed 'the Hottentot Venus' and displayed 'on a raised stage like a wild animal' so that her anatomy could be scrutinized by a paying audience (Hall, 1997, p. 264). Apart from her size (she was only 1,37 metres tall), Baartman became an attraction because of her 'unusual' anatomical features: her relatively large breasts, her protruding buttocks, and her enlarged labia (Hall, 1997, p. 264). As summarized by Hobson (2018), Baartman and her story have ultimately 'shaped representations of blackness and beauty'. Although sometimes argued to have been overly theorised and conceptualised, Baartman's case remains highly relevant and illustrative in discussions surrounding representations of the black female body.

Reaching for more contemporary examples, bell hooks (1992) discusses her personal experiences before drawing attention to the ongoing objectification and subsequent fetishisation of the black female body in contemporary culture in her essay 'Selling Hot Pussy'. She explains the seemingly unnecessary sexualisation of black female singers, such as Tina Turner and Aretha Franklin, as 'a sign of displaced longing for a racist past when the bodies of black women were a commodity, available to anyone white who could pay the price' (hooks, p. 122). Turning towards the visual arts specifically, Farrington (2003) explores the shifting politics behind representations

of black female bodies by black women artists themselves in art from the 90s through the works of Renee Cox and Alison Saar. She explains that, although the figure of the female nude is abundant in Western art, the black female body 'has been virtually invisible within this context', thus emphasizing 'the value of the African-American woman artist's endeavour to represent her own body' (Farrington, p. 19). Today, female African-American artists such as Walker continue to challenge racist and sexist notions that remain part of American cultural heritage.

A SUBTLETY

In this particular exhibition, stereotyping and the politics behind the representation of the black female body were not the only issues being raised. Walker (2014) stated in an interview that through *A Subtlety*, she wanted to address 'the sugar trade, the slave trade, the various meanings that are put upon sugar, as an industry, and then the by-products of the industry, like the molasses, by-products not just of industry but of slavery' (Sikkema et al., 2014). Indeed, the sphinx was completely covered in historically suggestive processed sugar, causing her to be blindingly white (Carpio, 2017, p. 552). Surrounding the sphinx, fifteen brown cartoonesque human-sized statues of children stood scattered throughout the vast warehouse, carrying baskets stuffed with the spoils of agriculture. Twelve of these figures were cast in resin and coated in molasses and sugar, the remaining three were made of sugar completely. These figures melted away or collapsed to varying degrees over the course of the exhibition, depending on their build (Carpio, 2017, p. 551). One visitor recalled feeling disturbed by the deteriorating sculptures and remarked: 'It was like finding the remains of small children by the side of the road during high summer'[2]. Walker (2014) herself referred to these sculptures as 'sugar boys', stating that 'they [change] every day. There's little drips, things coming from the interior, they leak. [They] sort of live and breathe in a way' (qtd. in Sutton). Their dark hues and human size allowed them to almost blend in with the audience, emphasizing the interactive element of the exhibition.

An interesting analysis could be made of the selection of colours that featured in the exhibition. The whiteness of the sphinx's sugary skin was almost blinding, even more so through the contrast with the dark brown sugar boys that surrounded her. The refinement process, in which brown sugar is refined into white sugar, was gradually undone, as the sphinx's skin showed discolouration over the course of the exhibition, tainting the whiteness of the sugar. The sugar boys slowly melted away, bleeding a dark red liquid from their base. The pools that formed on the concrete floor were reminiscent of blood. Although this symbolic play of colours alone could form the basis for an interesting analysis, I have decided to focus on other aspects of the exhibition. I found that the questions raised by this play of colours could also be answered through other perspectives, which provided equally, if not more so, interesting answers.

The many layers of this exhibition were not confined within the walls of the Domino Sugar Refinery. Along with geo-tagged, or location-bound, filters accessible through the Snapchat app, a hashtag was launched, inviting the 130,554 attendees of the exhibition to share their own pictures of and with the sphinx and her companions through Instagram (Munro, 2014). Within the initial couple of days after the opening, social media was flooded with pictures of the exhibition. Visitors uploaded selfies and pictures in which they sexualised and fetishized the sphinx, posing as though licking, pinching or touching her breasts, buttocks, and labia (Munro, 2014). Although many people responded to these pictures with outrage and anger, Walker herself expressed a lack of surprise:

> I put a giant 10-foot vagina in the world and people respond to giant 10-foot vaginas in the way that they do. It's not unexpected. […] Human behaviour is so mucky and violent and messed-up and inappropriate. And I think my work draws on that. [My work] comes from responding to situations like that, and it pulls it out of an audience. I've got a lot of video footage of that [behaviour]. I was spying (qtd. in Miranda, 2014).

The revelation that Walker anticipated these reactions and worked to capture them, suggests that Walker intended these reactions to be a fundamental part of the exhibition. In fact, within six months after the closing of the exhibition, Walker released a 27-minute documentary-style film centred around the behaviour of the visitors of *A Subtlety*. The film, titled *An Audience*, functions as the concluding yet crucial chapter to the exhibition. Although the sphinx appeared to be the tangible centrepiece of *A Subtlety*, I would like to argue that the audience as portrayed in *An Audience* was the main spectacle of the exhibition as a whole. Building up to this conclusion, I will analyse the sphinx herself, the presentation and discussion of the exhibition both at the site itself and through social media, and finally the audience of the exhibition, as portrayed by Walker in her film *An Audience*. It is important to realise that *An Audience* is not an autonomous documentary film, rather, it should be treated as an

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[2] Review posted by Karen S. from New York on Yelp: <https://www.yelp. com.au/biz/a-subtlety-by-kara-walker-brooklyn>

essential part of the exhibition. It is through this film and its ability to retrospectively hold up a mirror to the audience, that notions of the stereotype are challenged, rather than simply reiterated.

The exhibition was organised by Creative Time, a public arts organisation based in New York that 'works with artists to contribute to the dialogues, debates and dreams of our times' (Projects, n.d.). In the curatorial statement found on the Creative Time website, the chief curator of Creative Time, Nato Thompson (2014), states that 'Walker has appropriated racist imagery throughout her career, frequently depicting scenes of intense violence and sex that are peculiarly -and uncomfortably- alluring'. In the exhibition, the sphinx 'stands mute, a riddle so wrapped up in the history of power and its sensual appeal that one can only stare stupefied, unable to answer' (Thompson, 2014). Thompson (2014) also explains that the title of the exhibition, *A Subtlety*, refers to the small sculptures made of sugar paste and almonds that were served at aristocratic bouquets in the Middle Ages. They were sculpted to be representative of important figures or events, and could only be consumed by royalty (Thompson, 2014). Thus, the subtlety as a medium carries notions of power at its core, whilst potentially functioning as a vehicle through which to discuss issues of colonialism, inequality and sexuality.

The title of the exhibition and the sphinx's sugary skin inevitably evoke theories on cultural consumption. Halfway through the 90s, Peterson and Kern (1996) rejected Pierre Bourdieu's notion that aesthetic taste could be determined, sustained, and reinforced by social hierarchies, and argued that cultural consumption could no longer be characterised by 'higher' and 'lower' tastes. Rather, they suggested that the divide between 'high' and 'low' culture was fading, allowing for an 'omnivorous appropriation' of culture (p. 900). Around the same time, Hall collaborated with Raymond Williams in describing the social dynamics at play in cultural consumption. Through the case-study of the Sony Walkman, Hall and Williams (1997) examined how post-structuralist notions had changed the way we consume culture, as culture became increasingly more tailored to the individual (p. 104). However, with the ongoing developments in technology, (social) media, and the changing role of the individual, cultural consumption has transformed even further. In 2007, Oriel Sullivan and Tally Katz-Gerro suggested that contemporary omnivorous consumption can be defined by 'cultural tasting and switching among, or differently combining, [cultural] activities', indicating a growing sense of 'independence and flexibility' in the cultural consumer (qtd. in Eriksson, 2011, p. 481). Recently, a new mode of cultural consumption has appeared, in which the tendency towards omnivorous cultural consumption and the move towards individualisation have crystallised into a new medium: the selfie. The selfie has become a sharable commodity, and has even been dubbed 'a celebration of consumer culture' (Iqani and Schroeder, 2016, p. 411). Although I will return to the impact of selfie-culture on art exhibitions later, I would like to keep these omnivorous and individualised tendencies in contemporary cultural consumption in mind throughout the analysis of Walker's exhibition.

THE SPHINX

I would first like to turn to the tangible centrepiece of the exhibition, the sphinx. Walker's sphinx brings to mind the majestic Egyptian monument, not only in form but also in sheer size. Measuring 75 feet from paws to rump, her raised head almost touching the ceiling of the five story-high warehouse, *A Subtlety* is 'the largest single piece of public art ever erected in New York' (qtd. in Carpio, 2017, p. 551). The sphinx also appears in Greek mythology in Sophocles' tragic tale of 'Oedipus'. When Oedipus meets the sphinx he is presented with the riddle 'what walks on four feet in the morning, two in the afternoon, and three at night?', which Oedipus answers correctly. Defeated and enraged, the sphinx throws herself off a rock, thus killing herself and relieving the nation of her terrors. Oedipus is granted the honour of marrying the queen, who also happens to be his mother (Karas and Megas, 2018). However, the sphinx in the exhibition does not speak or pose riddles in a literal sense. Rather, she embodies a riddle herself by bearing symbols of sexuality and fertility that contradict her features of the deliberately desexualised Mammy stereotype. As will become clear towards the end of this paper, I would like to argue that the riddles posed by both sphinxes can be solved with the same answer: 'humankind'.

As mentioned before, the title of the exhibition, *A Subtlety*, is also a reference to the small sugar statuettes that were consumed by royalty and the clergy. As a female African-American artist, Walker has described feeling like 'a desirable outsider, a delicious new confection […] to be moulded and sculpted, cultivated and cuisined, consumed and defecated and consumed again' (qtd. in Shaw, 2007, p. 139). Shaw (2007) explains that 'like Basquiat before her, [Walker] is the flavour of the month, a product presented to a hungry white art audience to see how good she tastes' (p. 139). This description mirrors the passivity of the sphinx as sugary sculpture. Coated in an estimated 40 tons of sugar, the sphinx does indeed resemble 'a giant dessert that has been set out for visitors to enjoy' (Davidson and Guadalupe, 2016, p. 180). Thus, the sphinx could be understood as a mute confection, in the sense that it represents only its tangible self. In this sense, the featuring of the Mammy stereotype could be interpreted as problematic. As Rosello (1998) points out, the repetition of stereotypes is always a form of enactment and consequent endorsement of the stereotype. In other words, 'there is no innocent reference to a stereotype' (Rosello, 1998, pp. 38-9). Through this approach to the stereotype, the incorporation of the Mammy stereotype and the

choice for sugar as material would suggest that the sphinx indeed sits patiently, waiting to be consumed by her spectators. This treatment of the stereotype also brings to mind the question posed by Mitchell (1994) in the chapter 'Narrative, Memory, and Slavery': 'What if the materials of memory are overwhelming, so traumatic that the remembering of them threatens identity rather than reconstituting it?' (p. 200). In this question, the 'materials of memory' could be interpreted as stereotypes, implying that the reductive qualities of the stereotype are sustained by iterating them.

However, apart from referring to a dessert, the term 'subtlety' also invokes the spectators' ability to perceive the deeper meanings that prevail beyond the initial glance. This double meaning of the word 'subtlety' signals towards the other way in which Walker's sphinx could be understood within the context of the exhibition. The word 'subtlety' invokes a deeper analysis of the sphinx herself, of the materials used, of the historical context into which the work is embedded, and how she herself interacts with the world around her. In her exaggerated size, her radiant colour, and her brazenly displayed genitalia, however, the sphinx is far from subtle. Hence, this analysis aims to move beyond the superficial and uncover the subtleties hidden behind the sphinx's sugary exterior. A deeper analysis of the sphinx would, arguably, uncover how the incorporation of the stereotype into this work does not simply serve to repeat the stereotype. Rather, it would reveal the implicit absurdity and violence of the stereotype, challenging its legitimacy.

The African-American stereotypes that proliferated after the Civil War were intended to 'undermine the social status and mobility afforded to people of colour' (Farrington, 2003, p. 17). These stereotypes became part of popular discourse and functioned to 'make fast, firm and separate what [was] in reality fluid and much closer to the norm than the dominant value systems care[d] to admit' (Dyer, 2009, p. 16). Thus, African-Americans were depicted as being 'stupid, shiftless, lazy, irresponsible, and dangerous' (Farrington, 2003, p. 17). As mentioned before, female stereotypes specifically were often rooted in sexual bias, depicting African-American women as either sexually promiscuous 'Jezebels' or physically unattractive 'Mammies' (Farrington, 2003, p. 17). The Mammy stereotype was posited by mainstream white America as proof that black women were content and happy to be enslaved (Pilgrim, 2012). According to Pilgrim (2012), the Mammy stereotype was also deliberately constructed to be the opposite of the mainstream definition of attractiveness at the time. In a society that considered white skin the beauty ideal, the Mammy was portrayed with a dark, often pitch black, skin colour (Pilgrim, 2012). She was overweight, sometimes morbidly so, and often portrayed as old, never younger than middle-aged. This deliberate attempt to desexualise the female slaves in the household and to de-eroticise their bodies was meant to eradicate any suspicion that the man of the household could be physically attracted to these women (Pilgrim, 2012). Sexual exploitation of black women by white men was very common during the antebellum period, which illustrates the 'necessity' of this stereotype: if the female slaves were rendered unattractive, desexualised and de-eroticised, the white wife and her family would be safe (Pilgrim, 2012).

Both historical and contemporary stereotypes could be considered a type of colonial subject. As Bhabha (2003) points out, in order to construct a colonial subject, forms of difference need to be articulated based on predetermined notions of race and gender (p. 19). Thus, if 'the epithets racial or sexual come to be seen as modes of differentiation, realised as multiple, cross-cutting determinations', a discourse is enforced 'that inform[s] the discursive and political practice of racial and cultural hierarchisation' (Bhabha, 2003, p. 19). Also the Mammy stereotype could be argued to have been constructed upon the intersection of these notions of differentiation and hierarchisation. The Mammy was created by virtue of colonial discourse, through the establishment of a particular and preconceived set of qualities, brought together to form an 'arrested, fixated form of representation', thus functioning both in the discursive and the political realm (Bhabha, 2003, p. 26). From the moment of its emergence, the Mammy stereotype did not only serve to relieve the burden of slavery in the eyes of the coloniser, but also in the eyes of the colonisers' wives and family. Furthermore, the Mammy stereotype actively served to reinforce and maintain the colonial discourse of 'racial and cultural hierarchisation' (Bhabha, 2003, p. 19). Within the exhibition, however, the Mammy stereotype is presented in a paradoxical context. Her distinguishing desexualising qualities are countered by her exaggerated and overly sexualised female features, thus dismantling and undoing her original aim and purpose.

According to Collins (2006), the Mammy stereotype remains prevalent in contemporary culture, particularly though popular television, in the form of the 'Modern Mammy'. She explains that the Modern Mammy requires a delicate balance between being appropriately subordinate to white and/or male authority yet maintaining a level of ambition and aggressiveness needed for achievement in middle-class occupations' (p. 140). These familiar notions of 'strong black women', who are 'tough, independent, smart, and asexual' strongly resemble those that were previously used to define the Mammy stereotype (Collins, 2006, p. 141). Collins (2006) proposes Oprah as famous example of the Modern Mammy: '[a] good deal of Oprah's success lies in her ability to market herself within the familiar realm of the Mammy, not violate the tenets of being a black lady, yet reap the benefits of her performance for herself' (p. 142). I would like to argue that examples such as this one could be difficult to identify precisely because they are so ingrained in popular contemporary culture. However, the inclusion of the historical Mammy

stereotype in this exhibition challenges the concept of the stereotype exactly by bringing it into a paradoxical and contemporary context. By confronting visitors with the violence and inadequacy implicit in historical stereotypes such as these, while linking historical notions with contemporary popular culture, processes of identifying and challenging contemporary stereotypes could be initiated.

In the context of the exhibition, this uncanny hybrid of traditional Mammy and markedly sexualised femininity is presented through and mirrored in the mythical body of a sphinx. As mentioned by Davidson and Guadalupe (2016), Hegel, in a turn towards Orientalism, describes the sphinx as 'a liminal creature, standing along the dividing line between the human and the animal' (p. 188). In his interpretation of the sphinx as a symbol of the ancient Egyptian spirit in relation to Oedipus who symbolises Western civilisation, Hegel determines that the sphinx's suicide marks the triumph of Oedipus and Western civilisation over the liminal creature and, thus, over the Egyptian spirit. Davidson and Guadalupe (2016) explain how Walker's work 'performs a recombination and reversal of the Hegelian reading of the sphinx' by identifying the sphinx as a stereotypical black female (p. 190). As became clear in the analysis of the Mammy stereotype, mainstream white America conceptualised the black female body as less-than-human, and thus as a liminal figure too: she had to be recognised as human before consequently being dehumanized. The embodiment of the sphinx as Mammy thus 'identifies the black female body as a liminal threshold of Western culture' (Davidson and Guadalupe 190). Keeping in mind that the sugar trade depended greatly on slave labour, the 'utilisation' and consequent destruction of the black female body was a prerequisite for the development of American sugar production. Thus, like the sphinx, the black female stands at the origin of a fragment of both Western civilisation and capitalism, which were dependent upon her destruction for the establishment and maintenance of an autochthonous entity.

This 'destruction of the black female body' also echoes in the sugary bodies of the sphinx and her companions. Davidson and Guadalupe (2016) quote Lisa A. Lindsay in reminding us that the sugar industry alone 'was responsible for more than half of the estimated 11 million slaves who were brought to the new world', meaning that 'sugar production was by far the single largest slave occupation' (p. 190). According to historian Elizabeth Abbott, the majority of workers on sugar plantations were women. She states that these 'slaves, many of them women, were then working eighteen to twenty hours a day' in dangerous conditions (qtd. in Davidson and Guadalupe, 2016, p. 191). Lindsay adds that 'with plantation profits high, planters calculated that it was more economical to work a slave to death and buy a replacement' (qtd. in Davidson and Guadalupe, 2016, p. 191). Sugar and sugar production are therefore intrinsically linked to black female slavery and to the destruction of the black female body. Thus, the sugar that coats the sphinx and its history are deeply entwined with the same black female bodies that are themselves being monumentalised.

The deterioration and discolouration that occurred over the course of the exhibition rendered the sugar spoilt, resulting in the melting and discarding of all 40 tons of sugar after the exhibition was over. Recalling Shaw's (2007) description of Walker as 'a desirable outsider, a delicious new confection' and of the original meaning of the term 'subtlety' as sugary statue, I would like to argue that this deterioration process gives the sphinx and her companions agency (p. 139). Although it seems that they are passively subjected to the visitors and their sometimes vulgar or offensive reactions and remarks, they actively react to the presence of the visitors, regardless of the visitors' individual behaviour. They 'spoil' themselves, rendering their bodies useless and disposable. Even the most respectful visitors contribute to this 'consumption' of the sphinx and the sugar boys, mirroring how sugar consumption contributed to the endorsement of slavery, regardless of any consumer's individual political convictions.

Returning to the notion of the sphinx and the black female slaves as liminal creatures, I would like to argue that the concept of the stereotype itself could also be interpreted as liminal. Bhabha (2003) has stated that the 'stereotype gives access to an 'identity' which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defence, for it is a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and disavowal of it' (p. 27). In other words, the concept of the stereotype is unstable and when tested against 'the real world' appears to be in constant transition between being recognised and being renounced. Through Hegel's interpretation, the hybridity of the sphinx's body could be seen as a metaphor for the historical conception of the black female body as a liminal figure, which in turn can be found mirrored in the very concept of the stereotype that is featured in the sphinx's face.

The markedly feminine hybridity of the sphinx also evokes the feminist literary concept of female hybrid monsters. Lidia Curti (1998) describes how 'hybrid creatures have been creeping into women's narratives, putting to question the frontier between foulness and loveliness, the human and the animal, me and you, female and male' (p. 107). These female hybrid bodies become uncanny, as they represent both the Freudian familiarity of the female womb, as place where we all come from, and a sense of mystery and the unknown. Curti (1998) explains how the incorporation of female monsters into literature can be interpreted as 'a derisive counterpoint to the stereotypes of the feminine' (p. 107). I would like to argue that Walker's sphinx functions as a way to counter these stereotypes of the feminine as well as the African-American Mammy. Through the hybrid-figure of the sphinx, an identity is

articulated '-in the sense in which that word itself denies an 'original' identity or a 'singularity' to objects of difference-' that stands separate from colonial discourse despite, or even thanks to, previous negative stereotypical notions (Bhabha, 2003, p. 19).

The incorporation of monsters into feminist discourse has also been discussed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. In her analysis of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Spivak (1985) notes how the insertion of the monster into the narrative undoes binary notions of male and female, and of self and other (p. 254-55). In *Frankenstein*, the magistrate explains that 'if it is in my power to seize the monster, be assured that he shall suffer punishment proportionate to his crimes' (qtd. in Spivak, 1985, p. 258). However, he is then forced to admit 'from what you have described to be his properties, that this will prove impracticable' (qtd. in Spivak, 1985, p. 258). The monster is rendered too different to be held accountable according to human law, too different to be humanized. Thus, the monster is 'the absolutely other' that cannot be related to the self (Spivak, 1985, p. 258,). Curti (1998) quotes Jane Dallop in stating that:

> [t]he word *monstrous* here refers to a 'continuous multiple being' … a being whose multiple parts are neither totally merged nor totally separate […] thus calling into question the fundamental opposition of self and other. Such a being is terrifying because of the stake any self as self has in its own autonomy (p. 110).

Arguably, the sphinx represents both this 'absolutely other' and this 'other self'. The uncanniness that emerges from the female sexuality combined with the stereotypical Mammy features, portrayed on the canvas of a mythological creature known for its riddles, results in another that defies the recognisable fragments it is made up of. Precisely by existing as a 'continuous multiple being', made up of fragments that seem to contradict each other, and yet form an absolute whole, the sphinx gains her own autonomy by embodying an alternative approach to the binary self/other discourse. Thus, any self that stands in front of the sphinx, becomes riddled in his attempts to articulate any 'forms of difference' that would be needed to construct 'the object of colonial discourse - that 'otherness' which is at once an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity' (Bhabha, 2003, p. 19). Thus, the hybridity of the sphinx allows her to be too different to be humanized, too different to be othered, putting the self into question.

SOCIAL MEDIA

I would like to turn to the way in which the exhibition was presented at the site itself and on social media over the course of the exhibition. The exhibition was organised at the soon to be demolished Domino Sugar Factory. This historical building was responsible for over half of the United States' sugar refining within 25 years of its opening in 1855 (Diamond, 2017). The building continues to carry the marks of its labour: 'Walls are stained by rust and oxidised sugar, and the bottoms of massive bone char filters are streaked where the sugary syrup had dripped' (Diamond, 2017). The decision to place the exhibition in a factory rather than a gallery or museum is interesting. Arguably, its location and the fact that it was freely accessible, positions the exhibition in society and at the contemporary end of history, rather than within the art-world. The boundary of museum walls that separates more 'traditional' art works from direct interaction with society has been removed. Thus, the rich but problematic history of the building contributes to the meanings of the exhibition and very directly links the content of the building with society outside. Walker has stated in an interview that the site worked to inspire and develop her ideas for the exhibition and that she was inspired by the molasses that covered the walls from top to bottom, creating what she refers to as a 'really powerful space' (qtd. in Sutton, 2014). Furthermore, the specific processes that originally took place in this particular refinery, in which raw sugar was refined into processed sugar, carry another metaphor in them. The 'refinement' of raw, brown sugar into white processed sugar could be interpreted as a nod towards ongoing notions of white supremacy in the United States. Thus, the historical weight of the refinery, which functions as the literal context of the exhibition, places the exhibition into the historical discourses of slavery and sugar production.

Upon entering the factory, visitors encountered signs encouraging them to take pictures and selfies and to post them under the hashtag #KaraWalkerDomino. Over the course of the exhibition, Creative Time also launched several social media campaigns that invited people to post their selfies and pictures taken at the exhibition. Controversial pictures in which visitors posed in front of the sculptures in obscene or profane poses appeared online, sparking debate and outrage. In an article discussing these 'offensive Instagram photos', Munro (2014) points out that 'official hashtags are not an uncommon practice for art exhibitions and events, but for a controversial show addressing sensitive issues, the need and desire for it is confusing. It's not exactly a work that's suited for a light-hearted selfie'. Furthermore, a website was launched called 'Sugar Selfie' on which people who

couldn't actually make it to the exhibition could 'pose' in front of the sphinx with the help of their webcam.[3] The title of the website referred to the exhibition as 'the selfie event of the season', emphasising this interactive element of the exhibition.

These invitations to 'contribute' to and 'interact' with the exhibition could be regarded as problematic. The presentation of a naked Mammy figure with her breasts, buttocks and labia in full view evokes, again, the case of Saartje Baartman. Arguably, Walker frequently features or alludes to Baartman as an 'abstract concept' throughout her oeuvre, a practice which is explored and problematized by Keizer (2011). Rather than treating Baartman as an individual historical example, Keizer (2011) proposes that Walker employs generalised and stylised representations of 'the body of the 'Hottentot Venus' within the frame of reference of minstrelsy' (p. 205). She argues that Baartman is still denied agency over her own body, as Walker 'merely makes use of Baartman's body for US cultural politics' as a result of cross-diasporic borrowing (p. 205). Returning to Walker's sphinx, the anatomical features that are on display, and that have become the main focus of many 'offensive Instagram photos', indeed ring (un)surprisingly familiar (Munro, 2014). As stated by critic D'Oyley (2014):

> I look at [the sphinx], then at all the (mostly white) people with their smartphones enthusiastically photographing 'it', specifically the butt. I don't want to think of the Hottentot Venus because I don't think that every black body that's displayed should be compared or reduced to the 19th-century kidnapped South African woman who was forced to be on display as some sort amusement. [But] here's a(nother) big, black booty on display, and here are (mostly white) folks gawking at it, some even posing with it.

This sense that 'history [is] unintentionally repeating itself' is based on the notion that the visitors taking offensive or vulgar pictures with the sphinx are missing the deeper messages, historical context, or the subtlety, behind the exhibition (D'Oyley, 2014). Returning once again to the double meaning of 'subtlety', I would like to argue that these visitors engage only with the first definition of the word, that of the sphinx as sugary sculpture, waiting to be consumed. Their engagement with the sphinx's features occurs only on a superficial level, meaning that they take the stereotypical features of the sphinx 'straightforwardly, as realities', rather than as the historical stereotypes that they represent (Davidson and Guadalupe, 2016, p. 180). Although Keizer's argument would certainly ring true for most cases where Baartman is summoned *again* into a compromising position, I would like to argue that this particular exhibition calls for a reversal of the gaze which has 'traditionally' been directed towards the black naked body. Although the blatant nakedness of the sphinx might function as a metaphor for the exhibition of Baartman, in this exhibition it is the audience that is eventually put on display.

THE AUDIENCE

Thus, in conclusion, I would like to analyse the audience, their behaviour, and their reactions, as portrayed by Walker in her film *An Audience*. This 27-minute film was presented at Walker's 2014-15 exhibition, appropriately titled *Afterword*. For *An Audience*, Walker instructed six cameramen to film the audience of *A Subtlety* during the final hour of the final day of the exhibition. In reaction to the abundant portraits of the sphinx shared online, Walker turned the camera on the visitors instead, capturing them 'in the act of looking - at the work, at themselves, at one another, and especially looking their phones and cameras' (label qtd. in Wilson, 2014). It should be noted that this film was purposely edited and included into *Afterword* by Walker, rendering it a part of the exhibition, rather than an objective documentation of the audience of *A Subtlety*. In short, I would like to emphasize that the audience we see is the audience Walker wanted us to see.

The film begins outside of the refinery, following an African-American woman as she works her way through the crowds, clutching her two young children by their hands and dragging them along behind her. Once inside, the camera stops following her, focusing instead on different people in the crowd. Initially, visitors are filmed standing in awe, mouths open, gazing up at the sphinx. Several people stare silently, others point out details to their companions or step closer to peer at the sphinx's skin or into the sugar boys' baskets. Two children pose in front of the sphinx, their photographer telling them to 'hold it right there' when they smile broadly. Next is a teenage girl, posing model-style, hand on her hip. When the camera moves to the side, we see the line of visitors waiting for their turn to pose in front of the sphinx's enormous breasts. Photographers are being instructed to 'take [a picture] from down here', to capture specific poses, and to 'take one with the head on it'. Through screens of

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[3] The 'Kara Walker selfie generator' website boasted the following introduction: "CANT MAKE IT TO THE DOMINIO FACTORY TO TAKE PICTURES OF YOURSELF IN FRONT OF KARA WALKER'S SUGAR BABY?? YOUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY NEED NOT KNOW!! REALISTIC SELFIE GENERATOR!!! ITS LIKE YOU ARE REALLY THERE!!!!". The website featured an app with which it was possible to insert a picture of yourself into pictures of the exhibition, 'like you are really there'. The website is currently offline. <www.SugarSelfie.us>

phones, iPads, and cameras, people are shown taking selfies alone or in small groups. Several people step in to photograph a young boy who has touched the pool of molten sugar that oozes from one of the collapsed and melting sugar boys. The boy stares into the camera as it zooms in on his hands that are dripping with thick resin-like goo. A voice echoes through the hall: 'Ladies and gentlemen, on your way out, the artist would like to invite you all to carefully touch the sphinx'. While the film shows different people gingerly placing their hands on the sugary surface, we hear an off-camera voice ask 'can I touch the nipple, do you think?'.

This documentation of the audience photographing themselves and each other invokes a further expedition into the development of the practice of cultural consumption in relation to the upcoming field of selfie-studies. The practice of taking selfies in proximity to art works in particular has been explored by Hunter (2018) in her article 'In the frame: the performative spectatorship of museum selfies'. She explains how the taking of a selfie at an exhibition or in a museum not only allows visitors to 'announce their embodied appropriation like a trophy', but also illuminates social capital through the sharing of pictures through social media (Hunter, 2018, p. 60). Hunter (2018) calls upon Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst to explain that this sense of performativity is a defining characteristic of contemporary culture:

> So deeply infused into everyday life is performance that we are unaware of it in ourselves or in others. Life is a constant performance, we are audience and performer at the same time; everybody is an audience all the time (qtd. in Hunter, 2018, p. 58).

