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Culture Unbound Vol. 2 Editorial

By Johan Fornäs, Martin Fredriksson & Jenny Johannisson

Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research was launched in June 2009. Its first volume consisted of 24 academic articles, two photo essays, two reviews and totally more than 500 pages of text. The contributions came from more than ten countries on four continents and the articles covered a wide range of research areas: from cultural policy or science and technology studies to music theory and commercial ethnography. Many of the articles were grouped into two main thematic sections: one on “What’s the Use of Cultural Research?”, with six articles, and the other on “City of Signs – Signs of the City”, comprising eleven articles guest-edited by Geoff Stahl. Articles are peer-reviewed in a double-blind process, and published open-access by Linköping University Electronic Press (http://www.cultureunbound.ep.liu.se). To multiply interfaces, Culture Unbound is also present on FaceBook.

We are proud of this first volume. We worked hard, but the success was only possible thanks to the support of our strong editorial board, whose members have generously helped us make a flying start. Another vital resource has been our firm basis in three cooperating units – the Advanced Cultural Studies Institute of Sweden (ACSIS), the Department of Culture Studies (Tema Q) and the Swedish Cultural Policy Research Observatory (SweCult) – with funding from the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and a starting grant from the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation (Riksbankens Jubileumsfond). But most of all, we are immensely grateful for the valuable contributions from authors, guest editors and the large number of anonymous reviewers who, for the time being, must remain anonymous to safeguard the integrity of the peer review process.

The main proof of usefulness is how scholars respond to this new voice in cultural studies and other forms of research on culture. We have received encouraging feedback from actual and potential authors, reviewers, editors, advisors and readers. When the journal was launched on June 11, it immediately attracted attention. In the first three weeks, Culture Unbound had more than 530 visitors, and over the course of the year this number has grown to more than 1,500. The most read articles – Tom O’Dell’s “What’s the Use of Culture?”, closely followed by Mikko Lehtonen’s “Spaces and Places of Cultural Studies” – can boast more than 250 visitors. And reader interest seems to be stable: our second theme section, “City of Signs/Signs of the City”, published on December 18, attracted more than 330 visitors in only three weeks. These numbers tell a lucid story: Culture Un-
bound is here to stay! Nevertheless, although we are pleased, this is no reason to just sit back. It takes time for a new journal to shape its profile, prove its quality and become a truly established forum in the academic world. There is still a long way to go before this has been achieved, and we will surely keep on walking.

The enthusiastic response from authors and readers strengthens us in our conviction that there is a need for an open-access electronic academic journal for cultural studies and other branches of cultural research with an interdisciplinary orientation. At the launch of the first volume, we explained how Culture Unbound from its Swedish home base is to serve as a transnational and inclusive forum that seeks to bring together strands of “glocal” cultural research from different parts of the world. It strives to cross boundaries and move beyond a narrow understanding of culture and cultural research.

Firstly, culture is, in some ways, less limited by strict boundaries. In several of the multiplying definitions of the term, culture and cultural aspects or phenomena move across the boundaries of inherited divisions, necessitating increased and focused attention that does not limit itself to any given disciplinary or geographic domain. Culture Unbound will trace these changes as they affect new developments of cultural research.

Secondly, cultural research is currently in an interesting flux, with growing interest in, and need, for boundary-crossing innovations, where the field of cultural studies is becoming transnationally glocalised and is mutually interacting with other, sometimes regional, branches of interdisciplinary cultural research. Culture Unbound will act as an interface and arena for such interchanges.

Thirdly, the journal Culture Unbound will formally strive to provide an unbound, free and open space for intellectual exchange. Not bound to any printed format and not limited by subscription fees, it is an open-access resource available to anyone with a networked computer and a wish to take part in recent developments in the understanding of the many facets of culture and culturalisation.

The wide geographical and thematic span of the articles published in 2009 implies that we have taken these ambitions seriously. But the goals from our first volume’s editorial are still valid. Culture Unbound welcomes individual article manuscripts on any topic of relevance to cultural research, and from any world region.

We have an impressive number of guest editors who have offered to organise thematic sections that we agree touch on key issues of current cultural research. This first 2010 release includes a group of articles on “Surveillance”, edited by Toby Miller, who presents these articles in his own introduction to the theme. This topic is particularly urgent today, inviting new scholarship in the legacy of Michel Foucault to critically explore how new forms of communication and media technologies are integrated in a subtle politics of the gaze, involving a combination of state authorities, market enterprises and civil society communities. 2009 Nobel Prize winner Herta Müller has depicted how techniques and practices of surveillance and self-surveillance under dictatorship penetrate and shape the most intimate relations and subjectivities. In shifting modes and proportions, similar
mechanisms are equally evident in China, Iran or, in more subtle forms, in democracies like the United States. In Sweden, too, the government recently passed laws permitting the authorities to gather information on all electronic data traffic across national borders, and private businesses to collect data necessary to press charges against alleged piracy. This development, in turn, breeds critical responses, and the newly-started Swedish Pirate Party has, as a result, even won seats in the European Parliament. They represent an awkward mixture of neoliberal nerds and anarchist activists, but they nevertheless indicate that the new surveillance strategies cannot be installed without resistance, and that younger generations are certainly not pacified. Toby Miller’s theme section, with analyses from many different locations, offers ample evidence of both the dangers and the contradictions involved in the dawning 21st century landscape of surveillance. A forthcoming theme section on “Intellectual Property” (edited by Eva Hemmungs Wirtén) will reconnect to similar issues from a slightly different perspective.

A comparable mixture of fateful tragedy and unexpected rays of hope can be found in the climate issue, where widespread passivity and arrogance threaten the future of the human species on this planet, while so much responsible activity is simultaneously emerging all over the globe. Cultural studies should engage far more actively in such issues, since the climate crisis itself is related to an intrusion of human culture into planetary nature, and since possible solutions must involve cultural transformations of lifestyles on all societal levels. Therefore, in June 2009, ACSIS organised, a big and successful national conference in Norrköping, Sweden, on “Culture–Nature”. It will leave several traces in Culture Unbound, beginning with a theme section entitled “Feminist Interrogations of Posthumanism”, which will be published this coming fall. In it, our guest editor Jenny Sundén will explore some of the most crucial intersections between culture and nature in the field of gender studies.

These issues also relate to the ongoing geopolitical transformations that need to be addressed by cultural research: the shift in economic and political power between Europe, North America and East Asia; and the fate of the unification processes in Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America. Another issue where we invite articles or proposals for theme sections concerns the intermedial aesthetics of new media genres such as reality television, games, blogs, autobiography or crime fiction. And why not make theoretical or methodological combinations that have been rare or even unfashionable in mainstream cultural studies?

These thoughts merely aim to bring inspiration to the new year – the actual outcome is up to our readers, authors and co-editors. What we do know is that in the hereby opened second volume, we plan to release a number of thematic sections reflecting the relevance, richness and homogeneity of contemporary cultural research: “Culture, Labour and Emotions” (edited by Tom O’Dell); “Rural Media Spaces” (edited by Magnus Anderson and André Jansson); “Literature and the
Public Sphere” (edited by Torbjörn Forslid) and “Uses of the Past” (edited by Peter Aronsson). Many more are planned to follow next year. The co-editors this year happen to be predominantly Swedish, but we will continue to commission authors from various world regions, and will be particularly welcoming to authors and guest editors from other continents for all future volumes of our favourite journal of current cultural research.

Welcome to a second year with Culture Unbound!

**Johan Fornäs** is Editor-in-Chief of *Culture Unbound*, Professor at the Department of Media and Communication Studies at Södertörn University in south Stockholm, and Director of the Advanced Cultural Studies Institute of Sweden (ACSIS) at Linköping University. With a background in musicology, he is a Board member of the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation (Riksbankens Jubileumsfond) and was 2004-08 Vice Chair of the international Association for Cultural Studies (ACS).

**Martin Fredriksson** is Executive Editor of *Culture Unbound*. He is also administrator at ACSIS, with a Ph.D. at the Department of Culture Studies (Tema Q), Linköping University. He recently published his dissertation *The Rights of Creativity* that explores the relation between the cultural construction of The Author and the history of Swedish Copyright Law 1877-1960.

**Jenny Johannisson**, Ph.D., is Associate Editor and Review Editor of Culture Unbound. She works as a researcher and lecturer at the Centre for Cultural Policy Research, the Swedish School of Library and Information Science, Borås, Sweden. She is Vice Chair of the Swedish Cultural Policy Research Observatory (SweCult) and member of the scientific committee for the International Cultural Policy Research Conference (ICCPR). Her main research interests concern local and regional cultural policy against the backdrop of globalization processes.
Surveillance: The "Digital Trail of Breadcrumbs"

By Toby Miller

Surveillance is an ordinary part of daily life. It’s commonplace, routine. If you talk to state security agents, they’ll tell you there are perhaps ten million spies in the world (approximately half of whom are Chinese). The United States alone boasts well over three million surveillance and enforcement workers (http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes330000.htm), and we all know how pervasive closed-circuit television has become in major cities (there are said to be 4.2 million such cameras in Britain and thirty million in the US) not to mention radio-frequency identification chips, website cookies, store-loyalty cards, and global-positioning trackers (Butler 2009). Law-enforcement services are thrilled with YouTube’s surveillance possibilities as a means of directly observing “crimes”. They even urge YouTubers to become amateur sleuths. One in five employers in the US screen candidates for jobs by searching social-networking sites such as Facebook for incriminating evidence about them (Miller 2009; Havenstein 2008). Even as most countries in the Global North see decreases in violent crime and terrorism (down 4.4% in the US in the first six months of 2009, http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/2009prelimsem/index.html), there are massively-increased investments in the surveillance sector, whose public-relations machines trot out panics galore (La Vigne et al. 2008). The computing-security firm McAfee publishes a Virtual Criminology Report each year that is dedicated to alarming readers about information systems’ porosity—and exciting them at the ease with which these can be turned to surveillance purposes.

This should surprise no-one. For surveillance has been a central strut of modernity since it began, supposedly making populations secure and productive. Foucault explains:

an important problem for [French] towns in the eighteenth century was allowing for surveillance, since the suppression of city walls made necessary by economic development meant that one could no longer close towns in the evening or closely supervise daily comings and goings, so that the insecurity of the towns was increased by the influx of the floating population of beggars, vagrants, delinquents, criminals, thieves, murderers, and so on, who might come, as everyone knows, from the country. ... In other words, it was a matter of organizing circulation, eliminating its dangerous elements, making a division between good and bad circulation, and maximizing the good circulation by diminishing the bad (1978/2007: 54; also see 1976)

With the expansion of state authority into the everyday, into all corners of life, the quid pro quo for the security afforded by governments has become that our lives be knowable. The equivalent expansion of corporations into the everyday, into all

corners of life, has as *its quid pro quo* for the provision of goods and services by companies that they, too, know more and more about us. The supposedly neoliberal paradise of the monadic, ratiocinative, citizen-consumer is nothing of the sort. It represents the onward march of governmental and corporate knowledge of the population, spectacularly exemplified by the genre of securitainment that Mark Andrejevic engages in this thematic section. As Jessica Behm’s essay shows, even military clothing is now a technological surveillance device, while however poorly it may do the job, biometrics’ ongoing popularity as a method of “identifying” miscreants is notably examined by Kelly Gates here.

It’s touching, isn’t it, to see both left and right tie themselves in knots over surveillance? The right shouts about too much state power, even as it calls for authoritarian policing and religious and racial profiling of potential evildoers. The left shouts about too few civil liberties, even as it calls for legislation to secure freedom from corporate oversight. The right seems not to care a jot about corporate invigilation of everyday life; the left not a whit about the need to protect societies through espionage. Hence bodies like the American Civil Liberties Union referring to contradictory yet bipartisan anxieties over the birth of a ”surveillance monster” inside a ”surveillance society” (Stanley and Steinhardt 2003). Both sides get caught up in dilemmas over how to understand the act of looking, as if it were unholy. In related papers for this section, Henry Krips troubles psychoanalytic film theory and Ruhi Khan queries “native” ethnography.

There is an interesting history to the complex blend of private and public surveillance that underpins what these contributors offer us. A poll of over a thousand US business executives in the mid-1970s followed up a *Harvard Business Review* study of 1959 (Wall 1974; Furash 1959). The corporate hacks who were surveyed believed that espionage had increased over the previous decade and a half, because of declining ethics, increasing competition, macroeconomic concerns, and shareholding by executives. The bigger the company, the more intelligence it gathered, and the more security measures it took. Secondly, younger executives were more in favor of espionage than their older counterparts, regardless of legality. The US government estimated a loss to corporate business of US$3 billion in 1965 because of (mostly domestic) spying, and US$4 billion five years later. By 1973, almost three hundred thousand security guards were employed by US corporations, and overall expenditure on the sector was US$4.4 billion. The Federal Bureau of Investigation investigated four hundred cases of industrial espionage in 1994 and eight hundred in 1996, while the American Society for Industrial Security estimated annual losses to US companies from such assaults at US$100 billion in 1997, up five-fold in two decades (Miller 2003). As the FBI puts it, explaining its operations under the Economic Espionage Act of 1996, ”The Cold War is not over, it has merely moved into a new arena: the global marketplace” ([http://www.fbi.gov/hq/ci/economic.htm](http://www.fbi.gov/hq/ci/economic.htm)). In 2004, theft of trade secrets
and critical technologies was said to be worth US$250 billion a year (Gebhardt 2004).

The euphemism “competitive intelligence” has been coined to describe both legal and more dubious sides to surveillance. Some of this work involves studying political activities, laws, economic reports, country and client information, production figures, and research and development. The dubious part comes when marketing or technological developments have their costs cut by stealing information developed and paid for by others. Classic cases include car designs, drug prototypes, anti-parasite chemicals, toothpaste market reports, and disk drives (Miller 2003).

During the late 1980s, the Central Intelligence Agency kept its budget up despite perestroika by claiming that national security risks were being displaced by commercial ones, with industrial surveillance the latest Soviet threat. In addition, it was stated that even allies were penetrating US firms in search of secrets that would produce business advantages. And throughout its life, Britain’s Official Secrets Act has been subject to debates over the status of commercial forms of knowledge and whether their theft can be construed as a threat to security on purely economic grounds. This is the point where safety and national interest meet in the capitalist world system. US intelligence claims that dozens of countries are involved in economic espionage against it, and must be countered through ever-greater levels of surveillance. Government policy shifts were announced in the 1990s, tying the spy agencies of Australia, Britain, the US, Russia, and South Africa to economic work separate from, and equal to, their alibi of national security (Miller 2003).

And the private sector itself? In addition to spying on competitors, corporations also engage in surveillance of their employees. The newer technologies offer crucial forms of Taylorism, measuring keystrokes and delivering anti-theft tactics. No computer, email account, or phone is secure from corporations’ predations and obsessions (Bupp 2001; Mosco and Kiss 2006; Hayes 2008; Derene 2007). My principal concern here, however, is their surveillance of customers, particularly via the media.

The prevailing euphemism for this surveillance is “accountability”. That term should refer to corporations and governments being accountable to popular democracy; but in the culture industries, it signifies the information about audiences that commercial web sites and TV networks hand to advertisers. These data cover identity, wealth, and taste: who people are, what they watch, when and where they do so, and what that then urges them to purchase. Hence the advent of firms such as Phorm and FrontPorch (“Watching” 2008), and corporate consultant Openwave’s useful Privacy Primer, which says it is offering consumer protection from an Era of Behavioral Marketing, but gleefully avows that “On the internet, customer feedback isn't requested so much as it’s collected, like a digital trail of
breadcrumbs. Mobile technology only sharpens the focus on user behavior by bringing location and contextual information into play” (2009).

New on-line corporate sites that replay US television and movies, such as Hulu, use ”geo-filtered access logs” to disclose viewer information, alongside confessional testimonies by potential audiences—if you tell us about your life and your practices of consumption, we’ll tell you about programs that may interest you (Miller 2010). Disney’s global sports TV network ESPN exploits interactive fora such as “My Vote” and “My Bottom Line” to uncover more and more data about audience drives, in the name of enabling participation and pleasure in watching. Visitors to Time Warner’s HBO web site on boxing encounter a section entitled ”COMMUNITY” that invites them to vote in polls, subscribe to a newsletter, and express their views on bulletin boards. This ”COMMUNITY” is a system of surveillance that allows the network to monitor viewers for ideas without paying for intellectual property—which they must sign over in order to participate (Miller 2010; Miller and Kim 2008).

And consider the impact of YouTube’s Video Identification. The software was developed with Disney and Time Warner. It is a surveillance device for tracking copyrighted materials on the site that follows the history of each uploaded frame, spying on users to disclose their internet protocols, aliases, and practices to corporations. That permits these companies to block or allow reuse of texts, depending on their marketing and surveillance needs of the moment. YouTube has become Hollywood’s valued ally, tracking intellectual property, and realizing the culture industries’ dream of engaging in product placement each time copyright is infringed on line, while learning more and more about their audiences (Miller 2009).

There is, of course, a certain amount of resistance to these tendencies, from unions (Mosco and Kiss 2006) and social movements (Privacy International publishes a yearly review of ”Surveillance Societies” [2008] while Liberty (http://www.liberty-human-rights.org.uk) and the Electronic Privacy Information Center, http://www.epic.org, do pathbreaking work) plus scrutiny through privacy commissions (such as Canada’s, http://www.priv.gc.ca/index_e.cfm) and academia (the Surveillance Studies Network, http://www.surveillance-studies.net, runs the journal Surveillance and Society, while, more ambiguously, the Information War Monitor consults with “industry”, http://www.infowar-monitor.net; also see Maxwell 1996, 1998, 1999; 2005; Lyon 2007; Cohen 2008).

I began this introduction by insisting on the ubiquity and inevitability of surveillance. That certainly doesn’t mean we should accept the way that states track residents’ every move, or that corporations observe employees’ and customers’ every shimmy, selling the results without their knowledge or approval. Foucault is right to twin surveillance to modernity as a longstanding form of control as the predicate to growth. But it has always had a paradoxical other side. The right to anonymity, to being a stranger, is just as much part of modernity as is the trade-
off with security (Simmel 1976). Specifically, the internet is a multiply-edged sword, and we must be aware of all its capacities in order to control it democratically, thereby securing the right to individual and cultural mystery as much as security.

Toby Miller is Professor Media & Cultural Studies at the University of California, Riverside, and the author of over twenty books, the latest of which is Television Studies: The Basics. E-mail: tobym@ucr.edu.

The editor and the authors would like to thank the anonymous reviewer whose thoughtful and initiated response has contributed greatly to this thematic section of Culture Unbound.

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Reading the Surface: Body Language and Surveillance

By Mark Andrejevic

Abstract
This article explores the role played by body language in recent examples of popular culture and political news coverage as a means of highlighting the potentially deceptive character of speech and promising to bypass it altogether. It situates the promise of “visceral literacy” – the alleged ability to read inner emotions and dispositions – within emerging surveillance practices and the landscapes of risk they navigate. At the same time, it describes portrayals of body language analysis as characteristic of an emerging genre of “securitainment” that instructs viewers in monitoring techniques as it entertains and informs them. Body language ends up caught in the symbolic impasse it sought to avoid: as soon as it is portrayed as a language that can be learned and consciously “spoken” it falls prey to the potential for deceit. The article’s conclusion considers the way in which emerging technologies attempt to address this impasse, bypassing the attempt to infer underlying signification altogether.

Keywords: Body language, surveillance, poker TV, Lie to Me, lying, homeland security.
Reading the Surface: Body Language and Surveillance

The opening sequence of the pilot for Fox TV’s *Lie to Me*, a police procedural devoted not to forensic science but to body language, portrays the lead character, deception expert Dr. Cal Lightman, expressing his disdain for speech. “I don’t have much faith in words myself”, he says, after being told by the belligerent lawyer for a white supremacist that his client won’t talk (*Lie to Me* 2008). Lightman explains to the lawyer, “Statistically speaking the average person tells three lies per 10 minutes of conversation.” He nevertheless continues to question the reluctant suspect, discovering where a bomb has been hidden by gauging the nonverbal reactions to his verbal probes. As Lightman speaks, the camera provides cues as to where his attention is directed: to tiny twitches in the suspect’s lips, a tightening of the throat, and a partial movement of his shoulder. When a fleeting expression lets Lightman know that he has correctly guessed the location of a concealed bomb, the lawyer objects and Lightman responds, “What do you mean? He just told me!” (*Lie to Me* 2008). If the suspect’s words have been filled with indignant denials, lies, and misdirections, his body has been speaking the truth, albeit unwittingly. The next scene portrays Dr. Lightman in didactic mode, translating the suspect’s gestures for an audience of law enforcement officials – and also for the show’s viewers – into the emotions they express. If the diegetic tutorial leaves viewers hungry for more, the show’s viewers can also go to the show’s Web site to see how the plot points are based on actual research on body language and micro-expressions.

The combination of instruction and entertainment in *Lie to Me*, which relies on the research of the show’s advisor, expression expert Dr. Paul Ekman, places it in an emerging multi-genre constellation of programming devoted to what might be described as the promise of visceral literacy: the attempt to bypass the vagaries of speech to get at the true underlying sentiments that speakers all too often attempt to mask. Joining *Lie to Me* in this inter-genre programming mix are a range of reality shows that feature lie detection – perhaps most notably Court TV’s *Fake Out*, in which a former FBI profiler trains contestants in the art of lie detection, and also MTV’s *Exposed*, in which prospective dates are subjected to voice stress analysis. Alongside such shows we might include the frequent use of lie detectors on a range of reality shows as well as recurring news analysis segments that feature “body language experts”, including Tonya Reiman and Joe Navarro, who look behind the words to reveal what newsmakers are allegedly thinking and feeling. As the introduction to one body language segment devoted to the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign on CBS’s *The Early Show* put it, “You heard what the candidates had to say last night during the presidential debate, but did you hear what they didn’t say, did you see what they didn’t say? There’s a lot to be learned from their body language” (*The Saturday Early Show* 2008, 27 September). Both *The
Early Show and Fox News’s Bill O’Reilly feature recurring body language segments that double as tutorials in how to read the body language of others.

This chapter approaches the recent constellation of instances of body-language analysis in popular media –portrayals of the attempt to bypass the level of conscious discourse by turning to the body – as characteristic of emerging logics of surveillance associated with the mobilization of the spectre of risk in a reflexively savvy era in which self-presentation is relegated to the realm of façade and speech (political speech in particular) to that of stagecraft. It is worth noting at the outset that a paradox lies at the heart of such logics, which portray surface appearance as a means of discerning a hidden yet directly accessible inner state. In advocating what seems at first a radical empiricism, they simultaneously project beyond surface appearances to hidden, underlying truths. The distinction between depth and surface, reality and appearance gets flattened into the realm of appearances, some of which can be dismissed as misleading or inessential, others of which, at least to the initiated, allow essence to come to the surface where it can “speak” for itself. The paradox is a familiar one with a long history in the analysis of facial expression and body language. The social function of such analyses varies with historical context. Thus, an early analysis of physiognomy (dubiously) attributed to Aristotle, evinces a mania for classification and categorization as means of making sense of the natural world, whereas the 18th century physiognomy of Lavater (and his followers) embraces the Enlightenment notion that surface signs provide access to the hidden, underlying truths accessible to practitioners of science. The 18th century techniques of both physiognomy and phrenology asserted that an inner (emotional, psychological) state manifests itself, albeit indirectly, in physical forms that can be detected at the level of appearance. In each case the mental or emotional is linked to the corporeal in a directly legible way. To invoke the Hegelian terms used by Dolar (1994), an “infinite judgment” that posits the identity between matter and mental life is at stake in such claims: a particular arrangement of muscles or bony bumps is equated with a mental state or psychological disposition. As Dolar puts it, in a different context (the identity of use and exchange value in Marx), in such “infinite judgments”: “The ‘immaterial’ equals the ‘material,’ the ‘supersensible’ equals the ‘sensible...’” (1994: 68).

Although 20th century forms of body language analysis which, broadly construed, range from the analysis of non-verbal communication (popularized as an academic discipline in the 1970s) to lie-detection technology, do not necessarily share the Enlightenment conception of underlying truth, they reveal a bias toward the notion that bodies may speak more honestly than words. Even while dismissing the notion as naive, Burgoon, Buller & Woodall note that, “nonverbal behaviors are assumed to be more truthful and therefore more trusted….In fact, research shows that when verbal messages contradict nonverbal ones, adults usually believe the nonverbal message” (1996: 7-8). Much of the academic and popular literature on body language reproduces the notion that non-verbal expressions tend
to be more spontaneous or difficult to control than speech, if only because of the complexity of keeping track of and managing the various dimensions of gesture, expression, posture, and so on. The popularized promise of body literacy, especially as espoused in a range of self-empowerment books on body language (see, for example, Reiman, 2008; Navarro, 2008, Hogan, 2008; and Kinsey, 2008, to name a few), reproduces the promise of bypassing appearance to get to an underlying sense of accuracy or authenticity. Geoffrey Beattie, who served as on-air psychologist and commentator for the Big Brother reality TV show in the U.K., promises in his book that those who master his theories of gesture analysis – based in part on his study of interactions on the reality show, “may also learn to read minds in a very real and in a very scientific sense” (2003: 37).

It is not so much the validity of such claims that this article explores nor the various qualifications of non-verbal communication as more or less accurate than speech (surely it serves as an important dimension of communication), as the context in which they acquire meaning and allure as a means for bypassing the slippery medium of speech and the potentially deceptive nature of its content in an era of generalized risk and savvy scepticism. The promise that viewers can learn to read the hidden truths revealed by the materiality of the body links together a constellation of cultural developments ranging from the proliferation of self-help body language books in the past decade or so, the emergence of the forensics-oriented police procedural (which focuses on detection equipment and lab work) as well as TV shows like Lie to Me and The Mentalist, the use of body language in news analysis, and new forms of marketing and deception-detection technologies.

Perhaps the clearest contemporary examples of such developments are provided by cutting-edge neuroscience applications, including the 2008 decision by an Indian court to convict a suspect of murder based on readings from an electroencephalogram. The brain scans were processed by software that, “tries to detect whether, when the crime’s details are recited, the brain lights up in specific regions — the areas that, according to the technology’s inventors, show measurable changes when experiences are relived, their smells and sounds summoned back to consciousness” (Giridharadas 2008). The equation here is between material traces – the electrical impulses in the brain – and memories of lived experiences. The software’s designer claims that the machine can differentiate between memories of events recounted by others and those directly experienced by the subject under investigation. Highlighting the affinity between law enforcement and marketing, a similar equation is embraced by the developing “science” of neuromarketing, in which focus group research is replaced by brain scans that measure affective response to advertising campaigns. The equation here is between blood flow in the brain and desire. As one press account of neuromarketing researchers at a company called the BrightHouse Institute put it, a “glowing yellow dot near the top of the brain…was the magic spot – the medial prefrontal cortex. If that area is firing, a consumer isn’t deliberating...he’s itching to buy” (Thompson 2003).
It is crucial to such accounts that the physical data not be subject to conscious mental control – that it remain automatic and immediate, and thus inert from the perspective of self-conscious reflection. Otherwise, the promised short-circuit becomes subject to the same forms of reflexivity associated with conscious speech, and is no longer a short-circuit at all. The promise of direct access to the underlying emotions, impulses, and memories behind a manipulable façade is predicated on this inertness – its non-reactivity to reflection. If, for example, one of the shortcomings of focus-group marketing is that consumers may not know exactly what they want and that they can be influenced by the process itself, the supposed advantage of neuromarketing is that this short-circuit that provides direct access to desire: “M.R.I. scanning offers the promise of concrete facts – an unbiased glimpse at a consumer's mind in action. To an M.R.I. machine, you cannot misrepresent your responses. Your medial prefrontal cortex will start firing when you see something you adore, even if you claim not to like it” (Thompson 2003). Even, presumably, if you do not know you like it.