In other words, visitors no longer only visit museums or exhibitions to see the objects on display there. Seeing others and making sure oneself is seen at the exhibition has become an equally important aspect. This shift of focus from the works on display to the spectator *viewing* the works on display could also indicate a disruption in exhibition narratives, as the placing and photographing of oneself in front of an exhibited object redirects the focus of the exhibition. Arguably, the practice of taking and sharing selfies even allows the visitors to become an active part of the exhibition themselves. This is exactly what happened in Walker's exhibition. The audience was encouraged to take and share pictures and thus to become an exhibited object themselves. The documentation of this act in the film *An Audience,* which was also displayed in the exhibition, reinforces this notion. Ultimately, the inclusion of the audience as a curated and stylised object put on display, functioned as a mirror for the audience to view themselves and others in.

Throughout my research, I noticed that the vast majority of articles and reviews of *A Subtlety* reacted indignantly to other visitors, referring to them as 'white people. Lots of white people' (King, 2014). Visitors were persecuted online for posing with the sphinx, for taking pictures of ''it', specifically the butt', and for missing the 'deeper meaning' of the exhibition (D'Oyley, 2014). Critics wondered if 'the mostly white visitors [would be able to see] the violent history the art reflected' (Powers, 2014), and if 'the cluelessness of the white audience [participating] in a spectacle without knowing they're part of it is an inside joke for black folks to laugh and shake their heads at' (D'Oyley, 2014). However, this 'overwhelming whiteness of viewers' has not been mirrored in the audience portrayed in Walker's film (King, 2014). Throughout the 27 minutes, the film captures many different people of all ethnicities, genders, and ages, all documented responding to the sphinx in their own way. Apart from focusing only on those holding a camera, the film features people wiping away tears, or pretending to pinch the sphinx's buttocks. Children are filmed laughing and running around, a grown man is shown doing somersaults in front of the sphinx's breasts. I would like to argue that the stereotypes incorporated into this exhibition are challenged and countered by Walker's representation of the audience's diverse responses to these stereotypes.

Davidson and Guadalupe (2016) point out that a fragment of the audience fails to see the stereotypical features of the sphinx 'as stereotypes and instead take them straightforwardly as realities' (p. 180). However, the reactions of other visitors remind us that this exhibition does not 'simply repeat the historical stereotypes, instead [it offers] a critical dimension that makes manifest their implicit violence and absurdity' (Davidson and Guadalupe, 2016, p. 187). Taking into account that the film was incorporated into *A Subtlety* as a concluding chapter, I would like to argue that the sphinx was never the main attraction after all. If the exhibition is interpreted as a setting in which Walker documented the audience's encounter with historical stereotypes, *A Subtlety* becomes a surprisingly contemporary affair. The seemingly oblivious audience here serves as a passive object in front of the cameras, their gaze is reversed, allowing us to scrutinise *them* in a triangular line of vision. The 'many offensive Instagram photos' thus become as much a part of the exhibition as all the critical articles that sprung up to discuss them. Rather than documenting either the superficial or the critical reactions, *An Audience* demonstrates that both reactions -and everything in between- were equally represented. Thus, the film appears to refrain from employing 'modes of differentiation, realised as multiple, crosscutting determinations, polymorphous and perverse' with the aim of portraying the audience in a certain way (Bhabha, 2003, p. 19). Whereas some of the audience members knowingly or unknowingly contributed to the 'political practices of racial and cultural hierarchisation', it is precisely the variety in approaches to these practices that reminds us that there is no such thing as a fixed identity (Bhabha, 2003, p.

19). In response to the range of reactions to the exhibition, Walker concludes: 'People are stupid, but the greater majority are conscientious, if not always respectful' (qtd. in Miranda, 2014).

TOWARDS CLOSURE: FROM STEREOTYPES TO HUMANKIND

A Subtlety is an exhibition in which historical images, such as the sphinx and the Mammy stereotype, are reiterated and re-examined. I would like to return to the question posed by Mitchell (1994): 'What if the materials of memory are overwhelming, so traumatic that the remembering of them threatens identity rather than reconstituting it?' (p. 200). Rather than answering this question directly, I would like to argue that my analysis of this exhibition inspires a reformulation of the question. In this case, 'the materials of memory' that Mitchell refers to could arguably be interpreted as stereotypes, in the sense that any repetition or iteration functions only to confirm that which people would prefer to deny or forget. As argued before, the hybridity of the sphinx offers an alternative approach to the self/other binary. She embodies the articulation of a *new* identity, 'in the sense in which [the word 'articulation'] itself denies an 'original' identity or a 'singularity' to objects of difference' (Bhabha, 2003, p. 19). With this in mind, I would like to argue that this particular iteration of the stereotype works neither to threaten nor to reconstitute identity, rather it works to formulate a new, separate identity. Thus, the sphinx invokes a reconfiguration of 'the materials of memory', putting into effect processes of reconsideration and overcoming. Furthermore, the variety of reactions that emerged as a response to the invitation to iterate, repeat, and objectify the sphinx and her stereotypical features do not only illustrate different approaches to these 'materials of memory', but also pose new riddles about the impulse to condemn the reactions and approaches of others. In this sense, *A Subtlety* offers alternative approaches to the concept of the stereotype through what appears to be a surprisingly contemporary exhibition. Although some reactions to the sphinx could be considered more respectful than others, *An Audience* reminds us that it is precisely this variety in approaches and responses that differentiates us, as individuals, from the stereotype. Ultimately, the riddles posed by both sphinxes call for the same answer: humankind.

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'But is it good?' Why Aesthetic Values Matter in Sociological Accounts of Tastes

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ABSTRACT

If the relation between social position, cultural capital and tastes is well known in the literature, many accounts of tastes do not bother to examine the aesthetic dimension of the cultural capital. Yet, people are immersed during their lives within a multiplicity of aesthetic values that are processed into aesthetic dispositions that orient their cultural choices. This article develops a theoretical model for taste-making that helps us examine the implications of why aesthetic values should be taken seriously. First these values are historically situated and hence are bound to change over time. This means that the definitions of our conceptual tools, such cultural capital and highbrow culture, need to be monitored and updated when necessary. Although they are rooted in social transformations, these values acquire a force of their own and motivate people's cultural preferences. This matters since these values also participate in the delimitation of what is perceived as good, bad, right and wrong in society. In short, I argue that tastes are influenced by people's social position but in a much more indirect way than has often been assumed.

Keywords: cultural capital, taste, morality, aesthetics, habitus

INTRODUCTION

When we encounter a painting, or listen to a song, we try and decode it, attach a value to it, and assess it. Is it beautiful? Ugly? This is the kind of evaluation we do every day – consciously or not - in order to make sense of our cultural landscape. Sociologists have taken an interest in this process and have been keen over the years to demonstrate that it is as much a social as it is an aesthetic one (if not more). Key figure among them, Bourdieu sought to challenge the idea inspired by a Kantian aesthetic that 'pure' taste, as the ability to judge the beautiful and what is aesthetically 'good', was disinterested and was claiming to universality. Instead, showing how tastes were socially determined, he argued that 'Kant [has an] inclination to identify the universal with the universe of cultivated people' (1984, p. 599).

Since Bourdieu's demonstration, many sociological accounts have privileged what Woodward and Emmison call 'studies of objectified tastes' (2001) that relate people's cultural preferences to their socio-economic characteristics in a quite systematic way. These approaches have been essential in helping people grasp the importance of these cultural preferences in understanding social inequalities and the way these preferences act as markers of social position. However, they have relied on a reductive vision of aesthetic principles in which 'high' and 'low' cultures have become robbed of all intrinsic value and simply defined by the symbolic value given to people who like them. Taking the example of art, Ted Cohen showed very well the problem of such an approach.

> 'What makes the high art high? Is it that its appeal is mostly to high audiences? Then what makes the audience high? That its taste is for high art? Well, of course, that makes a *circle*.' (Cohen, 1999, p. 142)

Cohen suggests that this circular reasoning leaves many questions about the meaning of cultural tastes unanswered. This paper represents an attempt to better understand how tastes for cultural and artistic objects or activities[i] get formed. *Cultural tastes* are considered here as observable practices which constitute a key part of people's lifestyle[ii] (i.e. what people like in music, art, etc. and what to appreciate to do as cultural activities).

Most sociological research on cultural preferences has avoided examining the aesthetic structures and criteria underlying them, leaving these to art philosophers and historians. Even some of the most iconic works in the sociology of art have adopted a value-free sociology, Becker's 'art worlds' (1988) being a perfect example. The article aims to outline the main reasons why aesthetic values should be taken seriously by researchers seeking to understand the formations of tastes. They should be seen as linked to questions of social power (and hence not universal) but not reducible to them (Harrington, 2004, p. 53). They refer here to values that define the boundaries between art and non-art and between good and bad art (e.g. beauty, skills, originality, reflexive power, etc.) and should be distinguished from aesthetic experiences, as explained in the first section of the article. The article presents a theoretical model to account for the making of tastes. Its starting point, which, in my view, still deserves to be thoroughly emphasised, is that, following Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital (1979a), *aesthetic values* are internalized into schemes of dispositions that guide people in the formation of their tastes and influence how people classify what is art, what is worthy of interest, what is sophisticated and refined and what is not (i.e. *people's internal aesthetic classifications*). If aesthetic values are examined seriously, it will become clear that these values are historically situated and hence are bound to change over time. This implies that the definitions of our conceptual tools, such cultural capital and highbrow culture, need to be monitored and updated when necessary. This matters even more once we understand that these values also participate in the delimitation of what is perceived as morally good, bad, right and wrong in society.

FIRST A NOTE ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AESTHETIC EXPERIENCES AND AESTHETIC CLASSIFICATIONS

Before any discussion on the role of aesthetics in shaping cultural tastes, there is a need to distinguish between what could be called 'aesthetic classifications' and 'aesthetic experiences' as they refer to different objects of study. Aesthetic classifications can be associated with Bourdieu's work on 'Distinction' (Bourdieu, 1979a). He shows how tastes cannot only reflect people's natural inclinations but also act as social markers since they reflect aesthetic principles that are socially valued or not. Bourdieu's theory gives a complex picture of the – French – class society in the 1970s showing how social position is built upon different forms of resources, economic, cultural, social, and, eventually, symbolic (i.e. social prestige). He particularly underlines the importance of cultural capital and its different forms - institutionalized through degrees and diplomas, objectified in cultural objects and goods (e.g. paintings), and embodied in social dispositions, knowledge, skills (e.g. 'appearing to be cultured') - in the production and maintenance of social stratification and inequalities (Bourdieu, 1979b). Indeed those brought up in a culturally rich milieu are more likely to develop an 'aesthetic disposition', i.e. an ability 'to "decode" the formal [aesthetic] structure of the cultural work' (Lizardo, 2008, p. 2), and to acquire cultural skills through the 'habitus' that enable them to secure more easily potentially advantageous degrees. Habitus converts people's social origin and position into a set of socially learnt dispositions, skills and ways of acting. It makes the link between the social space and the lifestyle space in Bourdieu's theory.

In comparison, Hennion and DeNora's work is distinctive in the study of aesthetic *experiences*, which, for some, are more telling than simply examining 'patterns of cultural transmission' supposedly *à la Bourdieu* (Kaszynska, 2014). Their research focuses on the interactions between the object and the subject and how both are produced and transformed by these interactions. If we take the example of music, it is shaped through the meanings listeners 'attach' to it when they experience it at given moments (Hennion, 2007). The distinction between music listener and creator as well as that between the object and the subject become blurred: first, the meaning attached to music is not a given but results from a mutually constitutive relationship (or 'reflexive activity' Hennion would say) that attaches together an individual keen to experience and an object ready to surprise; second, music contributes to the development of the self (DeNora, 1999).

These approaches of aesthetic experiences are most certainly valuable because they take the artwork seriously. DeNora's perspective reveals how music has aesthetic properties that act in people's everyday life. For instance, some music pieces are capable of generating specific emotions (2000). Arguably in line with Dewey's conception of aesthetic experience (Strandvad, 2012), Hennion's theory of attachment (Hennion, 2001) tells us in comparison less about how and why specific aesthetic properties and structures of artworks become activated in the transformative encounter between the subject and the object. To put it bluntly, focusing on the experience, we

know what music does to us (and what we do to music) but not much how. I agree with Born's critique of these interactionist approaches and that 'the microsocial has to be re-connected with the macro-social, and with historical analysis' (2005, p. 22). Therefore, it does not suffice to explore tastes as an individual aesthetic experience which would be first and foremost subjective; there is also a need to recognize that people's tastes are inscribed within aesthetic boundaries that are socially and historically situated.

FOUR PROPOSITIONS FOR A THEORETICAL MODEL OF TASTE-MAKING

This article identifies key propositions about the individual process of taste-making made in the literature and brings them together in a comprehensive model. The model developed here links social origin (i.e. how people have been brought up) and position (i.e. current position in the social hierarchy) to tastes as practices but in a more complex way than many current approaches assume. It outlines the importance of aesthetic values – embedding moral conceptions - in the formation of people's cultural capital and tastes and recognizes the historical determinations of aesthetic judgements. It is summarized in **Figure 1** but *this figure should only be conceived as a communication tool* whose function is to help the readers follow my reasoning. The mechanisms I am seeking to unravel are more complex than in this representation but, once this is established, the graphical representation of my arguments (not of the 'reality') can be used for the sake of clarity.
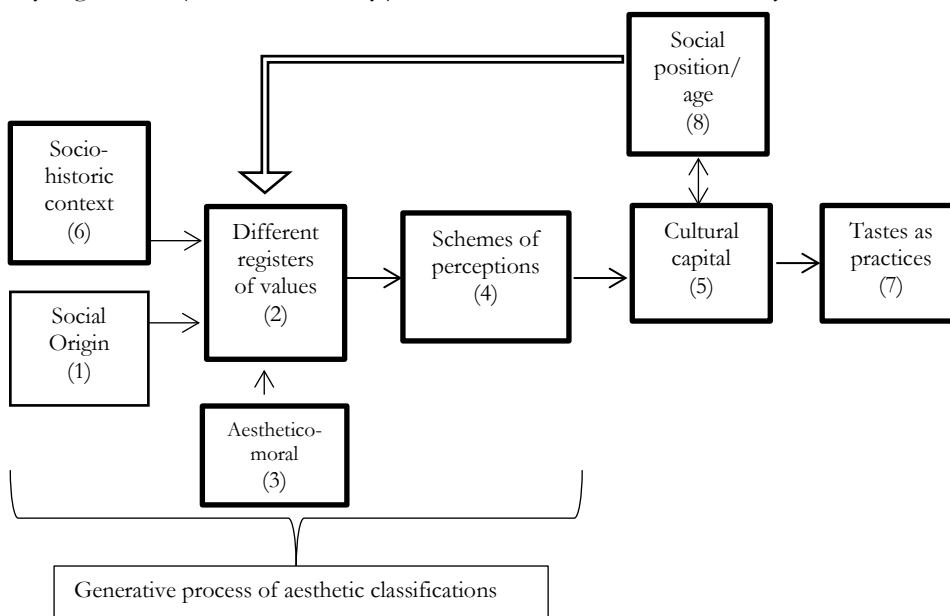
Figure 1. Model to account for tastes: graphical representation

My starting point is that those like me who believe that people's differences in tastes and lifestyles are related to differences in cultural capital or resources often overlook the fact that these resources include specific aesthetic values and a disposition to rely on them. Once one accepts the premise that cultural capital has an important aesthetic dimension, there is a need to understand the process through which some values become important in people's aesthetic classifications at some moments in time and why certain groups adhere to them and others not. How do these values reconfigure cultural capital and hence tastes hierarchies? We know what is happening but it is less clear *how*. In a way, all the pieces of the puzzle discussed below will be known to cultural sociologists – and I do not claim originality here - but there is still an urgent need to think about how to articulate them with each other.

Proposition 1: Aesthetic Values are Historically Situated

Figure 1 tells us that different registers of values (2), including important aesthetico-moral ones (3), are available in society for individuals to build their own judgments on cultural forms (or their schemes of perceptions or dispositions - 4) and hence their tastes (7). An example of these would be that art should be attached to a serious and disinterested pleasure. Whether or not this value is being embodied in people's cultural capital (5) through a disposition to appreciate serious art depends on their social origin (1) and position (8). Friedman (2011) showed how this disposition is sought after in specific comedy shows by those in privileged positions. Yet, my point here is that these values are not only socially but also historically situated (6). The idea of art as a serious and disinterested pleasure emerges at a certain point in time, with the rise of modernism in the 19th century (Esquivel, 2008). What makes high art high can then in part be unravelled by a look at history.

Proposition 2: Aesthetic Values Acquire a Semi-autonomous Force

I will also argue that, although aesthetic values are shaped in a specific social and historical context (hence through social forces), they develop a force of action of their own, which has often been ignored in cultural sociology. They become principles of action that help unconsciously shape people's tastes and guide their reactions to an encounter with a cultural good in specific contexts and interactions. For instance, people appreciate van Gogh's work because they appreciate the aesthetic values that it embodies (e.g. technical virtuosity or expressivity) not just because it is socially considered as high art. These aesthetic values become important in themselves and sociology needs to take stock of them.

Proposition 3: The Concept of Cultural Capital, Given its Important Aesthetic Dimension, is in Constant Need of an Update

The register of aesthetic values on which people draw for their judgments of taste is then bound to change over time. New aesthetic paradigms emerge all the times and keep changing the society's aesthetic and cultural classifications (the latter being the social ranking of cultural genres). This will inevitably alter the meanings associated to cultural capital (especially under its embodied form) and to highbrow culture.

Proposition 4: Aesthetic Values are Intrinsically Bound up with Moral Values

If aesthetic values cannot be perceived as universal anymore, they nevertheless play their own and substantial role in cultural production and reception. Such role becomes even more visible when one considers that aesthetic values are intrinsically bound up with moral values, as I will argue later in this article. In defining 'the good taste' and 'the bad taste', they also draw lines between 'the [morally] good' and 'the [morally] bad' more generally. Aesthetic values are essential in shaping possible forms of togetherness and are not perceived here as detached from the moral sphere. Following Vaisey's 'dual-process model of culture in action' (2009), I will show that such links between the aesthetic and the ethical are visible at different levels of consciousness. If they are visible in people's explicit accounts of their tastes, they are even more important in constituting a practical consciousness that guides people's action. Taking van Gogh's example again, his aesthetic excellence comes in part from the 'sacrifice' he made through his life and work in oder to reveal to us the madness of our society (Heinich, 1991).

STARTING POINT: TAKING SERIOUSLY THE AESTHETIC VALUES IN CULTURAL CAPITAL

In order to understand the role of cultural capital in taste-making, I need to briefly first discuss the notion of habitus. Bourdieu's habitus (1979a) is the mechanism through which external environments are processed at the individual level into specific perceptions, appreciations, and actions (Lizardo, 2004). Cognitive sociology tells us that part of the role of the habitus is to perceive and collect raw information from the environment and to transform it into schemata, which are representations of the world people live in at a certain moment in time and can influence people's action (Lizardo, 2004). This constitutes some sort of tacit cultural knowledge that influences the type of resources (or capital) they gain access to or develop (especially in terms of embodied cultural capital, Bourdieu, 1979b). As DiMaggio (1997, p. 267) put it, this knowledge or 'representations of culture' form a '"toolkit" (Swidler, 1986) or "repertoire" (Tilly, 1992): a collection of stuff that is heterogeneous in content and function'. In line with this view, I consider here that this repertoire includes aesthetic values and classificatory principles that guide people's perceptions and judgements of cultural products and, importantly, is shaped to some extent by the social trajectories of people within the social field. Hence, people's dispositions to appreciate cultural forms (or schemes of perception), which eventually shape our cultural preferences and form part of our embodied cultural capital, are engrained in different registers of aesthetic values (see **Figure 1**).

As discussed in previous work (Hanquinet et al., 2014), Bourdieu's theory refers to two main aesthetic registers, the highbrow and the popular aesthetics. They are endorsed by different class fractions defined by specific configurations of cultural, economic and social capital. The highbrow aesthetic echoes the Kantian principle of disinterestedness and pays more attention to the form than to the content of art. It emphasizes the autonomy of art as it should appear detached from everyday life. In line with the idea of 'art for art's sake', distance, detachment and affective neutralization are core conditions to enjoy art. At the opposite, the popular aesthetic draws on the idea that art should evoke or represent something tangible. Popular art is immediate, concrete and emotionally tainted (and not in a disinterested way). While some see this vision of popular culture as an 'anti-aesthetic' (Bennett et al., 2009; Shusterman, 1991)[iii], Bourdieu's aesthetic classification nevertheless contains some substance in the sense that it avoids a circular reasoning that defines the value of tastes only by the characteristics of those who consume them. His emphasis on the role of autonomy in the cultural field reveals his ambiguous position towards highbrow aesthetics (Ahearne, 2004, p. 71): he helped de-mystify its supposedly sacred nature and showed its links

with the field of power but still perceived it as a tool for emancipation and enlightenment (Chaumier, 2010) that should be valued (Stewart, 2012)

Importantly, Bourdieu's own definition of cultural capital relies on an implicitly historicized vision of aesthetic values, reflecting the ways he interpreted the state of the cultural field at a specific moment in time. Unfortunately, the relational vision of the aesthetic underlying his concept of cultural capital has been progressively obscured by the repetitive use of fixed definitions of popular and highbrow culture. The latter is still being frequently defined as art museum visiting, taste for classical music, opera and art book reading, as if, in almost 40 years (since *Distinction*), highbrow culture could not change. Yet, for Bourdieu, these aesthetic principles related to the development of the field of cultural production. This field is in constant flux and new aesthetic paradigms have appeared. In addition, the rise of the consumer and digital society has radically transformed the breadth and composition of the range of cultural goods one can have access to. These developments can modify the ways we perceive and classify cultural products and ultimately what constitutes our cultural capital. Let us now take a closer look at the historical process through which certain values over others become praised as a sign of quality of art at a certain moment in time and the ways in which these aesthetic classifications participate in the formation of individual preferences.

Proposition 1: The Socio-historical Genesis of Individual Aesthetic Preferences

As Wacquant (1996, p. XVI) suggested, history is embodied in the habitus. Hence, aesthetic values are more than the reflections of people's status and the aesthetic schemata or dispositions that orient people's tastes mirror the socio-historical context of cultural production and can also help change it if one also sees the habitus as 'action-generative' like Lizardo does (2004).

Different authors have demonstrated how the aesthetic criteria we rely on are the product of a historical moment. DiMaggio (1982), for instance, shows the role of new urban elites in the institutionalization of highbrow culture in Boston at that time. Levine (1990) explains further how the very notion of 'highbrow culture' emerged at the end of the 19th century in the United States as the result of different transformations in the sphere of cultural production that echoed in the sphere of cultural consumption (autonomization and sacralization of culture, opposition to any mixing of genres, depreciation of popular forms of culture, distanciation from an unknowledgeable audience, etc.). These processes were also linked to the emergence of new fractions of class who used their cultural capital to affirm their social position. An important point though is that Levine has never denied the role of aesthetics in these changes but contends that aesthetics cannot explain alone changes in behaviours and attitudes and in the institutional settings that went along with the establishment of high culture (p. 228).

This illustrates the fragile and dynamic nature of the aesthetic and cultural classifications we use, even when they have been supported by longstanding institutions. An example of this is the 2018 Pulitzer prize for music that was not awarded to a classical or jazz musician but to a rapper for the first time, Kendrick Lamar. Lamar is presented as a sophisticated and genuine composer[iv] and his work as aesthetically refined as legitimate classical music can be; yet, this critical success also means the introduction of new aesthetic values, his music being praised for its 'vernacular authenticity'[v] or its explicit social relevance with its storytelling force[vi]. It also shows how the field of cultural consumption – where tastes are expressed – is intrinsically related to the field of cultural production from where new principles of perception and appreciation can be validated (Lizardo, 2008). While rap and hip hop have for long been considered as a lowbrow or popular genre with little aesthetic value (Bryson, 1996), its appreciation has increased over time (Lizardo and Skiles, 2015) and some sort of connoisseurship of the genre may shortly become a distinctive resource.

Proposition 2: Aesthetic Values: A Force of their Own

From above, it is clear that *new aesthetic values are rooted in social transformations* and hence have a social dimension. Yet, once formed, aesthetic values have a force of their own, as they are in various ways integrated in people's practical consciousness and this guides them in their everyday encounters with cultural goods. They form 'moral-cultural scripts' that shape 'one's "gut" responses to the possibilities raised in particular interactions' (Vaisey, 2008, p. 1705). In the same way Vaisey showed how moral values (or schemas) influence teenagers' behaviours, I argue here that aesthetic values are 'cultural forces in ways that [people] are largely unaware of and [often] unable to articulate but that nevertheless shape their […] judgments' (idem, p. 1704) (forming this practical consciousness). I will come back to Vaisey's theory in the section on morality.

Hence, aesthetic values could not simply be reduced to the socio-historical conditions from which they emerge (Harrington, 2004). Disputing the idea of aesthetic universalism, Stewart (2012) recognizes the context within which aesthetic values are embedded in but also seeks to outline that sociologists should still account for aesthetic values. Otherwise, the cultural object runs to risk to 'disappear' under the threat of cultural relativism. To put it simply, high art is high not just because its audience is high (-status). Similarly, Wolff (2008) aims to develop an aesthetic theory that would recognize the socially situated character of aesthetic values –as unravelled by critical

theory (race, gender and postcolonialism). Her 'aesthetic of uncertainty' avoids the temptation of 'falling back on discredited notions of timeless beauty and universal values' (p. 18) but would still offer tools to understand the role of aesthetic values (composition, form, originality) in the production and reception of art: 'Curators, museum directors, publishers […], confronted by the new postmodern relativist aesthetic, still have to continue their work as cultural mediators […]. […] [T]hey surely need to be able to defend their choice in aesthetic […] terms' (p. 21).

While many may find it difficult to discursively describe/ justify their gut reactions to a cultural object, experts may more easily account for what *motivates* their instinctive responses to a cultural object. If their work reveals how values can help justify tastes (so after the fact), they may also hint, I would contend, at how they can be part of a practical consciousness guiding our preferences. In his Guardian article 'Sorry MoMA, video games are not art' (30/11/12)[vii], the British art critic, Jonathan Jones, reacts very negatively ('gut feelings') to the decision of the Museum of Modern Art in New York to collect and exhibit games. The quote below reflects how very specific aesthetic criteria have informed his judgment of taste. Video games cannot be art because they do not translate personal authorship and imagination. According to him, games have been considered as art by some art theorists who have emphasized 'their interactive dimension and liberation of shared authorship' (Jones, 2012), which he disagrees strongly with. While a game's purpose can be found in its interactivity with an audience, an artwork, suggests Jones, can exist on its own, as a reflection of an artist's creative power.

> 'Walk around the Museum of Modern Art, look at those masterpieces it holds by Picasso and Jackson Pollock, and what you are seeing is a series of personal visions. A work of art is one person's reaction to life. Any definition of art that robs it of this inner response by a human creator is a worthless definition. Art may be made with a paintbrush or selected as a ready-made, but it has to be an act of personal imagination.' (Jones, 2012)

The aesthetic rhetoric used here echoes some values inscribed in the modernist principle of art of art's sake, where the artist frees her- or himself in a pure act of self-expression. In a counter-piece, Keith Stuart (06/12/12)[viii], the *Guardian*'s games editor and now renowned novel author, accuses the art critic of being 100 years behind (I am paraphrasing here) and, while he asks whether the question of game as art matters *in fine*, he presents compelling counter-arguments, including the idea that all art is collective (interestingly resonating with Becker's analysis of the art worlds), and outlines the increasingly emphasized participative, interactive, experiential and communicative dimensions of art (see for instance Bourriaud 2003) that would give video games legitimacy as art. Interestingly as well, Stuart somewhat regrets the predominant focus in visual design taken by the MOMA in its initial selection of games, rather than also considering the meaning of games. Concepts seem to matter for game experts as much as design; this is arguably in line with the development of conceptual art since the last century.

What we see in this example is a conflict between aesthetic values or, even, aesthetic paradigms. My point here is that these values shape these experts' tastes in a way that cannot simply be explained by their social position (they are both cultural experts), by the educational background (they are both highly educated) or, even, by their age (at first sight, there does not seem a huge generational gap either). Both sets of values have emerged at different times in history but have also co-existed and gained validity in the art field for a while now. They can nowadays both compete in the artistic evaluation of the same objects. As Daenekindt (2017) suggests, the way people internalise publicly available aesthetic values may not be related to traditional social divisions, at least not directly. These divisions may, I argue, have instead a role in delimiting the possible repertoire of values from which different social groups draw. Moreover, these critics, who are the most typical 'cultural intermediaries' according to Bourdieu (1979a, p. 359), represent the bridge through which these aesthetic values can be distilled more subtly into a wider population. As we know, cultural intermediaries can, through their expertise, frame what is worthy of interest and impact on cultural hierarchies (Maguire and Matthews, 2012, p. 559). They diffuse aesthetic criteria in the public sphere that can be progressively incorporated in other people's everyday dispositions towards art.

This example illustrates how aesthetic values are involved in shaping people's tastes. While their understanding requires us to contextualize them, these values have achieved a semi-autonomous[ix] force on tastes that cannot be reduced to the social position or origin of those who have incorporated them. This is only in recognizing their specific role that we can approach tastes as the ever-changing battleground of competing aesthetic paradigms and that we can envisage the possible coexistence of different forms of highbrow aesthetics (Hanquinet, 2017).

Proposition 3: Bringing Aesthetic Values Up-to-date

We have seen so far that the repertoire of aesthetic values changes overtime due to social innovations and transformations, while acquiring a force of their own. This has implications with regard to the substantive meaning that is given to Bourdieu's conceptual tools, especially cultural capital and highbrow culture. Although Bourdieu's concepts are still essential for their capacities to unravel hidden mechanisms, Prior rightly contends that 'we need to find satisfactory ways of updating and warping [Bourdieu's] ideas to account for inflections in the cultural landscape' (2005, p. 125).

Bourdieu's definition of highbrow culture draws on an implicitly modernist aesthetic and, as Prior argued (2005), his account of art perception should be updated to account for the rise of postmodern cultural values (e.g. entertainment or distraction). Modernism has challenged the traditional characteristics of works of art, such as representation, harmony and beauty, and artistic skills, endorsed the 'Art-for-the-art's sake' principle valuing detachment in arts consumption and stressed the autonomy of works of art. Although this paradigm is still influential, new ones have emerged. In particular (but among others) postmodernism questions the gap between the commercial and popular on the one hand and the highbrow on the other and promotes a 'playful' aesthetic based on transgression and experimentation (Esquivel, 2008; Featherstone, 1991). It also seeks to reduce the boundaries between life and art, enabling more participative, inclusive and immediate forms of art and culture. As argued elsewhere (Hanquinet et al., 2014), this has transfigured the content one should give to highbrow culture as it can include both classical and 'emerging' cultural referents. We have, for instance, shown that new dimensions can be crucial in the development of distinctive aesthetic preferences, such as one that privileges a socially explicit reflexive art compared to art detached from social concerns. As a direct and major consequence, the very conceptualization of cultural capital should now take into consideration the plurality of aesthetic paradigms at play in its formation. All of this is in line with the idea of 'emerging' forms of cultural capital (Prieur and Savage, 2013), which translates the adhesion to new or, maybe more accurately, previously scorned values by high-status groups, such as tolerance, fun, interactivity and intervention (e.g. Ardenne, 2004; Bourriaud, 2003). This idea of emerging cultural capital illustrates that the conceptual tools most used in cultural sociology should not be taken for granted; yet, they should be historically contextualized further.