**Generalized Suspicion**

The obvious difference between the marketing and detection examples is that whereas the latter attempt to circumvent deliberate deception, the former claim access to truths about consumers they may not know themselves. Both rely on forms of monitoring that detect activity supposedly beyond the reach of an individual’s deliberate control over self-representation. What unites these forms of monitoring is a faith in direct access to hidden depths combined with a reflexive savviness toward discourse proper – the understanding that, for example, speech can be deceiving, caught up in forms of power or ideology as well as in deliberate forms of deception. This combination of generalized scepticism with a seemingly naive faith is not an unfamiliar one in the current conjuncture. In his lament on the fate of critique in a terminally savvy era, for example, Latour (2004: 228), describes the neighbour (in his Bourbonnais village) who looks down on him as a dupe for believing mainstream media accounts of the September 11 attacks rather, presumably, than the conspiracy theory outlined in Thierry Meyssan’s bestseller, *L’Effroyable Imposture*, which claims the attacks were secretly orchestrated by the U.S. government. A similar combination of generalized scepticism with willing suspension of disbelief is the stock-in-trade of the U.S. right-wing publication *Human Events* (described by firebrand right-wing pundit Ann Coulter as the “Headquarters of the Conservative Underground”) which debunks mainstream media and political narratives even as it barrages readers with get-rich-quick schemes and miracle cures. There is at times a tragicomic complementarity between the feature articles, which routinely ridicule global warming claims and social welfare programs, and the ads, which promise instant wealth and promote
miracle cures for cancer. The articles criticize social programs even as the ads market snake-oil substitutes to fill the needs the debunked programs address. Žižek (1999) has described this combination of scepticism with naiveté as symptomatic of the decline of symbolic “efficiency” – the faith in grand narratives that might serve as ground and guarantee of shared meaning in a society. He sees Beck’s (1992) analysis of the risk society as symptomatic of the decline of one of these narratives: the notion that science might serve as a guide for human action and a means of adjudicating between competing claims about environmental risks produced by human activity. The result is an ersatz democratization of competing claims in which the criteria for adjudication are themselves called into question, and hence the resurgence of conspiracy theories alongside the debunking of dominant narratives. As Žižek (2001) puts it, 

The problem is not that...conspiracy theorists regress to a paranoiac attitude unable to accept (social) reality; the problem is that this reality itself is becoming paranoiac. Contemporary experience again and again confronts us with situations in which we are compelled to take note of how...the ‘big Other’ that determines what counts as normal and accepted truth, the horizon of meaning in a given society, is in no way directly grounded in ‘facts’ as rendered by the scientific ‘knowledge in the real.’ (219)

If paranoia is not the defining mistake of conspiracy theory, he goes on to argue, category confusion is: the problem is a conflation of the hermeneutics of suspicion as “a formal methodological stance”, with “the positivization of this suspicion in another all-explaining global paratheory” (220). It is this confusion that licenses the implicit message of publications like Human Events and Meyssan’s work: conspiracies are all the more believable precisely because they run so astounding counter to the received wisdom – they gain their legitimacy through the thrill of being illegitimate and their appeal to the desire of what Lacan (1973-4) calls the “non-dupe”, who seeks above all not to be fooled.

The goal of the non-dupe is to bypass symbolic representations through direct access to reality, an attitude that lends itself to forms of monitoring – such as body language analysis – that take place, as it were, beyond the back of the subject. In this regard, it underpins forms of surveillance designed to circumvent deliberate control over self-representation. The background risk, as symbolic efficiency falls prey to debunkery, is that of being taken in by representations. Proliferating forms of monitoring and surveillance mobilize this risk and promise to help manage it. It is possible to trace this logic in the generalization of savvy skepticism – what Žižek describes as the subjective response to “reality itself...becoming paranoiac” – from the micro-level of interpersonal relationships to the macro-level realm of the so-called Global War on Terror. At the interpersonal level, the forms of identity play that Turkle (1997) associated relatively early on in the internet era with online subjectivity are paralleled by the subsequent proliferation of techniques for online monitoring and background checking. Turkle made the connection between the performative character of identity online and the deconstruction of grand nar-
narratives and subjectivity relatively early on in the internet era: “In my computer-mediated worlds, the self is multiple, fluid, and constituted in interaction with machine connections; it is made and transformed by language” (1997: 19). The online world that captivated Turkle – that of role playing in virtual fantasy worlds – has been far outstripped, suggestively, by the proliferation of social networking sites that facilitate always-on forms of mutual monitoring. If MUDs allowed one college junior interviewed by Turkle to play the multiple online roles of a seductive woman, a “cowboy type”, and a “rabbit of unspecified gender” (1997: 22), Facebook, by contrast, makes it possible for a college student to lose his girlfriend because he portrayed himself as single online.

Turkle’s analysis suggests that the internet thematizes an understanding of the constructed nature of representation characteristic of a population that has grown up with a reflexive understanding of media representation, exemplified by meta-coverage and meta-programming (news about the constructed character of the news and television about TV). Pushing the argument still further, Coleman (2003) suggests that the interactive capacity of the internet appropriated by programming formats like Big Brother (that rely on viewer feedback), “makes all representations of reality vulnerable to public challenge and disbelief” (35). Coleman’s analysis suggests that there is a politically empowering character to such challenges, perhaps because of their apparent kinship with a notion of the public sphere in which political viewpoints are subject to critique. However, the post-deferential politics Coleman invokes, in which the pleasures of everyday sociality are privileged over stuffy forms of political deliberation, does not lend itself to the forms of rational critique invoked by Habermas (1962/1991). They fit rather, with what Massumi (2005) has described as the “affective fact” associated with the threat of risk in the neo-liberal era: a fact that generates its own truth while effectively displacing the debunked ideals of rational-critical deliberation: “The breakdown of logico-discursive reasoning and the accompanying decline of the empirical fact does not of course mean that there is no longer any logic – or any facts. There is a tautological logic that tends to prevail, and a new order of facts associated with it emerges” (7). Such facts are visceral – a directly intuited gut reaction that short-circuits the potential deceptions of both rationality and deliberation.

If the notion of post-deferential and post-ideological society invoked by Coleman (2003) is of a piece with scepticism toward grand narratives and thus the decline of symbolic efficiency identified by Žižek and the rise of the “affective fact” described by Massumi. It is also characterized by a structure of feeling in which the invocation of such narratives reeks of undemocratic elitism. As Coleman (2003) puts it, a post-deferential culture is one in which,

The element of performance within shows like Big Brother...are also manifestations of testifying and witnessing which, at least for some people, provide a more authentic sense of accountability than parliamentary debate or political interviews. Moving
This formulation of the politics of everyday speech has a close affinity, in other words, to the fascination evinced by Bill O’Reilly’s body language segment with the underlying emotions and interpersonal dynamics of political actors rather than in the deliberative content that serves merely as the occasion for their appearance. Body language monitoring transposes elements of political deliberation into the register of personal authenticity. On one such segment, for example, body language analyst Tonya Reiman suggested that vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin may have lost an opportunity to look sympathetic when her debate opponent Joe Biden referred to being a single father after the death of his wife and one of their children. Reiman gave her seal of approval to Biden’s emotions: “Whenever we get very emotional, we look down. And he was. The catch in the throat, that’s you know, an involuntary muscle. It just gets caught...And that's a true emotional response” (Fox News: The O’Reilly Factor 2008). However, she faulted Palin’s reaction to Biden’s emotional display: “instead of looking at him making eye contact, which would have been very powerful. Instead, she chose to basically keep that smile pasted on her face and ignore that” (Fox News: The O’Reilly Factor 2008). None of which had as much to do with the issues being debated as with the perceived authenticity of the candidates in their treatment of one another – and the implicit impact of these performances of sociability, witnessing, and testifying on a voting public seeking a visceral connection to the candidates.

If generalized scepticism serves as an alibi for attempting to bypass the level of discourse in the political sphere through recourse to more “direct” forms of monitoring, the generalization of surveillance in the post-9/11 era turns this logic back on the populace. One of the hallmarks of the so-called Global War on Terror declared by George Bush is the ubiquity of potential threat: since terrorists don’t clearly identify themselves, suspicion is generalized; since they use unconventional forms of warfare, virtually anything can be redoubled as either target or weapon. As Xavier Rauffer, the director of the Department for the Study of the Contemporary Critical Menace at the University of Paris II, puts it, “previously clear distinctions—between attack and defense, the state and civil society, the public and private sectors, civilians and the military, war and peace, police and army, legality and illegality—are becoming blurred” (Kamien 2006; 132). We might add to this list of blurred boundaries that between citizen and suspect, as evidenced by the forms of covert surveillance of the civilian population practiced by the Bush administration.

It is against this background of reflexive suspicion associated with the demise of symbolic efficiency, that the promise of more direct forms of access via techniques for body monitoring takes shape. For the purposes of this argument, the turn to the body might be understood as one manifestation of a more generalized (and self-defeating) attempt to circumvent the level of discourse. Other forms of
information gathering serve a similar purpose, such as, for example the collection of patterns of social interaction or movement throughout the course of the day that reveal either unconscious or disguised tendencies. The goal is to obtain information about monitored targets that escapes strategies of dissimulation or self-deception. We might describe such forms of monitoring as attempts to gather useful information about potentially deceptive or misleading forms of self-representation (that is to say all conscious forms of self-representation) while bypassing or sidestepping self-conscious forms of communication. Which is not to say that such forms of monitoring are separable from, say, face-to-face interaction. To detect whether someone is lying according to the body language experts, you have to get them to speak. In this regard the attempt to bypass the vagaries of speech also relies upon the incitement to discourse: the more speech and gestures available to the analyst, the more raw material for interpretation, the more potential truth-revealing leaks.

*Lie to Me*, for example stages the split between conversation and body reading – it is in the space between what the words and the body say that the analyst inserts his or her interpretation. Suggestively, it is this same space that is invoked by Oliver Sacks (1985) in his account of the reactions of patients with global aphasia and tonal agnosia to a speech by then U.S President Ronald Reagan. The former group could comprehend the body language of the president but not the meaning of his words, the latter could understand the words but not their intonation or the body language. Both apparently found the speech unconvincing. As Massumi (2002) interprets the story, “‘The Great Communicator’ was failing to persuade...To the aphasics he was functionally illiterate in extra-verbal cueing; his body language struck them as hilariously inept...The agnosiacs were outraged that the man couldn’t put together a grammatical sentence or follow a logical line to its conclusion” (40). If the integration of words and gestures, viewed uncritically, might serve the purpose of deception, the role of the body language expert is to take them apart, with the focus on the content for the purposes of interpreting the gestures. Much the same might be said of other forms of scientific psychology that ask test subjects questions not to evaluate the content of their answers but to observe the physiological signs that accompany them. As the Web site for “Project Implicit”, an online battery of association tests that gauge varying response times puts it, “It is well known that people don't always ‘speak their minds,’ and it is suspected that people don't always ‘know their minds’” (IAT Home 2008). What the tests do, in other words is sidestep self-understanding and self-representation to get at these recalcitrant minds directly. The next two sections take up the impasse of such approaches through examples from popular culture: the tell-reading tutorials on televised poker, and the body language segments in political news coverage.
It Takes a Liar…

Against the background of the Global War on Terror, it is possible to trace a constellation of popular culture formats that might be loosely grouped in the category of “securitainment” – a hybrid genre that provides instruction in strategies for risk management and security training as adjuncts to its entertainment content. Such cultural forms cater to a neo-liberal culture of ongoing self-training (see, for example, Palmer 2002 and Ouellette and Hay 2008). In the category of “securitainment” we might include such television programs as Fake Out, a Court TV show that offers instruction in lie detection from an FBI profiler, It Takes a Thief, which teaches viewers how to secure their homes, Australia’s Border Security: Australia’s Front Line, a reality show about customs workers, and a similarly themed American reality show, Homeland Security USA. What these shows have in common is not just the theme of securitization but also an instructional/informational element that caters to the interactive ethos of the digital era. If the boundaries between civilian and soldier are blurred in the war on terror, such programming reinforces this porosity: the instructional components of the show take on practical salience in an era of generalized risk.

This article argues that another show which partakes in the logic of securitainment, although less obviously, is the televised version of the World Series of Poker, which provides tutorials in the management of (albeit contrived) risk and, especially, in monitoring strategies for reading the bodies of others who are attempting to deceive you. Tournament poker serves as a metaphor for the universalisation of suspicion – a microcosm of the decline of symbolic efficiency. The only guarantee at the poker table is that nothing anyone says can be trusted: the oft-cited though rarely enforced rule is that the only information a player is explicitly forbidden from sharing with other players during game play is the true content of his or her hand. In a world where everyone is expected to lie, the one form of deception ruled out is lying in the guise of truth.

The default language of the table, then, is body language. As 2004 World Champion Tim Raymer put it in an interview on the World Series of Poker, “it’s about gathering data: reading tells is an important part. I like to look at the chest to see how fast they’re breathing” (World Series of Poker 2007, episode 4). He describes the importance of monitoring the veins in his opponents’ necks, following their hand movements and talking to them not to listen to the content, but to gauge their reactions, their tone of voice, their apparent confidence level. As commentator Vince Van Patten put it when describing the chatter at the poker table, “there is a method in their madness, they are looking for some information: a few little tells any little edge they can get” (World Series of Poker, 2007, episode 7). Indeed, conversation at the poker table is not about what is said, but about how it is said. As on Lie to Me (which might also be the title of a poker show), speech is a ruse for eliciting somatic signals. Similarly, on the show The Mentalist, the main character, who, like Cal Lightman in Lie to Me is portrayed as an
expert in reading body language, grabs the wrist of someone he is interrogating, listening to the words, but lining them up alongside the pulse. Poker pro Phil Gordon, who has hosted a celebrity TV poker show and written a guidebook about poker strategy, claims that for the trained player, “Getting info from other players is relatively easy, you just have to know what to look for…it’s not particularly the answer, but it’s the style in which someone answers that gives away the strength of their hand” (World Series of Poker, 2007, episode 7).

On The World Series of Poker, home viewers are schooled in the art of detecting “the tell” – the spontaneous gestures that, like the “microexpressions” studied by Dr. Paul Ekman, provide information about the underlying emotional states of players. Slamming your chips into the pot aggressively, for example, is a tell. Leaning back is a tell, as is leaning forward; a show of strength means weakness, and vice versa. As Celebrity Poker Showdown host Phil Gordon, put it, “looking directly at your opponent is a sign of weakness. You're trying to look at your opponent to look strong; but if I have a good hand, why would I want to intimidate my opponent?” (Celebrity Poker Showdown, 2005, Tournament 7, Game 2). The goal is to learn the significance of signals that are supposedly harder to control than words – to believe only your own eyes, never the other players' words. As in the case of other forms of what I am calling securitainment, the spectacle of lie detection on poker TV serves as a tutorial. “This is a lesson for the players at home”, is the repeated refrain of the show's hosts, who understand that the TV episodes are advertising for a booming ancillary market in learn-to-play products, and for the tournaments whose jackpots increase in proportion to the number of participants they draw from the audience ranks. Instruction is also a form of recruitment.

The case for treating poker TV as a form of securitainment is based not just on the fact that it provides instruction in risk calculation and people monitoring, but in the way it relates the two. Risk is in part a function of the reconfiguration of discourse and the competitive conditions at the table: all are pitted against all in such a way that none can be trusted and everyone is a strategic liar. Moreover, the risk starts anew with each fresh deal since the history of the cards is obliterated with each shuffle. Walter Benjamin highlights the disjointed character of gambling, noting its affinity with the alienation of the division of labor: “Since each operation at the machine is just as screened off from the preceding operation as a coup in a game of chance is from the one that preceded it, the drudgery of the labourer is, in its own way, a counterpart to the drudgery of the gambler” (1930/2006; 114). What Benjamin calls drudgery is the result of the alienation that makes it impossible to cognitively map any relation between subsequent instances of activity. Each deal, each cast of the dice, each turn of the wheel represents a new start – or a kind of inane repetition independent of previous activity. The artifice of the gambling table is to separate risk from any historical context –
even the mathematics of probability place a ban on the notion that a previous cast of the dice might influence subsequent ones.

The de-historicized sense of risk parallels the mobilization of the spectre of the war on terror, which in its emphasis on securitization, interrogation, and surveillance backgrounds any attempt to, as it were, “make sense” of the threat or to situate it in a historical context. Former Homeland Security Director Tom Ridge’s “readiness” campaign framed the implicitly ahistorical character of the threat by comparing terrorist attacks to natural disasters: “Families in Florida prepare themselves for the hurricane season; families in California prepare themselves for earthquakes. Every family in America should prepare itself for a terrorist attack” (Ad Council, 2003). This de-contextualization of terrorism parallels, as Rapping (2004) suggests, the de-narrativization of risk portrayed on reality shows like Cops (and poker TV), whose twilight landscape of strip malls and trailer parks is populated by characters, “that embody a proneness to random, sporadic violence that is represented as a permanent condition of human, or rather subhuman, nature. They are simply violent in ways that make no sense at all. We get no ‘story’ of any kind onto which we might hang a diagnosis or criminal profile” (22). The result, she argues, is what might be described as an actuarial approach to criminal risk resulting from a constant and irrational element of contemporary life (like the hurricane season) and justifying increasingly comprehensive forms of monitoring and oppressive forms of policing. Much the same can be said of the proliferation of the CSI franchise, whose plausibility is based not on any attempt to make narrative sense of the ubiquitous and insistent background of extreme crime, but on the explication of detection technology, which serves as the hero of the self-replicating format.

Similarly, an overview of the emerging policy-oriented literature on homeland security reveals that the risk of terror takes on the characteristic typical of Beck’s (1992) conception of reflexive risk – disturbing precisely because of its incalculable and unpredictable nature. Even if such risk is reflexive – somehow related to human activity – any attempt to narrativize it is nonetheless foreclosed: deliberation over history and politics cannot provide access to a risk that is, by definition, at least from the recent U.S. policy perspective, an irrational one. Risk management in this context relies on universal suspicion, surveillance (since everyone is potentially lying), and general mobilization (citizens must take on some of the duties of defence).

Consequently, homeland security campaigns call for the population to serve as an extension of the monitoring apparatus of the state, instructing the populace in some of the “tells” of potential terrorists (wearing unseasonably bulky coats to conceal explosives, and weapons, etc.). Life in the era of universal risk is, to put it bluntly, one big crap shoot and survival skills include preparation, alertness, and training in the ability to read others, calculate risk, and respond accordingly. The intersection of game theory and war strategy has a storied history that entered the
computer era and went mainstream in the post WW II era scientific community. What poker adds to the risk calculation process in the era of the so-called global war on terror is the cultivation of monitoring strategies associated with, as the poker wisdom puts it, playing the player and not the cards.

Despite the recurring invocation of battle and fight metaphors, it is perhaps fair to say that both poker and the war on terror share the characteristics of neo-liberal forms of risk mobilization. The hallmarks of neo-liberalism include the responsibility of the citizenry in the face of an array of economic, security, social, and health risks, along with the de-differentiation of the roles of citizen, police officer, and entrepreneur. As Lupton (2006) puts it, “risk strategies and discourses are means of ordering the social and material worlds through methods of rationalization and calculation, attempts to render disorder and uncertainty more controllable. It is these strategies and discourses that bring risk into being, that select certain phenomena as being risky and therefore requiring management either by institutions or individuals” (98). Thus at least part of the commonality between the lessons of the war on terror and those of poker TV might be attributed to their positioning within the constellation of neo-liberal strategies for the mobilization of the threat of risk.

This commonality has not been lost on the security sector, which has not only borrowed surveillance systems from one of the leaders in the field, gambling casinos (O’Harrow 2005), but is funding research on the strategies of body language analysis promulgated by poker TV commentators. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has budgeted some $3.5 million for research at Rutgers University to develop, “a lie detector capable of interpreting facial expressions and body language… scientists believe small movements such as shoulder shrugging or hand gestures can be analysed by computers to tell if someone is telling the truth” (Engineer 2005; 7). Time magazine has reported that in the U.S., “tens of millions to hundreds of millions of dollars are believed to have been poured into lie-detection techniques as diverse as infrared imagers to study the eyes, scanners to peer into the brain, sensors to spot liars from a distance, and analysts trained to scrutinize the unconscious facial flutters that often accompany a falsehood” (Kluger 2006). One government contractor, No Lie MRI has announced plans for, “a brain-scan lie-detection service” (Kluger 2006).

**Psychotic Politics**

The political analogue of citizen tutoring in a realm of reflexive risk and savvy skepticism is the instruction in “reading” politicians provided by the analysts of political body language. If the responsible citizen needs to be ever-vigilant for risk and deception, this same imperative is turned back upon the political sphere that helped mobilize it. The result is an analysis of political discourse that attempts to reveal the true character of politicians by setting aside the content of their finely-
spun speech and focusing on their bodies. The combination of savvy skepticism with a desire for unmediated access to a politician’s “authentic” character is symptomatic of the demise of symbolic efficiency. It is a combination that Žižek defines as a form of social psychosis, referencing his interpretation of Lacanian psychoanalysis: “psychosis involves the external distance the subject maintains towards the symbolic order…and the collapsing of the Symbolic into the Real (a psychotic treats “words as things”; in his universe, words fall into things and/or things themselves start to speak)” (1996: 196). It is a world in which brain scans reveal murderers, a fleeting micro-expression can give away a lie and George W. Bush can imagine the possibility of pushing aside the language barrier to gaze straight into Vladimir Putin’s soul.

The Bush presidency might be described, in these terms, as the embodiment of the logic of the decline of symbolic efficiency and the rise of the affective fact: the apotheosis of the role of visceral literacy in the triumph of the postmodern right. Far from representing a reaction to the deceptions, obfuscation, and recalcitrance toward public accountability of the Bush administration, the generalization of savvy skepticism anticipated them. From the start Bush played the role of the non-dupe and the body-language communicator – the politician who warned us of the duplicitous character of politicians and their savvy speech, directing his scorn toward the policy wonks like Al Gore and their naïve faith in reasoned analysis, bookish intellect, and the potentially benevolent role of government bureaucracy. During the 2000 campaign Bush’s approach recalled Lacan’s description of the knave who doesn’t shrink from the burden of “realism”: “that is…when required, he admits he’s a crook” (Lacan 1997: 183). One of the signature quotes of Bush’s 2000 campaign was his explicit mistrust of politicians themselves: “We don’t trust bureaucrats in Washington, D.C. We don’t believe in planners and deciders making decisions on behalf of America” (Mitchell 2007: A27). In a sense, the public had no right to claim that it had been deceived or misled by the Bush administration, which had signalled its understanding, in advance, that government was not to be trusted. Perhaps this is why indignation toward the various transgressions of the administration was so lacklustre, even in the face of activity that would have made Nixon blush: indignation is the province of the duped, not the savvy populace and the candidate who takes on, “the burden of ‘realism.’” Moreover, Bush modelled his own visceral appeal, making fun of his awkwardness with language and having recourse instead to his Texas style and swagger, while at the same time showcasing his own ability to cut through the verbiage to act on gut instinct (Suskind, 2004). Bush was the Texas poker player, cards close to his chest, taking in the souls of others at a glance, and at the same time appealing to the confidence inspired by his own demeanor.²

In such a context, perhaps it only makes sense that political coverage would recruit body language experts to “read” politicians the way Dr. Cal Lightman reads suspects. But when political discourse is pushed to the side, the leftovers are
merely broad generalities about perceived character traits. We learn whether someone seems to feel confident at particular moments, what their general disposition is toward a political rival (often, unsurprisingly, antagonistic), whether their emotional declarations are authentic or staged. When Hillary Clinton endorses Obama at the Democratic National Convention, we are told, for example, that she falls short on the enthusiasm scale. According to body language expert Joe Navarro, the problem lay in her hands: “we look for hand gestures to tell us what's important. So, you know, when we see them out, when we see them up, this is significant. And, you know, we saw them just a few times last night, but not enough. This was not an impassioned speech” (CBS News: The Early Show, 2008a). As for Sarah Palin, we learn perhaps unsurprisingly, the (affective) “fact” that she is a family person, “Well, you can see she's comfortable with her family. The family is comfortable with her. And a lot of times we – the public – picks up on little subtleties. And what we can tell is that she's a loving mother, a caring mother, but a focused mother,” (CBS News: The Early Show, 2008a). In short we learn the kind of banalities that Hegel attributes to the soothsayers of physiognomy, “As regards their content, however, these observations are on a par with these: ‘It always rains when we have our annual fair,’ says the dealer; ‘and every time too,’ says the housewife, ‘when I am drying my washing’” (193).

Partaking of the logic of securitainment, political body language experts are framed not just as analysts, but also as tutors, providing expertise to a populace faced with the risk of possible deception. To the extent that politicians are, in this type of analysis, judged on their interpersonal skills and the alleged authenticity of their emotions, the ability to discern these is readily transferable to other realms of social life. To put it somewhat differently, by setting aside its specific content, such forms of political analysis transpose political discourse into the realm of everyday social life by mediating them in what Coleman (2003) describes as “a more accessible and humane way”. This notion of political authenticity is perhaps what an anonymous political consultant was relying on when he chided political reporter Ron Suskind and other critics of George W. Bush for judging the president’s political competence by his apparent incuriosity and lack of detailed knowledge of the issues. The consultant suggested that what Suskind did not understand was that Bush related to his supporters on a more direct level: “They like the way he walks and the way he points, the way he exudes confidence” (2004).

Since body language analysis readily defaults from political content to personal authenticity, it is a skill that transfers easily from the realm of politics to that of daily life, business, and social interaction. We are also invited to train ourselves in the art of visceral literacy in order to be able to perform optimally in each of these realms. As Today show host Matt Lauer puts it, in one of his introductions for Joe Navarro, “So…if it's a science, someone like you can use this in your daily life and teach others how to use it in their daily lives?” To which Navarro replies, “Absolutely” (NBC News: Today 2007). As in the case of the poker shows, the
expert consultants explain literacy skills that, if audiences learn them well, will help them navigate a social landscape in which speech and appearances can all too often be deceiving. Suggestively, the realms of politics, business, and social life require the same skills, according to Lauer, “…being able to decode more subtle nonverbal cues may be the secret to success in business and in love” (NBC News: Today 2007).

However, there is a paradoxical double logic to the more direct and immediate language of the body – at least to hear the experts tell it. Just as the “speakers” – those giving off unconscious cues – are not necessarily aware of the signals they are sending, so too do these signals convey meanings to us in ways that we may not realize. When someone, for example, signals confidence, this confidence is apparently automatically conveyed – which is why, for example, Palin presumably lost points with her audience for not showing empathy to Biden. To interpret the signal is simultaneously to posit how it will be received. Two conversations take place simultaneously at two levels: one at the level of speech that is subject to reflexive savvy skepticism, and another, at the level of the body, in which signs are sent and received, exempted from reflexive forms of examination and critique. Thus, Lauer ends his segment with Navarro by noting that, “if you're in social situations and you're not quite communicating what you think you're communicating, maybe stop and take a look at your body language. It might not be what you're saying; it could be what you're doing” (NBC News: Today 2007).

The reflexive move – breaking the “code” of body language – collapses the difference between these two levels. The emergence of the body language expert signals the moment when this language becomes conscious of itself. Similarly, the process of interpretation signals the end of immediacy. Once we understand that, as Navarro puts it, “we’re constantly transmitting. We’re sort of billboards” we can attempt not just to learn the language but to turn it to our particular ends (NBC News: Today 2007). Thus, the character of Joe Navarro – news analyst, security expert, and poker tutor – helps bring the argument full circle. In addition to his news gigs, he serves as an instructor at the World Series of Poker Academy, which offers seminars in anticipation of the “main event” – the tournament featured on the World Series of Poker television show: “I tell players I'm going to teach them what I've learned through my work in counterintelligence, catching spies…There's no reason poker players should not be aware of why we do these things, why people behave the way they do” (New Zealand Press Association 2008) In his seminars, Navarro argues that breaking the code of body signals allows them to be put to use. His video lessons, compiled in his Read ‘Em and Reap Poker Course: A Spy-Catcher’s Video Guide to Reading Tells, advises players to cultivate an air of confidence at the table by using body language at the table to signal to other players the messages you want them to receive. In a segment on hand gestures (“steepled” hands project confidence), Navarro advises his viewers
to, “Use this information both to guard yourself, to read other people and also use it effectively in bluffing” (Navarro 2007).

What he gives with one hand – the promise of direct access to underlying emotional states – he takes away with the other by demonstrating how, once deciphered, such signals can be put to use. Now, when a poker player sees an apparent tell, the question that immediately arises is whether it is a deliberate one calculated to send a particular message by simulating immediate access to underlying emotional states. The result is a form of reflexive self-undermining that Hegel anticipated in his critique of physiognomy: “in this appearance the inner is no doubt a visible invisible, but it is not tied to this appearance; it can be manifested just as well in another way, just as another inner can be manifested in the same appearance. Lichtenberg therefore rightly says [in his critique of physiognomy]: ‘Suppose the physiognomist ever did take the measure of man, it would require only a courageous resolve on the part of the man to make himself incomprehensible again for a thousand years’” (1807/1977: 190-1).

**Conclusion: The Grand Narrative is Dead – Long Live Symbolic Efficiency!**

The analysis of body language finds itself caught in the impasse it sought to evade. In conceding the demise of symbolic efficiency it attempted to bypass the symbolic register altogether, envisioning a direct, ostensibly unmediated (and, hence, paradoxical) form of communication. However, the attempt to repress symbolic mediation resulted, perhaps unsurprisingly, in its return: body language takes on the character of the forms of symbolic discourse it sought to replace. The promise of immediate access to hidden depths has once again receded. Perhaps this is one of the reasons for recourse to brain scan monitoring technologies: the hope that these will retain the promise of direct access because it is harder to control the blood flow in our brain than our expressions and gestures.