The aesthetically sensitive approach I have taken so far enables me to give a more substantive interpretation of the figure of the 'cultural omnivore', which has most famously challenged the irreducible tensions between high and popular culture. Omnivores, usually highly educated and from upper-middle classes, tend to appreciate both high and low(er) forms of culture (Peterson and Kern, 1996; Peterson and Simkus, 1992). There is now a consensus among numerous cultural sociologists to see it as a source of distinction (Bryson, 1996; Coulangeon and Lemel, 2007) since omnivores do not like 'everything indiscriminantly' (Peterson and Kern, 1996, p. 904). High cultural capital would then now draw on a wider range of cultural goods and activities whose legitimacy is diverse but whose combination is socially valued. Interestingly, Lizardo and Skiles (2012) have seen omnivorousness as an 'aesthetic disposition' that enable people to see the formal and aesthetic attributes of a wide range of objects, including common ones. This capacity to distinguish form from function has emerged, as we know, alongside the autonomization of the art sphere at the end of the 19th century. For Lizardo (2008), the current conditions have changed with the 'intellectualization' of popular culture and the increasing permeability of high culture to popular aesthetics but, for him and his colleague, this has led to the generalization of this rather modernist aesthetic disposition 'outside the canonical domains' (Lizardo and Skiles 2012, p. 269). Although convincing, this account also gives a shallow impression of postmodernist aesthetics, which would be 'just' the consequence of the wider scope of an ultimately very modernist aesthetic disposition (see also for a critique Daenekindt, 2017). However, as we have just seen, a look at recent artistic and cultural developments suggests that omnivorousness would also (if not mainly) translate new schemes of perception emerging from new aesthetic paradigms based on a deconstructive approach to art and on subversion, pastiche, irony, playfulness, and 'de-differentiation' (on which: Lash, 1988 but also Baudrillard, 2002; Esquivel, 2008; Jameson, 1998)[x]. These constitute proper aesthetic values translating recent developments in the field of cultural production, which have influenced individuals' dispositions towards art.

To draw on my previous example of video games increasingly perceived as art by key taste makers (but not without resistance), it is evident that this change in the existing cultural classifications can alter what can be conceived as cultural capital: a disposition that allows people to see video games in aesthetic terms can arguably contribute to the development of new 'emerging' forms of cultural capital (see also Friedman et al., 2015). Such appreciation and knowledge in video games, indeed, form new resources on which people can draw and that are not symbolically accessible to everyone. This does not challenge the link between cultural capital and highbrow culture but would suggest that there may as well be now different forms of highbrow cultures, which can for instance take a more classic or contemporary outlook. The multiplicity of highbrow culture has been clearly illustrated by the position of our two critics Stuart and Jones on the matter of the artistic quality of video games. Again, highbrow culture cannot be merely defined by the symbolic value given to people who like it.

Proposition 4: Aesthetics and Morality

This article has attempted so far to show the importance of aesthetic values in the formation of people's tastes. Even if they emerge out of social and historical processes, they often unconsciously motivate our appreciation of a cultural object or our dislike for it. Aesthetic values also intrinsically carry a moral dimension, making them even more crucial in accounts of tastes. As Wolff argues, the modernist idea of art for art's sake may have hidden the link between aesthetics on the one hand and ethics and the political on the other but that, now that this idea is less dominant, it becomes clearer that ethics and aesthetics are 'bound up together' (2008, p. 138).

Formal aesthetic values question, challenge and also suggest life visions. Wolff discusses the example of the Holocaust and shows how ethical issues can have a part in discussions about what should or should not be represented in arts but also how influencing directly issues of aesthetics. The aesthetic is hence inseparable from the ethical[xi]. As Wolff rightly says, '[t]he pretense of impartiality and the defense of a purely aesthetic motivation can no longer be maintained in our time. [...] The work of art [...] always meets its viewer, even at its most nonrepresentational, in the context of a specific social and historical moment in which the aesthetical, the ethical, and the political, as we know, are never quite separable' (2008, p. 141).

A few sociologists have shown how cultural preferences could be justified on the basis of moral principles[xii] (Heinich, 1998a, 1998b; Woodward and Emmison, 2001) but their focus is more on how separate ethical and artistic registers of values can be explicitly used in people's justifications of their tastes. For instance, this can be used to understand why many would now make a point of not listening to the songs of Noir Désir, a once adored French rock band that fell in decline after his lead singer was guilty of the homicide of his partner. Meyer (2000) also links tastes to different historically situated 'rhetorics' but, compared to others, he seems to suggest that these rhetorics may influence people's *dispositions* in specific institutional contexts. They can also be more *explanatory* than 'classical sociological variables alone' (p. 49). According to him, in a pluralistic society, models of taste-making should not only focus on one form of discourse to assess art that would be primarily associated with the upper classes – a discourse of 'refinement' - but should incorporate other aesthetic rhetorics that would explain the increase level of eclecticism, such as that of 'authenticity' (which based on Rousseau has a strong civic resonance). This adds weight to Vaisey's differentiation (2009) between a 'discursive consciousness' (i.e. how people make sense *a posteriori* of their behaviours and choices) and a 'practical consciousness' taking the form of dispositions shaping people's courses of action. Seeking to demonstrate the importance of internalized moral-cultural scripts to account for behaviours and choices, Vaisey follows here Sayer's conception (2005b) of the habitus as being composed of not only aesthetic but also of ethical dispositions which would also be historically developed[xiii]. As he notes, 'Sayer revives parts of the classical notion of habitus that Bourdieu ignored and invites us to extend the logic of Bourdieu's theory from "good music" or "good art" to "the good" more generally' (p. 1685). He seeks here to show how the mechanisms of classification at work in one area – the aesthetics – are also deployed in the second – the morality.

Therefore, just as I have argued for aesthetic values, morality seems also to provide evaluative schemes of perceptions that are not reflexive and conscious – at least not in a deliberative way - but that still have a major role in guiding people in their everyday life, including in what (and how[xiv]) they like and appreciate and what they do not. I want to extend such a view and to explore how both sets of dispositions interact to shape taste and not only to justify them. More specifically, I would like to go a step further here: not only morality and aesthetics work with similar classificatory mechanisms (good versus bad); they also interact in the formation of tastes because they emerge from the same generative process, i.e. the habitus. The previous example on Noir Désir illustrates that moral principles can make people disregard cultural products (more or less) consciously but *morality and aesthetics are more much intertwined than that*. To quote Becker, 'people do not experience their aesthetic beliefs as merely arbitrary and conventional; they feel that they are natural, proper and moral. An attack on a convention and an aesthetic is also an attack on a morality' (1974, p. 773). This could be applied to any behaviour that can be judged as an aesthetic transgression. Any visible sign of tastes that is not in line with people's aesthetic standards classifies their holders as unconventional at best but most likely as deficient. Therefore, what is perceived as aesthetically problematic may be classified as morally low and, vice-versa, what is perceived as morally disputable may be judged as of bad aesthetic quality. Such reciprocity is essential for those interested in tastes as a defining part of people's lifestyle. As Guyer put it analyzing Kant's philosophical work, '[a]esthetic ideas render moral conceptions accessible to sensibility'. If this serves art as a condition for remaining captivating, this is also essential for the diffusion of moral conceptions: 'at the end of the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* Kant implies that the significance of taste lies in its unique capacity to provide sensible representation of moral ideas' (1990, p. 142). Kendrick Lamar's music, for instance, has been aesthetically praised because it portrays 'the complexity of modern African-American life' in an 'authentic' and 'affecting' ways[xv]. By denouncing racism, by telling the lives of Afro-Americans who have to deal with a biased criminal justice system, corruption, the lack of future prospects and everyday violence and by questioning the notions of good and evil, his music definitively is imbued with moral ideas about how we should live together (inspired by his Christian faith).

Moreover, recent works on disgust tend to support the idea that moral and aesthetic values are intrinsically related, through the habitus which historically circumscribed dispositions in general. Lawler, for instance, analyses how the aesthetics of working-classes' lifestyles is perceived by the upper-classes as translating 'ignorance and immorality' (2005, p. 437). People who are defined by a lack of taste (by others), being too popular (referring to Bourdieu's popular aesthetics) or too vulgar, are also seen as lacking good values to live in society and induce disgust in others. As Lawler rightly says, disgust seems so personal and instinctive that its collective dimension could be forgotten. Drawing on aesthetic signals that are related to notions of respectability and good manners,

disgust is so linked to what the 'guts' tell you that it is possible not to see how it helps classify people into 'us' and 'them'. Going back to the Kantian aesthetic vision which links aesthetics and morality, Lawler shows that 'the properly human is marked out by its innate ability to appreciate beauty (to have 'taste')' and that 'conversely, those lacking this property are lacking in humanity, if not non-human' (p. 439), while reminding us that beauty is not universal but historically and socially situated within class relations. More generally it has become clear over the last thirty years that aesthetic values are essential in the understanding of symbolic struggles and moral domination (Skeggs, 2004) but research on this has been inclined to see aesthetic values as *only* defined by mechanisms of class and not as also connected to a semi-autonomous cultural field.

What this illustrates is that aesthetics has a hermeneutic power: it classifies people and gives a meaning to these classifications but it does so partly through its intrinsic moral dimension.

TASTES: FLUID BUT STRUCTURED MODEL

Let us now go back to the model, as shown in **Figure 1**, and use it to answer the question 'But is it good?'. When we listen to a song or contemplate an artwork, it is largely accepted since Bourdieu's *Distinction* that we unconsciously draw on our cultural resources in order to shape our instinctive reaction to it ('I like it', 'It does not speak to me', etc.). I have emphasised in this article that, if the relation between cultural capital (5) and tastes (7) is well known in the literature, many accounts of tastes do not bother to examine the aesthetic dimension of the cultural capital. Yet, people are immersed during their lives within a multiplicity of aesthetic values that are processed into tacit schemes of perceptions (4) or aesthetic dispositions (i.e. embodied form of cultural capital). These dispositions, which are at work in the development of people's cultural tastes, are not only related to their social position (8) and how they have been brought up, i.e. their social origin (1), but also *when*. This refers to my first theoretical proposition: taking aesthetic values seriously in a model of taste-making requires to understand how they are socially *and* historically situated. The set of values and principles (2), especially the aesthetico-moral (3), one can have 'access' to depends not only on the kind of resources they have inherited from their parents and social milieu and acquired later at different stages of their lives but also on their overall socio-historical context (6). The field of cultural production is in constant flux and is characterized by diverse aesthetic transgressions or changes, which influence people's cultural consumption. New aesthetic values and paradigms emerge over time (aesthetic modernism, postmodernism, etc.) and alter and shape the kind of aesthetic values and norms individuals could get familiar with and alters the range of aesthetic principles on which cultural capital can be built, possibly in messy ways (Daenekindt, 2017).

In **Figure 1**, what I call 'the generative process of aesthetic classifications' refers to the ways in which these aesthetic values reflecting specific individual and socio-historical contexts are therefore absorbed by individuals who transform them into schemes of perceptions and dispositions. I agree here with Daenekindt that the way people internationalise aesthetic values and actually activate them in social situations (i.e. the internal aesthetic classification) do not necessarily reflect the 'external system of aesthetic principles (i.e. in the form of governing aesthetic criteria in the cultural field') (2017, p. 43). Discrepancies exist between the individual level and the principles at work in the cultural field. It does not mean though that individuals are not aware of the aesthetic order (i.e. which aesthetic values are more socially praised) and that they may feel some of level of 'dissonance' in the way they internally process them and rely on them in everyday life (Lahire, 2006; 2008).

Hence, in **Figure 1**, individuals' cultural capital is activated differently in specific contexts depending on their social position and other socio-demographics (age and place of residence). These socio-economic characteristics are essential to understand why new aesthetic principles are only endorsed by certain social groups whose age, education and social position enable them to acquire new resources. As these resources are then not equally distributed in society and positively distinguish those who possess them, they are often associated with the emergence of new forms of symbolic domination in the social space and hence of new groups of taste markers able to make established cultural codes fold. This has been clearly shown in the example of how the growing perception of video games as art or of hip hop as legitimate can influence the content of highbrow culture and hence of cultural capital. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly here, individuals' cultural capital is also shown in **Figure 1** to be influenced by their social position in a less immediate way by confronting individuals with different environments as they progress in their life course. The set of aesthetic values people have at disposal is susceptible to evolve throughout their lifetime (see the loop effect represented by the arrow) (Daenekindt and Roose, 2011).

Our social position and our background are not sufficient to account for which aesthetic values operate when. Otherwise, people's tastes would be characterized by much more intragroup consensus that has been observed. Even among visitors of modern and contemporary art museums, whose level of education is overall high, an important amount of heterogeneity in cultural tastes and practices has been observed (Hanquinet, 2013a, 2013b). Hence, the role of aesthetic values has to be examined seriously and, if we want to do that, I have argued that we

need to consider three other important implications. First, even if inscribed within social forces and transformations, aesthetic values, once internalised, guide us in the evaluation of cultural objects we are confronted with in a semi-autonomous way (proposition 2). They have a force of their own in the sense that social position and origin can only partly 'predict' what aesthetic principles make a cultural product worthy to us. These principles, for themselves and not as a proxy of social background, *motivate* our cultural preferences, even if we cannot necessarily explain them rationally. Yet, social research has not much sought to analyse which aesthetic values are incorporated into people's possibly large and changing repertoires and under which conditions this process happens. This is especially visible in the difficulty sociology has had in updating the content given to cultural capital and highbrow culture despite some valuable attempts to attract attention to our outdated ways of using them (DiMaggio and Mukhtar, 2004; Hanquinet et al., 2014; Prior, 2005). **Figure 1** lays the foundation for us to understand why these intrinsically aesthetic concepts are in need of constant updating (proposition 3). Cultural capital is fluid (Prieur and Savage, 2013) and adapts to new inflections in the cultural landscape.

Finally, the last implication of my model outlines further why a rigorous model on taste-making matters. The aesthetic is not only about what is beautiful. It is also about sharing and debating life visions and is hence intrinsically bound up with morality (proposition 4). Tastes are not trivial differences but can create quite rigid boundaries between people because they contain principles of life people want to adhere to or to reject. We would not have sometimes intense instinctive rejection ('a gut reaction') or 'disgust' of some music or art if the only reason was that it is not aesthetically pleasing. It disturbs us because it challenges our perceptions of what we have established to be good and bad ways of life. In contrast, tastes can also bring people together by emphasising their commonalities and create 'interpretive communities' (Fish, 1980).

In conclusion, this article has provided a thorough demonstration of the main reasons why aesthetic values should be taken seriously by the researchers seeking to understand the formations of tastes. This has designed a model of taste-making in which taste is shown to be influenced by social origin and position but in a much more indirect way that it is often assumed. First these characteristics condition the set of values people are embedded in – according to the social context they live in – and second they influence the practical selection of aesthetico-moral values people operate in the development of their cultural capital. Far from being universal, these aesthetic values should be seen as originating from specific social and historical contexts (hence through social forces); yet, once formed, they impact on people's tastes, in a semi-autonomous fashion. They have a force of their own, which should be studied in itself and not only reduced to social divisions.

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[i] I focus in this paper on cultural participation, which includes areas, such as the visual arts, music, film or literature which have conventionally been consecrated as 'artistic' but also a wider range of practices (such as watching television) that are not necessarily recognized as belonging to the artistic realm but still are part of a cultural lifestyle.

[ii] Bourdieu distinguishes taste as 'a system of schemes of perception and appreciation' and tastes as 'classified and classifying practices, i.e. distinctive signs' (1984: 171). In this paper, I will from now on refer to the latter definition.

[iii] In Bourdieu's view, the popular classes tend to be attracted by what is left unconsumed or seen as unworthy by the upper and middle classes. His approach tends to deny any real aesthetic character to popular culture (Shusterman 1991).

[iv] Coscarelli, J. (16/04/18). Kendrick Lamar Wins Pulitzer in 'Big Moment for Hip-Hop'. *The New York Times*. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/16/arts/music/kendrick-lamar-pulitzer-prize-damn.html (Accessed 14 November 2018).

[v] Idem

[vi] UCLA Newsroom (25/11/18). Rapper Kendrick Lamar winning the Pulitzer Prize for music: What does it mean? Four UCLA professors on the prize going to a non-classical or non-jazz record for the first time ever. Available at: http://newsroom.ucla.edu/stories/kendrick-lamar (Accessed 14 November 2018)

[vii] Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2012/nov/30/moma-video-games-art (Accessed 20 December 2018)

[viii] Stuart, K. (06/12/12), Are video games art: the debate that shouldn't', The Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/technology/gamesblog/2012/dec/06/video-games-as-art (Accessed 20 December 2018)

[ix] It is *semi*-autonomous for three reasons: 1) their emergence is rooted in social transformations, 2) their internalisation into dispositions is dependent on people's social background and positions and 3) their activation takes place in interactions.

[x] However, these new developments and values are not always seen positively by the authors mentioned here.

[xi] Following Sayer (2005b), even if a difference between moral and ethics can be drawn, I will not distinguish moral and ethical values here.

[xii] The role of morality in drawing symbolic boundaries has also been outlined by Lamont (1992) in her critique of Bourdieu but she focuses only on conscious 'repertoires of evaluation' (see also Vaisey 2009: 1685).

xiii Sayer himself recognizes that 'the distinction between aesthetics and ethics is sometimes fuzzy' (2005b, p. 290).

xiv On this difference, see Daenekindt and Roose (2017).

xv Coscarelli, J. (16/04/18). Kendrick Lamar Wins Pulitzer in 'Big Moment for Hip-Hop'. *The New York Times*. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/16/arts/music/kendrick-lamar-pulitzer-prize-damn.html (Accessed 14 November 2018)

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Making Evaluative Judgements and Sometimes Making Money: Independent Publishing in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

Independent publishing is a sector of the cultural field that is perceived to be threatened by market forces but also one in which is buoyed by critical and commercial success and a rise in the number of small presses. The article innovates by probing the oft-neglected matter of evaluative judgements as publishers, in their role as cultural intermediaries, negotiate aesthetic, ethical, commercial and temporal considerations in deciding which books to publish. Drawing on primary data from a study of independent literary publishers from six countries, I draw attention to how they justify their decisions in order to mark their distinctiveness in the field and distinguish themselves from the corporate houses. I find that field-specific aesthetic judgements assess the extent to which literary manuscripts contribute to the conversation by responding to developments in the field. In contrast, decisions made on this basis of ethical considerations mean that the publishers' output might veer from 'art for art's sake' towards more heteronomous regions of cultural production in order to contribute towards a sense of the common good. Finally, the temporal dimension of evaluative judgements distinguishes independent presses from their rivals by pointing to a distant future of literary fame that reaches far beyond the marketing schedules of the corporate houses.

Keywords: aesthetics, independent publishing, evaluative judgements, ethics, taste

INTRODUCTION

Thompson (2012) identifies three key developments in trade publishing: the polarization of the field, with five or six big corporations taking a dominant position; the relentless pursuit of bestsellers; and 'shrinking windows', as publishers seek to publicise their books in an increasingly crowded marketplace. But whereas Thompson takes a broad view of the publishing field, this article focuses on the relatively under-explored area of independent literary publishing. It is a sector of the cultural field that is perceived to be threatened by market forces (Bourdieu, 2003) but also one which is buoyed by critical and commercial success and a rise in the number of small presses (Kean, 2017; Thompson, 2012). This article innovates by probing the oft-neglected matter of evaluative judgements as publishers, in their role as cultural intermediaries, decide which books to publish. There has been little research on the evaluative judgements made by those working in independent publishing. Publishers are inundated with potential book projects but on what basis do they make judgements about the titles they want to publish? What criteria do they deploy (or profess to deploy)? Drawing on primary data from a study of prominent independent presses from the UK, USA, Canada, Germany, Australia and Finland, the article draws attention to the aesthetic, ethical and temporal dimensions of evaluative judgements. A key finding is that publishers justify their decisions with reference to evaluative criteria that mark their distinctiveness in the field and distinguish themselves from

corporate, market-driven publishing houses. The criteria to which they refer derive from within the field but also from elsewhere.

The article has as its focus the analysis of forty-seven semi-structured interviews with independent publishers from six countries. Field analysis is applied because it provides a framework within which to understand and trace the power dynamics and practices of the independent publishing world at a macro level (Bourdieu, 1993, 1996, 2008). However, whereas field analysis enables a view from afar, the subject matter of this article requires closer proximity in order to gain a finer grained analysis of the evaluative judgments made by individuals operating within this field. This information is not obtainable using field analysis alone. Bourdieu (1998, p. 40) defines field as

> a structured space, a field of forces, a force field. It contains people who dominate and others who are dominated. Constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space, which at the same time becomes a space in which the various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field.

He argues that society is made up of a number of fields, many of which overlap and all of which relate, in some way to the wider field of power, the field of fields (Bourdieu, 1993, 2014). As societies develop a more complex division of labour and as this in turn enables more specialisation, a number of unique fields develop, each with their own specific rules and logic which often run contrary to those of other fields. The longer a field exists, the more autonomy it is able to gain. For example, the most autonomous region of the field of literary production operates in accordance with its own rules (Bourdieu, 1996). Bourdieu finds that in this area of restricted production, the logic of the economic world is reversed and success is measured not by profits or book sales but by the degree of peer recognition and a logic of 'the loser wins', which is based on form of gratification that is so completely deferred that it is often posthumous (Bourdieu, 1993). Success, whether through awards bestowed by bourgeois institutions or expressed in hard cash is likely to be indicative of 'selling out'. Each field is structured by power relations; fields are sites of struggle over its spoils. This struggle takes place between newcomers and those who are currently dominant (Bourdieu, 1993).

Thompson (2012, p. 4) takes Bourdieu's insights on field and applies them to the world of book publishing. First, he argues that field analysis helps us to understand that book publishing does not consist of one field but a plurality of fields, from the field of poetry to the field of academic book publishing. Second, the relational emphasis of field analysis allows us to see that those involved in the field – whether individuals, institutions or organisations – are oriented in their practices, even if not always consciously - towards others (Thompson, 2012; Bourdieu, 1993, 1996). Third, field analysis can help us to understand the different resources possessed by the various participants in the field of publishing. These resources include, for example, cultural capital (cultural competences), social capital (networks, connections), economic capital (financial resources) and symbolic capital (prestige, renown) (Bourdieu, 1986). Thompson's (2012, p. 11) fourth point is that each field of publishing has its distinctiveness, its own specific logic, that is 'a set of factors that determine the conditions under which individual agents and organisations can participate in the field – that is, the conditions under which they can play the game (and play it successfully)'.

There are, however, limits to the analytic value of field analysis. First, there is a tendency in much field analysis to view the practices of the world from afar, without drawing attention to the actual moments of engagement between publishers and the manuscripts they read (Stewart, 2012, 2014). Second, the emphasis on power dynamics means that field-specific aesthetic criteria are often neglected (Stewart, 2019). Third, Bourdieu's field analysis was conceptualised on a national scale and was predominantly concerned with French society. The challenge remains, therefore, to theorize the field of independent publishing on a global scale (Savage and Silva, 2013). Fourth, field analysis depicts 'a Hobbesian power-struggle between interests' and neglects the ways in which individuals cooperate (Garnham, 1993, p. 185). For example, Gonsalves' (2015) research on the Frankfurt Book Fair finds that Indian publishers, as outsiders and newcomers to the field, deploy strategies of friendliness (rather than rupture and revolution) in order to make headway. Bourdieu depicts an 'amoral economy' and rejects claims 'that certain actions can be disinterested rather than (subconsciously) instrumental' (Sayer, 1999, p. 407). Fifth, with its focus on the interplay between habitus and field, field analysis often reduces cultural objects to little more than symbols in a wider game of power (Hennion, 2001, 2007). It is important, therefore, to consider the dynamic interplay between individuals and cultural objects as well as the materiality of the objects (Stewart, 2012; Rubio and Silva, 2013; Savage and Silva, 2013). Finally, and most relevant to this article, field analysis does not tend to give an adequate account of the evaluative judgements, whether ethical or aesthetic, that are made by individuals in the course of their everyday practices (Stewart, 2017). According to Bourdieu (1993b), the practices of agents are expressions of the interplay between habitus and field: their perceptions are adjusted on the basis of the 'fit' (or not) between the dispositions and capitals that they have developed and acquired through social origin and education, and the requirements of the field. However, beyond the notion of 'semi-conscious' practice, field analysis has little to say about normative judgements. As Sayer (1999, p. 404) points out, 'even allowing for the

bodily, habitual character of much social behaviour, Bourdieu's deflation of the role of actors' normative often reasoned, judgements undermines his explanations'. It is the purpose of this article to examine the oft-neglected basis on which evaluative judgements are expressed. I argue that judgements are part of the struggles associated with social fields but not reducible to these conflicts. I contend that by considering the aesthetic, temporal and ethical aspects of judgements, we are able to draw attention to what Max Weber would call their value-rational aspects. Weber (1968[1913], p. 25) argued that value-rational social action, as an ideal type, is 'determined by a conscious belief in the value for its own sake of some ethical, aesthetic, religious, or other form of behaviour, independently of its prospects of success'. Many of the independent literary publishers are driven, at least in part, by value-rational considerations even if these are commingled with other, more instrumental motives such as making a profit on the books they sell. It is difficult if not impossible to entirely separate these various dimensions of judgement. Weber (1968, p. 22) argued that it is rare to find an instance of social action in its pure form, as an ideal type, or where the intention and meaning of the action is fully conscious and explicit. Along these lines, I would suggest that it is hard to isolate a judgement made by the publishers in this study that is *entirely* rooted in aesthetic, ethical, temporal, strategic or economic considerations. Nevertheless, I argue that we can gain a finer-grained analysis by attempting to distinguish these various dimensions of evaluative judgements.

I find that the aesthetic values to which the publishers refer are rooted in the literary field. For example, the publishers place high value on field-specific stylistic innovation, making a significant *contributions to the conversation*, and demonstrating *charisma in the authorial voice*. These criteria all accord with the notion that the literary field has a cumulative logic to which one can only contribute by doing something new and innovative (Bourdieu, 1993). In staking out this claim, the independent publishers have to negotiate two key aspects of their trade, referred to metaphorically by one publisher as *the cathedral* and the *stock market*. In doing so, they are keen to situate themselves, rhetorically at least, in the cathedral. 'We are not in it for the money', is the common refrain, and here, they state that they are more interested in aesthetic (rather than market) values and these values accord with aesthetic criteria specific to the literary field. In contrast, the ethical judgements they utilise, including the assertion that their decisions are informed by a desire for inclusivity as they seek to combat the diversity deficit, are rooted in civic values that refer to the common good and derive from sources external to the literary field.

METHODS AND ANALYSIS

I recruited my initial group of respondents at the London Book Fair and Frankfurt Book Fair in 2016. The recruitment process did not go well initially because the publishers' schedules were full. I did manage to speak to some publishers and contacted them after the conference along with others that I had been put in touch with through a colleague who works in this industry. After the first batch of interviews using this purposive method of sampling, I asked the interviewees to recommend two or three other publishers whom I might contact. This worked very effectively and the recommendations ensured that people were very often willing to return my emails and agree to be interviewed. In the course of the research, I was able to speak to senior figures at a range of independent presses.[1] They were mainly publishers of literary fiction and poetry, from the one-person-run small presses that operate on the fringes of the field to those that had experienced considerable financial and critical success on a global scale. The majority of the publishers to whom I was directed were English language publishers, so this limits the claims I can make in relation to the wider applicability of the findings. The sample was also skewed by the fact that, in the main, publishers recommended houses that were, in some ways, notable or successful. This notwithstanding, many of the houses, including those possessing considerable symbolic capital, told me that they faced a perpetual struggle to survive.

There are many different kinds of independent publishers who fit the key descriptor that they operate on their own and are not owned by another company. Many small presses might aim at a mass market and are commercially-oriented, whether they publish romantic fiction or popular science. In contrast, the focus of my study is independent publishers that specialise in literary fiction and poetry and, to borrow from Ken Gelder's work, occupy various positions in the field of Literature (with a capital 'L') rather than in the field of popular fiction. As Gelder (2004, p. 14) puts it, 'Literature shares many of Bourdieu's 'autonomous' characteristics, while generally speaking popular fiction rests fairly comfortably at the 'heteronomous' end of things'. In reality, this distinction is often muddied. For example, some of these independent literary houses, though oriented towards the autonomous pole of the field, adopted a *portfolio approach* (more of which later) in relation to commercial interests. In other instances,

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[1] I conducted a mixture of face-to-face and Skype interviews, each lasting approximately 60-90 minutes. The vast majority of respondents were senior figures (e.g. publishers or editors) at independent houses from the USA (19), UK (16), Australia (4), Germany (4), Canada (2) and Finland (2). One of the interviewees ran an organization that promotes small presses in the US.

as we will see below, their ethical judgements sometimes pushed their outputs towards the heteronomous pole as they attempted to distance themselves from the white, male, middle-class dominated literary avant-garde scene.