The prospect that these high-tech forms of depth detection may face a similar fate is perhaps anticipated by the development of an alternative form of monitoring, one that dispenses with the depth model altogether. In a much-hyped issue of *Wired* magazine, info-trend guru Chris Anderson argued that the advent of data warehousing at an unprecedented level, “offers a whole new way of understanding the world” which renders theory and depth models obsolete: “Out with every theory of human behavior, from linguistics to sociology. Forget taxonomy, ontology, and psychology. Who knows why people do what they do? The point is they do it, and we can track and measure it with unprecedented fidelity” (Anderson 2008). This new form of understanding neatly complements the demise of symbolic efficiency – it collapses the gap between sign and referent by remaining agnostic about causality and meaning. Since, as Anderson (2008) puts it, “[c]orrelation supersedes causation” in the petabyte era “No semantic or causal
analysis is required.” Nothing to debunk – just patterns generated by the process of what Ian Ayres (2007) calls ‘super crunching’ breathtakingly large amounts of data. The goal here is to bypass the tricky realm of meaning by dispensing with depth altogether in order to generate patterns that predict without explaining anything. If a search algorithm spits out the information that someone who drives a Mercury is more likely to vote Republican or to respond to a particular type of advertising appeal, the question of why remains moot. It is a pragmatic, instrumental mode of anti-understanding. It cuts the Gordian knot of explanation by dispensing with it altogether and substituting correlation.

The enthusiasm for the power of “super crunching” in the petabyte era is of a piece with a contemporary constellation of savvy attempts to bypass the debunked level of discourse and get things to speak for themselves – but what we are trying to get them to say has shifted. No longer do we ask them to explain themselves, to provide insight into hidden truths, rather we array appearances into algorithmic patterns to predict likely responses. In the case of the database, things speak to us not from the depths of inwardness, but from the complexities of the surface, forming patterns whose robustness varies directly with the comprehensiveness of the data set. As Anderson (2008) puts it in his essay on “The End of Theory”: “With enough data, the numbers speak for themselves.”

The catch, of course, is that this new form of understanding is limited to those with access to giant databanks and tremendous processing power. If practical knowledge in the petabyte era means having access to and organizing incomprehensibly large datasets, it is a form of knowledge destined to be monopolized by the few (at least for the foreseeable future). In this regard it reinstates a certain asymmetry characteristic of surveillance – one that is mimicked by emerging forms of peer monitoring facilitated by social network applications like Facebook, which organize and present growing amounts of data about our “friends” to us. Not so long ago, the effort of determining the daily activities of hundreds of acquaintances would have been a laborious, time-consuming task. Thanks to Facebook applications, all we have to do these days is log on and scan the incoming alerts, watching as they accelerate in frequency and complexity. Perhaps these applications can be understood as one way of mimicking the data-crunching mode of understanding outlined by Anderson at the level of interpersonal relations. The goal is not to decipher the content of a conversation – indeed conversation is not the point and can be bypassed entirely on Facebook – but rather to accumulate and scan patterns of information that are automatically collected and relayed from online “friends”. In this regard the users of Facebook come, in certain respects, to imitate (on a much smaller scale) the forms of monitoring practiced by commercial data miners. In the era of Facebook and Google, when you meet someone new, you can background check them online. Students have told me, for example, that they “friend” potential dates on Facebook to do background research about them online, learning details of their tastes and personality – without necessarily
having to talk to them – before meeting up again. In other eras this behavior – researching detailed information about a relative stranger’s likes and dislikes, favorite moments, the people they are close to – might have been considered borderline stalking. In the database era it is an increasingly automatic practice of both screening for potential risks and incompatibilities as well as figuring out how to get the most out of the next encounter (just as marketers attempt to sell more effectively by tailoring their appeals to specific individuals based on their tastes and past behavior). The multi-functionality of background checking is emphasized by online sites like Abika.com which offers to background check individuals for a range of purposes from job screening to law enforcement, to trying to figure out how to impress a date. In this de-differentiated era, monitoring becomes the common denominator for an increasing range of strategies for both minimizing risk and maximizing returns on investments of time, energy, labor, and emotion. Perhaps unsurprisingly, forms of scanning and monitoring associated with social networking can readily be put to use by everyone from law enforcement agent to marketers and potential employers. Consider, for example the use of Facebook by New Zealand police to catch a thief who removed his face-obscuring balaclava in front of security cameras: “Queenstown police used the social networking site Facebook to post surveillance pictures, which were later recognised by users,” (The Southland Times 2009).

The development of a monitorial model of social interaction, in which discourse can be replaced by data scanning – tracking Facebook updates, twitter posts, personal blogs, and so on – lends itself to this kind of multi-purposing. It is not an entirely new mode of social interaction – one-way forms of monitoring, scanning, and information gathering are perhaps integral components of human sociality (we constantly collect observations and make inferences about others). However, the development of the technology combined with the mobilization of the specter of risk and the fate of symbolic efficiency help to reposition it as a practice that meets the imperatives of an era of information and communication glut. The depthless mode of knowledge via correlation perhaps addresses the impasses of savvy reflexivity, but it is a way of knowing that favors those who own and control the databases. One response might be to suggest with Lyotard (1984) that the databases be thrown open. This seems unlikely in an era in which their privatization promises to become increasingly profitable. It perpetuates the logic of generalized monitoring and fails to address the discrepancy in processing power and access to algorithms. Access to databases is one thing – making sense of them quite another. Rather than generalizing the mode of instrumental and correlational knowledge invoked by Anderson – an actuarial model of correlation, induction, and prediction best suited to marketing and public relations – perhaps an alternative is to rehabilitate the non-self-identical and contradictory character of the symbol itself: the fact that, for example it can be inadequate to the reality it designates – or vice versa. Žižek (1999) highlights the role that symbolic efficacy plays
in opening up a space of possibility beyond the seemingly irrevocably given character of directly experienced reality. Symbolic efficiency, as Žižek puts it, relies upon, “the distance (between ‘things’ and ‘words’) which opens up the space for…symbolic engagement” (1996: 196). That is to say it is the paradoxical space of the symbolic that opens up the possibility that things might be otherwise than how they “directly” seem. Rather than subordinating and suspending the realm of discourse to attain an unmediated essence, or alternatively attempting to limit knowledge to the surface play of correlation and induction (both surveillance-oriented approaches), it means thinking the relationship between these two: sacrificing our savviness to, what (with a nod to William Blake) we might describe as a radical naïveté.

Mark Andrejevic is Associate Professor in the Communication Studies Department at the University of Iowa and a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Queensland’s Centre for Critical and Cultural Studies. He is the author of two books, *iSpy: Surveillance and Power in the Interactive Era* (2007), and *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched* (2004), as well as numerous articles and book chapters on surveillance, digital media, and popular culture. E-mail: m.andrejevic@uq.edu.au.

**Notes**

1. The snake oil ads pedalled by *Human Events* are a fascinating genre that recall an earlier era of patent medicine ads, complete with heavyset headlines, and long explanations by an array of experts complemented with testimonials from miraculously cured customers. The ads trace a landscape of anxiety about health, environmental and economic concerns. The general tone of the ads is provided by a couple of the headlines: “If you want an opportunity to bank SAFE, annual gains of 65% while you lie on the beach in some exotic location then...You Must Respond To This Letter NOW!” and “What if I were to tell you that a billion-dollar drug company discovered a true CURE for cancer...and told no one?” The full ads are available online at: [http://www.investorsdailyedge.com/ad/mediaads/bndeagle022509.html?fc_c=1368349x2852852x61007965](http://www.investorsdailyedge.com/ad/mediaads/bndeagle022509.html?fc_c=1368349x2852852x61007965) and [http://www.isecureonline.com/Reports/HSI/LHSIJB07/?fc_c=1315494x2636898x61007965](http://www.isecureonline.com/Reports/HSI/LHSIJB07/?fc_c=1315494x2636898x61007965).

2. The apparent refutation of the Bush era represented by Barack Obama’s decisive victory in the 2008 US Presidential elections may represent not the politics of the non-dupe, but, rather a skepticism toward the impasse of generalized skepticism itself. More likely what is at stake is a contest between, on the one hand, the postmodern right epitomized by the Tea Partiers, Palinites, and “birthers” (who question whether Obama was born in the US), and, on the other, the Obama-style attempt to reinstate some notion of shared reality based on recourse to logico-discursive analysis. Žižek (2009) had described this latter attempt in terms of the task of asserting “a new ‘ordering’ against the capitalist disorder” (p. 130). In this context, the appearance of shows like *Lie to Me* and *The Mentalist* (both developed prior to the start of the Obama administration) should not be read as a critical reaction to the Bush era, but rather as continuous with poker TV, body language news analysis segments, and so on.
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Silhouettes of War: 
Technologies of U.S. Soldiering and Surveillance

By Jessica J. Behm

Abstract

This paper forwards a theory of silhouetting in relation to technological augmentation in U.S. Military uniforms and suggests that the increasing utilization of metamaterials, nanotechnology, and surveillance technologies operates under a rhetoric of invisibility that complicates the technologies’ visible destruction. Methodologically, the paper attends to three general technological developments in the evolution of the U.S. Army uniform: the design of the new Army Combat Uniform (ACU); the technological advances in the uniform, including embedded wearables, biometric identification devices, and 3D combat enhancement systems; and the bio-networking, GPS, and digital communication arrays that physically link digital uniforms to a larger geopolitical network of U.S. military strategy and surveillance. Throughout, the work traces the aforementioned theory of silhouetting in relation to select sociopolitical consequences of linking digitally enhanced soldiers into a transnational grid of surveillance.

Keywords: Surveillance, U.S. Military, uniform, technology, silhouetting, invisibility, cartography
There is no need to fear or hope, but only to look for new weapons.
~Giles Deleuze, Postscript on Societies of Control

The unity of complex phenomena appear...to be things quite apart from the direct visible truth.
~Albert Einstein

Introduction: Silhouettes of War

Invisibility in Strategy

In the late afternoon on November 5, 1937, Hitler convened generals of the Reich Chancellery in secret meeting (later designated the Hossbach Conference) to articulate Germany’s expansionist need for, and entitlement to, greater geo-ethnic territory. The minutes’ transcript, presented as evidence at the Nuremberg Trials of 1945, identifies cases for the occupation of Austria and Czechoslovakia as well as the compulsory emigration of their inhabitants. Hitler speculated on plans to impair France’s lines of communication, push back lines of occupation in Austria, and draw lines of allegiance with Italy — all strategies to preserve pure lines of descendency in Germany and further state autarchy. Colonel Friedrich Hossbach records that prior to beginning his address, Hitler requested, “In the interests of a long-term German policy, that his exposition be regarded, in the event of his death, as his last will and testament” (qtd. in Welch 1999: 191). If killed, it was imperative that his policies were followed — orchestrated invisibly by his will — by all generals present. Even in death, his presence would be traceable by articulated lines of war strategy, though he had himself disappeared.

Invisibility at Sea

Across the world a young MIT oceanographer, Athelstan Spilhaus, was dropping a small device into the Atlantic Ocean. The invention would revolutionize submarine warfare for the next fifty years as it combined measurements of oceanic temperature and pressure, recording what was called a “trace” on a carbon-coated card that would allow U.S. WWII submarines to seemingly disappear from sonar. Because oceanic temperature gradients create layers that change the properties of sonar refraction, as submarines descend through depths alternating warm with cool temperatures, they are alternately visible and invisible. Bathythermograph measurements thus allowed U.S. submarines to hide from Hitler’s naval fleet by using the very properties of water against them. Having discovered how to manipulate the blind spot of the ocean the ships sank through thermoclines, moving through a transparent sea that nonetheless concealed them. Even in the ocean the enemies’ presence would be traceable by lines of sonar, though the ships had themselves disappeared.
Invisibility on Land

Addressing the U.S. Air Force Academy on June 2, 2004, President Bush compared Operation Iraqi Freedom to World War II, facilitating an alternate historiography that justified the Iraq War as one of “the great clashes of the last century between those who put their trust in tyrants and those who put their trust in liberty” (Bush: 2004). Despite the startling political, strategic, and operational differences between the wars, many U.S. neoconservatives have persisted in this rationalizing logic. Yet in Iraq, the tactics for identifying and evading the “enemy” have been radically transformed in the absence of a clearly defined military front.

The headline of The New York Times on the morning of November 4, 2006 was not particularly unusual: “Sniper Attacks Adding to Peril of U.S Troops”. The U.S. was at war, yet columnist C.J. Chivers writes that U.S. Marines were, surprisingly, dancing — albeit uncomfortably. Chivers states, “In conditions where killing the snipers has proved difficult, the marines have tried to find ways to limit their effectiveness. Signs inside Marine positions display an often-spoken rule: Make yourself hard to kill” (Chivers 2006: 2). Chivers describes the dance of evasive maneuvers that the marines perform as “cutting squares”. However, the marines’ partners are invisible, watching their performance through the eye of a scope, while the marines stare “down their barrels at dozens of windows that face them, as if waiting for a ghost’s next move” (Chivers 2006: 1). Attempting to diminish their visibility, the marines “zig and zag as they walk, and when they stop they shift weight from foot to foot, bobbing their heads. They change the rhythm often, so that when a sniper who might be watching them thinks they are about to zig, they have zagged. Now and then they squat, shift weight to one leg and stand up beside the place where they had just been” (Chivers 2006: 2). Yet as Chivers notes, this performance of disappearance is tiring. The marines cannot escape the inevitable — though the scope lines are invisible their targets and bodies remain resolutely present on terrain that is everywhere the “front”: “As operations drag on, some marines begin to stop cutting squares. And sometimes even those that are moving are still shot” (Chivers 2006: 2). The laser of a military scope is termed a sight line precisely because it delineates an invisible line that will reveal, at the end, a visible target. Even on land our presence is surprisingly visible though we hoped to have disappeared.

I. Silhouetting Techniques

Historically, war has coveted appearance and disappearance: the tidal-tectonic patterns of the ocean harnessed to conceal naval weaponry, the properties of nuclear and atomic physics manipulated in order to evaporate entire cities, and the warmth of human bodies concealed in order to disappear from heat-seeking missiles. Enacting a double erasure, the records of technologies of disappearance are
also often secreted: plans for mechanized death camps and atomic missiles disappear for decades or are lost forever. Yet 21st century technologies of war that operate under the guise of invisibility only momentarily delay the grim, eschatological inevitability — the technologies are frequently cloaked, in rhetoric and real-time deployment, to achieve greater destruction. In addition, the design, testing, and deployment of military technologies often complicates the “visibility” of the consequences of war. A rhetoric of invisibility thus operates at four distinct levels — in the design of technologies which explicitly forward the possibility of invisibility for the soldier, in the testing of technologies which may uncouple the technology from its visible or ethical consequences, in the deployment of technologies wherein concealment facilitates greater technical acuity, and in the discourse of technologies wherein ideas of invisibility conceal intentionality.

Adam Smith’s “invisible hand” continues to wave in 2010, but this time it is not surreptitiously guiding self-interested capitalists toward economic nationalism; rather, the “invisible” market forces that operate in technology and military sectors are deliberately mapping technologies onto visible bodies and the hands are many. While Smith’s theory imagines a collective of self-interested individuals that contributes, if inadvertently, to social welfare, a general theory of silhouetting suggests it is possible to deliberately map seemingly invisible technologies that target bodies, territories, and spatial borders, creating a visible cartographic project that charts the technologies’ strategic production and consequences. Silhouettes of war are thus those techniques and technologies that operate under the rhetoric of invisibility even as they catalyze visible destruction.

Mapping a cartography of silhouetting processes is significant as it traces the very real ways in which the implementation of seemingly “invisible” technologies creates undeniably visible devastation for diverse communities and citizens. What is at stake in the rhetoric of invisibility is the denial of real, visible effects: the “invisible” sonar, infrared, surveillance, and nanotechnologies of military weaponry cannot also elide the destruction of visible targets. Likewise, what is at stake in the rhetoric of disappearance is the undeniable persistence of appearance: vanished “weapons of mass destruction”, the removal of dictators, and evasive tactics of military hide and seek cannot also erase the body count these disappearing acts engender. This is the paradox of invisibility: its power derives from its ability, at any moment, to make itself or its target visible. And once the target is revealed, so too are the tangible implications of technologies and discourses of invisibility for international policies: mapping invisible cartographies reveals visible ones. As Virilio appropriately notes, “all techniques meant to unleash forces are techniques of disappearance” (Virilio 2002: 67).

Silhouettes of war are material techniques and technologies that may be specifically traced in processes of design, labor, manufacturing, and implementation, but which “silhouette” more complex and unexamined agendas by invoking ideas of invisibility. This project is distinctly not concerned with labeling discrete tech-
nologies as “bad” — as in antithetical to social and political goals of a humanist democracy — but rather in examining 21st century wearable technologies with attention to the silhouettes that accompany their production and performance. In this essay, the strategic, technical, and political silhouettes of war that accompany the design and deployment of 21st wearable military technologies will be restricted to an examination of the recent evolution of the U.S. Army uniform, increasingly imagined as a digitally enhanced, embodied bio “weapon” that is embedded within communication arrays that physically link ground soldiers within a larger geopolitical network of U.S. Military strategy and surveillance. The term silhouette here takes on an additional valence as it refers to both an embodied soldier and the cultural “shape” of 21st century digitized uniforms.

Methodologically, this paper will attend to three technological developments in the evolution of the U.S. Army uniform. First, the design of the new Army Combat Uniform (ACU) which replaced both versions of the standard Battle Dress Uniform (BDU) as well as the desert camouflage uniform and was predicted to have 100% deployment to all Army personnel by December 2007 (TRADOC 2009). Second, the technological augmentations to the uniform, including embedded wearables, biometric identification devices, and 3D combat enhancement systems. And third, the bio-networked, GPS, and digital communication arrays that physically link digital uniforms to a larger geopolitical network of U.S. Military strategy and surveillance. While the third section examines GPS networks, it is with an eye to analyzing their significance for the ground soldier. It is also important to note here that U.S. Military uniforms are not “standard” issue, but variously reflect the unique history, priorities, and cultures of the discrete U.S. service branches and indicate the more complex ways in which each service branch has historically embraced or rejected technologies best suited for their distinct service cultures.

This essay serves as a brief introduction to a theory of silhouetting in relation to technological augmentation of digitally enhanced U.S. soldiers within a transnational grid of surveillance. Yet silhouettes of war — techniques and technologies that operate under the guise of invisibility with visible effects — are inextricably linked to constitutive ethical concerns that, as the three introductory vignettes suggest, develop from specific, material conditions of production, labor, and geopolitical historicity. To engage in war we must distinguish our identity from that of a designated enemy and this requires some invocation of a border — whether it is geographically or ideographically constructed. A psychology of enmity is thus endemic to all constructions of conflict in war and the possibility for both conceptual and concrete invasion. Within academic discourses regarding border theory and the subsequent critiques of its varied postmodern incarnations, much border scholarship continues to examine geo-political boundaries as visible, often linear constructions, even if they are theorized to be shifting, perforated, transgressed, and contested. That is, though the solidity of the border is queried its silhouettes
the techniques and technologies that shadow visible territorial, cultural, and socio-political demarcations — are less often traced. In many 21st century war conflicts the distinction between the rhetoric of solid borders and the persistent impression of silhouetting techniques is realized with devastating lucidity by new technologies. Techniques of war that rely on seemingly “invisible” technologies such as sonar, GPS, satellite, and surveillance techniques not only complicate ideas of the border as impermeable, or even semi-permeable to particular bodies, commodities, and information, but also challenge the very construct of a border.

Querying the rhetoric of a solid border should not undermine the complex and destructive ways in which the demarcation and patrol of borders — along very real physical lines — is enforced. However, when a border is monitored by GPS and satellite technologies that draw boundaries in space along invisible orbit lines, and patrolled by personnel that eliminate persons along invisible scope lines — it is no longer sufficient to discuss the permanence of a physical border, even as a perforated trajectory. Rather, silhouetting techniques — those that employ a rhetoric of invisibility — critically problematize the persistent notion of borders as terrestrial, if contested, demarcations of the nation-state because they operate along seemingly invisible trajectories (e.g. GPS satellite orbits) that nonetheless trace distinct, geopolitical borders and facilitate state military operations. As Seyla Benhabib suggests in her investigation of the constitutive elements required for a deliberative democratic society, “The modern nation-state system, characterized by the “inner world” of the territorially bounded politics and the “outer world” of foreign military and diplomatic relations — in short, the “state-centric” system of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries — is, if not at an end, at a minimum undergoing a deep reconfiguration” (Benhabib 2002: 179). Theorization of a uniformly visible border, in addition to providing false stability and referentiality, obscures the accompanying forces at work — silhouetting techniques — that create visible destruction via a rhetoric of invisibility. Silhouetting technologies designed for monitoring and military deployment that utilize sonar, radar, and infrared may be as devastating as their visible counterparts (e.g. hand-to-hand combat) but they are deployed, more insidiously, with an accompanying rhetoric of invisibility that may mask their visible effects. In the 21st century, U.S. Military ground soldiers occupy an uneasy position as they are increasingly conceived of and developed as potentially “invisible” digital weapons, despite the resolutely visible and embodied consequences of military conflict and combat for soldiers and citizens.

II. The Velcro Soldier

U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) projections for the next decade anticipate the design of nanotechnology uniforms that will digitally camouflage soldiers, visually erasing them from the battlefield, and simultaneously endow them with 3-D
modalities, x-ray vision displays, embedded biometric sensors, and ultrasonic medical diagnostics. The DoD funds numerous R&D programs for advancing uniform technology, some of these have included the Digital Military Police Program, Special Operations R&D Support Element (SORSE), and the Education and Training Technology Application Program (ETTAP). New technologies have been implemented to both materially alter the standard BDUs, last changed in the early 1980s, as well as radically augment the technical capabilities of the military uniform — transforming it from standard issue clothing into a digitally networked version of the Ancient Egyptian Ammon-Ra’s invisibility cloak, capable of disappearance and omnipresence at once.

However, although combat styles and the geopolitical terrain of military theater sites have changed radically, as of 2004 the traditional U.S. Military BDU had not been modified substantially in 25 years. U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) generates and distributes military training documents, many of which are approved for public distribution and available on their website. One can download unusually diverse documents, ranging from request forms for new military uniforms (TRADOC 248-RF); the official procedure for homosexuals in the military (TRADOC 600-26); and training aids for mine clearing lines, plastic rifles, and portable grave registration kits (TRADOC 350-9). These documents contribute to the institutional and operational bureaucracy that regulate military functions, and also provide textual discourse that informs device training, weapons use, and tactical maneuver strategies — in essence, basic requirements for participating in (and surviving) modern military life.

TRADOC publishes a list of all changes for the new ACU — which began replacing all BDUs for Army Active, Reserve and National Guard Soldiers in 2005 — as well as descriptions of the digitized camouflage pattern, care and wear instructions, and justification for discrete design modifications. The document states, “There were 20 changes made to the BDU. The bottom pockets on the jacket were removed and placed on the shoulder sleeves so Soldiers can have access to them while wearing body armor. Buttons were replaced with zippers that open from the top and bottom to provide comfort while wearing armor. Patches and tabs are affixed to the uniform with Velcro to give the wearer more flexibility and to save the Soldier money, also the cost to get patches sewn on will be eliminated.” Additional modifications include improved desert boots and moisture wicking t-shirts and socks. A quote from Sgt. Maj. Of the Army Kenneth Preston affirms, “Every modification made on the uniform was designed with a specific purpose and not just for the sake of change” (TRADOC 2009: 1). (See Figure 1)

For civilian observers, the most conspicuous change was certainly the digitized camouflage print, phasing out the woodland camo (as well as the three-color desert combat uniform) that had defined the U.S. Army for decades. For the new ACU, the Army utilized a print already developed by the U.S. Marine Corps, and also removed black entirely stating, “Black is no longer useful on the Army uni-
form — it is not a color commonly found in nature, and it immediately catches the eye” (TRADOC 2009: 1). We may infer that it particularly “catches the eye” in the dominant biome of current U.S. combat — the Middle East.

Though highly publicized, the muted pattern of digitized camouflage is not a recent design. As early as the 1970s, a Dual Texture Camouflage (Dual-Tex) was utilized by the U.S. Army 2nd Armored Calvary Regiment in Europe (Cramer 2007). Developed by Lt. Col. O’Neill, a West Point professor in engineering psychology, Dual-Tex was determined to reduce detection by 50% in comparison to the 3-color NATO pattern also used at the time. However, some Army personnel resisted the idea that small squares provided better mimicry of natural environs, so the standard BDU persisted for three more decades (Cramer 2007).

**Army Combat Uniform (Via U.S. Army PEO Soldier)**

![Figure 1. U.S. Military Army Combat Uniform, Defense Industry Daily, February 2, 2009](image-url)

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In addition to the pattern changes implemented to better suit the current environment of U.S. Military combat operations (the mixed desert and urban sites of the Middle East rather than Southeast Asian and South American jungles), fabric and functionality modifications were also developed. Rather than the 100% cotton of the standard BDUs, which were issued with Nomex fire-retardant for specific missions, the ACU has the same fabric content as the modified Enhanced Hot Weather BDU, a rip-stop nylon/cotton blend with an applied wrinkle-free treatment that has eliminated the time-honored tradition of pressing and starching one’s uniform. New enlisted soldiers were predicted to receive four ACUs courtesy of the U.S. Army and it was suggested that, “soldiers will eventually reap gains in money and time by not having to take their uniforms to the cleaners or shine boots” (Uniform Market 2004). The life expectancy of the ACU uniform (not correlated to the life expectancy of the deployed soldier) is six months. Beginning in January of 2003, the first twenty-five prototype uniforms were tested on Stryker squads at the National Testing Center; twenty-one were then re-issued with modifications again to Stryker squads at the Joint Training and Readiness Center in Fort Polk, Louisiana; and finally, a third version was worn by a select group of Stryker Soldiers for testing in Iraq. The ACU uniforms began wide distribution to Army branches in 2005, with the gradual phase-out of BDUs based on stock depletion; the transition was expected to be completed by December 2007.

Why do these precise uniform changes matter? Simply stated, because some feel that the new uniforms have not worked particularly well, and that their failure may be partially attributed to sociopolitical discourses that inform the construction of uniforms as well as industrial design flaws. In his 2007 article, “New Army Uniform Doesn’t Measure Up”, active duty officer and Iraqi Engineering Commander Eric Coulson, describes “the good, the bad, and the ugly” consequences of the new ACU for soldiers stationed abroad (active duty soldiers deployed to Iraq were the first prioritized to receive the new uniforms). To begin with, the ACU, in an attempt to make the contents of modular pockets more accessible, replaced zipper and button closures with Velcro. However, under the heading “The Bad” Coulson writes, “This material [Velcro] is just not ready for combat. Putting anything of size or weight in the pant’s cargo pocket will often cause the closure to fail if your Velcro has any wear and tear — which in Iraq, it does. Soldiers risk losing belongings” (Coulson 2007). Additionally, many patches, recognition labels and skill tabs — that is, official demarcations of authority, rank, and valor — are now adhered with Velcro. (At least until they fall off.) Here Coulson remarks:

First patches are much more likely to be lost now that they can be easily removed. And, more obviously, Velcro repair kits are beginning to appear in the exchange shops — a tacit admission the Velcro does not last. Instead of shelling out cash to put new patches on the blouse, Soldiers now have to buy new Velcro to replace the material that failed. (Coulson 2007)

In the military, standards of perfect appearance — precisely folded bedding, spit polished shoes, and spotless uniforms — are legendary and also enforced by dis-
disciplinary regulations, even in Iraq. The ACU is now worn with a rough-boot that no longer requires polishing but this, suggests Coulson, is the only discernable “good” of the uniform. The new ACU itself “shows every last bit of dirt the Soldier’s been exposed to. I never once saw my original BDUs stain like my ACUs have” (Coulson 2007). However, in comparison to the other difficulties of the material of the ACU, staining seems quite incidental. First, the uniforms are not lasting for their projected six-month life span; Coulson writes, “In more than 10 years of active and reserve service, I never once had a uniform ”malfunction”. Twice in my tour in Iraq I have had the crotch on my pants rip out. Embarrassment was the least of my worries. Had I not been near the end of a patrol it would have been a serious problem if my vehicle had gone down” (Coulson 2007).