I interviewed twenty-two women and twenty-six men (one of the interviews included two respondents). Their high levels of cultural capital mirrored those of cultural intermediaries documented in other research (e.g. on comedy scouts (Friedman, 2014) and television buyers (Kuipers, 2012)). Just as Giselinde Kuipers' (2012, p. 587) television buyers had in common high levels of cosmopolitan capital, with 'similar speech styles: similar informal, loose, pleasant yet business-like manners – even similar hairdos and clothing styles', the literary publishers in my study had high levels of academic capital and most were educated to postgraduate level. Some had doctorates and worked in academic institutions; some analysed their own practices through the lens of sociological perspectives, thus demonstrating familiarity with my game as well as their own. The interviews went well perhaps because their position as independent publishers is (relatively speaking) homologous with mine as a sociologist: we both occupy positions within what Bourdieu (1984) would call the dominated fraction of the dominant class.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen in line with an interpretivist approach which focuses on the subjective meaning attached to individuals' social action (Weber, 1968; Fielding, 2006). The interviews were not designed to discover a hidden truth behind the publishers' statements but rather sought to gain insight into how meaning is socially produced (Fielding and Thomas, 2008) and the how the publishers perceive their vocation (Lamont, 1992, p. 18). The publishers' responses in the interviews might be considered as 'practical accounts', which need to be considered in relation to their positions in the field (Bourdieu, 1993; Thompson, 2012). The interviews are also generative of boundary work, which is used 'when we try to define who we are: we constantly draw inferences concerning our similarities to, and differences from, others, indirectly producing typification systems' (Lamont, 1992, p. 11). With this in mind, we can see that there is not necessarily a correspondence between what the publishers say and their genuinely held beliefs or modes of conduct (Fielding and Thomas, 2008). Nevertheless, by understanding these accounts in terms of the logic of the field and each publisher's situation in that field, I am able to consider the wider structural issues that might impact on the judgements expressed. As discussed below, independent publishing is a field dominated by the well-educated middle classes (O'Brien et al., 2016). It is no surprise, then, that certain book projects are more likely to resonate with the publishers' habitus than others. We can also understand the strategies that follow from the size and scope of the publishing house. However, if we carefully probe the basis on which the publishers make evaluative judgements, we see various modes of judgement at play (Sayer, 1999; Stewart, 2017). Moreover, reference to the logic of the field helps to see why the relatively prominent, financially buoyant publishers might be more inclined to be pragmatic in their approach to balancing commercial and artistic considerations in deciding what to publish. It also helps to explain why those publishers situated at the very margins of the field, whose books of poetry might be expected to sell only a handful of copies, place aesthetic, temporal and ethical considerations at the fore. I was surprised about the remarkable similarities between similarly-situated publishers, from country to country. The main differences between such publishers lay in the different funding regimes to which they had to respond (e.g. the USA model of non-profit, which required a perpetual search for benefactors and philanthropists, as compared to the UK and Canadian models of State-funding, which required a lot of form-filling and waiting).

I conducted a thematic analysis of the interview data in order to identify significant patterns. In the process of coding, there was a degree of movement between deductive and inductive work (Braun, 2006). At times, my research was informed by field analysis and conceptual frameworks generated in my previous work on the sociology of taste and aesthetics (e.g. Stewart, 2012, 2014, 2017). But at other times, new codes and themes were generated from the data in a manner more akin to a grounded theory approach (McLeod, 2001). When presenting my findings, I have utilised striking illustrative quotes that highlight the prominence of a particular theme.

A prominent theme in the interview data is boundary work (Gieryn, 1983; Fournier, 2000). Gieryn (1983) originally deployed the term to describe how scientists ideologically differentiate science from non-science in order to protect their domain and increase symbolic and material gains. He cites several historical examples where scientists have performed boundary work. To take one such example, physicist John Tyndall made the case that 'science is justified by its practical utility when compared to the merely poetic contributions of religion, but science is justified by its nobler uses as a means of "pure" culture and discipline when compared to engineering' (Gieryn, 1983, p. 787). In independent publishing, similar boundary work is taking place and much of it is justified along aesthetic and ethical lines. In contrast to the big corporations, the publishers argue that independent literary presses have a higher degree of aesthetic autonomy, thus distinguishing them from what they portray as technocratic, money-driven corporations. This boundary work also distinguishes their inclusive, socially progressive approach from the cynical sales-driven strategies of the major houses. 39 of the interviews generated 105 instances of this kind of boundary work.

FIELD-SPECIFIC AESTHETIC CRITERIA: 'CONTRIBUTING TO THE CONVERSATION'

It is primarily through *field-specific aesthetic criteria* that the independent publishers seek to distinguish themselves from the bigger houses. Aesthetic criteria are often neglected in sociology, considered only to the extent to which they are markers of class background or symbolic struggle (Hennion, 2001; Highmore, 2016), but they are prominent in the publishers' accounts of their evaluative judgements. A recurrent theme in the interviews is the need for a manuscript to 'contribute to the conversation'. This aligns very much with Bourdieu's (1993) observation that for a field to develop, its newest contributions must in some way respond to and react against the most recent developments in the field's cumulative history. New artists 'must inevitably situate themselves in relation to all the preceding attempts at surpassing which have occurred in the history of the field and within the space of possibilities which it imposes upon the newly arrived' (Bourdieu, 1993, pp. 265-266). Bourdieu proceeds to argue that if a newly arrived artist were to merely replicate (without irony or pastiche) something that has already been done in the field, then the artistic outcome will be kitsch. The respondents make it clear that the most significant field-specific aesthetic criterion is for a manuscript to be distinctive in the sense of doing something *new*:

> [F]or me what's really important is that the work is distinctive and that it's trying to do something that other people are not doing. There's a lot of imitation particularly amongst some younger poets who might fixate on certain ticks of style or rhythm or forms of language or forms of imagery that have been developed in other people's practice ... And I'm really not interested in that, I'm interested in people who are trying to push their boundaries in their own way. And I don't mind if it's very experimental and it fails sometimes (Maria, Publisher, UK).[2]

Several publishers make the point that writers' programmes and workshops featuring a 'house style' leads to a lot of imitative writing. However, to imitate the work of a currently in-vogue avant-gardist is not nearly as lamentable as to imitate a long-dead Romantic writer or to submit Elizabethan-style sonnets. In the interview data, the desire for the new is often expressed as 'contributing to the conversation' in three key ways: first, *stylistically, through formal innovation*; second, *through charisma and a strong and distinctive authorial voice*; and third, as discussed below, through *engaging with pressing contemporary issues*. Crucially, the publishers favour writers with *a voice of their own*. The preference for formal innovation, which defines itself in opposition to writing that is merely descriptive, or which 'gushes' with subjectivity, can be seen in this response:

> I have certain prejudices, in favour of a highly vocalic poetry, for example; a love of parataxis and a slight resistance to hypotaxis; I like enactive poetry and dislike merely descriptive poetry … I guess I avoid gushing poetry, poetry which foregrounds an irritating 'I', poetry in which formal principles are not evident after a few lines (David, Publisher, UK).

Along similar lines, a 'normal love story' is out of bounds for the publishers unless it is 'very literary or … experimental or [offering] a new approach to the language' (Paulo, Publisher, US). But there is more to this than merely demonstrating an aesthetic disposition and a formal mastery of language (Bourdieu, 1984). For many of the publishers, formal innovation is a key aesthetic criterion, along with newness, originality and risk-taking. What is significant is carving out a distinctive way of writing. As one publisher puts it, such writers are 'doing a good job of consistently implementing that which they're trying to accomplish' (Max, Publisher, US). The work should thus fulfil obligations only to itself: it is consistently developed and yet it also has some appeal that is inherently meaningful to the writer. This distinguishes them from writers who are pursuing a style that has been developed by someone else (Simmel, 1991[1908]), and it is preferable to have work that is exhilarating and imperfect than surefooted and safe (Silvia, Publisher, US). Curiously, this means that sometimes publishers take on work that they do not personally like but which they recognize as good because of its distinctiveness and originality within the field; it 'fits within the boundaries, within the kind of logic of that world' (Charlie, Publisher, UK). So, the cumulative logic of the field has some bearing on the field-specific aesthetic criteria to which publishers refer. For example, one publisher pointed out that one of his most significant books had made a contribution to the development of Caribbean literature even though it only sold a few hundred copies. This is because many of the purchasers of the book were poets themselves.

Charisma, an expression of distinctive authorial voice, is put forward as a further aesthetic criterion in selecting an author and/or their manuscript. This sense of charisma accords with Weber's (1946[1915], p. 295) notion of 'an extraordinary quality of a person' that goes beyond the ordinary capacities of a human being. Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) notion of an inspired order of worth works along similar lines and refers to the creativity,

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[2] The names of the interviewees have been replaced with pseudonyms.

imagination, artistic sensibility and asceticism of those who 'do not necessarily reject public esteem or money … but who do not make these goods the very basis for the value of their work and for their worth' (2006, p. 88). The publisher's descriptions are not so other-worldly but they nevertheless they are willing to overlook holes in the plot, clunky or over-written passages and under-developed structure if they sense that the author's voice is sufficiently *one of a kind*. It is argued that the various shortcomings in a manuscript can easily be fixed as long as there is a central voice that is able to dominate:

> There's a sense of authority in certain kinds of writing, that willing suspension of disbelief. That takes voice, I think, more than anything else. It takes that first paragraph maybe, not even the first page, to convince you that, okay, I'm with you, I'll go with you, I'll follow you, and it's really difficult to do and difficult to say why in some cases I might get that feeling and a colleague might not (Silvio, Editor-in-Chief, US).

There is a sense that a distinctive voice will necessarily have something to say, and if this is not immediately forthcoming, it must be cajoled and delicately teased out. Where it does emerge, this charismatic writing, imbued with a sense of authority, is perceived to be *enchanting*. As a counterbalance to the more formal innovation that occurs at the level of language, this charisma is sensorial and conveys excitement. As one publisher puts it, recalling her encounter with a manuscript, 'all the hairs on the back of my neck stood up, you know, it was really exciting to read' (Katherine, Publisher, UK). In another account, there is a sense of intimacy and *presence* as the authorial voice works its magic on the body:

> I want to feel that the writer is sitting right next to me and talking to me. I want to feel that I can get inside that writer's mind and see that mind in action … that writer might be somebody that's spilled their whole guts … there has to be a sense of some kind of intimacy (Alice, Publisher, US).

The *charisma of the authorial voice* is characterized above all by authority and presence. It commands attention and makes the reader feel as though s/he is in the presence of the author who speaks with a singular voice. It has an additional aspect: the authorial voice has a *vision* that actually changes the reader. As one publisher suggests, '[t]hat's the ideal thing to have … a book which actually changes you' (Robert, Publisher, UK); the reader becomes a different person after the encounter. In order to achieve this state, there is a complete surrender to the voice. Here, one of the publishers refers to falling under the sway of the authority of the authorial voice:

> What comes round to me is the word authority and just the complete trust in the author that I think the highest compliment I pay to them … I'll miss my subway stop, I want to be so engrossed in something that I don't want to put it down, I lose time and perspective. I don't care … future, past, whatever genre it doesn't matter to me, I just want to be completely swept into whatever world that the author's writing about (Dylan, Publisher, US).

'COMPLETE CRAP' AND THE PRESERVE OF THE HOPELESS AMATEUR

When there is no such uniqueness, charisma or authority, writers are rejected. They are deemed guilty of imitation or of failing to 'contribute to the conversation'. Other writing is rejected merely because it is prosaic: for example, a 'straightforward novel' with 'a beginning, rising, confrontation, and closing' (Leonard, Publisher, US). It is argued that adherence to such formulae leads to 'straightforward descriptions', 'drudgery', 'earnestness', 'formulaic writing', 'detailed but uninteresting sentences' and 'work that is perfectly adequate but dull'. A more serious error is 'confessional gushing'. In Bourdieu's (1984, p. 44) terms, this is the least prestigious form of literary work because it reduces 'the things of art to the things of life'. A common error is to submit manuscripts that have nothing in common with the 'house style'. One publisher estimates that as many as 75 per cent of unsolicited submissions from UK writers commit this error, making this nation 'the preserve of the hopeless amateur'. This notion of the 'amateur' lurks behind many of the pejorative descriptions. Unlike Antoine Hennion's more progressive use of the term, referring to 'any lay-person engaged in a systematic activity, which makes them develop, in various degrees, their sensitivities or abilities in that domain' (Hennion, 2007, p. 112), many of the publishers associate the amateur with 'terribly written books' (Madeleine, Publisher, AUS). A failure to adhere to field-specific aesthetic criteria is thus a key characteristic of bad writing. As often with discussions of bad taste, a sense of disgust is invoked as a means of boundary work (Miller, 1997; Lawler, 2005):

> I get physically sick when I have to read a book that is amateurish and lacks talent and total non-creativity. I could never publish that kind of book even if it were guaranteed to sell well (Hannah, Publisher, US).

[T]he dirty little secret of trade publishing around the world is that most unsolicited submissions are complete crap and it's not worth your time reading them (Nicholas, Publisher, AUS).

COLLABORATIVELY FORMED EVALUATIVE JUDGEMENTS

The collaborative formation of such judgements is central to the process of deciding which books to publish. In the 47 interviews, there were 39 references to some form of collaborative decision making. There are some exceptions to this rule, especially among the presses where one person is able to hold sway:

I am *the* audience and my hope is that others can share in my sensibility. I have no readers and no discussion groups. In order to be published by my presses (and to date, incidentally, I have published about 600 books over the years), I have to be moved and enjoy the work (Leonard, Publisher, US).

I have the great privilege of running a small press where my own sense of judgement is really determinate of what we publish and it comes down to what wows me and what I personally respond to (Gemma, Publisher, US).

However, most of the publishers indicate a need to get a second opinion and this was true even for these publishers who have considerable editorial autonomy. For example, one literary publisher reflects on the need to get a second opinion on a book:

R: And often I sent it off to my fellow director and say, look, am I wrong here? And, nine times out of ten, he backs my judgement.
I: It's quite handy to have that sort of community judgement?
R: He tells me if I'm being a total idiot (Christopher, Publisher, UK).

It is made apparent that evaluative judgements are collectively formed by various members of the editorial teams. This is described by the publishers as an engaging and lively and sometimes feisty process, generating heated debate out of which collaboratively formed judgements arise.

In the main, the bigger-sized independent presses have institutionalized collective decision-making processes in place. At times, consensus emerges swiftly, at other times, it might be that the board is split between those who enthusiastically endorse a book project and those who remain to be persuaded. The virtue of these processes, it seems, is that when a final decision is made, the team can feel confident to put their energies behind the book. One USA-based publisher describes how this collaborative process works:

Most manuscripts that we end up signing on have at least two of the four of us read it, sometimes all four of us have to read it, usually that means the first few that have read it are on the fence … our submission process is pretty drawn out and long and it's kind of frustrating and it's something we're always trying to figure out ways to improve, but, at the same time, because when we take on a book, then the six of us then work so closely and so hard on each one, it's really nice when all four editors have read something and are already excited about it before we sign it on and you don't have to convince them after making the contract, it's just better. It doesn't mean the book is going to actually sell better, but it just feels better in the office if there's a general amount of enthusiasm before we even start working on the book (Chrissie, Managing Editor, US).

This process is also used as a means of anticipating a book's reception in the marketplace. The idea is that the editorial team can make judgements that approximate those that will be made by the wider readership:

In a group of eight of us, if four people are very, very high on the book and four people hate it then that sort of tells me, well, 50 per cent of readers might fall in love with this book. Whereas if six out of eight are lukewarm about it, it tells me 80 per cent of people who read this book are going to be lukewarm. So that's not good enough, even if the total likes might add up to the same. Because you need a book that's going to come to the top of the bookseller's pile, it's going to come to the top of the reviewer's pile, it's going to come to the top of the reader's pile (Sylvia, Publisher, US).

In the bigger independents, the collaboratively formed judgements are passed on to the chief editors or publishers who make the final decision.

A BALANCING ACT BETWEEN THE AESTHETIC AND COMMERCIAL

As part of the evaluative judgement process, 38 of the publishers made 91 references to a 'balancing act' that involves the creative and commercial aspects of publishing. There are considerable differences in the extent to which the publishers place economic criteria at the fore of their decisions. The bigger independents, those that have had the occasional bestseller, are more likely to be of this mind-set. Even if they are not actively seeking to publish a bestseller to support other titles, they make it clear that they make pragmatic decisions in order to put forward a selection of books that are likely to make a profit. One publisher states that it is a truism that 20 per cent of books carry the 80 per cent that fail (Daniel, Publisher, UK); another repeats a quote from a mentor that two-thirds of publishing is about failure (Sylvia, Publisher, US). According to a Finnish publisher, half of publishing 'is the stock exchange, half of it is a cathedral' (Elias, Publisher, FIN). At the more pragmatic end, many put forward a balanced selection of titles just as an asset manager might diversify her or his portfolio. These findings accord with research by Friedman (2014) and Kuipers (2012) which draws attention to the institutional logic that leads cultural intermediaries to make choices on the basis of what they expect will appeal to a particular market segment. This means that they often make judgements that run contrary to their own taste preferences. In the case of my study, what I term a *portfolio approach* is deployed. This is where a range of manuscripts are selected which range from those which accord with the publishers' aesthetic preferences to those for which they feel no affinity but which are likely to appeal to existing markets. This approach, which blends aesthetic and professional *closeness and distance*, is common in the bigger independent houses. In contrast, in the one-person-led publishing houses, aesthetic considerations are more likely to be at the fore of evaluative judgements and here, economic success is regarded with suspicion (Bourdieu, 1993, 1996, 2008). One publisher, who has discovered several writers that went on to be famous authors, proclaims: 'I stand utterly outside of the commercial world and its demands' (Leonard, Publisher, US). One of the small poetry presses concludes that in order to reach new readers it is preferable to give away books of poetry rather than incur considerable expenses by having a stall at a major book fair (Andre, Publisher, US). That said, many of the presses are concerned about generating enough sales for their authors. Curiously, in line with field-specific expectations, the instrumental or formally rational element of publishing is often supressed even if it lurks in the background of all decision-making processes:

> [W]hen we're making decisions about to publish or not [and presenting these to the owner of the publishing house], we're not supposed to talk about the financial part. But at the same time we're supposed to be thinking about what books can sell (Emily, Senior Editor, US).

A prominent Australian independent publisher laments that 'the creative impulse triumphs over commercial considerations' but unfortunately, her tastes as a publisher do not align with those of the public to the extent that what she considers to be a great book will not necessarily sell (Madeleine, Publisher, AUS). Expressions of creative autonomy, mirroring those made by the writers themselves (and in many instances, the publishers are also authors) are enabled by funding procured as part of non-profit status, or by the money that comes in from labour performed in other occupations.

What unites the responses of the small and larger presses is their belief that they are, in the main, able to publish books that accord, in some ways, with their personal preferences and value-orientation. They do not need to publish books purely for the sake of profit, regardless of qualitative considerations. In sum, such is their value orientation that (to return to the Finnish publisher's metaphor) *they are in the cathedral more than they are in the stock exchange*. This allows them to draw symbolic boundaries between their position and the stances taken by those in the commercial houses:

> I think one thing, we're very lucky that we're still in a position where we don't have to publish something that we don't like. And with all respect to larger publishers with different challenges that do have to publish things that maybe the individual editor thinks is crap but they know it's going to sell, fortunately we don't have to do that. And that's a great position to be in because we can start with that very personal reaction to what you're reading and whether you like it or not (Silvio, Editor-in-Chief, US).

> I mean, you can just think of the whole 50 Shades of Grey phenomenon and all that stuff, I mean, we would never have published that. If that had been offered to us exclusively we would never have published it. We would just have said this is complete crap, go away. But other publishers think, wow, there are $5 million signs here. We're different in that way (Nicholas, Publisher, AUS).

THE ETHICS OF INCLUSIVITY AND THE DIVERSITY DEFICIT

Ethical judgements have their sources outside the literary field and accord with the civic world described by Boltanski and Thévenot (1999, 2006) in their analysis of various orders of worth to which individuals refer when justifying their actions to others.[3] The need for justification occurs during particular critical moments or situations where, in order to resolve the dispute, individuals seek to find common ground in a principle that is 'superior to persons and can institute equivalence among them' (Boltanski, 2012, p. 14). Each order of worth provides common constraints when individuals are engaged in dispute and 'they must base their arguments on strong evidence, expressing in this way their will to converge towards a resolution of their disagreement' (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999, p. 366). When referring to the civic order of worth, individuals 'give up their particular interests and direct themselves towards the common good' (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999, p. 371). Along these lines, respondents in my study appeal to the civic order of worth and, more specifically, to an ethics of inclusivity.

Claire Squires (2017a) draws attention to the diversity deficit in the world of publishing, finding that discrimination is implicit and explicit, institutionalized and systemic. These findings are reinforced by O'Brien et al.'s (2016) analysis of the 2014 British Labour Force Survey, which demonstrates that publishing is socially exclusive and dominated by those from professional and managerial backgrounds (2016, p. 123). Other research demonstrates that while white, middle-class writers are published across various genres, BAME writers are often pigeon-holed and expected to conform to an aesthetic of romantic fetishization that draws on their heritage (Saha, 2016). This is reinforced by technologies such as BookScan, which are deployed in order to predict the likely sales of books based on sales of 'similar' books (e.g. books written by other Asian authors) (Saha, 2016). This rationalizing attempt to anticipate the unpredictability of the book market relies on and reinforces essentialist notions of racial difference. Saha (2016, p. 2) refers to this as the 'rationalizing/racializing logic of capital'. As Driscoll and Squires (2018a) point out, gender inequalities also need to be considered; publishing is an industry staffed, in the main, by women, but with men more likely to be occupying positions of power. Documenting their trip to the 2017 Frankfurt Book Fair, they argue that the publishing world is dominated by casual sexism; they 'observed multiple moments of sleaze across the halls as men looked women up and down, and took advantage of their captive positions on stands to talk at them for extended periods; a casual appropriation of women's bodies and attention' (Driscoll and Squires, 2018a, p. 2). In another article, using games as metaphors with which to playfully critique book festivals, they draw attention to the 'Anglophone and metropolitan dominance of world literary markets' (Driscoll and Squires, 2018b, p. 24). In my research, 25 of the publishers interviewed made 56 references to diversity issues reflected on how these impact on their book acquisition plans. At the same time, if any of the publishers were resistant to confronting the diversity deficit, they would be unlikely to relate this to me in the context of an interview.

One publisher recounted an intense discussions that followed after one of their authors was arrested on suspicion of sex offences. How would they deal with this situation? This author had had a long-established and celebrated career. Moreover, the book that was due to be published accorded with the publisher's criteria of literary excellence. However, the publisher vetoed the publication of the book on ethical grounds: it would not be appropriate to publish a book by a convicted sex offender no matter how good the content. In a comparable instance, a book dealing with a long-established author was called into question when the manuscript arrived: it contained sexist, misogynistic content and thus was deemed inappropriate for publication. Here we see the ethical dimension of evaluative judgements in play in this appeal to the civic order of worth. Another instance can be seen in relation to the principal of inclusivity. In deciding what to publish, the independent publishers seek to distinguish themselves from the large corporations through their attempts to address the diversity deficit. While corporate houses are deemed content with 'their one black writer', several of the independents outline how they are attempting to address the lack of BAME representation in publishing:

> The small presses, yes, they've picked up a lot of stuff that the New York publishers just won't do … You know, our press was founded by a queer writer of colour, that's not that common, and diversity is part of what we think about, all kinds of diversity, and it goes from everything to race and sexuality and gender, but also age, that we have a 91-year-old author, you know? People can forget there's an older generation. I think sometimes the historical can be lost (Paulo, Publisher, US).

> We don't…we're not looking to make a quick buck. We're not looking to…for the huge best seller outside poetry as it were. So, yes, we're constrained in that sense and we're also constrained in various ethical ways which…well, we've always been that actually in terms of publishing a wide range of authors from a wide range of backgrounds and nationalities in fact (Alexander, Founding Director, UK).

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[3] These six orders of worth are civic, market, industrial, domestic, inspiration and fame (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006).

Many state that they are taking steps to address the diversity deficit. These include hosting readings specifically for BAME and LGBTQIA groups, those with mental health issues, the homeless; creating screen reader adaptable books for those with visual impairments; and publishing anthologies of poems written by deaf and disabled authors. Such practices are often costly and only made possible by State funding or private patronage. Other measures include offering paid internships to encourage those not able to work for free; inviting younger writers and more women onto editorial boards; giving talks and seminars in schools to encourage careers in publishing; curating literary events whose invitees are not the usual crowd; pushing submissions from BAME groups to the front of the 'slush pile', and openly inviting submissions – on the website platform – from under-represented groups:

R1: … we were at a publisher's meeting, and the keynote speaker was … giving this talk about diversifying. And … she had this hashtag, like, Canadian publishing is so white.
I: Yeah.
R1: Which was like, right after the Oscars, with the Oscars' so white hashtag, right.
I: Yeah, yeah.
R1: And we were sitting in the room, and we were looking around, and we were like, you know, we were kind of...
R2: White publishers all in the room.
R1: Everyone, right, I think there might have been one person of colour, and one indigenous publisher in the room, and that was it.
R2: Uh-huh (Lucy, Publisher, CAN).
R1: And so somebody in the room said, well I only get manuscripts from, like, white dudes, like, what can I do, right. And [she] just said, well all you have to do is just ask, just let them know that you want to, that you're interested in seeing, like, you don't have to tell them that you're gonna publish them. But, like, invite them into the thing. Because often, people will come to your website, and look around, and then they'll just see nothing but white, and they'll be like, well this isn't for me (Louis, Publisher, CAN).

Of course, adding a message to a website only has limited value and cannot overturn major structural obstacles to access in the field of publishing. Nevertheless, this technique has apparently been very effective in encouraging minority groups to submit their work. Another strategy is reverse gentrification, which is justified in these terms:

Because the industry is … run by such a kind of college educated upper middle class white that's reflected a lot in the books, and one of our conscious missions … reverse gentrification … is to try to publish books by authors that don't necessarily look like us, that maybe, you know, are not even the target audience for books that need a place and a voice (Chrissie, Managing Editor, US).

Carrying on as usual would be enough to perpetuate the diversity deficit. As one publisher observed, 'because of … whatever kind of cis hetero circles I inevitably move in, if I allowed that to happen completely it would be an entirely male list probably, because almost everything I get submitted is from men' (Theo, Publisher, UK). Avant-garde poetry networks lack ethnic diversity and are over-represented by the white, university-educated middle classes whereas there is more ethnic diversity on the spoken-word circuit. Without actively intervening, there is a danger of all-male lists. Publishers expressed similar problems in relation to diversity of readership. As a senior figure at a German publisher puts it, 'we can see what is the average reader … and he is male, he is between 50 and 60 and he has academic education. So that's what we have now and we must find ways where to get new readers, younger readers, more female readers' (Lottie, senior figure, GER).

Another means of 'contributing to the conversation' involves engaging with contemporary social and political issues:

R1: … in the early days, we were really excited about how the writer was experimenting with the genre they were working in. Now, what really excites us is that not only are they doing that, but they're also doing something that, for lack of a better word, is sort of political, you know. But, you know, this interesting mash up of an innovative novel that's also dealing with the questions of feminism, or an interesting book of poetry that's dealing with not only the question of how a poem works, but also, the question of, you know, the person's place within the world as... (Louis, Publisher, CAN).
R2: As a transperson, or commentary on the environment, like, whatever (Lucy, Publisher, CAN).

> R: I think it's definitely a sort of objective measurement, is around this idea of contemporary … some larger canvas contributing to the über-conversation about how we're living now … what does it mean to be human in the 21st century (Silvia, Publisher, US).

There is a sense among the responses that a pure aesthetic, formal innovation or even a postmodern playfulness is not enough in this era. This is because field-specific aesthetic criteria are augmented by criteria from outside the field, inspired by political, environmental or social issues and the intersectional dynamics of identity.

However, judgements placing value on 'diversity' are often commingled with consideration of aesthetic criteria:

> So if you looked at Caribbean writing up to about the 1990s, it was very masculine … so there is another story within that where there are a lot of writers who are exploring their sense of Caribbean-ness but their gendered Caribbean-ness. Quite recently, we've done a thing where Caribbean gay sensibilities have been part of the fiction and poetry we've been publishing … [But] I wouldn't publish a book just because it was a gay novel or…it's got to be good (Larry, Publisher, UK).

Here we see that evaluative judgements are rarely if ever expressed as pure types but often consist of a blend of different elements. As Weber (1968, p. 26) pointed out in his analysis of social action, it is very rare that we find a concrete type that is characterized exclusively by one mode of orientation (e.g. *entirely* value rational, affective or instrumentally rational). Therefore, the identification of 'ideal' or 'pure' types serve as tools with which to distinguish between the various modes of orientation that make reality so messy and complicated. Along similar lines, evaluative judgements are often composed of a number of elements. For example, despite his civic-minded, ethically-driven stance on publishing authors from under-represented groups, Larry maintains that the work 'has got to be good'. At the same time, many publishers are categorical that there are certain things that they would never publish, no matter how good stylistically: these include works that are deemed to be racist, sexist, homophobic, right-wing, ableist, anti-Semitic, gratuitously violent or demeaning of a particular religion.

THE TEMPORAL DIMENSION OF EVALUATIVE JUDGEMENTS: *IN THE MOMENT AND OVER TIME*

In the interviews, there were 25 references to the temporal dimension of evaluative judgements. This dimension is often neglected in analyses of taste that focus on its social determinants (Stewart, 2015). Sociologists have been attentive to the *sweep of time* that leads up to the moment of aesthetic engagement, to the intersection of habitus and field (Bourdieu, 1984; Stewart, 2015). However, this is not the whole story. The *particular moment* of aesthetic engagement is also dependent on a range of dynamic contextual factors that can sway an individual's evaluative judgements (Stewart, 2012, 2015). In the case of independent publishers, the extent to which they are drawn to a book might depend on contextual factors: the lighting, the degree of comfort in the room, their degree of affability with others present, their personal mood and the extent to which they feel under pressure. Moreover, the moment of engagement is characterized by the degree of intensity and this might be somewhere between passionate engagement (Benzecry, 2011; Hennion, 2001) and indifference (Ngai, 2012). Another dynamic to consider is whether the aesthetic engagement is *sustained* or *distracted* (Stewart, 2015).

Quick-fire judgements are significant when considering manuscripts for publication. They are indicative of the trained habitus of the publishers and their familiarity with field-specific aesthetic criteria. This kind of bodily judgement is referred to by Claire Squires (2017b, p. 29) in her research on publishers' tastes in the era of big data, where many of the respondents discussed their decision-making in terms of 'instinct' and 'gut reactions', and in Friedman's (2012, p. 32) research where notions of 'talent' are aesthetic judgements aligned with the personal tastes of scouts working in the more autonomous region of the comedy field. Here, the reputation of agents is gained on the basis of their ability to demonstrate the 'aesthetic capacity to identify and propel culturally legitimate comedy' (2012, p. 35). In my study, I argue that 'gut reaction' refers to a bodily-attuned familiarity with the current state of play in the field of publishing (e.g. knowing immediately what is trite, what is cutting-edge). This 'gut reaction' is expressed *in the moment* and enables the publisher to swiftly discard unsuitable manuscripts:

> I always say that you can look and in the first five pages if something doesn't grab you it's out. I mean, really, you should love it, it should be amazing (Paulo, Publisher, US).

> It doesn't usually take me long in a manuscript to know that I'm personally not interested in publishing it. Sometimes just a few pages tells me a lot (Andre, Publisher, US).

> Because what happens is that, you can look at page one, and often you know at the bottom of page one that you don't want to do it (Christopher, Publisher, UK)

On the other hand, evaluative judgements are not just made in the moment. They also extend over time:

> I think if I can go away from a manuscript and a couple of days later the poems are still bothering me and I'm still thinking about them and I can still actually remember them I know that's a good collection (Charlotte, Publisher, UK).

> R: There will be some cases where I put it back in the drawer, kind of thing, because I can't make up my mind.
> I: Aha.
> R: And just wait, the drawer is a very valuable critic (Christopher, Publisher, UK).

Here, the drawer becomes a tool, an aid to critical judgement. Time thus works as a filtering process through which value is attributed. The process might take a matter of days, weeks or months. When more strategic, economic calculations are at play, different aspects of time are foregrounded. For example, in contrast to the more heteronomous sectors of the publishing world where a book is given a window of six to eight weeks during which it can expect the overwhelming majority of sales, many of the independent literary publishers project their expectations into the distant future. Here, they are referring to the importance of backlists and legacies:

> What you want is these books that sell over time, these things that go out the gate, they get good attention, they sell well and then they never stop, and that's the dream of publishing is to have back list titles, and New Directions has the Tennessee Williams back list. How many people still teach The Glass Menagerie every year in schools? Or Grove Press, they have Beckett, you don't have to worry with Beckett. They have Beckett, they have Henry Miller, Burroughs, these guys that were barely sold in the first couple of years (Paulo, Publisher, US).

In this example, value is projected into the future and so gratification is deferred. Creating a legacy involves patience and a careful nurturing of authors with the awareness that they will need to be given time to mature and to find their voices:

> I think for fiction … we're definitely not looking for a one book project, we're looking for talented writers … a person who has a lot of talent, and we can train or develop her or his talent. It might take years … it might take two years before anything is published. We never, ever publish anything straight, like, this is good, let's go … so we pay a lot of attention, and it takes a lot of time, the whole process of finding, as I said, the right direction for this person, or for the book, so I think the editors are very good at picking and recognising this kind of talent. It might be something that the writer doesn't recognise in him or herself, but there is this talent that needs to be developed (Sarah, Publisher, FIN).

Many of the independents are 'backlist' presses, confident that the value of their books will extend into the distant future. For example, several of them anticipate that the authors that they publish will still be read 50 or 100 years from now. As one publisher puts it, 'it takes a generation for these things to settle out' (Max, Publisher, US). Long-term legitimization is glimpsed when authors start to appear in handbooks and anthologies (Maria, Publisher, UK). A further sign of such legitimization is inclusion in academic curricula or institutional collections.

CONCLUSION

At the end of *Merchants of Culture*, Thompson (2012, p. 380) reflects on what he refers to as trouble in the publishing trade, arguing that trade publishers, pressured by budgetary demands, fall into a mind-set of short-termism, and publish books that 'are not books that add much to the cultural well-being (or even, for that matter, the entertainment) of the human race'. However, even these measures might not be enough to cover up for the fact that growth targets have often been met through mergers and acquisitions without which the financial situation of the bigger publishers would look very different. In my research findings, 'trouble in the trade' lurks in the background, though I find that many of the independent presses are flourishing in spite of the existential dangers they face (Bourdieu, 2003). This accords with Thompson's argument about the polarization of the field which is comprised of 'a small number of very large corporations which, between them, command a substantial share of the market, and a large number of very small publishing operations' (Thompson, 2012, p. 147). With the 'shrinking of the middle', there has been some room for independents to thrive even if they face a perpetual struggle to stay afloat. This article highlights how independent publishers stake out their position through the field-specific aesthetic and ethical criteria they deploy when selecting books. Moreover, they are confident that in the course of time, their judgements will be validated as their backlists grow and the titles accrue further symbolic capital.

I have drawn attention to three key dimensions of evaluative judgements: aesthetic, ethical and temporal. Each of these clashes with modes of judgement that are based on economic reasoning though in many instances, the *portfolio approach* adopted by some of the bigger independents is favoured. This is where they publish books that accord with their aesthetic preferences *alongside* titles that are likely to appeal to particular market segments. I find that *field-specific* aesthetic judgements assess the extent to which literary manuscripts *contribute to the conversation* by responding to developments in the field. In contrast, decisions made on this basis of ethical considerations mean that the publishers' output might veer from 'art for art's sake' towards more heteronomous regions of cultural production in order to contribute towards a sense of the common good. Finally, the temporal dimension of evaluative judgements distinguishes independent presses from their rivals by pointing to a distant future of literary fame that reaches far beyond the marketing schedules of the corporate houses.

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Mediating Identities: Community Arts, Media, and Collective Identity in the Frontline Resistance to Fracking

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ABSTRACT

Vista Alegre is a municipality in the province of Neuquén, Argentina. Situated in a region traditionally known for its fruticulture economy, Vista Alegre has recently been identified as a potential location for fracking, a development that has resulted in widespread opposition among its inhabitants. The fight against fracking in Vista Alegre has followed a number of channels, from road blockades to art festivals and a legal challenge to the municipality. This paper analyses the conflict focusing on the forms of community art and media employed by the local assembly against fracking to widen and sustain participation in the struggle, and the role that these media have in mediating collective identity processes in the fight against fracking. Building on the concept of mediated identities (Fornäs and Xinaris, 2013), I look at these community art and media practices as dialogical (Kester, 2004). I propose that activities such as art festivals, mural painting and open radios contribute to collective identity processes through three mediating tactics: participation, knowledge sharing and the event modality. I conclude by arguing that these forms of community arts and media can be seen as a productive output of the conflict (Merlinsky, 2015), as they become crucial practices of cultural resistance.

Keywords: collective identity, mediated identity, community arts, community media, fracking

INTRODUCTION

The Argentine Patagonia, the southernmost region of the country, was incorporated into the national territory in the late nineteenth century following the 'conquest of the desert', a military campaign that resulted in the killing and displacement of thousands of indigenous people. The region has for long been marked by fossil fuel extraction, but it has recently become a site of increased economic interest to national and transnational capital (Riffo, 2017). This expansion of the extractive industries has been met by the resistance of indigenous mapuche communities claiming back ancestral land and other local communities protecting their environment and traditional economies (Svampa and Viale, p. 2014). Protests against the socioenvironmental effects of fossil fuel extraction have for decades taken place in the region (GER-GEMSAL, 2013, p. 771), but it has been since the recent development of the *Vaca Muerta* (Dead Cow) megaproject, which brought with it the technology of fracking[1] (Taller Ecologista and Observatorio Petrolero Sur in EJES, 2018), that fossil fuel extraction and its surrounding conflicts have reached a new peak in terms of intensified mobilisations, followed by state repression.

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[1] Hydraulic fracturing or fracking is a technique employed for the extraction of non-conventional fossil fuels that has been linked to water source contamination and seismic activity. For an overview of fracking see BBC News (2015) 'What is fracking and why is it controversial?' http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-14432401

Focusing on the case of Vista Alegre, a community resisting fracking in their territory in the province of Neuquén, Argentina, this article seeks to interrogate the concept of mediated identities in the context of collective action at a local level. I build on scholarly work on the collective identity of movements (Melucci, 1996; Klandermans et al., 2002) and the role of art and media in community identity processes (Bang and Wajnerman, 2010; Dewey, 1985, 2005; Kester, 2004, 2011; Lowe, 2000) by applying the concept of mediated identities (Fornäs and Xinaris, 2013) at the micro level and analysing the tactics through which mediation takes place in community arts and media practices in Argentina's frontline resistance to fracking.

Following a review of the literature, I describe the conflict surrounding fracking in Vista Alegre and the narratives of opposition that have emerged as a result. I then examine the role of three types of community arts and media—festivals, murals and 'open radios'—in the reimagining and sustaining of a collective identity that reinforces place-based elements while incorporating an anti-fracking stance. Adopting a perspective that considers the importance of collective identity in collective action and the dialogical potential of creative practice, I argue that the rich arts and media programme of Vista Alegre's assembly against fracking has taken a central role in championing the transformation of the locality's collective identity as a way of strengthening collective action. Through an analysis of specific examples, I propose that there are three tactics in the production of community arts and media that are employed in order to mediate this process at a local level: participation, knowledge sharing and the event modality. As a result of this interrogation, this article makes three specific contributions. First, it advances research on the culture and identity of social movements and collective action by expanding the theorisation of collective identity mediation at the micro level. Second, it proposes an empirically-informed frame of analysis for understanding the tactics through which community arts and media can be employed in mobilising communities and facilitating collective identity processes. And third, it offers an empirical account of the growing but still under-studied conflict surrounding fracking in the Argentine Patagonia.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Collective Identity in Collective Action

Collective identity, be that in the context of community resistance or large-scale social movements, is a foundational feature of collective action (Melucci, 1996). As Fornäs and Xinaris explain,

Identity formation can be broadly described as the development of ways to define and give meaning to individuals or collectives in relation to others and to themselves. Identities are formed both from within and from the outside, in a complex interplay of mutual recognition and understanding of self and others (Fornäs and Xinaris 2013, p. 12).

Collective identity is central in activism because it 'creates a shortcut to participation' (Klandermans et al., 2002, p. 236). That is to say, that feeling part of a group or community and identifying with those involved tends to be a stronger draw than the demands and outcomes of the movement itself. Indeed, argues Melucci, 'isolated and rootless individuals never mobilize', and it is the relational networks embedded in the social fabric that 'facilitate involvement processes and make it less costly for individuals to invest in collective action' (Melucci, 1996, p. 65). Mobilisations are often started by those who already have an identity and wish to defend it. But identity is not fixed, it is 'constructed and negotiated through a recurrent process of activation of the relations that bind actors together' (Melucci, 1996, p. 70), and transforms alongside the evolution of movements (Della Porta and Diani 2007, p. 110). In collective action, collective identity processes are often facilitated by leading figures; these can be strong leaders or moderate ones—what Gerbaudo (2012) has termed 'choreographers'.

At a global scale, the environmental movement is not homogenous, and there is not one shared collective identity. However, research in the field of political ecology has noted the shared experiences of several communities at the frontlines of environmental degradation across the world, linking the environmental justice movement in the United States with the 'environmentalism of the poor' in Latin America, Africa and Asia, and suggesting the existence of a movement of global dimensions (Martinez-Alier et al., 2015, p. 732). This movement is global, even if most conflicts target local grievances, because such events belong to "classes of conflicts that appear regularly elsewhere in the world" –e.g. fracking—or because they raise the issue to a global scale through global networks (Ibid, 747). Within this, however, movements at a local scale develop their own narratives and identities. For this reason, it is useful to look at these in relation to place.

In his study of Occupy Mongkok, Yuen develops the concept of place-based collective identity. Place here is not only a physical space, but is 'conceived of as a historically, socially, and culturally constituted space', which serves to gather political actors and solidify a political force (Yuen, 2018, p. 3). When considering the role of place in identity we must also consider scale. A shift from community to movement, or from local to part of a wider, global struggle, as has been the case of Vista Alegre, can be understood within the frame of identity boundaries (Drury et al., 2003, p. 192). Boundary framing is a process, and it is the result of discussions within the collective

which allow people to define the internal relations of that collective and the ones with external actors (Drury et al., 2003, p. 206). Indeed, focusing on the role of interpersonal interactions is crucial for understanding how the social construction of meaning occurs (Klandermans, 1992). It follows that narratives also have a central role in the building of collective identities; in the context of conflict, narratives are important tools of communication, and can also be strategic (Polletta, 1998, p. 420). Political actors 'construct narratives in order to communicate their ideas to the organisations they are protesting against, to the general public, and to themselves' (Serafini, 2018).

Collective identity processes are shaped by the forms of media that activists use in order to generate and share symbols and stories related to a movement (Gerbaudo and Treré, 2015); both form and content matter. Collective identities can therefore be understood as mediated, when mediation, according to Fornäs and Xinaris, menas 'that something functions as a linking device between different entities', and 'media are socially organised technologies made for being used in the practices of communication that are prime examples of such mediating processes.' (Fornäs and Xinaris, 2013, p. 15). The two authors also argue that 'people shape their tools of communication that then shape them.' (Fornäs and Xinaris, 2013, p. 12). In collective action art and media serve as the channels through which the narratives of a movement are communicated to those within and outside of it, but also, they are often the tools and languages through which narratives are formed and identities negotiated (Serafini, 2018), or in other words, mediated. Following this line of thought, I will now move on to an exploration of community arts and media as practices through which those interactions can take place.

Arts and Media as Community Resistance

Dewey's seminal work on art and society emphasises the importance of art as an experience, moving away from a focus on the artwork as object and towards an understanding of art as a transformative event (Dewey, 2005 [1934]). Dewey celebrates the accessibility of the popular arts, and argues that art can help develop the identity of citizens, and thus enable people to become politically active. At a community level, he adds, art can enable organising for problem solving, and foster debate over pressing issues within a community (Dewey, 1985 [1927]).

Community art can be regarded as 'a distinct setting for social interaction' (Lowe, 2000, p. 360). It is inclusive and collaborative in nature, and usually consists of artists working with non-artists in order to create work that is in the public interest (Raven, 1993; Lowe, 2000, p. 364). In the case of Vista Alegre, however, the art and media projects that emerged from the fight against fracking are initiatives of community members themselves; some of them artists and community organisers and others not. While artists and musicians from outside the neighbourhood sometimes take part in the activities, we could describe this type of community art as 'self-led', in order to distinguish it from the kind of participatory practices that bring outsider artists into an unknown setting, removing agency from the community and verging on the 'evangelical' (Shaughnessy, 2005, p. 209).

Community art provides experiences of community life and shared making that can enhance feelings of unity and belonging (Lowe, 2000, p. 366), as well as generating a sense of collective identity (Ibid, 377), working on common concerns, and developing feelings of solidarity (Ibid, p. 371). In the case of Vista Alegre, the community is already existing; what is sought by assembly organisers, as I will demonstrate, is an opportunity to widen the locus of shared identity and belonging from a shared culture and sense of place towards including also an element of joint opposition to fracking.

Looking at the Argentine context specifically and from the perspective of social psychology, Bang and Wajnerman (2010) argue that at a time where society is characterised by the weakening of relationships and the dismembering of spaces for community organisation, the generation of processes of collective art-making contributes to a community's ability to become agents of transformation in their immediate realities. One of the stages of collaborative art in community settings is the collective or 'group' process, in which a community has the opportunity to jointly deal with an issue or need. This process is not only the result of the interpersonal relationships established, but also of the participation in different decision-making processes on behalf of members, during which information is shared and common parameters and positions can be built (Bang and Wajnerman, 2010, p. 93). Bang and Wajnerman situate community art as a distinct kind of creative practice, different from 'elite' and 'commercial' art; that is, 'popular art', or art of the people. Borrowing from Ticio Escobar, they define popular art as the set of aesthetic expressions of a given culture which are able to reveal truths about that culture (Escobar, 2004, p. 153; Bang and Wajnerman, 2010, p. 95-96). Following Colombres (2004), they propose that popular art can be seen as rite (as opposed to spectacle, which would apply to other kinds of artistic events), because it facilitates the production and transformation of social reality, as opposed to a reproduction of it (Bang and Wajnerman, 2010, p. 97). Finally, in addition to being transformational for participants, we must consider that art can be strategically political both in its processes and in its content.

In a similar trajectory to community arts we find the field of community media. Community media 'have the power to move community members from being dependent and passive in order to become actively involved in the creation of a more meaningful society'(Paranjape, 2007, p. 468). Local, community media values local cultures and grassroots governance, and it '*both produce*[s] *and maintain*[s] the culture of a community' (Forde et al., 2002, p.

57, emphasis in the original). Same as in social movements and community arts, in community media practice we often find leaders, change makers, or 'media activists' who act as facilitators for collective practice with the aim of aiding community development (Paranjape, 2007, p. 462).

Within the broad range of practices that encompass community arts and media, a widespread genre is that of community murals. Community mural art is often associated with the renewal of urban spaces, but also with renewal in a broader social sense. Community mural movements tend to emerge during times of social, economic or political unrest, as was the case of the murals in Belfast during The Troubles (Lisle, 2006), and bring with them a desire for change (Marschall, 2002, p. 48). Murals can be tools and signs of revolution, but can also serve to sustain a movement internally. Reed explains how Chicano murals in the US went from earlier revolutionary artworks to pieces designed to promote pride against daily racism, and fight against intra-community violence (2005, p. 115). These motivations overlapped in turn with the function of murals in struggles over public space. Murals, adds Reed, are often collectively produced, making the process of production in itself participatory, and a space for collective identity building and political action (Ibid, p. 116).

Another example of such practices is the 'open radio'. A widespread form of movement building in Argentina, open radios are gatherings, usually taking place in a public space such as a square, during which a group of people host conversations, play live and/or recorded music, and make speeches. The radio can either be live broadcasted, or remain as an unrecorded, site-specific event. The open radio, argues Argote (2013), serves as a tool for communication, public visibility, and social relations. It takes a form—the radio—that is familiar to all, and repurposes it as a political tool in the public space. Open radios are linked to a tradition of community radio, a widespread medium for community development across the world. Community radio offers a space for people to talk about local concerns. It facilitates empowerment and the consolidation of communities. The local nature of these radios can play a crucial cultural role by 'enabling dialogue between diverse components of a community, building on a common background, shared culture and experience' (Forde et al., 2002, p. 56). Community development begins with talking about the issues that confront a community and how to address them (Gaynor and O'Brien, 2012, p. 437). Adopting an event modality within the medium of radio, open radios act as public events where these conversations can take place.

Another widespread form of community expression is the festival. Community festivals can be rooted in the local identity of the place where they are held (Scheper and Dalla Déa, 2012, p. 9), or be organised by communities with other kinds of shared identity, such as Latin American festivals, or groups organising around a particular issue like the fight against sexual assault (e.g. Li, 2018). In the same way as open radios, festivals bring together communities to one location, and as such can act as facilitators of other social processes such as political community organising. While festivals are not always politically oriented, they can be important spaces for counter-culture and political action, a tradition that goes back decades (McKay, 1996).

Collaborative and participatory creative practices mobilise certain 'forms of intersubjective affect, identification, and agency' (Kester, 2011, p. 68). Kester argues that in cases of collaborative and participatory art practice, 'the act of expression is generative and contingent. Rather than transmitting pre-existing content, expression takes place through an unfolding, extemporaneous process among an ensemble of collaborative agents.' (Ibid, p. 114). He frames these kinds of practices as dialogical (Kester, 2004), meaning that they 'involve the co-presence of bodies in real time', and 'revolve around an experience of reciprocal modelling, as each subject shifts roles, anticipates, mirrors, and challenges the other' (Kester, 2011, p. 114). In other words, when considering these forms of art and media and their potential for generating dialogical spaces, we are considering the capacity of media as 'vectors of affect' (Cefai, 2018).

METHODOLOGY

This study draws from a variety of qualitative data and focuses specifically on the way in which community arts and media have become crucial mediators in collective identity processes in Vista Alegre's fight against fracking. In the first place, I engaged in participant observation in Vista Alegre for three consecutive days in August 2017. The visit was part of a ten-day trip to the province of Neuquén, Patagonia, during which I engaged in participant observation and informal conversations and conducted six other in-depth interviews with environmental activists in other parts of the province. The trip to Vista Alegre was timed in order to coincide with the open radio event, and it included active participation in the open radio, informal conversations and joint meals with several community members, short trips to neighbouring localities and one semi-structured in-depth interview with Milton, a community leader. The interview with Milton was crucial to the study because of his elemental role in both the campaign against fracking and in the running of Vista Alegre's main cultural hub, 'El Remanso'. After hearing about the case of Vista Alegre through other interviewees months earlier and having spoken to Milton informally, I travelled there with the aim of studying a particular aspect of Vista Alegre's movement against fracking: the role of community arts and media. Having a concrete research question, this type of short-term

ethnographic approach was elected as a suitable research method (Van Maanen, 1988). The data gathered included audio recording, photographic records and fieldnotes.

In the second place, I conducted text analysis of the Facebook page for Vista Alegre Libre de Fracking y en Defensa de la Vida (Vista Alegre Fracking-Free and in Defence of Life) since its creation in May 2016 up to January 2018. This involved the analysis of both images and text about the campaign and the events and actions organised by the assembly, as well as posts sharing external content such as mainstream and alternative media articles. Finally, images of artwork and events taken during participant observation were also analysed, acknowledging the specific value of images in ethnographic research (Pink, 2001).

My approach involved methodological triangulation in order to present a nuanced analysis of the ways in which community art and media are being employed in collective action. Because the conflict in Vista Alegre is ongoing, this article does not aim to provide a closed analysis of the beginning, development and resolution of a conflict, or trace the evolution of collective identity. Rather, it looks at how community art and media are being instrumentalised in a context of socioenvironmental conflict of local and global dimensions, and aims to suggest a frame for understanding the role of community art and media as mediators in collective identity processes, and as vehicles for cultural resistance at the micro level.

THE THREAT OF FRACKING

Vista Alegre is a municipality in the province of Neuquén, Argentina, located 24km north of the provincial capital. It is situated in a region traditionally known for its fruticulture economy, and although not part of recognised indigenous mapuche territory, the majority of Vista Alegre's close to 4,000 inhabitants identify as being of mapuche ancestry[2]. In early 2016, inhabitants from Vista Alegre became aware of the government's intention to enable fracking in their locality. Oil extraction had for long been a major source of income in nearby parts of the province, and fracking, a non-conventional form of fossil fuel extraction, had begun to take place in recent years, following the discovery of the *Vaca Muerta* (Dead Cow) shale play, one of the largest reserves of non-conventional fossil fuels in the world (Taller Ecologista and Observatorio Petrolero Sur in EJES, 2018)[3]. In response to this development, members of the community began to carry out research on fracking and the potential risks associated with this technique, and consequently mobilised to try to ban fracking in the immediate area and nearby river banks[4]. They organised road blockades and handed out informational leaflets; they put together a report on the negative impacts of fracking collecting information from previous cases in Latin America and beyond; and they worked towards placing the issue in the media. That same year a number of community members decided to create an assembly, which they called Vista Alegre Libre de Fracking y en Defensa de la Vida (Vista Alegre Fracking-Free and in Defence of Life). They also began to generate alliances with other groups and sectors of society opposing fracking, such as the indigenous organisation Confederación Mapuche de Neuquén (a coalition of mapuche communities at provincial level), and the NGO Observatorio Petrolero Sur, a research organisation and oil industry watchdog. After a year of hearing rumours about the arrival of fracking followed by months of gathering information and over half a year of collective struggle, in December 2016 the community of Vista Alegre managed to submit an ordinance for the banning of fracking in the area during an extraordinary session of the local council. This was signed and approved unanimously and to the surprise of the provincial government, only to be declared unconstitutional a year later[5]. The conflict is still ongoing.

Vista Alegre has certain elements that define its collective identity as a municipality and community: its closeness to the river, the region's tradition of fruticulture, a way of living defined by the dynamics of small towns in rural areas, and its mapuche heritage. While the inhabitants of Vista Alegre are not part of a mapuche *lof* or community, elements of the mapuche cosmovision are embedded in their understanding of the environment and their position within it. Furthermore, there has been a recent strengthening and promotion of mapuche cultural heritage in the town, made manifest for instance in the offer of Mapudungun (mapuche language) lessons at the cultural centre. This celebration of mapuche heritage as well as Vista Alegre's collaboration with the Confederación Mapuche de Neuquén can be understood within a political resurgence of indigenous peoples and the formal establishment of

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[2] While there is no statistical data for this, participants have told me around 80% of the town's population identifies as having mapuche heritage.

[3] The exploitation of non-conventional fossil fuels in the area had begun to be championed by the centre-left administration of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in the last decade, and continues to be a strategic activity for the right-wing government of Mauricio Macri, elected in late 2015.

[4] At the time the Argentinian state oil company YPF (with Petrobras and Pampa) had already drilled some conventional wells in the area, and the company Pan American Energy was operating the gas field Lindero Atravesado, also in the adjacent area. For more information see the following report by Platform (2017) 'Argentinian community defies BP and Petrobras to ban fracking'
https://platformlondon.org/2017/04/03/vista-alegre-fracking-argentina/

[5] See (in Spanish) Loncopan Berti, Laura (2017) 'Vista Alegre se quedó sin su ordenanza antifracking'. *Río Negro*.
http://www.rionegro.com.ar/region/declaran-inconstitucional-una-ordenanza-antifracking-ED4162798

their collective rights, which in Argentina and other countries in the region began in the 1990s. It must also be considered in relation to a history of devastating environmental, economic and social effects of conventional fossil fuel extraction in and around mapuche territory in the region, which also goes back decades (Pérez Roig, 2014, p. 160).

The neighbourhood of Costa de Reyes, one of the four neighbourhoods making up Vista Alegre, had also been particularly marked by a recent period of gang-related violence among young people in the early 2000s, which led to the death of a young man. The people of Costa de Reyes took this as a turning point and decided to take action to improve the lives of their young people. They realised *murga*, a form of combined arts performance genre from the banks of the Río de la Plata in Argentina and Uruguay, could function as an activity that combined many different art forms, from painting to poetry, dance and percussion, and that it could also generate a space for politics, meaning it could be a space for building an understanding and critique of society. Led by Milton, a local community leader, in the year 2000 they began the *murga* Sueños Compartidos (Shared Dreams), and became a referent group for the other neighbourhoods in the district as well. *Murga*, says Milton, has an important element of critique, but it can also be about proposing alternatives. He adds: "With the *murga* for instance we criticised the educational system, so we then decided to generate a library where we could offer courses to children in the neighbourhood."[6]

The arrival of fracking as a new, external threat, led to a number of changes that had an impact on the community of Vista Alegre. In the first place, the neighbourhood went from dealing with internal conflict—sustaining the cultural provision for the youth in order to avoid a return to violence and rivalry—to dealing with an external threat. Second, they went from having a lifestyle that is in itself alternative to advanced capitalism, to being part of a protest movement against extractive capitalism and imperialism, together with other organisations on a local and transnational level. These two transformations took place under the threat of the most brutal of changes: the pollution of the rivers Neuquén and Negro, and the shift in the region from an agricultural economy to a fossil fuel one, with all the social, economic, and environmental changes that would entail.

BUILDING AN OPPOSITION

Milton López is a mover and shaker in the Vista Alegre community. He runs the local cultural centre El Remanso (the only cultural centre in the municipality), and has been at the forefront of the fight against fracking since 2016. I first met Milton in person in August 2017 when I visited the Costa de Reyes neighbourhood, which is the active centre of the fight against fracking. He told me about how the community had been organising since the previous year, talking to other members of the community, going on marches, attending meetings to learn more about the topic, and gathering whatever little money they could to sustain the struggle. Milton describes the threat of fracking entering their community in the following way:

> We believe that this is aiming towards the dispossession of communities and their ability to continue to live almost independently from the capitalist system. Because here you have some land, and you have good water, you can keep your own animals. But when you break apart the ranches, when pollution starts, and when the production zones begin to be dismantled for the construction of housing for those working in the fossil fuel industry, all of this generates inequality […] We live in a privileged place, and we think this is what bothers the state. That with so little money we can be as happy as we are, that we can live so well.

Contrary to the personal transformations manifested in the up taking of ecological values or 'greening of the self' undertaken by subjects as a result of environmentalism in the Global North, in countries like Argentina environmental conflicts often involve 'a broad array of actors seeking to defend local livelihoods and wellbeing' (Merlinsky and Latta, 2012, pp. 191-2). Furthermore, 'popular actors increasingly seek to participate in the construction of environmental problems in reference to dominant scientific and technological cognitive frames' (Merlinsky and Latta, 2012, p. 192). The narrative against fracking espoused by Milton and the assembly in Vista Alegre is not one that focuses specifically on environmental, land, economic, or health issues, but rather adopts a holistic perspective. What is at stake is a way of life. An extract from the Facebook page description of Vista Alegre Libre de Fracking, which was initially created with the aim of organising the local community but now has gathered hundreds of external followers, states the following:

> It is important that the whole community joins this claim, this struggle that is just beginning. When the years go by, we want to still be able to enjoy the river with our family, our children, and future

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[6] Milton López, personal interview, 26 August 2017. Translation from Spanish by the author.

generations. This is only the beginning, it doesn't matter which culture or ideology represents us, because if we do not act fast the consequences of pollution will drag us all down with them[7].

The above statements put forward three main points: First that the struggle is for common goods (specifically, the river), and second, that the damaging or disappearance of the commons would destroy a whole way of life. These statements manifest the inherent tension between the ideology and practices of extraction and that of the commons (Dahlin and Fredriksson, 2017, p. 254), also questioning the productivist criteria with which Western rationality evaluates the sustainability of territories (GER-GEMSAL, 2013, p. 767). But the struggle is not only a material one, it is also a symbolic one (Dahlin and Fredriksson, 2017, p. 268), as the understanding of water and land in Vista Alegre does not fit into the extractivist logic of resource. The third point, made in the Facebook page statement, is that everyone is at risk, and everyone should therefore be part of the mobilisation against fracking. Getting the whole community behind this cause is something Milton has been working on since the beginning of the conflict. As the man behind El Remanso, he has used his position to facilitate the sharing of information and encourage community members to join the fight through the use of community arts and media, as I will expand on later.

The assembly is aware of the way in which their localised struggle is also connected with other movements at a global scale, as is often the case in movements resisting fracking (Stasik, 2017). In our conversations, members of Vista Alegre's assembly made reference to other movements against fracking they have established contact with, such as those in the United States. Also, the assembly often shares information about fracking in other countries through their Facebook page. Mobilisations against fracking can be described as 'place-based yet engaging with transnational networks' (Escobar, 2004, p. 221). This gives place to the building of a narrative that draws from pre-existent struggles against fracking in other parts of the globe; that adheres to an anti-imperialist stance that is widespread in the Latin American region, but that is still also centred around 'place-based epistemologies, economies and ecologies' (Escobar, 2004, 2008). In other words, it not only attempts to preserve the characteristics of the locality, but also upholds the relationship between the local community and the land as a legitimate source of knowledge and as a relationship under threat to be preserved.

THE ROLE OF THE ARTS AND MEDIA IN THE FIGHT AGAINST FRACKING

From the success of the *murga* project and the need and want to generate more cultural activities for both young and old members of the community, came El Remanso, Vista Alegre's cultural centre situated in the neighbourhood of Costa de Reyes. The centre is open to anyone who wants to share a particular knowledge or skill. It has a closed activities room and an open-air stage in the back garden, which was collectively built by a group of neighbours. Milton explained how that stage has been a platform for much of their communications activities in the fight against fracking. It allows them to host bands or shows, and allows the rest of the local community to come along and hear about the struggle. This way, he said, people slowly begin to understand what's going on.

From the belly of El Remanso came a number of activities aimed at building a collective fight against fracking. In March 2017 El Remanso held a festival called Art Festival in Defence of the Rivers. The festival was held outdoors, and it featured photography and painting exhibitions by local artists, live music, games, sharing of food, and sharing of information about the current issues affecting the two main rivers in the Neuquén province. From the Facebook page of El Remanso, and later shared in the assembly's page, read the words:

> Last Saturday we shared a day of pure magic, of art, of small big rites that filled us with strength. With certainty and reaffirming that we are on the right path: the path of collective struggle, of a struggle that includes the arts, with the same loved ones as always and with others yet to meet.