Another difficulty has arisen with the camouflage pattern that, while perhaps tested effectively at home, is receiving negative feedback from deployed soldiers. Coulson remarks, “The pixilation assists in breaking up the shape of the Soldier — particularly through night vision — but in general it stands out against anything except a concrete wall” (Coulson 2007). Critically, the new material, in addition to having poor Velcro adherence, becoming more easily soiled, malfunctioning and, despite good testing, providing poor camouflage, presents a much graver problem — it is not treated with fire-retardant and has contributed to injury and death as a result of its high flammability. Coulson writes:

The 50/50 blend of cotton and nylon does not appear to have the staying power or the protection of the old 100% cotton or the Nomex of today’s flight suits. In fact, Soldiers and Marines that spend a great deal of time in vehicles in Iraq are being issued tan Nomex flight suits to protect them from the possibility of flash fires in their vehicles. The cotton/nylon blend burns very quickly and can add to the injuries sustained in a burning vehicle by melting to the Soldiers’ skin. […] The extra cost of Nomex will be more than made up in savings for the treatment and care of burned Soldiers. (Coulson 2007)

The political economy of the uniform’s garment production is similarly problematic. The Washington Post published a lengthy article in March 2006 after production for the new military ACU had begun with the headline, “Uniform Makers Pay Poorly, Union Says”. By law, U.S. Military uniforms must be manufactured in the USA with American materials and labor. While the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics documents the average wage for U.S. sewing machine operators at $9.24/hour, and the average wage of an industrial uniform sewer at $6.55/hour, initial pay at the cited companies for military uniform sewers averaged $5.49/hour, generally without health insurance coverage and benefits, and with high rates of layoff. The Unite Here report documents that underpaid military uniform sewers must depend on supplemental government programs including food stamps and Medicaid at an estimated cost to taxpayers, of $45 million dollars (Joyce 2006)

The difficulties of the new ACU indicate not only material and design failures but are suggestive of more fundamental strategic and operational miscalculations.
— a new “camouflaged cloak” has not proven to protect soldiers against Iraqi insurgent tactics. To this end, U.S. Military branches are not only redesigning the material uniform of the U.S. soldier, they have invested substantially in the last decade in nanotechnology and metamaterial sciences that prophesy soldiers may “disappear” on 21st century battlefields. The practical implementation of these technologies is yet years away, but the Army has simultaneously pursued multiple R&D projects to enable soldiers to transform how the bounds of their own material bodies function — to “wear” technology that radically augments their visual, communication, surveillance, and combat possibilities. As invisibility is only a trick of perception, if they can’t really become invisible perhaps they may at least appear to.

As previously stated, the development of advanced wearable military technologies is often accompanied by a rhetoric of invisibility — institutional exposition suggests that a soldier may become “invisible” or so hyper-augmented as to no longer appear human, and thus vulnerable to the human predicaments of war. Yet this rhetoric obscures the political intent — what is at stake in the rhetoric of invisibility is the denial of visible effects: augmented technologies conceal a soldier temporarily in order to better eliminate the enemy permanently. And these technological adaptations (i.e. VR simulation training, live-feed helmet cameras, embedded wearables, invisibility suits, and globally networked surveillance techniques) are proving to have unexpected psychological and ethical consequences: there is a price for bodily augmentation — enhancing one’s vision also confers the burden of witnessing and one’s own invisibility does not elide the ongoing visibility of violence. As Rupert Smith asserts in *The Utility of Force*, the employment of force “has only two immediate effects: it kills people and destroys thing” (Smith 2005: 8). Virilio’s suggestion in *Desert Screen: War at the Speed of Light* that as a result of advanced military technologies Desert Storm effectively did not occur beyond the television screen — a war reduced to miniature images of precision missiles guided by remote operators — is not applicable in the current Iraq war. The body count is simply too high to propose it is physically or theoretically screen-based. But military strategy has indisputably been reconfigured by new technologies and following Virilio, “one must innovate to conquer” (Virilio 2002: 91).

In *The Utility of Force*, Rupert Smith offers an unprecedented examination of military strategies that continue to inform the production of specific technologies and justify their use in diverse theaters — his work provides a critical backdrop for understanding how military institutional language and strategic inertia inform the perceived need for “advanced” technologies. And, if applied in the U.S., his analysis implies that the continuum of changes predicted to turn the U.S. Army uniform into a digitally enhanced, embodied bio “weapon” embedded within telecommunications arrays must be tempered by an assessment of the “utility of force” of the proposed 21st century digital warrior.
Smith begins by simply declaring, “War no longer exists”. This of course does not mean that there are not sustained, geopolitical conflicts that involve the engagement of both global and local military forces. It means that war, as it has been fought and is still imagined by militaries and civilians alike, no longer exists. Smith asks us to consider that the last “tank battle” (wherein two armies visibly maneuvered into strategic formation and faced off) occurred in the Sinai Desert during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. In the chapter on modern operations he suggests that, contrary to the perceived functionality of a diverse array of weapons designed during the Cold War — including expensive air, ground, and sea combat systems — the most efficacious weapon in the last two decades has been the machete. He further asserts that even those military strategists who have recommended the adoption of rapid, light, and strategically mobile forces, still do so within the old milieu of war. However, industrial war, which relied on deterrence and technological innovation between superpowers — with temporary, site-specific conflicts that were seen to be resolvable with superior weaponry or political maneuvering — has been replaced in the 21st century by non-state combatant forces, geographically distributed and networked guerrilla and terrorist organizations, and individuals and geopolitical nation-states alike that operate entirely outside the “law” of international treaties and humanitarian policies. In the scenarios that Smith describes, it is not the sophistication of technology that is lacking — i.e. the lack of an advanced, biometrically networked soldier — but rather a sufficiently complex understanding of strategic action and consequences in rapidly evolving, geopolitical conflicts.

As example of this problematic, Smith argues that there is pervasive and “abiding” confusion among officials in the U.S., UK and in UN forums regarding the “deployment” of force versus the “employment” of force. While this may seem a semantic quibble, for Smith it is constitutive of his broader arguments regarding the role of force in 21st century conflicts. To deploy force, in Smith’s framing, is to send or situate force in a conflict zone, but it does not imply that it will be used (we could say “fired”, to use a term that has become similarly antiquated in the era of suicide bombers, terrorist plane, subway, and train attacks, and military abrogation of rules on prisoner torture). In contrast, to employ force is to use it a manner that is not restricted to deterrence. Smith remarks that while the Commander of the 1995 UN PROFOR in Bosnia, he “spent a lot of time trying to explain to a range of senior figures…precisely this issue” (Smith: 6). The semantic distinction matters because, as Smith argues, it has constitutively informed the very real employment of violent military weaponry in scenarios where deployment (a deterrent role) would have sufficed, and conversely, has cost thousands of lives in theaters where deployment was used without the ability to employ force when it was critically needed (a combatant role). The current U.S. conflict in Afghanistan is arguably an example of the former, while Bosnia in 1995 is affirmatively an example of the latter. The title of Smith’s work arises from the impetus
to understand when to use force, not simply how to effectuate it through technological development. The efficacy of applying Smith’s arguments to technological development often appears absented from promotional narratives, such as that of the MIT Institute for Soldier Nanotechnologies which envisions soldiers wearing “a 21st century battlesuit that combines high-tech capabilities with light weight and comfort. Imagine a bullet-resistant jumpsuit, no thicker than ordinary spandex, that monitors health, eases injuries, communicates automatically, and reacts instantly to chemical and biological agents. It’s a long-range vision for how fundamental nanoscience can make Soldiers less vulnerable to enemy and environmental threats” (MIT 2009). What silhouettes, we must ask, are “invisible” in this description of a U.S. Army uniform that will “help transform today’s cotton/nylon fatigues and bulky equipment to a sleek, lightweight battle suit that provides everything from responsive armor to medical monitoring to communications – and more – in one integrated system” (MIT 2009). In addition to promotional language that, without reference to the suit’s explicit function in warfare and engaged conflict, transforms a U.S. military battle suit into “sleek” utilitarian clothing with biomedical telecommunications — it is the dangling modifier “and more” that requires further interrogation. Herein rest the silhouetted techniques that implicitly shadow the stated applications of the reconfigured U.S. Army uniform.

III. The Digital Soldier

In the June 2007 issue of The Atlantic Monthly, Brian Mockenhaupt’s article, “The Army We Have”, examines recent shifts and historical trends in military basic training. In the article’s caption he writes, “To fight today’s wars with an all-volunteer force, the U.S. Army needs more quick-thinking, strong, highly disciplined soldiers. But creating warriors out the softest, least-willing populace in generations has required sweeping changes in basic training” (Mockenhaupt 2007: 86).

A U.S. infantryman himself, Mockenhaupt’s states his ideological position clearly: “The further society drifts from the ideals of the Army — shared hardship, individual sacrifice for the collective good, institutionalized adherence to notions of integrity, loyalty, and duty — the more alien the world of military training becomes” (Mockenhaupt 2007: 89). His article, including interviews, personal experience and observation, military history, and critical commentary on DoD policy, works to create an image of U.S. Military basic training that is at once adapting to rapidly evolving combat and theater needs, and remains psychologically and physically unable to provide the rigorous training that is requisite for 21st century warfare. Mockenhaupt describes the difficulties and ongoing discourse for U.S. training as follows:

Turning civilians into soldiers and teaching them to kill has always been difficult work, but the new challenges and demands have made it harder still, so the Army has made sweeping changes in the basic combat training every recruit must go
through. […] To this end, the Army has shifted the culture of basic training away from the demeaning treatment and harsh indoctrination that have always characterized standing armies. [Yet] they’ll slowly unlearn one of society’s cherished mantras: Sometimes, they’ll come to understand, violence is the answer. For all the evolution in military tactics, weaponry, and organizational structure, the basic aim of military training — producing strong, disciplined soldiers, skilled with their weapons — remains constant, and the core methods are simple. You must look like everyone else. You must act like everyone else. You must perform like everyone else. If you don’t, you will be punished. Or worse, the group will suffer for your mistakes. (Mockenhaupt 2007: 90-92)

As example of the reaction to changes in basic training regimes which seek to ensure soldiers “act like everyone else” but via gentler training methods — what some view as a “softening” of military procedure — Mockenhaupt quotes an anonymous drill sergeant at Fort Knox who argues, “What are we trying to do here, produce combat-effective soldiers, or are we thanking them for joining the Army and letting them slip through the cracks because we need numbers?” (Mockenhaupt 2007: 94). One of the fundamental strategies for producing combat-effective soldiers that “look, act, and perform like everyone else” — thereby cohering group identity by eliminating individuality — has always been the uniform. As Jennifer Craik suggests in her work, Uniforms Exposed: From Conformity to Transgression, “In Maussian terms, the [military] uniform created a persona in individuals and a powerful collective presence. The uniform became a means of shaping actions — both physical and mental — and instilling new habits including movement and posture, developing an aesthetic sensibility, and inculcating new habits of cleanliness” (Craik 2005: 30).

In the U.S., the Army uniform functions to assimilate soldiers materially into military life, and yet provides immediate indication of rank, battle experience, and feats of valor through distinguishing insignia, patches, and slight changes in cut and style — it acts as both material cloak and political slogan. With the increased numbers of American enlisted women serving in Iraq, it has also become the “fabric” for arguments regarding women’s participation in military combat. In her work on the evolving challenges for U.S. military servicewomen, Helen Benedict asserts:

The military has a profoundly muddled approach to women’s uniforms. On the one hand, women must wear the unisex combat fatigues, on the other, their dress uniforms are not pantsuits, as one might expect, but skirts to be worn with “flesh tone nylons” and jackets tailored in an exaggerated hourglass shape. Until recently, army women also had to wear a small, folded cap with their dress uniforms known as “the cunt cap” in army vernacular. They now wear the same beret as men. (Benedict 2009: 39)

More recently, however, the traditional uniform has become physically and strategically part of a defense system that moves beyond its old visual signification of disguise, defend, and defeat: it has itself become a digitally enhanced weapon. This section will examine three technologies — embedded wearables, biometric identification devices, and 3D combat enhancement systems that work to trans-
form the uniform into a digitally integrated component of a unified global surveillance network — before attending to theoretical questions of the uniforms’ physical and psychological consequences.

When the MIT Institute for Soldier Nanotechnologies (ISN) was founded in 2002, initiated by a $50 million dollar contract from the U.S. Army Research Office as well as private industry donations (e.g. DuPont, Raytheon, and Partners Healthcare), U.S. Army chief scientist Michael Andrews declared to the media that, “The idea is to develop high-tech gear that would allow soldiers to become partially invisible, leap over walls, and treat their own wounds on the battlefield” (Register 2003). The language of the press conference introducing the new collaborative project between MIT and the U.S. Army read much like a trailer for a big-budget, sci-fi film, emphasizing such innovations as an optically invisible suit, “live” sensory fabric that would respond to bullet impact, and self-tourniquetting clothing. Andrews stated that, “Instead of bulky bullet-proof vests made of Kevlar, scientists envision uniforms lined with a slurry of fluids that respond to invisible magnetic fields, creating an armor system that can go from flexible to stiff during combat” (Register 2003). Of note, MIT president Charles M. Vest claimed that he didn’t wish for the center to “get tangled up in classified research”, thus all technologies were to be made available for industrial as well as military applications. One of the center’s proposed directors, Professor Edwin L. Thomas, also confirmed that the institute was to be “run on a business model, with regular milestone reviews” (Business Week 2003).

Today, the institutional tagline of the ISN is “Enhancing Soldier Survivability” and ISN suggests that, “because nanotechnology operates at length scales where classical Newtonian physics breaks down, it offers engineers the potential for creating unprecedented new materials properties and devices” (MIT ISN 2009). Military camouflage has always, of course, relied on the precarious claims of disappearance — temporarily disappearing oneself to better permanently disappear another — and collusion between university, private industry, and government agencies is certainly not new. Yet what is “innovative” in recent private, corporate, and university partnerships is the semantic and ideological turn the discourse has taken: invisible (or invisibilizing) technologies, many designed ultimately to evaporate rather than evade the enemy, now openly masquerade as unclassified research (compare for example, the historic secrecy of the development of the U.S. atomic bomb versus the business model slogans of 21st century academic institutes with military contracts). What is now affected — marketed even — is what Deleuze describes as “the introduction of the ”corporation” at all levels of schooling” (Deleuze 1992: 7). What remains silhouetted, however, is the visible destruction of “invisible” technologies in this discourse — as if an “invisibility suit” might also disappear the reason for, and consequences of, the development of these suits for war. The rhetoric never hints at the establishment of technologies for peace; rather, a systems engineer at the U.S. Army’s Soldier Systems Center in
Natick, Mass, Jean-Louis DeGay asks us to imagine that, "With a uniform like Predator's, our soldiers would really have a lopsided advantage. [...] Science fiction is rapidly becoming reality — and that could change forever the way wars are fought" (Business Week 2003).

Increasingly, the U.S. Military uniform is being reconfigured not as a garment, but as a scientifically sophisticated, digitally augmented weapon in its own right. Embedded wearables refer to digital systems that are physically integrated into the soldier’s uniform, transforming the material, helmet, mask, etc., and are generally embedded as part of a larger military technological system (e.g. military GPS surveillance). For example, camouflage fatigues will, if projected developments from research institutions such as MIT, the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory, and the University of Tokyo, continue as planned, soon be replaced by virtual and/or metamaterial forms of optical camouflage. Metamaterial generally denotes the recombination of extant elements to form a uniquely composite element with variant properties. For example, U.S.-British researchers in October 2006 developed a metamaterial that made a small object invisible to microwave radiation, foreshadowing the potential for objects to be rendered invisible to light, which occupies a different electromagnetic wavelength.