The reason people came and listened, according to Milton, is that El Remanso had already been able to demonstrate a consistently strong work ethic through previous projects, such as the *murga*. In other words, Milton argues that the tangible impact that the work of El Remanso has had on the social fabric of the neighbourhood is why people also attend cultural events related to fracking. This trust is evidenced by the fact that the centre survives only on support from the local community, as confirmed by other community members I encountered on my trip. It was also corroborated by my observations of the planning and delivery of the open radio, which will be described shortly.

Another visual arts initiative that emerged from El Remanso in the context of resistance to fracking was the painting of murals in Costa de Reyes. Led by a local artist and art teacher, young people from the area took part in the design and making of four murals situated at the entrance of the neighbourhood in November 2016. One of

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[7] This statement features as the page description for the assembly's public Facebook page. Translation from Spanish by the author.

Figure 1. Mural reading 'We are children of the river'. Photograph by the author

the murals presents the image of the land, a blue sky and the river morphing with the figure of a womb, and surrounded by the sun, the moon, and birds. The mural also reads the phrase 'we are the children of the river' (**Figure 1**). The second one is an image of cultural centre El Remanso next to the river, also featuring musical instruments and an image of a shining sun. A third mural states 'Welcome to Costa de Reyes, land where dreams are shared', and shows a man picking red apples from a tree, a symbol of the local fruticulture economy (**Figure 2**). And the fourth mural shows the image of an indigenous woman with black breaded hair making bread, and surrounded by flora.

All four murals allude to elements of Vista Alegre's place-based identity. Some of the pieces also make reference to the cultural activities of the neighbourhood specifically: the description of Costa de Reyes as a land where dreams are shared refers to the *murga* Sueños Compartidos, and the image of El Remanso celebrates the activities of the local cultural centre. Finally, several elements represented in the murals such as the symbiotic relationship to the river, the traditional local economy, and the indigenous heritage, which are central to Vista Alegre's place-based identity, have also been placed at the centre of local narratives against fracking. In addition to the aforementioned murals, in 2018 the assembly organised further mural-painting events, which they called *muraladas*, and which featured visiting artists from outside the area. Mural-painting is conceived of here as an event-based and process-centred community art form that engages local youth, and also, as an output that becomes a long-standing in situ communication piece.

The third medium that people in Vista Alegre have employed in the fight against fracking is the open radio. The Costa de Reyes neighbourhood was host to an open radio on 26 August 2017, which I attended during my visit. The event had a slow start in the early afternoon, and went on until the early evening. Around 3:00pm a sound system was set up in a local square, and a DJ started playing music. People began to arrive slowly, encouraged by Milton who regularly interrupted the music to invite the local community into the square, and let them know we were going to have an afternoon of games, music, community, and updates on the fight against fracking. Overall around 100 people attended the event, many of whom were children, and joined the games Milton had prepared. There were also two bands playing. The first, Sequía, played folk music with political messages. In-between songs they explained the poetic and political meanings of their songs and expressed their opposition to fracking, and they also addressed the crowd in Mapudungun, the mapuche language. The second band that played towards the end

Figure 2. Mural reading 'Welcome to Costa de Reyes, land where dreams are shared'. Photograph by the author

of the event was a local band. They played *chamamé* (an upbeat Argentine folk genre), and the event came to a close with dancing.

Another important aspect of the event was food. We made *torta frita* (a pastry made out of flour, water, and lard) on the side of the square, and prepared hot chocolate. In a humorous tone, Milton said on the microphone 'let the water be for *torta frita* and *mate*[8], not for fracking!'. Throughout the event Milton provided a few brief updates on the ordinance the assembly had presented in order to ban fracking in the municipality. As a guest from the UK, I was also invited to say a few words about the fight against fracking in my country of residence, contributing to reinforcing the global level of the struggle. Overall the event was as much of a community-building exercise as it was an event for sharing information. A limited amount of updates on the legal status of the ordinance were provided through the microphone, and updates were also shared with people on a one-on-one basis as they arrived in the square.

TACTICS FOR THE MEDIATION OF COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

Considering the examples discussed and the perspectives offered in the reviewed literature, I was able to identify three main, overlapping tactics that characterise the way in which arts and media practices are being instrumentalised in the fight against fracking in Vista Alegre with the aim of consolidating collective identity and as a result, strengthening collective action. These are participation, knowledge sharing and the event modality. By considering these three concepts, we can further understand the ways in which community arts and media can take on a role in collective struggle.

The first tactic is participation. The above events allow instances for participation and the strengthening of social relations, such as joint cooking, dancing, playing music, and presenting creative work. Creative participation gives place to the 'group process' outlined by Bang and Wajnerman (2010), and can lead to feelings of ownership over a project, to sustained involvement and to transformations at the individual and collective level (Kester, 2004; Bang and Wajnerman, 2010). Furthermore, in the context of social movements and activism, creative participation

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[8] Mate is an herbal infusion common in several South American countries.

can be a pathway to political participation (Serafini, 2018b). Participation is an important element of mural painting, as young people are given the opportunity to decide what elements represent them and their neighbourhood and what it is they are fighting for. They are also provided an opportunity to produce the murals themselves, thus becoming active agents in the building and representation of the neighbourhood's collective identity on both a discursive and material level. Events such as festivals also allow participation on multiple levels, from socialising to the opportunity to exhibit work or perform for the community, as several local artists did.

The second tactic is knowledge sharing. During events such as festivals and open radios, knowledge sharing about fracking and the developments in the conflict is carried out in two ways: through general announcements and speeches, and through one-to-one conversations that take place as part of socialising. In mural painting on the other hand, there are two stages of knowledge-sharing: the first is a communal sharing during the production of the mural. This is not restricted to the conflict surrounding fracking, but also involves the sharing of feelings and ideas about the neighbourhood, the river, and the identity of the area. The second involves the sharing of these ideas and feelings with the wider community once the murals are done, and take on their role as agents in the construction and representation of local narratives and a collective identity. Community arts and media are therefore sites where knowledge is both shared (news and technical information) and dialogically generated (local narratives about the conflict).

The third tactic is the event modality. During special, programmed events such as festivals and open radios, community members are drawn together into a particular space at a particular time. But other art forms which are usually not regarded as event-based, such as mural art, can adopt an event modality as well when framed as such by organisers. This was the case for the recent *muraladas* (mural painting public events) in Vista Alegre, which featured visiting artists. Indeed, the turning of mural painting into an event is common to other socioenvironmental struggles in Argentina, as is the case of the movement against open-pit mining in Andalgalá, province of Catamarca[9]. The event modality dictates a cultural calendar and acts as a way of bringing the community together. It allows specific instances of participation and knowledge sharing (e.g. through one-to-one informal conversations or through amplified, performative announcements) that would not be possible on such scale, for instance, if the chosen media was a community newspaper.

These art and community media forms and the dynamics they allow can be seen as dialogical, as they are collectively built, generate social spaces, and allow horizontal conversations and transformations. Milton and other members of the assembly are taking the creative efforts and communal forms of artmaking that had already been flourishing in the neighbourhood since the creation of El Remanso and the *murga*, and using these and new practices for generating transformational spaces that can strengthen the local resistance to fracking. Through participation and knowledge sharing in community events, the organisers open up a space for collectively negotiating and then reproducing narratives in defence of the common goods and against fracking. Through this exercise, they facilitate a shift in the community's identity, which is no longer only defined by its traditions, economy and relationship to the land but now is also defined in relation to the external threat of fracking. Finally, these arts and media practices are not only tools in organising but also a way of preserving a lifestyle under threat, and can therefore be seen as symbolic, relational and material forms of cultural resistance.

CONCLUSION

The threat of fracking has become an object of mobilisation for the community of Vista Alegre. This mobilisation, generated by a group of neighbours that work towards including the whole community, makes manifest Vista Alegre's determination to preserve their local environment and traditional economy, as well as their adherence to regional and international movements against fracking and extractivism more widely. As a result of the external threat of fracking, there has been a re-enforcement of the place-based identity of the community in defence of their land, water, and way of life—slogans like 'let the water be for *torta frita* and *mate*, not for fracking' and 'we are the children of the river' capture the assembly's objective of reinforcing the local identity, centring common goods (the river) as the issue at stake, and placing fracking as a threat against a long-standing way of life.

In the fight against fracking, collective identity processes are mediated through the use of such media and platforms as festivals, murals and open radios, all forms of popular, participatory arts and media that act as opportunities for strengthening and sustaining community bonds whilst serving as spaces for sharing information and introducing the anti-fracking agenda into the collective identity of the neighbourhood. Identities are mediated through dialogical, rite-like instances of community arts and media. Mediation here means allowing multiple identities to coexist, evolve, and become engrained, from the long-standing, local, place-based identity to a transformed collective identity that also includes a stance against fracking. More specifically, the tactics of

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[9] Personal interview with Rosa Farias, member of the Asamblea del Algarrobo in Andalgalá, an assembly fighting open-pit mining. 27 February 2018.

participation, knowledge sharing and the event modality facilitate this process by opening up dialogical spaces. The three tactics combined are particularly well suited to a context of ongoing conflict in which what is needed is mass community involvement, opportunities for learning and sharing relevant information, and opportunities for generating and strengthening feelings of ownership over the cause. As with all participatory practices, however, the extent to which participation results in active political engagement for all has limits, as the uneven involvement of actors in organising and decision-making can result in different levels of agency within the collective (Serafini 2018b, pp. 59-60).

We can also consider these forms of community arts and media as 'productive' outcomes of the conflict, meaning mid-term transformations in social life that are generated by such conflict. This implies moving away from a 'win or lose' perspective on movements, and towards an understanding of conflicts as 'horizons for the reconfiguration of social relations' (Merlinsky, 2015, p. 10). In the case of Vista Alegre, it is particularly useful to highlight the productivity of these creative forms of identity building and resistance instead of focusing only on the legal outcomes of the mobilisation in order to understand its social effects, given the limitations of legal remedies to socioenvironmental conflicts. In Argentina, there is still 'a significant gap between the formal recognition of rights and their implementation in substantive practice' (Merlinsky and Latta, 2012, p. 195). The opposition to fracking has led to consolidating a growing programme of creative community activities that differentiate the neighbourhood and its particular struggle as one embedded in arts and participation. Art and media have become significant products of the conflict in generating symbolic, relational and material forms of cultural resistance, understanding cultural resistance as 'culture that is used […] to resist and/or change the dominant political, economic, and/or social structure'(Duncombe, 2002, p. 5).

Symbolic resistance is found at the narrative level, in the way the opposition to fracking is framed and narrated, be these through slogans stated out loud during events, or through the visual narratives that are constructed in murals. Relational resistance is found in the strength of the community bonds, enhanced and sustained through community arts and media. And material resistance is found in the ways in which the physical spaces of Vista Alegre are transformed as a result of these practices, become sites of rite, communication and place-based identity building through physical gatherings in squares, and most importantly, through the production of new murals that reconfigure the symbolic as well as the material and aesthetic characteristics of the neighbourhood. This transformed sense of space and relationship to the territory that has resulted from the conflict and from the culture of resistance in Vista Alegre can be understood as a form of 'territorial productivity' (Merlinsky, 2015, p. 11).

While locally the fight against fracking has gained visibility and it can also be linked to a global environmental movement, the national context still remains one of media invisibilisation of environmental conflicts, and the collusion of state and corporate powers results in what has been described as 'David vs Goliath' scenario (Svampa and Viale 2014). Under these circumstances, cultural resistance is especially important because it can facilitate urgently needed shifts in collective understandings of environment, development, and the consequences of the expansion of extractive activities at a regional and national level. Indeed, at the global scale, cultural texts have been crucial in facilitating such shifts with regards to fracking, as has been the case of the documentary *Gasland* (Vasi et al., 2015).

This paper has contributed to the fields of media studies and social movement studies by providing a qualitative account of one of the most pressing socioenvironmental conflicts in Argentina at the time of writing: the expansion of fracking. Most importantly, it makes a theoretical contribution in developing the concept of mediated identities in the specific context of community and place-based collective action. To this end, a framework for understanding the tactics through which community arts and media mediate collective identity processes was offered. Further work in this area could apply or adapt this framework to other contexts, in order to gain a comparative understanding of how different media play a part in the formation and transformation of collective identity at the micro level).

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Disentangling Individualism: Toward a Heuristic Tool for Cultural Analyses of Evaluations of Self and Society

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ABSTRACT

Individualism belongs to the core of Western evaluative logic. This paper aims to determine what exactly now constitutes individualism as an often used cultural discourse and, more importantly, how its content varies depending on different semantic constellations. A systematic classification of different possible individualistic types of evaluation is proposed, which can eventually serve as a heuristic tool for further cultural analysis. The paper starts with identifying two essential meaning dimensions of freedom/control: (1) a self-dimension and (2) a society-dimension. Second, it explores how combinations of these different dimensions of meaning yield four different 'semantic fields', which all fall under the general heading of individualism, namely liberal, egalitarian, radical, and subjective individualism. These different types are described based on illustrations stemming from political, cultural, and philosophical domains.

Keywords: evaluation, discourse, self, individualism, cultural analysis

INTRODUCTION

People are evaluative beings: we do not only act upon the world, but simultaneously seek to interpret, classify, and vindicate these actions (Sayer, 2011). We feel obliged, out of concern for others and our surroundings, to understand, defend, and explain our choices and doings, and for this we rely on a multitude of beliefs and values. Repeatedly, it has been argued that, in modern Western societies, *individualism* increasingly came to constitute the core of our evaluative logic (e.g. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Dumont, 1977; Elias, 1991; Taylor, 1989). This is certainly not farfetched seeing that notions such as individuality or autonomy are ingrained in our juridical (i.e. principle of individual sovereignty), political (i.e. single vote democracies), and economic (i.e. capitalism as system of free consumption) system, and provide the cultural foundations for contemporary modes of social control (i.e. governmentality) (e.g. Rose, 1989; Foucault, 2008; Elchardus and De Keere, 2010). Consequently, it has become common practice to perceive the 'other' – in the same way as the 'self' – as a singular individual capable of making autonomous choices.

That all members of society are seen as singular 'individuals' and that this view is a dominant cultural framework in Western contemporary societies, does not entail that we share the same understanding of what that individual is supposed to be, how it should act or how its relation with society is to be conceived. Highly valuing individuality is one thing, giving it content and having an opinion on how to put it into practice is yet another.

Although people often deploy the same individualistic notions to evaluate their lives and those of others, the way they use and interpret them can depend on their position in society, the historical timeframe they are a part of or the institutions they are connected to. As C. Wright Mills aptly stated:

> A symbol has a different meaning when interpreted by persons actualizing different cultures or strata within a culture. (...) A block in social actions, e.g. a class conflict, carries a reflex back into our communicative medium and hence into our thought (1963, pp. 435-6).

Hence, we might all be individualist, but do not necessarily endorse the same type of individualism, seeing that the latter necessary involves a multiplicity of meanings and views.

The objective of this paper is to now propose a heuristic yet systematic tool to analyse and categorize different individualistic notions people employ when evaluating their life and those of others. Whether these individualistic evaluations come about in the process of day-to-day interaction (e.g. during ordinary discussions) or manifest themselves within more complex cultural forms (e.g. novels or movies), we are still in need of an instrument to carefully and systematically read into these differences. Because if we place every type of individualistic evaluation under one large umbrella of individualism, then we do not take into account the importance of variations in ethical, cultural and political logics, which are crucial elements within both group boundary work (Lamont, 1992, 2000) as well as class conflicts (Sayer, 2011).

This paper begins by identifying the conceptual problems that mark the current sociological use of individualism by focussing on three popular topics in social science: neo-liberalism, class morality, and civic engagement. Second, I offer a short overview of past attempts to distinguish between different types of individualism. Finally, I propose a multidimensional reading of individualism by focussing on two major meaning dimensions of freedom and control, namely a self-dimension and a society-dimension. These two dimensions combined eventually render a categorization of four different types of individualism: *liberal*, *egalitarian*, *subjective*, and *radical individualism*. These are then described by giving examples stemming from different cultural domains, such as social movements, politics, ethics, and the arts. The latter step is not carried out with the intention of promoting more taxonomical analyses of ideas but to create a comprehensive heuristic instrument that will allow us to interpret and analyse individualistic evaluations in a more systematic and relational way.

IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM

A lack of systematically taking into account variations in individualism results in three types of conceptual problems. First, individualism becomes a container term that qualifies as a label for any contemporary set of norms or values (e.g. neo-liberal ethos, longing for self-development, nonconformism, or the politics of emancipation). Second, if we refrain from systematically explicating the possible variations, social theory runs the risk of an ongoing proliferation of concepts that, in the end, might just refer to one and the same belief or set of values (e.g. *self-actualization* (Bell, 1976), *self-realization* (Honneth, 2004), *self-expression* (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005)). Third, a narrow and unidimensional definition of individualism easily leads to a reasoning whereby every cultural belief that does not fit that definition is deemed the opposite, namely collectivism (e.g. Triandis, 1995). Yet, seeing the strong individualization of social control in contemporary society (Foucault, 1990, 2008; Rose, 1989, 1999; Elchardus, 2009), it is rather unlikely that dismissing autonomy or individuality as a whole would be a very prevalent attitude within Western societies (although it is, theoretically, not completely unthinkable). As yet explained, it is more likely that there exist variations in how people value and use these concepts rather than fully reject them. Let me illustrate these problems by recalling how individualism as a concept is applied within the study of three popular topics of contemporary social science: neo-liberal ideology, class morality, and civic engagement.

Neo-Liberalism and Individualism?

Repeatedly, the argument is being made that neo-liberal policies and reforms are culturally justified through a discourse of individualism. People are accepting, as the logic goes, a loss of collective security and an individualization of social problems because they cling to their individualistic values too much. However, the manner in which these individualistic values are described differ drastically. It is, for example, often claimed that individualism fosters neo-liberalism because it implies models of selfhood that emphasize self-fulfilment and a search for self-realization (Cabanas, 2016; Honneth, 2004; Willig, 2009) or authenticity (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005; Rose, 1989). In this way, individualism forces people on a quest for self-development, making them neglect the importance of collective support and regulation. Yet, many other writings on neo-liberalism employ individualism to denote a completely different set of values such as the love for competition, entrepreneurialism, and self-responsibility (Bröckling, 2015; McRobbie, 2015; Wacquant, 2009). In the latter case, neo-liberalism is not justified based on expressive values, but on a more classical liberal or utilitarian understanding of self and society that actually emphasizes restraint. Still, in both cases, these values are labelled as individualistic and often used indistinguishably.

The argument here is not that these analyses are mistaken and that a search for authenticity or, on the other hand, entrepreneurialism cannot be a defining feature of both individualism and neo-liberalism. But, what is

problematic is that individualism is used as a vague container concept to denote every type of evaluation that appears to be related to neo-liberalism, although this seems to include very diverging sets of beliefs.

Individualism as a Middle-Class Discourse?

A second case wherein the use of individualism as a value concept is producing more confusion than clarity is the investigation of diverging class moralities. Repeatedly, it is argued that individualistic attitudes are typical for the (new) middle class. They seem, as research shows, to be characterised by an enthusiastic endorsement of self-development and strongly emphasize individual choice and expression (e.g. Lamont, 1992; Skeggs, 2009; Stephens, Markus and Phillips, 2014). Therefore, the conclusion is, to put it plainly, that the middle class are individualists while the working class are not.

However, this reasoning is problematic as it is a based on a very narrow understanding of individualism. It only focusses on individualistic attitudes such as expression and self-realization and, seeing that members of the working class do not uphold these particular beliefs, they are easily labelled as collectivists (e.g. Lamont, 2000; Mackenzie et al, 2006; Triandis, 1995). This necessarily implies that the working class are supposed to reject values such as autonomy or self-development. Yet, seeing the institutional (i.e. legal, political, and economic) constellation of the society that always presupposes at least some belief in singularity and autonomy, this is not all that convincing.

What is more likely is that members of the working class value a different kind of autonomy and self-development than their middle-class counterpart. As research, for example, revealed, the working class or those with downward social trajectories rely on notions such as perseverance, self-reliance, and hard work to frame their situation (Daenekindt, 2017; Kusserow, 2012) – values that remind us more of utilitarian individualism than of some type of collectivism. In this context, Kusserow (2012) even argues that working-class morality is actually characterized by, what she calls, a hard type of individualism. Moreover, plenty of research also demonstrated that members of the working class actually often support anti-collectivist values as they appear more distrusting of institutions (Elchardus and De Keere, 2013), often oppose political egalitarianism (De Keere, 2018; Houtman et al., 2008), and show a stronger support for nonconformism and independence (Hochschild, 2016; Willis, 1977). Hence, it would be more fruitful to allow for a varied understanding of individualism that does not only capture middle-class value patterns, but also grasps working-class evaluation without having to falsely label them as collectivist.

Civic Individualism?

A third case in which the concept of individualism is crucial yet used in an unspecified way is the study of civic engagement. Ever since the writings of Tocqueville – one of the first to use the term individualism – on early American civil society, it is claimed that individualistic attitudes inevitably engender a disintegration of public life (see also Lasch, 1991; Putnam, 2001; Sennett, 2003). Rampant individualism, as the argument goes, creates isolation and pushes for a commodification of social life, leading to the pursuit of self-interest as the only motive to engage in the public sphere.

Empirical research on volunteering, however, depicts a very different role for individualism. Apparently, people rely strongly on individualistic notions to justify and motivate their active participation in society. As Wuthnow showed, values such as the pursuit of happiness and self-realization seem to be crucial in understanding people's motivation to volunteer (1995). Instead of collectivism or authority, people turn to their self-expression (Welzel, 2010) or self-fulfillment (Kelemen et al., 2017) to frame their civic engagement. Hence, the type of individualism (i.e. valuation of self-interest and egocentrism) that Putnam and others have in mind might indeed erode civil engagement, yet there seems to be another, more civic (Seidman and Meeks, 2010), responsible (Wilkinson, 2010), or moral (Markse, 1987) type of individualism that actually fosters social participation. Hence, the question is not whether individualism has the performative force to hollow out the public sphere or not, but which type of individualism could be responsible for this and which type could have to opposite effect. This, again, asks for a systematic classification of different types of individualism.

Of course, these are only three examples but the way individualism is used in these cases is certainly not idiosyncratic. To be able to deal with these different conceptual problems, without dismissing the use of individualism all together, we need to construct a systematic framework that allows us to not only read and label these individualistic values more consistently, but also bring them into relationship with each other. Hence, the goal is to develop an analytical instrument that not just names variations in individualistic beliefs but also articulates how they configure together. How do they relate to each other in terms of similarities and differences and what are their basic premises? Before we come to such a heuristic tool, it is necessary to first review some of the main distinctions in individualism that have already been made within social science.

VARIATIONS ON A THEME

From the birth of the sociological discipline, scholars have tried to bring some clarity into the semantic fog created by the undefined use of individualism by discriminating between different types of individualism. The most famous, and probably oldest within sociology, is the distinction made by Durkheim between a *utilitarian* and a *humanistic individualism* (Durkheim, 1973). According to Durkheim, critics of individualism often conflate individualism with egoism, an interpretation that would only fit the utilitarian individualism of the Physiocrats or Herbert Spencer. The kind of individualism he himself defended starts from a humanist tradition and is characterized by a sacralisation of the individual in the abstract. Another founding father of sociology who saw a dichotomy within individualism was Simmel, who distinguished *quantitative* from *qualitative individualism* (Simmel, 1950). The former type has its roots in 18th century France and comprehends the individual essentially as a singular yet indistinguishable part of humanity (*Einzelheit*). Qualitative individualism, on the other hand, took shape in Germany during the 19th century and focusses on the uniqueness of every individual (*Einzigkeit*), placing high value on originality and self-realization.

Outside of sociology, classical distinctions in types of individualism have also been made. John Dewey, for example, wrote a pamphlet titled *Individualism Old and New* (Dewey, 1999) wherein he argues against what he calls *old individualism,* characterized by a culture of self-interest, materialistic concerns, and mechanistic social interaction. According to him, this individualism was rampant in the U.S. after the First World War and strengthened the corporate nature of society, while weakening social cohesion. For this reason, intellectuals needed to develop a new individualism, allowing people to react against the corporateness of society and rendering free and meaningful interaction possible again.

On the other side of the ideological spectrum, we find Friedrich von Hayek's distinction between *true* and *false individualism* (Hayek, 1948). In the same way as Dewey, he comprehends individualism as a set of principles, offering people guidance in solving both public and private problems, but warns his readers to be cautious of the type of individualism they endorse. The kind of individualism Hayek opposes is typified by a confidence in a rationalistic organization of society. This 'social contract individualism', as Hayek also calls it, 'always tends to develop into the opposite of individualism, namely, socialism or collectivism' (1948, p. 4). By contrast, true individualism starts off from the liberal tradition and is 'anti-rationalistic'. Instead of social engineering, society should depend on free collaboration and the permanent acknowledgement of a personal sphere of responsibilities.

This tradition to (re-)interpret, subdivide, or discover new forms of individualism had not come to a halt by the middle of the 20th century. Since the 1970s, sociology witnessed a revival of the Tocquevillian use of the concept of individualism as both a cause and a consequence of rising social isolation and the privatization of public life (e.g. Putnam, 2001; Sennett, 2003). They argue that contemporary society is typified by a disintegration that manifests itself in public nihilism, political apathy, and societal indifference. The most radical formulation of this way of thinking can be found in the work of Lasch (1991), who contends that *narcissistic individualism* has become a quintessential feature of contemporary society.

Yet, at the close of the 20th century, some sociologists started to endorse a more optimistic reading of the notion of individualism. The popular individualization thesis (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), for example, entailed the idea that increasing economic prosperity and social emancipation eventually also engendered, besides structural changes, a *reflexive individualism,* culturally typified by an emphasis on tolerance, relativism, and a longing for self-realization. This reflexive individualism shows much resemblance to what Bellah and colleagues (Bellah et al., 1985) call *expressive individualism*, which they then distinguish from *utilitarian individualism*. The latter entails an individualism based on puritan values such as self-interest, discipline, and personal responsibility. Expressive individualism, on the other hand, involves a subjective ethic of self-expression, urging people to find their true selves (see also Inglehart and Welzel, 2005).

What this short (and incomplete) inventory demonstrates is that individualism is a concept that is used to denote a wide range of notions (e.g. humanity, autonomy, authenticity, responsibility, and reflexivity) and therefore strongly varies in content depending on the emphases that are placed. Yet, for a systematic and contemporary analysis, these subdivisions of individualism fall short in two key ways. First, many distinctions (e.g. those of Durkheim, Simmel or Dewey) are in need of a cultural update so they are also applicable to more 'recent' societal developments. Secondly, and more importantly, most existing conceptual subdivisions in individualism do not really explain how the different variation actually relate to one another: what exactly are the differences and commonalities? This makes it very difficult to really apply the above divisions as a research instrument. Therefore, we are in need of a more systematic and gradual classification that explicates the relationships between all these sets of values so that it, eventually, can serve as a tool for cultural analysis.

SELF AND SOCIETY

In order to devise such a classification, we first need to disentangle the skein of concepts that constitute individualism by focussing on two fundamental dimensions of meaning making, i.e. a self-dimension and a society-dimension. Since individualism – in its most literal meaning – can be understood as the 'ism' or ideology of the individual, it is evident that the self, or allied terms such as individual, ego, or persona, qualifies as a core notion. Yet, when the term individualism is used, it generally involves much more than merely a view of the self – it includes an understanding of its relationship with society. As Alexander (1982, pp. 64-126) stated, every social theory, and, by extension, social discourse, needs to answer to an actor- and order-question, i.e. 'How do we understand the actor?' and 'How do we conceive social order?'

However, as the above account demonstrates, many different individualistic answers are possible to this double-sided question. In order to systematize the different possible answers, I propose here to focus on the importance of freedom and its counterpart, control. First, because freedom is a concept that lies at the heart of both individualism (Lukes, 1973; Dumont, 1977) as well as contemporary forms of social control (Foucault, 1990; Rose, 1999; Elchardus, 2009). Second, we recover two well-known conceptual antagonisms within Western cultural history in this way. The first antagonism relates to the actor-question and is about to what extent the actor should control or, on the contrary, liberate their own self. This division between self-control and self-liberation corresponds closely to the long-standing Western tradition that sees a tension between reason and will, control and expression, or restraint and passion. Second, to answer the order-question, we can turn to Isaiah Berlin's distinction between positive and negative freedom (1969). Whereas the latter concept understands autonomy as rejection of control, the former view entails a belief in autonomy through societal regulation. By combining these two dimensions of meaning, we come to a classification of four semantic fields that hold the building blocks for different individualistic discourses.

Furthermore, it is also important to consider that beliefs and discourses can vary in two ways: (1) on the basis of the concepts they employ and (2) by the manner in which the same concepts are being related to each other (Freeden, 1996). The different types of individualism are above all a consequence of the second sort of variation. Concepts, as Freeden makes clear, have an indeterminate rather than intrinsic meaning and are therefore susceptible to *morphology* (1996, 62). They are the product of human activity and consequently acquire meaning through both synchronic (i.e. semantic relationships between concepts at a given point in time) and diachronic (i.e. strings of historical groundings that determine variations in contents) processes (1996, 51-2). Hence, this classification is not about the rejection of any understanding of individuality, but about gradual differences in the emphases people put on certain interpretations and notions.

The classification proposed here, by reducing a set of complex and diffuse cultural evaluations to only two dimensions of meaning, is ultimately heuristic and it is therefore important to bear in mind that it is always gradual and inevitably characterized by overlap. As such, it is imperative to emphasize that this classification would lose its purpose if applied as an end in itself (i.e. classifying discourses as separate entities into a taxonomy) instead of as a means for cultural analysis (i.e. systematically interpreting how individualistic values relate to each other).

I continue with describing how evaluations of self and society can morph depending on a specific emphasis on either freedom or control.

Self-Dimension

The history of Western thought is not only characterized by an increasing cultural prominence of the self, but has also yielded different interpretations of what this self actually entails (Mauss, 1938; Taylor, 1989). In this regard, any self-conception needs to be capable of answering three sub-questions: an ontological, an epistemological, and an ethical question or, respectively, 'What is the self?', 'How can it be known?', and 'How must it act?' Depending on whether either freedom or control is valued, these questions can be answered in drastically different ways. Or, to be more precise, it can be read from a *self-control* or *self-expression* perspective.

From a self-control perspective, the ontological question can be answered by stating that the individual is primarily a project, always prone to improvement and is never a 'given' but must be controlled. Such a belief has its roots in the Protestant and Puritan idea that God's grace can only be earned if one exhibits determination and willingness toward self-improvement (Taylor, 1989, pp. 211-233). A reasoning that was further developed during the Renaissance (Burckhardt, 1914) and later secularized by the rationalistic philosophers of the Enlightenment (Taylor, 1989).

This relates to the epistemological question, namely that the true self can only be known through reason. The self must be detached from its particularistic desires and needs to be able to reform itself in accordance with the laws of reason. Therefore, the essence of the self never lies in its specific attributes or traits, but in how closely the individual corresponds to an ideal or rational self. The human self thus only appears when it constrains its irrational passions and inclination, which always impede balanced thoughts and behaviour. This ideal of self-objectification

often leads to a morality that emphasizes self-control and the ethical question is therefore answered in terms of discipline, restraint, and willpower.

The self-expression perspective is opposite to its self-control counterpart. Ontologically, the self is, according to this perspective, not made through control but interpreted as something that has to be liberated. The assumption here is that every individual has an unchangeable and unique core, which determines the essence of their being. Therefore, a person's authentic particularities need to be safeguarded as they define the essence of the individual. This view finds its philosophical roots in the writings of Rousseau and Montesquieu, and was further developed by German Romantics (Ferrara, 1998; Taylor, 1989).

From a self-expression point of view, answering the epistemological question has nothing to do with detachment or self-objectification. Rather than disengagement, the essentialist self asks for a full-on exploration and liberation of the self. Here, self-knowledge thus primarily entails discovery and disclosing, since the true individual lies buried under many layers of education, habituation, and socialization. This view yields, on the one hand, a strong positive valuation of notions such as authenticity, uniqueness, and intuition, and, on the other, a rejection of control, conformism, and restraint.

This same logic also steers us toward answering the ethical question in terms of authenticity and self-expression. An act is deemed good not because it corresponds to some external moral standard, but because it starts from a genuine 'urge' to do good. According to this view all moral deeds start off from a worthy moral individual, depending, in turn, on how authentic one is toward the deed, i.e. it is the intention – which has to be genuine and truthful – that determines the value of an act and not its actual result (Ferrara, 1998).

Society-Dimension

To answer the order-part of the question, we need to look at different interpretations of how to conceive individual control within society. In order to obtain a more systematic view of this issue, Isaiah Berlin's famous division between two types of freedom (Berlin, 1969) is – although certainly not unproblematic[1] – very instructive. In his seminal paper 'Two concepts of liberty' (1969), Berlin argues that there are two possible and even rival interpretations of the question 'What is freedom?', namely a *positive* and a *negative* approach. Negative freedom pertains to the question 'What is the area within which the subject — a person or group of persons — is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons?' (1969, 121) Hence, it implies that the individual is free only to the extent that one is *liberated from* constraints, intrusion, or obstacles. This type of liberty is termed negative, as freedom itself is not given any content but is completely defined by the absence of something.

In contrast to a negative interpretation, positive liberty is about the *freedom to* do something, or, more specifically, about the possibility to realize or develop oneself. However, people can only develop if the necessary conditions are fulfilled, i.e. if they have the required resources and capabilities. This view carries two important implications. First, that liberty is given some content: if the possibility of self-development is the essence of liberty, it implies a certain definition of what self-development entails. Second, it suggests that a particular degree of control is allowed, as long as it leads to individual development. Therefore, positive freedom, as Berlin wrote, refers to the question: 'What, or who, is the source of control or interference that can determine someone to do, or be, this rather than that?' (1969, 122).

FOUR TYPES OF INDIVIDUALISM

Now that the two meaning dimensions of individualism are defined, these can be combined in order to arrive at four separate semantic fields, each consisting of a different collection of individualistic notions and values. In the next four sections, I describe these specific combinations or styles of individualism, namely *liberal, egalitarian, subjective,* and *radical* individualism (**Figure 1**).

Liberal Individualism

When we combine a self-control perspective with a negative view on liberty, we end up with a traditional liberal variant of individualism. The fathers of liberalism (e.g. John Stuart Mill and Adam Smith) all plead for a minimization of public interference in the lives of civilians. They argue that there are certain domains in life, specifically in the private sphere, where the liberty of the individual should almost never be curtailed. From this viewpoint, self-interest is in itself not seen as a threat to societal stability. On the contrary, the pursuit of personal

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[1] Berlin forbears, for example, to take into account important factors such as the content of individual desires (Christmas, 1991) or the general conditions under which non-interferences is guaranteed (Pettit, 2001).
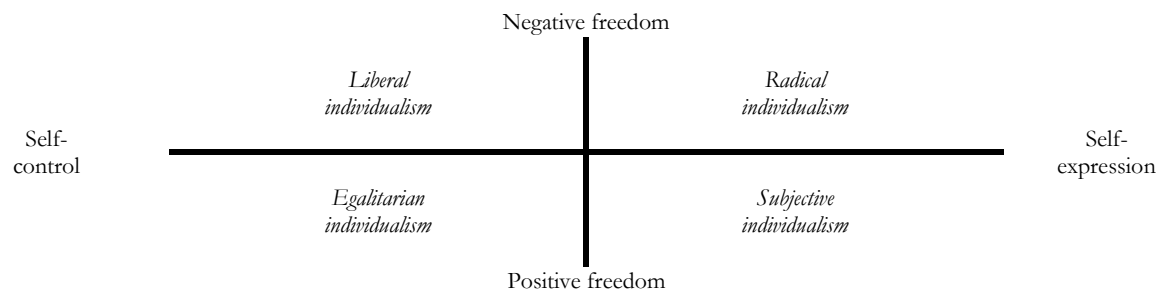
Figure 1. Two meaning dimensions and four types of individualism

gain can even be viewed, often by referring to Smith's notion of the 'invisible hand', as a mechanism that will eventually engender greater general welfare.

However, liberal discourses are not only characterized by a defence of negative liberty, but also entail a self-control perspective. According to Taylor, much of liberalism is based on the Lockean idea of a punctual self or 'the possibility to remake ourselves in a more rational and advantageous fashion' (1989, 170). Thus, from a liberal perspective, the idea that individuals should be free from interference needs to be accompanied by a belief that people are capable of a certain self-rationalization. In this regard, the liberal ideal of self is a restraining, calculating, and pro-active individual who takes responsibility for their situation and acts in order to better it, i.e. an *economical* or *entrepreneurial self* (Holmes, 1997).

Outside of its philosophical tradition, this type of individualism became an important socio-political discourse among the wider sections of society during the second half of the 19th century, and most notably within Anglo-Saxon countries. One of the most influential English political and social theorists of that period was without doubt Herbert Spencer. He became famous for what was later called 'social Darwinism', which is a relatively radical form of liberalism, explicitly combining a belief in self-control with a defence of negative freedom:

> What now is the most important attribute of man as a moral being? (…) May we not answer the faculty of self-control? This it is which forms a chief distinction between the human being and the brute (Spencer, 1851, p. 185).

If government was to interfere, as Spencer's 'survival of the fittest' logic further goes, it would disrupt the natural order of things and those who were capable of restraint and self-control would not be rewarded, whereas the 'brutes' would survive. That is why the state should not try to install an artificial form of equality by supporting those who lack the discipline to seize their opportunities.

From a cultural viewpoint, one of the most important exponents of this liberal individualism is perhaps the notion of the *self-made man* (Howe, 1997), embodied by a successful figure, ranging from Benjamin Franklin to Steve Jobs. Benjamin Franklin's influence – in addition, of course, to being one of the founding fathers of the U.S.A. – actually stems from writing one of the oldest and most popular self-help guides, namely '*Poor Richard's Almanack'* (1732–1758). In this annual publication, he promoted the idea of general self-improvement through the cultivation of liberal virtues, such as temperance, order, resolution, frugality, and moderation. Within the literary field, liberal individualism finds its most explicit advocate in the person of Ayn Rand. In her best-selling science fiction novel '*Atlas Shrugged'*, for instance, Rand tells the story of a society in which most creative minds and entrepreneurs are on strike as a protest against the over-regulative government.

Reflecting on the classical and contemporary interpretation of individualism, as described above, we can say that liberal individualism actually corresponds best to what both Durkheim and Bellah termed utilitarian, and Hayek, in his attempt to defend it, true individualism. Further, Dewey's critique on the American, capitalist, and corporatist individualism is actually directed primarily toward a liberal interpretation of self and society.

Egalitarian Individualism

Egalitarian individualism is a discourse that results from combining a belief in positive freedom with a self-control perspective. In this case, freedom is not interpreted as liberation from something, but as offering the possibility to develop oneself through collective support. All members of society thus need to attain the same level of development. Here, self-development is defined as the construction of an ideal citizen and equal member of the group. It is exactly this type of individualism that Simmel termed quantitative, and was defended by Durkheim while being fiercely contested by Hayek.

Because egalitarianism is mostly associated with only favouring collective solutions to problems, the political examples, such as syndicalism, socialism, or communism, are often understood as holistic or hierarchic rather than individualistic (e.g. Triandis., 1995). Yet, as both Berlin (1969) and Dumont (1977) argue, these – although

sometimes totalitarian – ideologies have their roots much more ingrained in individualism than in the holistic tradition.

In order to accommodate both freedom and equality, proponents of egalitarian individualism have often employed – implicitly or explicitly – notions such as *homo politicus*, 'universal man', or a 'general will'. Inequality, from this viewpoint, is merely a result of particularistic and fabricated circumstances that have disrupted the natural order, which is one of harmony and equality. This idea is grounded in a firm belief in bottom-up solutions to societal problems and restabilising the social contract. Hence, egalitarian individualism often manifests itself in an atavistic nostalgia for a lost organic collective.

The assumption that something of a 'general will' exists in every individual also has implications with regard to how the self is interpreted. The individual should above all strive toward being integrated within the collective. The construction of such an ideal individual involves the cultivation of self-control, from which, eventually, the individual as well as the group, nation, or *volk* can benefit. Take Fichte's writings on the creation of a new German nation through a re-education of all German citizens for example (Fichte, 1922). To arrive at such an ideal citizenship, he said, the cultivation of self-mastery is essential, because 'the root of all morality is self-possession, self-control, the subordination of the selfish instincts to the idea of the community' (1922, 175). A same logic can be discovered in the normative work of Durkheim. In his 'L'éducation moral' (Durkheim, 1934), he proposes three elements that can serve as foundations for a morality adapted to modern secularized life, namely (1) attachment to others, (2) autonomy or self-determination, and (3) discipline or self-mastery, notions that all lie at the heart of egalitarian individualism.

Finally, egalitarian individualism has also left its mark on the literary domain. Two influential and much-read authors who spring directly to mind are Charles Dickens and Émile Zola. Several of their stories are about denouncing the Spencerian idea of 'deserving poor' and revealing the social disruption and poverty resulting from early industrialization. With that, it is clear that many of Dickens' or Zola's heroes excel in Victorian values such as willpower and moderation, whereas the antagonists are often characterized by their greed, decadent lifestyles, or drunkenness.

Subjective Individualism

This individualism is termed 'subjective', as the combination of a positive understanding of freedom – which entails a belief in collectively supported self-development – with an emphasis on self-expression, leads to answering the actor- and order-question in a very subjectivist and person-centred manner. In contrast to egalitarian individualism, the level of self-development is not assessed by measuring how well an individual is incorporated into the group, but by evaluating how capable people are at expressing their 'own selves'.

Seeing the positive understanding of freedom, which allows for some degree of control, self-expression is only possible through collective support. In other words, the individual can only become a self under the guidance of specific institutions. Consequently, an emphasis is placed on personal, pedagogical, and therapeutic support. Hence, because of its positive evaluation of societal interference, this individualistic style is characterized by a belief in institutional solutions, organized welfare, and psychological guidance.

This belief in the collective importance of self-realization characterizes, for example, the humanistic psychology developed during the mid-20th century by psychologists such as Carl Rogers (1961). Humanistic psychology is mainly based on Maslow's principle that, when basic needs are fulfilled, we all develop a natural tendency toward self-actualization, manifesting itself in higher levels of creativity, spontaneity, tolerance, and problem-solving capacities. The crux of this therapy is that the psychologist must always find and encourage the patient's potential toward authentic inner development. This belief in a universal tendency toward self-actualization also resonates within the capability approach as developed by Sen and Nussbaum (Nussbaum, 1988), an approach that has, for example, been highly influential within policy-making institutions such as the United Nations (e.g. the philosophy behind the Human Development Index). It is clear that the United Nations supports a positive understanding of freedom whereby self-development is institutionally embedded.

In addition to therapy and policy, subjective individualism also left its mark on the political debates of the second half of the 20th century, in particular through the rise of new leftist, emancipatory, and ecological movements, which mainly involve quality of life and identity politics. Many of these movements were, as C. Wright Mills pointed out (Mills, 1960), characterized by a rejection of traditional socialist ideologies that envisage an utopian endpoint for humankind. These 'grand narratives' are perceived by new leftists as objectifying cages that force people into political straightjackets that deny them an authentic and personal engagement within society.

In general, this subjective individualism is widely diffused within popular culture through the rise of therapeutic self-help books, magazines, and television shows (De Keere, 2014; Illouz, 2008). But, contemporary writers such as Milan Kundera and Jonathan Franzen also articulate this longing for authenticity or therapeutic self-actualization and the problems it engenders. In movies, these themes have become popular since the mid-20th century as well, be it in the existential dramas of Ingmar Bergman or the psychological comedies of Woody Allen.

After having described this subjective individualism, we see that, in many ways, it corresponds to what Bellah and colleagues called expressive individualism (1985). It is a psychological yet institutionalized view on self and society, engendering a certain existential insecurity and longing for authenticity. This is a style of thinking that has regularly been defined as mainly characteristic of affluent Western societies (Elchardus and De Keere, 2010; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005).

Radical Individualism

Finally, the last type of individualism that needs to be described is called 'radical', because it rejects any form of control, not only stemming from others but from the self as well. Similar to subjective individualism, radical individualism implies an expressive interpretation of the self, but combines it with a negative understanding of freedom, declining any form of social interference. The self is understood as inevitable ('I am who I am') and control or regulation of it therefore needs to be denounced at all times, as it can only result in hypocrisy and deceit. This self-conception also manifests itself in a positive valuation of notions such as genuineness, uniqueness, and nonconformism. However, this does not have much to do with an institutional supported project of self-actualization and emotional wellbeing, but more with a hedonistic cultivation of gut feeling and impulse.

Academically speaking, this perspective has hardly been canonized within philosophy. The most important exceptions are perhaps Stirner (1907) and Tucker (1926). Both are considered to be founding fathers of radical anarchism. Their thinking is characterized by a rejection of authority, moral rights, and social regulations while advocating independence, hedonism, and unconditional self-expression. Stirner is in particular sceptical about individuals who uphold externally defined goals; the only thing people can rely on and believe in is their own true self:

> Why, I myself am my concern, and I am neither good nor bad. Neither has meaning for me. The divine is God's concern; the human, man's. My concern is neither the divine nor the human, not the true, good, just, free, etc., but solely what is mine, and it is not a general one, *but is – unique, as I am unique* (1907, 6).

The consequence of this line of thinking is an acceptance of egoism as a natural feature of humankind.

Politics that want to tap into radical individualism do not start from traditional ideologies such as liberalism or egalitarianism, but primarily imply an anti-establishment, anti-political, and anti-institutional position. According to this radical point of view, we are ultimately on our own and there are no clear social rules we can follow. In the end, governmental representatives or politicians also just follow their own feelings and interests and an altruistic engagement in the public sphere is therefore doomed to fail.

Although hardly influential within the philosophical or political field, radical individualism has always had many representatives within the artistic domain. This is echoed in the romantic ideal of the bohemian artist who renounces any societal and cultural mores and only follows their own instincts. The most outspoken example of this is probably the 'art of transgression', which aims at violating and even outraging social convention, while cultivating animal instincts and the abnormal (e.g. George Bataille or Antoine Artaud). Within popular culture, radical individualism also had clear influence. Not only via the screening of dystopian movies, including '*Clockwork Orange*' or '*Fight Club*', that involve a glorification of violence and sexual excess, but even more so through the popularity of late-20th century subcultures such as punk or gangsta rap. Musicians of these genres are often characterized by the importance they give to a nonconformist and 'just be yourself' attitude, which is combined with an anti-establishment mindset (Lewin and Williams, 2009).

Referring to the more classical interpretations of individualism, we can now grasp that it was actually this radical individualism that was feared by the likes of Tocqueville (Lukes, 1973). But, also more contemporary scholars – implicitly or explicitly – warned against the rise of a type of individualism that would potentially stimulate a hedonistic and egocentric culture (Lasch 1991; Bell, 1976).

APPLYING THE SCHEMA: AN EXERCISE

Coming back to the three cases that were used to illustrate the problem, i.e. neoliberalism, class morality, and volunteering, we can now apply the heuristic classification to better interpret the arguments and empirical findings.

In the case of neo-liberalism, it is not just individualism in general that seems to serve as a justificatory framework for socioeconomic reforms. It seems that both liberal individualism, with its emphasis on self-regulation and entrepreneurialism, and subjective individualism, highlighting the importance of emotional self-realization, play a crucial role in sustaining neo-liberalism. Yet, how these two types are used in varying settings and by people with different social positions is now up for investigation. Moreover, to fully understand the relationship between individualism and neo-liberalism, we should also explore how egalitarian and radical individualism might possibly serve as evaluative frameworks that allow for cultural critiques on neo-liberalism.

Also with respect to class morality, the classification helps us to reinterpret the different evaluative position-takings that typify the different class fractions. On the one hand, it seems that the individualistic attitudes popular among the (new) middle class, i.e. emotional self-fulfilment and expression, primarily fall within the semantic field of subjective individualism (e.g. Kusserow, 2012; Lamont, 1992; Skeggs, 2004; Stephens et al., 2014)

On the other hand, it seems that some of the collectivist tendencies of the working class, i.e. focus on interdependence and community life (e.g. Lamont, 2002; Stephens et al., 2014) does not necessarily makes them traditional collectivists but rather egalitarian individualists. However, as previous research demonstrated, the dominated fractions of society seem to be characterized by a mixture of (sometimes contradictory) value patterns (Houtman et al., 2008). With their emphasis on self-reliance and thrift, a part of the working class seem to actually adhere to a more liberal instead of egalitarian type of individualism, while yet another fraction appears to be more drawn toward radical individualism (i.e. anti-institutional and nonconformist attitudes). The classification proposed here now offers a unifying framework to explore how these attitudes actually relate to each other. This allows us, in the future, to explore how different positions and trajectories within the working class itself eventually engender varying understandings of both self and society.

Finally, this classification also serves as a tool to better understand the performative role of individualistic attitudes within the study of public engagement. As yet explained, the type of individualistic values that, according to Tocqueville, and later scholars such as Sennett and Putnam, has the potential to erode public engagement would be primarily related to radical individualism as it entails a refusal of conformism and rejection of societal participation. On the other hand, the more civic individualism that seems to have a strong positive influence on the desire to participate within the public sphere (Markse, 1987; Seidman and Meeks, 2010; Wilkison, 2010) corresponds with egalitarian individualism as described above. Moreover, here we can expect as well that not just one set of individual values can be influential. Depending on people's social positions, different types of individualism can be employed to justify their different civic roles. For example, the relation between a belief in self-expression and civic engagement (Welzel, 2010; Keleman et al., 2017), might be primarily stemming from middle-class participants, who already have a stronger tendency towards subjective individualism (Kusserow, 2012; Lamont, 1992; Skeggs, 2009) and will thus rely on this set of values to justify their participation.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this paper was to construct a heuristic instrument that would allow us to read into different sets of individualistic beliefs. The goal was not, however, to just name different type of individualism, but, to above all, explain how they relate to each other in a systematic way. In order to do so a schema based on two basic meaning dimensions, i.e. a self- and society-dimension, was suggested. These dimensions do not only allow for a categorization into four types, but also aid in thinking relationally about the differences. As Freeden (1996) explains, variations in ideas do not only happen because different concepts are employed but also due to the configurations in which they are being placed. Differences between ideas and values are therefore not necessarily categorical but more often gradual.

For these reasons the proposed schema, based on gradual meaning dimensions, can help to improve cultural analyses that aim at a systematic comparison of individualism between groups and over time. In doing so, it can aid in further solving the three conceptual problems, as identified at the beginning: (1) individualism as a container term, (2) continuous proliferation of new concepts for the same type of individualistic values, and (3) avoiding false dichotomies between individualism and collectivism.

Clearly, the intention is not to present this categorization as a framework that would allow us to comprehend all possible cultural expressions within society. Evidently, religion, gender, nationality, tradition, or ethnicity are other important factors that determine and give content to the types of evaluations that circulate within society. However, the scope of this classification might be quite large seeing that contemporary control mechanisms rely heavily on a commonly shared belief in a singular and autonomous self (i.e. individuation), and people are therefore almost obliged to uphold a certain interpretation of the individual and its autonomy. In other words, there is such a strong consensus on individualism in modern societies that it is difficult to imagine that one does not value its core notions.

Yet, the dialectic between (1) the consensus on individualism and (2) the different possible interpretations, stimulates a cultural dynamic that characterizes much of inter-group competition and coalition formation. On the one hand, the consensus on the worth of autonomy and individuality – at least in its most abstract form – has the potential for concealing conflicts as well as rendering alliances between groups possible. In other words, ideologically conflicting groups can always justify their collaboration by emphasizing their shared belief in self-development and personal liberty and so widen their influence on society. On the other hand, when surpassing this consensus, the different interpretations of individualism can equally be employed as instruments in a struggle over group interest and identity.

Hence, basically all members of modern society will march under the banner of individuality. Yet, different positions, groups, or parties will appear once people start to specify, on the two basic meaning dimensions, what they mean when using these notions. Therefore, individualism has the ability to both unite (through vague consensus) and divide (through expressing specific interpretations) different social groups. The classification proposed here can prove to be a crucial tool to eventually disentangle this cultural dynamic, inherent to individualism as a powerful cultural discourse.

However, making a gradual distinction between four different types of individualism, could not only be instrumental in respect to synchronic comparisons between groups, but it can also yield clear benefits in relation to a diachronic study of cultural transformations. As Savage (2009) argued, social scientists have a tendency towards epochalism, often claiming we now live in a new social order that is drastically different from previous modes of social and cultural organization. From reflexive modernism (Giddens, 1992) to post-modernism (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), the cultural revolutions seems to relentlessly succeed one another. However, these social changes are maybe not as categorically as they are often depicted, at least not in terms of value patterns, but might more often be cyclic, relational and gradual (Savage, 2009). Hence, instead of inventing a new type of individualism for every new epoch (see above), the challenge is to investigate on which of the two meaning dimensions value shifts occurs, which groups are involved in this and what are the possible counter-reactions in terms of value patterns. In this way, using the schema, we could get a less epochalist yet relational and gradual understanding of cultural shifts in individualism and avoid getting trapped in "the paradox of ever-renewing novelty" (Savage, 2009, p. 219).

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Media and the Preservation of Indigenous Languages: The Case of Films Made in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Sociolinguists, sociologists and other scholars have highlighted the consequence of language endangerment. Its implication on the cultural relevance of African people explains the hosting of conferences and other meetings by culture advocates and language experts. The momentum generated by such fora and concerns expressed by stakeholders have resulted in efforts geared towards the revitalization of indigenous African languages. The mass media constitute one of the agencies that are in the vanguard to preserve the languages. The concern of this study was to find out the success of film in preserving the language of Akwa Ibom people, one of Nigeria's indigenous languages, from going extinct. It also sought to find out if the people of the state learn the language and sustain interest in it because of its use in film stories. Data were generated from 480 respondents sampled using a questionnaire, responses from a focus group comprising six discussants, and results from interviews with five prominent producers of Akwacross films. At the end, it was found out that while movie makers deliberately produce films using the Akwa Ibom language with the hope of promoting and preserving this language, viewers of the movies do not in the main profess to use the film medium as a means of learning the language and that the medium does not motivate them to develop interest in the language. Film therefore is merely a storage facility for the language. As a result of these findings, the study recommends among other things, that culture advocates, promoters of indigenous languages and policy makers should enlist other agents of socialization like the family, school and social groups, including community associations and age grades, to promote and preserve indigenous languages. Film should be seen as a complementary channel for the preservation of languages and propagation of culture.

Keywords: culture, language, revitalization, preservation, film

INTRODUCTION

Some observers and scholars are of the view that cultural imperialism or cultural dominance manifests in several ways and that one of the ways that this happens is in the way some factors combine to hasten the disappearance of the languages of some (especially African) communities (Godsgift and Obukoadata, 2008; Oso, 2006; Ngonebu, 2003). In many African societies, indigenous languages are gradually but steadily being replaced with foreign languages. In Nigeria for instance, while the languages of the three major ethnic groups may have better chances of survival, the same cannot be said of the over 250 so-called minority languages. This is in spite of the fact that one of the things that stand a society out in the midst of others and make it relevant in the global equation is its culture. Language is the flagship of every culture. Nwala and Ubi (2012, p. 111) have noted that it is " a powerful

instrument for identifying cultures, the most important system of culture and the most important attribute of an ethnic group."

The exposure to foreign languages and the adoption of such languages as lingua franca by governments have had serious negative implications on indigenous African languages. On the other hand, the process of globalisation has meant that citizens of African countries must make a conscious effort to be proficient in European languages, to be relevant in a globalizing world since those languages are seen not only as the dominant or elite languages but also as the accepted languages of a globalizing world (Oso, 2006). This situation has relegated indigenous languages of most African countries to the background and many of them are at present, on the verge of extinction. When a people's language faces that threat or is at best, offered as mere item of entertainment of guests and visitors during ceremonies like cultural days and at festivals, the implication is that an integral aspect of a people's culture is being allowed to wither away. The indigenous language of Akwa Ibom people in Nigeria happens to be one of the languages in Africa that are facing extinction. As efforts are made in different ways by stakeholders to reverse the trend, this study concerns itself with the contribution of film in this regard

Akwa Ibom State is one of the six states in the oil-rich South-South region of Nigeria. It has three major tribes with three major dialects — *Ibibio, Anang* and *Oron* — which are mutually intelligible. There are also minor dialects such as Ekid, Andoni, Ibeno and Itu Mbonuso, among others. The major differences between the major dialects lie in the lexical and phonological variations in them. Generally, situational code-switching and conversational code-mixing involving the three main dialects are commonly observed during transactions and interactions among the people of the state. This attitude reflects in the films produced in the state and may either be a deliberate strategy for wider acceptability and patronage or merely a result of the dialectical influence of the film producers.

Since there is no discrimination by audience members on the basis of the dialect used in production, this study considers any movie made either in any of the dialects or in a combination of them as a film made in the language of Akwa Ibom people. Also, there is an association made up of movie practitioners from Akwa Ibom and Cross River states, whose primary objective is the production and promotion of indigenous films from the two states. Efik language, the dominant language in Cross River state is also understood by the speakers of the dialects found in Akwa Ibom state. This mutual intelligibility is the basis for the synergy between the two states. Films produced by these people are commonly referred to as Akwacross films.

Even though information is scarce about the number of films produced yearly in the industry due mainly to the fact that many of the producers do not register their films with the National Film and Video Censors Board because they operate with lean budgets, there are indications that a good number of movies in the Nigerian film industry come from the two states. With the large number of youths engaged in acting and in the various aspects of production and distribution of the films, the Akacross film industry which of course is the largest entertainment industry in the two states, is believed to be a sizeable part of the Nigerian movie industry, having over 7 million people in Akwa Ibom and Cross River states as its primary target audience.

The focus of this study however is the language of Akwa Ibom people and the scope covers only Akwa Ibom State.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Sociologists, language experts and culture advocates are deeply worried about the rate of endangerment or disappearance of indigenous African languages. One of the factors identified as reason for this is the imperialistic stance of Western languages especially English. Ibaba (2004) has cautioned that imperialism should not only be seen as a political phenomenon but also as a cultural one, manifesting in the approach to language use. The English language and other Western languages continue to dominate the global space at the expense of indigenous African languages. Some observers see this as a means to further dominate Africa (Sirajo, 1999; Oso, 2006; Anaeto, 2008). Speakers of minority languages have also expressed concern about the negative attitude of present generation towards indigenous languages. But that negative attitude cannot be unconnected with the fact that English and other elite languages have come to dominate Nigeria and indeed Africa.

These various concerns have resulted in agitation for deliberate actions and policies to revitalize endangered African languages. Efforts have equally been made by scholars, advocates and relevant organs and agencies, including the media, to protect endangered African languages. In Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, indigenous film makers have delved into productions using the Ibibio, Anang and Oron dialects (Akwa Ibom language), among other elements of culture. Has this effort translated to the revitalization of Akwa Ibom language? Can film production, using indigenous language mitigate the endangerment of the language? Do the residents of the state learn and use the language as a result of their exposure to Akwacross films?

STUDY AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the investigation is to determine the potential of film in language preservation. However, the specific objectives guiding the study include determining the perception of the frequency of use of indigenous Akwa Ibom language in films made in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria; finding out whether the residents of Akwa Ibom State learn the language through their exposure to the indigenous Akwacross films; determining the extent to which residents of the state find indigenous films interesting as a result of the use of the language; and to find out the extent to which the people of Akwa Ibom State deliberately expose themselves to Akwacrosss films for the purpose of learning the indigenous language of the people of the state.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study utilises agenda-setting theory, uses and gratifications theory as well as the cultural development hypothesis. Agenda-setting theory demonstrates that the facts through which people get to know about public issues are mostly made known to them by the media, and that the significance which they ascribe to an issue tends to be proportionate to the amount of attention given to the same issue by the media (Anaeto et al., 2008). To that extent, if film makers project a certain language through their movies, it is in the belief that the public will consider it important and will likely use such a language, thereby leading to its preservation and promotion. And if such a language is facing extinction, its projection in the films may lead to revitalization.

Uses and gratifications as a media theory came as a reaction to the notion that the media were powerful enough to influence public behaviour in the direction that media workers wished. With such level of influence, the media were imagined to control their audiences. But the research orientation which questioned the all-powerful-media tradition ascribed some level of authority and independence to media users based on the understanding that audience members could make decisions for themselves. Therefore the major tenet of the uses and gratifications perspective is that the "media do not do things to people rather people do things with media. In other words, the influence of media is limited to what people allow it to be" (Baran, 2009, p. 422). Uses and gratifications theory is relevant to this study in the sense that patrons of Akwacross films may among other things, see their exposure to the films as a means of learning, promoting and preserving their indigenous language. This is important because in contemporary Nigerian societies, family members are often urban-based, mingling in schools and work places with people from backgrounds different from theirs. This leaves them with little opportunity to speak their mother-tongues. They may therefore want to deliberately use the movies to compensate for the loss. And since uses and gratifications theory emphasizes the fact that the user decides what to use, it inspires the curiosity to find out the extent to which the people of Akwa Ibom State indeed use the film medium to learn, promote and preserve their indigenous language.

Cultural development hypothesis, which is a reaction to cultural imperialism perspective that Herb Schiller popularised in 1976 (cited in Ekeanyanwu, 2010), is an attempt to encourage 'Third World' leaders and the media to deliberately push indigenous values and beliefs onto the global stage until some, if not all of the values gradually gain relevance and are adopted as part of the emerging global culture (White, 2001). On his part, Ekeanyanwu (2010, p. 45) observes some weaknesses in the cultural imperialism thesis and advances a position for an alternative which should "help address developing nation's cultural needs…provide developing societies…the framework and platform to exploit the other inherent possibilities provided by the interface between culture and communication". He further argues that communication is a major carrier of culture and therefore communication experts such as movie makers, in this case, can contribute in promoting cultural elements from the developing world.

Since nothing says that communication can only carry the culture of one part of the globe, there is a potential in the media to convey indigenous African values to the global stage just as they have done with European and American values. To that extent therefore, if the use of indigenous African languages as means of expression in movies is sustained, and with the support and well planned actions on the part of the people and leaders in communities where indigenous languages face the threat of extinction, such languages will be revitalised, promoted and preserved.

METHODOLOGY

The crux of the study was to find out the opinion of the residents of Akwa Ibom State, concerning the use of film as a means of learning the language and to that extent, find out whether the medium is considered to be a useful vehicle for preserving the language. A survey design was adopted. Akwa Ibom State has a population of over five million people, using the last census figure and 3.4 exponential growth rate of the state. Four hundred and twenty respondents from the three senatorial areas of the state were surveyed, using the questionnaire. Six

respondents were recruited for focus group discussions. Interviews with five prominent indigenous film makers in the state provided the additional data for the study.

The state was divided into three clusters and two local governments were randomly selected, after which two electoral wards were also randomly selected. Thirty-five copies of the questionnaire were distributed in each of the 12 wards, giving us 420 respondents. Six focus group discussants were drawn, two each, from the senatorial areas. They were purposively selected based on frequency of exposure to indigenous Akwa Ibom films. The film makers interviewed were also purposely selected. They had each produced a minimum of three movies in the indigenous language of the state.

Data generated are analysed using percentages and weighted mean scores. Submissions of focus group discussants and interviewees' responses were qualitatively analysed and compared with quantitative analyses from which the conclusions were reached.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language is not only the means through which humans express views, experiences, emotions and expectations. It serves as well as a vehicle through which they get others to accept expressed thoughts and act in certain pre-determined ways. Each society develops its linguistic code with some sense of pride because it serves a communicative purpose and demonstrates the creative ability of the people. One reason every language is important to its owners is that:

> People who speak the same language find themselves emotionally attached to one another and appear to trust themselves more than they can trust those who do not speak that language. They also behave in ways that suggest that because of their language, they have something special which others do not have (Usua and Ire, 2008, p. 96).

Language is therefore one of the things that make a particular group of people think of themselves as special people thereby placing some value on themselves. The fact that a people's language is very important to the people remains undisputable. Not only is it the most distinct attribute of its users but also, every society develops its language in line with its peculiarities, necessitating its protection for the reason that it is the only way of thinking and behaving that befits the peculiar nature of the people that own the language. Language is a common property of the community; it becomes a label with which community members are identified. It also legitimizes membership of such a human community. Thus, Leong, in Adedimeji (2006, p. 249) describes it as "the tool used to define us and differentiate us from the next person."

The emotional attachment that people have towards their language is sometimes linked to politics, especially in the African context, as we will see below. Adedimeji (2006) in fact is of the view that language and politics are birds of a feather and that language domination is an extension of political domination, while in the view of Oso (2006, p. 30), "the use of any language is related to the distribution of power and other resources." Other writers have equally argued that language is not only a source of pride to its owners and a mark of identity but also one of the things that give them a sense of citizenship. Therefore, anything that leads to denial of opportunity for any group of people to use and protect their language amounts to a denial of rights of citizenship.

Language and culture are inseparable. According to Emenanjo (2006, p. 20), language "defines and delimits the realities of culture. It marks its geo-ethnic boundaries and transmits the essential, dynamic and stable elements of its native culture." To that extent, language sign-posts culture. Greenberg (Eze and Opara, 2010) opines that language is the basic means of accumulation, expression and transmission of every other cultural value. For Nwala and Ubi (2012), language depicts the way of life of its users and therefore becomes the channel through which the traditions and ethics of the people are learned and shared. It serves as the tie that binds the people to the culture into which they are born as well as providing the link to most other institutions of culture. Therefore without language, Essien (1990) notes, individuals, groups and societies lose their cultural identities and heritage because language is the foundation of the culture of the people.

Since language and culture are inseparable, it is not surprising that in many communities people attach so much importance to language and their attempt to protect and preserve their culture has also translated to effort to preserve and in some cases, revitalize their languages. Like its language component, culture itself is crucial to the existence of every human community. The extinction of the language of any society must be seen to have a very serious implication on the existence of that society. Culture is the most powerful means of separating one group from another, yet language gives character to culture. Therefore, as culture gives a sense of belonging and pride to the people as well as gauges their creative abilities and artistic prowess, language serves as both the backbone of the entire gamut of the culture as well as the means of interpretation of the symbolic elements within the cultural milieu of the people.

Because of the place of culture in human life, it has become one of the things that are taken seriously. Owete and Bobmanuel (2016) argue that the preservation of any people's culture has always been a preoccupation. "Whenever and wherever this culture was ever threatened, people have always risen up in defence of all that they cherish" (p. 276). It is not surprising that somehow, the issue of language and indeed culture, creeps into the domain of politics, and can easily serve as a symbol and instrument for rallying political, cultural and even revolutionary movements in some situations (Adedimeji, 2006; Nwala and Ubi, 2012).

For Owete and Bobmanuel (2016), culture is a basis for the negotiation of the relationship between societies just as it defines how influence will be applied in that relationship. Thus "diplomacy partly depends on culture for its full utilization". (269).

LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL DISCOURSE

Unfortunately, in spite of the importance of indigenous languages to communities, many African languages are said to be under threat. Scholars and language experts are of the view that Africa's contact with British colonisers resulted in the relegation of indigenous languages of the people to the background. Eze and Opara (2010) opine that with that contact, African people started dropping their local languages because of the influence of Western education and emphasized the use of English language.

It turns out that one of the vestiges that the British colonial government left behind in its former colonies is the English language which combined with and strengthened other economic and political factors to facilitate new forms of imperialism at a time physical control was no longer going to be fashionable (Sirajo, 1999). By the time the process of globalization began to intensify especially at the turn of the 21st century, English language which is effectively the leading language of globalization, gained even greater acceptance and prominence. As Asadu and Usua (2011, p. 129) have noted, not only are Africans today required to have knowledge and ability to use this language, the real implication is that indigenous languages have become "endangered species that are likely to die any time."

Cultural dominance or particularly, language dominance, is seen by many as the worse type of imperialism. It is potentially a source of and reason for disaffection between communities and societies. Realising this, the United Nations in 2003 adopted a position that aimed at ensuring that people respect and protect the cultural practices and beliefs of member nations of the global union, including the people's languages (Ekeanyanwu, 2010)

THE MEDIA AND THE PROMOTION CULTURE

Whether we are looking at language as the flagship of culture or the whole gamut of the latter, people make effort to preserve what they have and often raise an alarm over any attempt to destroy it in whatever way. It is such effort or the need for it to be made that brings the media into the equation. In the view of Rodman (2006), people all over the world see the media as having direct and powerful effects on audiences. Therefore they have been seen as one of the agencies for cultural transmission and preservation. Grossberg, Wartella, Whitney and Wise (2006) observe that the media are essentially a distribution system for culture. In the process of communication, as Baran (2009) has noted, there occurs the creation and maintenance of culture. This is particularly so when media professionals produce contents that we read, listen to or watch, with the intention of promoting certain cultural elements and practices. Not only is meaning shared through that process but culture is being constructed and maintained. Thus, the media are said to supply the cultural fare, create and shape the cultural experiences of every society and transmit as well as disseminate culture that they generate in contents (UNESCO, 1981).

Of all the mass media of communication, many scholars are of the opinion that film perhaps makes the most impact in the cultural realm (Atakpo, 2006; Sunday, 2009; M'Bayo and Onabajo, 2009). According to Opeyemi (2008), as film satisfies the needs of the audience in part by re-enforcing the already-held beliefs of viewers, and depicts whatever culture is embedded in it. Film may be created as art or for social comment, yet beliefs, attitudes and values that make up the culture of the producer manage to creep in (Godsgift and Obukoadata, 2008; Presly 2010). Many people therefore believe that film has become a very powerful means of conveying the cultures and beliefs of any particular society, and a strong one for preserving the cultural codes of the society in which it is produced (Mottram, 1990; Ekwuazi, 1991; Abubakar, 2008; Omoregie, 2010).

Film is believed to carry credibility because of its visual-based projected motion. It brings real life events, practices and operations among others, to the audience. To that extent, film becomes both prestigious and persuasive and can easily draw attention and get people to embrace the ideas promoted through the medium (Anaeto and Solo-Anaeto, 2010). This notion about the potential of the film medium has actually resulted in its deliberate use in many regions of the world to deal with national issues like strikes, jail-breaking, migration as well

Table 1. Frequency of Use of Akwa Ibom Language in Films Cross-checked with Educational level of Respondents

| Lang. use | No. of respondents | Educational level | | | | Percentage |
		SSCE/GCE	NCE/OND	HND/BSC	Masters/PhD	
Very often	125	36	24	60	5	30.27
Often	150	53	23	60	14	36.32
Occasionally	128	41	17	58	12	30.99
Never	10	3	2	3	2	2.42
Total	**413**	**133**	**66**	**181**	**33**	**100**

as in mobilising and in indoctrinating subjects (Ogunleye, 2000). In the United States of America particularly, it is noted that it has been a means for the manipulation of public opinion and in influencing the behaviour of citizens on a complex scale (Alozie, 2010). In Soviet Union, film was said to lead the way in bringing the many diverse nationalities to revolutionary consciousness, while in Germany, at a time the nation entered a period of economic disaster, film was used to evolve a new form of response to social and historical conditions (Mottram, 1990; Ogunleye, 2000; Alozie, 2010). In the same vein, in sub-Saharan Africa, film has been used for didactic teachings and in mobilizing populations for social and political purposes. From the experience in the defunct Lagos Protectorate of the colonial era where film was used to enlighten the people during the 1929 disease outbreak, to the early video film boom of the 1990s and beyond when film began to be used in fighting cultism and other social malaises, the medium has proved to be an effective means of addressing societal problems (Atakpo, 2006; Shaka, 2007).

As McQuail (2005) has noted, through the history of film medium, the display of didactic and propagandistic tendencies has always been obvious, though it should not invalidate the tenets of uses and gratifications perspective without a return to the field for further empirical scrutiny. This is important because it is from such tests that it could be concluded whether or not the influence of film is just one possible outcome and whether the result indicating the negotiation between the power of the media and the power of the people is another.

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Out of the 420 copies of questionnaire administered to obtain data for the study, 413 were recovered and found useful for analysis. Both males and females were well represented. Similarly, levels of education and age brackets were well represented. Respondents regularly watched films and more of them watched Nigerian films. On most preferred films, 217 (52.54%) were for Nigerian films, 132 (32.44%) preferred American (US) films while 40 (9.69%) and 22 (5.33%) preferred European and Indian films, respectively.

The data obtained indicate that films made in Akwa Ibom State frequently adopt the indigenous language spoken in the state as seen in **Table 1**.

From **Table 1**, it can be said that in the experience of Akwa Ibom people, the language of the people has been frequently used in film production since the combination of those who favour *very often* and *often* stands at 275 (66.59 %), higher than those who only noted its use *occasionally* and *never* which, combined, is 138 (33.41or %). Interestingly, this view cuts across the educational levels of respondents. The above findings are then compared with the submissions of the focus group discussants. Result from focus group discussion is in line with this outcome as discussants' unanimous position shows that the trend of producing films in the local Akwa Ibom language is fast becoming a vogue. Their discussion also indicates that many of the films that are created with English titles and actually produced in English language nevertheless allow the actors to occasionally code switch especially with local Akwa Ibom language interjections. Since the obvious interpretation is that the local language is frequently used to make films, it is necessary to further investigate whether indeed the people learn the language through their exposure to indigenous Akwacross films.

To attend to the above investigation, it is necessary to find out the extent of learning since it is nearly impossible not to learn anything at all about the language to which the people are constantly exposed through film. This is crossed-tabulated with age.

The data presented in **Table 2** show that the people of Akwa Ibom State do not learn their language as a result of their exposure to film, going by the simple majority. In terms of simple percentage, 24.70 percent of respondents are of the opinion that to a reasonable extent, the people learn the language by watching the indigenous films. Even though this opinion is expressed by a little below a quarter of the respondents, it remains significant that a number of the people of Akwa Ibom State learn the language through the film medium. This is because the total of one in every four people in this category would be the equivalent of a substantial part of the total population. In contrast however, more respondents (69.74%) opine that language learning as a result of exposure to film is to a *little* and *very little* extent. Still, 5.56 percent submits that no learning takes place as a result of exposure to film. To further probe this outcome, the weighted mean is calculated thus:

Table 2. Extent of Learning of Akwa Ibom Language through Akwacross Films Cross-checked with Age

Extent	Frequency	16-20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36 & above	W(X)	FX	Percentage	Decision
V. large	10	2	2	3	2	1	4	40	2.43	
Large	92	10	26	36	12	8	3	276	22.27	
Little	189	33	56	61	22	17	2	378	45.77	Negative
V. little	99	21	33	16	15	14	1	99	23.97	
No extent	23	9	6	5	1	2	0	0	5.56	
Total	413	75	123	121	52	42	10	793	100	

Table 3. Level of Interest of Respondents in Indigenous Film as a Result of Use of Akwa Ibom Language

Level	Frequency	W(X)	FX	Percentage	Decision
Very High	18	4	72	4.36	
High	88	3	264	21.31	
Low	141	2	282	34.14	Negative
Very low	115	1	115	27.84	
No interest	51	0	0	12.35	
Total	413	**10**	**733**	**100**	

$$(\text{WMS}) = \frac{\sum FX}{\sum F}$$

$$\text{WMS} = \frac{793}{413}$$

$$\text{WMS} = 1.9$$

With 1.9 WMS calculated, which is lower than the critical value of 2.0, it is further confirmed that in the main people do not learn the language through film. Focus group discussants were however divided on this subject matter. While three of them agreed that learning of the language occurs as a direct result of exposure to the indigenous films, the remaining three argued otherwise.

It is a possibility that interest in the indigenous films as a result of the use of Akwa Ibom language in production could ultimately result in the learning of the language. To find out whether the residents of the state find indigenous films interesting as a result of the use of the language, data are analyzed in terms of the level of interest as shown in **Table 3**.

Table 3 above shows that those whose interest in Akwacross films is *very high* and *high,* mainly because of the indigenous language, are 18 and 88 respectively. Those whose interest is *low* and *very low* are 141 and 115 respectively. In terms of percentage, the combination of *very high* and *high* is 25.67% while the combination of *low* and *very low* is 61.89%. Also, 51 respondents (or 12.35%) are of the view that the use of indigenous language in Akwacross films does not generate any interest in them. The weighted mean score is also calculated thus:

$$(\text{WMS}) = \frac{\sum FX}{\sum F}$$

$$\text{WMS} = \frac{793}{413}$$

$$\text{WMS} = 1.77$$

Since the calculated WMS of 1.77 is lower than the critical value of 2.0, the decision is that the use of indigenous Akwa Ibom language in the production of Akwacross films does not, in the main, stir interest among the people of the state. This is not without taking into cognizance the opinions of focus group discussants since the position of three out of the six respondents supports the result above. In spite of this outcome, the position of the other three discussants who support the view that the use of the language raises interest level in the films remains noteworthy especially because as we have seen above, there are those (25.67%) whose interest in the films is as a result of the use of the language.

On the extent to which the people of Akwa Ibom State deliberately expose themselves to Akwacross films for the purpose of learning the indigenous language of the people of the state, the result obtained is presented in **Table 4**.

The data show that only 113 respondents (or 27.36%) agree that deliberate exposure to Akwacross films for the purpose of learning the language of the Akwa Ibom people is to a *large* and *very large* extent. This is not an insignificant figure but is fewer than the 126 respondents (30.50%) who are of the opinion that exposure to the film with the intention of learning the language is only to a *very little* extent. Moreover, 99 respondents (23.97%)

Table 4. The Extent of Deliberate Exposure to Indigenous Film for the Purpose of Learning Akwa Ibom Language

Extent	Frequency	W(X)	FX	Percentage	Decision
Very large	52	4	208	12.59	Negative
Large	61	3	183	14.77	
Little	99	2	198	23.97	
Very little	126	1	126	30.50	
No exposure	75	0	0	18.17	
Total	**413**	**10**	**733**	**100**	

opine that learning is to *a little* extent while 75 respondents (or 18.17%) support the opinion that such intention does not exist. For the avoidance of doubt, WMS is calculated thus:

$$(\text{WMS}) = \frac{\sum FX}{\sum F}$$

$$\text{WMS} = \frac{715}{413}$$

$$\text{WMS} = 1.73$$

The calculated weighted mean score confirms that, in the main, the people of Akwa Ibom State do not deliberately expose themselves to Akwacross films with the intention of learning the Akwa Ibom language.

Still, on the extent to which the people expose themselves to the films with the intention of learning the language, the position of four of the focus group discussants aligns with the result presented above as they insisted that this is done to no reasonable extent while two said it happens to a reasonable extent.

The inputs of interviewees is considered important not only in finding out their reasons for producing in Akwa Ibom language, but also to compare their position on why they think people watch their films with the thinking of the consumers of the movie products. While the producers agreed that they produce with the intention of preserving the culture of the people, language being the leading component of that culture, they were however not in a position to confirm whether the people expose themselves to the films in a bid to learn the language. In the same vein the movie makers interviewed were not armed with information as to whether indeed the people learn the language as a result of their exposure to the films, and to what extent. Only one out of the five interviewees expressed a strong opinion that residents expose themselves to the films as a result of the use of the indigenous language. According to him, "most of the people here are not educated. They are more at home with language films". He was also of the opinion that Akwa Ibom people born in the cities who have access to the films will pick, whether consciously or otherwise, some elements of the language as they watch the films. But this lone voice is not weighty enough to invalidate the result on this earlier presented.

Four out of the five film makers interviewed said that even though indigenous films are popular among the people, they were not certain whether that popularity is as a result of the use of the language in the production of the films. However, two of them who held this view were quick to add that even though language is only one of the cultural elements of the people of Akwa Ibom State, the fact remains that most of the people of the state especially those in the rural communities are largely illiterate, making language an important force behind the popularity of the films.

Taken together, the data presented above have given us clear insight into the subject matter. Movie makers in Akwa Ibom state frequently produce in the local language of the people as seen in table one and corroborated by focus group discussants and the five film producers interviewed. The producers confirmed that the medium is not only popular among the people, but is also believed to have the potential of preserving the language. However, the next sets of results — that the people do not learn their language through the films they watch; that the level of interest of citizens is not raised by the use of the local language in films; that the people do not deliberately expose themselves to the films just so that they learn the language — suggest that interest and frequent exposure to the films may be results of other factors. One of such possible factors is that they may use the medium mainly for entertainment. If this is the case, the study has once again re-enforced uses and gratifications theory as the people of Akwa Ibom State who, in spite of heavy exposure to films made in the local language, do not adopt the attitude that movie makers want them to adopt towards the language. Further, the outcome of the study has raised some concerns about cultural development hypothesis which many African scholars naturally support.

Such scholars and indeed cultural advocates may have shown patriotism in calling for efforts towards the preservation of indigenous cultural practices, but as this study has demonstrated, the influence of the media is very minimal in bringing it to a reality. It therefore calls attention to the type of education adopted by African societies where Akwa Ibom State belongs. As Presly (2010, p. 341) has noted, "the greatest cultural imperialist tool is our form of Western education which does not place emphasis on our peculiarities and dynamics." The cultural development thesis will be meaningful if it recognizes the contributions that other factors such as the system of

education that is operational in the society can play. It should also take into account the need for other agencies that can help drive cultural development with the media merely complementing the process. Also, since, as Ekeanyanwu (2010) has argued, cultural dominance cannot be blamed on the media, language endangerment can equally not be blamed on the media (see also Lekoko, 2010).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Since every language derives from the environment of its speakers and is applied in the activities of the people, it shapes their very existence and therefore becomes the most outstanding element of their culture.. Any society that succeeds in promoting and preserving its language equally succeeds in making itself relevant and respected by others. This explains why the dominance that some languages enjoy over others is often not acceptable by speakers of imperilled languages. In the case of African societies, many languages are already facing extinction. Sociologists, language promoters and culture advocates, worried about the degenerating state of many indigenous African languages, believed by some to be a further consequence of imperialism, have called the attention of the global community to this development. Workshops, conferences and other meetings and advocacy programmes have been organised to address this trend.

One of the agencies that have been considered to have the capacity of being in the vanguard for the reversal of the trend is the media industry. The generally held notion is that the media, especially those from the North, have played a major role in perpetuating cultural dominance, resulting in the promotion of Western languages at the expense of indigenous ones. That being the case, a school of thought argues that the mass media can also be exploited to reverse cultural dominance, and by extension, tackle the endangerment of indigenous African languages.

The Nigerian movie industry, the third in the world in terms of volume of production, has played a role in reflecting Nigerian cultural values in productions. Some of the box office successes are movies produced in indigenous languages. The success of one of the early video films, *Living in Bondage* which was produced in Igbo, one of the indigenous Nigerian languages, was a good impetus for myriads of 'language films' to be produced in Nigeria. Akwa Ibom State is not left out in the production of films in indigenous languages. Akwacross films have recorded their successes in terms of popularity among the people of Akwa Ibom State. The cultural application of the film medium, and in particular, its use in the promotion and preservation of the language of the Akwa Ibom people was of interest to the researcher. This was so particularly, as a result of the danger of extinction that the language, like most minority languages, faces.

While the Akwa Ibom language is perceived to be frequently used in movie production in the state and the people frequently expose themselves to the films, language learning motivates only a fraction of the population to watch the films. In other words, this factor is not the main reason behind frequent exposure to the films since the results show that the people of Akwa Ibom State do not, in the main, watch the films with the primary intention of learning the language. Equally, the interest of the people in the films is not as a result of the language used in the production per se. The conclusion therefore is that since the language features in films, and because the people expose themselves to the films, the medium is only useful in telling the majority of the people about the existence of such a language without influencing them to use it.

Based on this outcome, the study recommends a reassessment of the notion that film is a strong agency for promoting and preserving languages. Real promotion and preservation can only happen if the people use the language adequately (Emenanjo and Blembo, 1999). Therefore cultural advocates and language promoters should shift emphasis from the media to other agents of socialization like the family and community associations to influence usage of indigenous languages while the media perform a complementary role by simply reinforcing what would have been done by the other agencies. Community leaders and government officials should devise means and avenues as well as create incentives such as competitions and fora for interactions, especially for young people, for the purpose of encouraging the use of indigenous languages.

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Book Review

Metaphysical Sociology: On the Work of John Carroll

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James, S. ed. (2018). *Metaphysical Sociology: On the Work of John Carroll.* London: Routledge.

For those with worries that sociological theory has become a sort of leisure activity, an illegitimate break from undertaking 'respectable' research, this well edited collection of essays on a highly idiosyncratic Australian sociologist will supply some much needed relief. It off-sets an increasingly depressing situation where main-line Anglo-American sociology is overly preoccupied with identity politics. Working from another end, guardians of methodological purity control indices of academic productivity whose financial basis is regulated by research funding authorities. The outcome of these two forces is to narrow the exercise of the sociological imagination thus contributing to the present conceptual famine in the discipline. New forms of sociological theory that break sociological conventions are rare, hence interest in this collection.

Within Anglo-American sociology Australian contributions are often overlooked. Carroll can make some claims, however to reverse this situation. Even though not a sociologist with breadth and depth equivalent to say Bauman or Bourdieu, Carroll, nevertheless has carved out a distinctive position within sociological theory which this collection brings into focus. In it, he emerges as a quirky, questioning critic called to deal with the unsettled questions facing sociology. He confronts these as a neo-Calvinist, that is one for whom God is dead. Coping with this demise of the deity has left uncomfortable legacies, notably over how to cope with stories of ultimate significance. While apparitions of the Divine are deemed 'evaporated', they have been replaced by visions of Weber's ghost which stalks the battlements of sociology. Even though the collection does not acknowledge this bleak turn of events, reflections on these by Carroll place him in the centre of unfolding debates on post-secularism.

There is much in Carroll's notion of a metaphysical sociology to recommend further exploration which this collection well supplies. To be found are stimulating essays, original and hard-nosed in analyses, all of which force sociology out into new territories. The collection contains thirteen essays, commencing with a helpful introduction by James (chapter 1) and ending in chapter 13 with Carroll's responses to these. In chapter 2, he further explores his notion of metaphysical sociology. Five of these contributions are devoted to reflections on his own controversial study *The Existential Jesus* (2007). The remaining five essays in the collection explore and expand other themes in Carroll's work, dealing with 'the eclipse of metaphysics', 'digital Western dreaming', 'ego-terrorism', mortality and 'modern metaphysical romance', their titles signifying their originality. These essays utilise film to good sociological effect. By marking the influence of Poussin's *Testament of Eudamidas* in framing his sociological thought Carroll provides a useful endorsement of the value of the visual in shaping sociological theory. To a large degree, a painting can be the image of a book, so well justifying Routledge's policy to place a copy of it on the cover.

The originality of Carroll's metaphysical sociology lies in its emphasis on narrative, on the origins and purpose of the human condition and on the implications of death. If Bourdieu's sociology is denoted by reference to

resentment, Carroll's version deals in reminders which revitalise the discipline's obligations to the humanities. Dealing with these challenges so generated means, as Carroll suggests, that 'such a sociology needs to be brave, even wild in what it takes on' (p. 22). Carroll pays his dues to these virtues, drawing heavily on Weber, especially his essay 'science as a vocation', Bauman, Nietzsche, Reiff and, unexpectedly, Tolstoy. He asserts that 'without metaphysics we wither. We lose the sense to our lives that we only gain through stories' (p. 13). But the story Carroll concentrates on, notably in *The Existential Jesus,* will surprise and disconcert.

Taken with his adulation of Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* the source of his interest in Calvinism, Carroll might be charged with propelling sociology, not so much into metaphysics, as into that forbidden territory: theology. Carroll's interest centres on passages pertaining to the identity of Jesus as in verses in the Gospel of Mark. Treated as the pinnacle of Western literature, in the transcript of an interview (chapter 3) Carroll claims that 'Mark's Jesus is the great Western teacher on the nature of Being; and that his real tragedy is that he ends up as his only student' (p. 25). It is the story of this tragedy, as conceived by Carroll that fascinates and grips him. His interest lies in the insecurity of Christ around the statement 'I am'. But this concern misses the point of Christ's perplexity. It is less about human identity more about its Divine form, for the query makes no sense without reference to the statement made by God to Moses: 'I AM THAT I AM' (Exodus 3: 14). Although interesting, if not limited as a reading of this Gospel, the sociological resources deployed for its construction are not discernible in the collection. The four other essays, however, responding to this study are really stimulating.

Whilst Scruton's essay (chapter 4) is useful as a reading of the work on Jesus, he hits on a vital objection: the absence of reference to the issue of the resurrection (p. 40), a point Dickson also picks up on (pp. 54-55). In response, Carroll resorts to his interest in the tragedy of the tale (p. 158). But in his chapter 5, dealing with the definition of culture and Carroll, Dickson hits a good point. He suggests that Carroll needs this omission of the resurrection to illustrate the dark side of cultural humanism and the tragedy of its collapse which binds religion to culture (pp. 44-47). Even if the resurrection is disregarded, Carroll's Jesus presents a story to be told, as is well illustrated in Sheen's eloquent essay 'The Passion in Port Talbot' (chapter 6). No less interesting is Murphy's essay (chapter 7) which reflects on Carroll's neo-Calvinism which so generates his 'remarkable' sociology (p. 66). It is curious the way Calvinism, at times, seems the implicit theology of sociology, notably in Weber but also in Simmel's interest in Rembrandt. Murphy suggests that this neo-Calvinism, all the more gloomy with God supposedly dead, leads to a state where religion has become entwined with culture, yet in this re-constitution of everyday life, great themes of destiny and fate still haunt the individual. As with other essays in the collection, much ground is covered with considerable and impressive economy.

Equally stimulating fare can be found in the five essays which follow. Tester's essay (chapter 8) on the eclipse of metaphysics expresses well its gloomy outcome: the realisation that the '*I* is *not* the self-sufficient maker of itself' (p. 80). Death looms in this essay, Tester taking his cue from Adorno. In a subtle appraisal of Antonioni's film *L'eclisse,* Tester illustrates the way turmoil ruptures the placid. Its characters live in a world of too much light which exposes the isolation of individuals but also a denial of their uniqueness. An equally creative essay (chapter 9) on digital culture follows. By using four digital video games, Maloney creatively illustrates the way new narratives are developed which involve the working of old stories. These illustrate many of the themes of tale and tragedy to be found in Carroll's metaphysical sociology. Issues of self-justification and isolation in revolt against conventional social orders are to be found in Bradshaw's exploration of ego-terrorism (chapter 10). It is a subtle, insightful essay. The 'existential fragility of life' (p. 127) is well illustrated in Gibson's essay (chapter 11) where efforts to impose will on social reality encounter distinctive pitfalls in late modernity. Her film is Michael Haneke's *Amour,* where contrasting responses to death are explored. Again, the art of story telling is brought to the fore and, as with Tester, a subtle reading of a film is put to insightful sociological analysis.

Perhaps it is invidious to suggest, but the most creative (and amusing) essay (chapter 12) comes from Sara James, the collection's editor. Like others much influenced by Carroll, her choice of film to explore love is brilliant. Referring to Carroll's interest in 'soul-mate love' (found in his *The Western Dreaming* (2001) she links her themes well to those of Bauman's liquid love and to online romance (pp. 144-46). By selecting Spike Jonze's film *Her* (2013) she gives a creative twist to what can be derived from Carroll. The film concerns a divorced man who falls in love with his operating system named Samantha and who becomes dependent on her. Unfortunately, he finds out that 641 others are also in love with her (p. 150). The dangers and fallacies of digital 'spiritual communion' (p. 152) are admirably explored.

In his response at the end of the collection, and far from being patronising, Carroll indicates that it gels far more than expected. 'Ground-breaking' is a term too often bandied about for feeble sociological works. With this collection, this is not so. It is doubtful if a better collection of essays on sociological theory will emerge in 2018. It works on the edge of sociological conventions creatively, offering many innovations and new territories to explore. The only caveat relates to the absence of a contribution that would have compared Bauman with Carroll.

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