A crude version of an invisibility suit was proposed by science fiction writer Douglas Adams in Life, the Universe and Everything — which he christens the “Somebody Else’s Problem Field”. Adams suggests that since humans psychologically tend to ignore unexpected or unpleasant objects they cannot, or do not, wish to explain — literally rendering them invisible and “somebody else’s problem” — it is feasible to build a shielding device which simply cloaks the desired object in a strange, unexpected “field”: he proposes cloaking objects in large Italian running shoes, or painting them pink. Yet recent developments in military camouflage often appear even stranger than fiction. Technologies of digital optical camouflage are being developed to transform soldiers into mobile, 3D screens wherein the environment behind the soldier is video-captured by a backward-facing camera and then projected onto flexible, screen-like fabric of a soldier’s uniform. In a description of this particular iteration of the so-called “invisibility suit”, technology writer William McCarthy states, “Rather than one video camera, we’ll need at least six stereoscopic pairs (facing forward, backward, right, left, upward, and downward) - enough to capture the surroundings in all directions. The cameras will transmit images to a dense array of display elements, each capable of aiming thousands of light beams on their own individual trajectories. And what imagery will these elements project? A virtual scene derived from the cameras' views, making it possible to synthesize various perspectives” (McCarthy 2007).

Phased array optics develop this schematic further, creating a 3D hologram image of the surrounding environment to be mapped onto the soldier. While natural parallax causes the accuracy of 2D projections to change based on viewing angle
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(to the human eye distance and orientation to an object transform the “reality” of its visual properties), 3D holographic projection has the potential for what scientists call a high index of true invisibility. Though real, like Ammon-Ra the soldiers will seem to have disappeared with only projected simulacra of themselves standing in their place.

The invisibility suits are part of a larger military project to create the “Future Warrior”. Uniform augmentation has also included a series of helmet-mounted displays equipped with digital maps, miniature enhanced laser scopes, and hands-free, screen-based instrument, maintenance, and training plans. While these digital helmets literally hook soldiers into a larger global grid of military defense information (real-time enemy location, injured vehicles, command communication, etc.) they also proscribe certain kinds of physical movement. For example, the Nomad Helmet-Mounted displays made by Microvision, which are a primary military contractor, allow Stryker soldiers to monitor both the physical horizon, outside of the vehicle, and the situational data (enemy positions, updated digital maps, etc.) projected on the interior of their helmet screens at once. However, because some of this situational data (monitored on Force Battle Command Brigade and Below, or FBCB2, computers) has historically been displayed on screens mounted inside vehicles, soldiers have to physically navigate both information systems at once. In his article, “‘Tech Success: ‘Heads Up’ takes on a fresh meaning for Army”, Brad Grimes suggests, “If you want to know what it’s like to be a commander in a brigade of Army Stryker armored vehicles, do 70 knee bends. It’s not that commanders are exercise nuts…Rather, it’s that cutting-edge technology sometimes leads to unintended consequences” (Grimes 2004).

Not only do helmet-mounted systems potentially choreograph one’s physicality, they are allowing soldiers to record, reconstruct, and sometimes distribute combat reality in significant ways. In addition to receiving video and data streams, digital helmets are also being equipped with miniature video recorders that allow them to produce documentation and archival data with unprecedented results. Helmet-mounted “lipstick cameras” not only track soldiers’ eye movements, allowing them guided target precision, they also track the day-to-day events of combat. Video from helmet-mounted displays is increasingly being examined to strategize for future attacks and plan missions as well as provide visual accounting for legal purposes (this is of increasing importance in the current Iraq war); however, it is also being covertly posted or distributed to friends and family members as video memorials and documentation of tragedy and transgression. In an article published in Military Embedded Systems the CEO of VioTac, David Ollila, describes the feed of a helmet-mounted video capture system, “The footage is raw, intense. Soldiers duck to avoid oncoming shots, weave through their surroundings, and aim their weapons with deadly accuracy. The screen is ablaze with the sights of war, the echoes of gunfire and the barked orders of a Marine unit providing an eerie soundtrack to the action onscreen” (Ollila 2007).
A third application of helmet-mount technology is being developed for the military’s mobile medical corps. In 2002, Microvision was also awarded a $3.3 million dollar contract from the Telemedicine and Advanced Technology Research Center (TATRC), a division of the U.S. Army’s Medical Research and Material Command (USAMRMC), for designing a digital medical helmet that would monitor vital signs, provide ultrasound readings, and download patient data on a mounted 17-inch display screen. Rick Rutkowski, CEO of Microvision outlines the vision for the company’s industrial application of Nomad to the military’s INFOMEDIC program, “The INFOMEDIC concept represents the future of battlefield medicine, and indeed the future of personal information display. We are excited about the opportunity to demonstrate the advantages that our display technology can bring to this critical aspect of military operations” (Rutowski qtd. in Virtual Medical Worlds 2002).

Wearable medical technologies present unusual corporeal challenges in the field because they are often operated by medics who must perform surgery or attend to wounds under dangerous circumstances, while also navigating a technological interface. Medical sonography has received particular attention through the Air Force’s diagnostic program (AFDMS), and preliminary research indicates that while embedded wearables offer sophisticated potential, they are yet hindered by basic operational difficulties. For example, medical sonographers generally operate the ultrasound transducer with their right hand, while navigating the keyboard and projected screen image with their left. However, the wearable sonography system was equipped with a keyboard mounted on the left forearm, which meant medics could not use the ultrasound transducer and type simultaneously. In development at the Worcester Polytechnic Institute is a voice activated keyboard and mouse to eliminate this difficulty (Vance 2007).

Mobile medic technology is being developed in tandem with wearable biometric systems that shift the role of the uniform from that of a digital soldier or doctor, to that of a digital police officer. Biometric surveillance has been highly controversial in the U.S. as part of a larger political and juridical discourse on immigration, privacy rights, and national security. Within the U.S. military, biometric scanning systems are rapidly transforming the capacity of officers to more efficaciously provide security, identification records, and track their own personnel, enemy combatants, and even detainees and casualties. Biometric systems converge with the previously discussed technologies: long-range retinal scanning devices are being covertly embedded into invisibility suits, mounted onto head displays, and integrated into the 3D training and combat enhancement systems). The new GRIDS (Global Rapid Identification System) “Jump Kit”, designed jointly by Cross Match Technologies Inc. (a global biometric solutions firm) and Quantum 3D (architects of 3D military training systems) is described as, “For Use in War Theaters and Other Extreme Environments”. The companies’ joint press release states:
GRIDS has been designed to be worn in combat zones, border operations, or by any individual operating in a harsh environment. The human wearable kit contains the THERMITE [2D/3D computer from Quantum 3D] with Cross match software, a Cross Match MV5X hand-held forensic quality fingerprint scanner, an iris camera, a digital camera, and GPS software to capture the latitude and longitude of the place at which each individual is being enrolled. […] Cross Match’s earlier versions of the multi-biometric GRIDS Jump Kit are currently in use…for the enrollment and identification of military and governmental personnel, police, security forces, detainees, and casualties. (Cross Match 2005)

Biometric surveillance presents multiple ethical and legal complexities, outside the scope of this paper to discuss; however, it provides an important corollary to the rhetoric of invisibility already mentioned. Within the evolving discourse of military technologies one finds advanced bio-surveillance and documentation procedures — designed to make humans’ biological, geo-political, and historical information increasingly “visible” — yet this occurs vis-à-vis technologies that increasingly employ distinctly “invisible” methods of monitoring.

The final technology to mention is a variation of 3D training and combat enhancement systems, currently produced by Quantum 3D; however, it segues into the final concern regarding the psychological (as well as physical, ethical, and political) consequences of the newly reconfigured digital soldier. Quantum 3D’s mission is to bring “the recent state-of-the-art real-time 3-D graphics into the embedded environment” (Cross Match 2005). While developments in virtual training have been theorized for a number of years¹, virtual training has recently begun to be activated not only in the U.S, but also in the field. That is, while real combat is occurring, virtual embedded training is simultaneously being enacted. This scenario presents a disquieting variation to Baudrillard’s now canonical description of simulation and simulacra — not only does the copy arrive in the absence of the original, it also occurs in the presence of the original. Thus, solider, simulation, and simulacra all operate coextensively.

Soldiers not only need to adapt physically to these new devices, the requirement to navigate multiple (virtual) data streams has discernable psychological effects. In a multi-disciplinary essay examining the physical, cognitive and social dimensions of wearable technology for the user, the authors suggest that, “Just as a wearable device can influence the physical configuration of the user, the ubiquitous nature of a wearable application can likewise magnify the effects of the technology on the cognitive processes of the user. […] Wearable devices offer the ability to interface more intimately with our existing cognitive processes” (Dunne et al. 2005: 7). However, “intimacy” also portends the complex psychological consequences for the soldier catalyzed by wearable technologies, particularly when those devices allow the soldier to experience and document graphic violence simultaneously, increase the resolution of a 3D interface with such accuracy that reality and representation may no longer be discernable, and effectively situate the soldier not only within the military’s organizational structure, but within a global network of image production, scientific development, and warfare commu-
niqué. The soldier is no longer the operator of a weapon but an embodied operand — one in the political and phenomenological process of becoming a body of sophisticated weaponry as well as a body in uniform.

The transition from military training to the metaphysical consequences of digital defense is necessarily an embodied journey. Even if the soldier has been uniquely refitted and reconfigured, the U.S. Military is not yet a phalanx of armed robots and, as such, even the most sophisticated digital soldier is yet vulnerable to basic physiological processes — like breathing. In his essay, “Breathing like a soldier: culture incarnate,” sociologist Brian Lande argues that, “Cultural patterning in the army is not an abstract intellectual process, but takes place at the level of the body as it engages in practical activity in the training environment, and becomes adapted to the military milieu” (Lande 2007: 95). His fieldwork in ROTC officer training camps is specifically focused on the way in which breathing — its patterning, habituation, control, and uniformity — provides philosophical indoctrination through strict physiological regimes. “Breathing like a soldier” he suggests, contributes fundamentally to a military *habitus* (following Bourdieu) and military *techniques* (following Foucault) that place the body at the locus of social and symbolic divisions of military life. Recuperating the body, amidst many sociological studies that have focused on military cultures as sites of value production, ritualization, or identity production, Lande’s thesis is that “Embodiment is thus a crucial but missing theme from sociological accounts of military life. In short, breathing is far from being a taken-for-granted physical activity. It is the social sinew that holds together social institutions by anchoring norms and beliefs in viscera” (Lande 2007: 97). Lande importantly links this physiological training to more precise techniques of psychological and philosophical control. As example, military marksmanship traditionally requires attention to four motions: breath control, trigger, position, and aim. Yet Lande traces the way in which these corporeal details are codified within military practices not only as gestures, but as coordinated movements that ensure soldiers embody norms and expectations of military culture as well as exercises of military corporeality. These seemingly simple physical events are important to examine amidst theoretical, industrial, and mediatic discourses that often privilege invisibility suits over inhalation, and virtual reality over the simple failure of Velcro.
IV. The Networked Soldier

This essay concludes with a brief glimpse into the technical and theoretical consequences of linking the U.S. ground soldier into larger, globally networked systems of information flow. It is impossible to discuss the possibility of a digital soldier without examining the global relay systems and geopolitical space through which telecommunication transmissions occur, as well as the consequences for the physically and politically embedded digital soldier.

In *Desert Screen: War at the Speed of Light* Virilio suggests, “Henceforth, the instantaneous speed of the transmission of data, as well as the extreme precision of the guidance and navigation of projectiles, will surpass the destructive power of conventional or non-conventional arms” (Virilio 2002: 79). Virilio continues to argue in the chapter entitled “June 1991: Desert Screen” that Operation Desert Storm represents an electromagnetic war, terminating at 2D television screens, rather than an environmental war waged on *terra firma*. He writes, “Thus, the military environment is no longer so much a *geophysical* one of the real space of battles...as a *microphysical* one of the real-time electromagnetic environment of real-time engagement” (Virilio 2002: 77). Virilio’s predictions of the control provided by the “efficaciousness of aerial power” (e.g. technologies of surveillance, satellites, and GPS) and the manner in which they “will come progressively to prevail over those of mass destruction: more precisely, those of land forces” (Virilio 2002: 81) has proven to be rather unique to the 1991 Gulf War. It does not apply to many facets of the United States’ prolonged, distinctly urban land warfare in Iraq. Virilio’s emphasis on the U.S. “satellite panoply” (Virilio 2002: 81) and commanders’ ability to follow the instantaneous speed of information in “real time” (84) at times overlooks the persistent “grounded” materiality and many errors of networked satellite technologies. Electromagnetic transmissions require space, physical conduits, and receivers to move through, and the force (institutional origins), energy (strategic operations) and power (terminal consequences) cannot be reduced to Virilio’s standard dromological equation of speed and collapsed time, physically or philosophically — his suggestion that, “It is easy to see that with this conflict in “real time”, we can no longer legitimately speak of a battlefield or of a “localized” war” (Virilio 2002: 84). Though it is theoretically engaging, based on the nature of electromagnetic transmissions, if not the continually violent, embodied effects of urban land warfare in Iraq in 2010, it is difficult to apply to the current conflict which has remained a distinctly *local* and *land-based* theater of war despite the ubiquity and posterity of electronic satellite images and communication. Virilio’s prediction here creates its own silhouette that absences the resolutely visible effects of the current Iraq War; following Smith, it also reduces the critical analytic and strategic distinctions that exist in different theaters of war, though they may be collapsed in the interest of ideology (for states) or theory (for scholars).
However, Virilio does astutely point out that in the 1991 Gulf War “stealth [furtivité] of the material tends to supplant that of the speed [rapidité] of the weaponry” (Virilio 2002: 78). Indeed, for the U.S. it is the possibility of concealment and disappearance, rather than simply speed, that is anticipated for the 21st century digital soldier networked into global communication arrays. Here, Virilio’s argument finds stark continuity a decade later, “To no longer lose sight of the enemy is thus to gain the upper hand, or indeed even to win the conflict, this war in which disappearance from sight tends to prevail over the power of conventional or non-conventional explosives” (Virilio 2002: 78).

Operationally, soldiers move within very specific physical environs with unique spatial architectures, historically designated as “Theaters of War” since the turn of the 20th century. In military operations a theater is used to describe the site or geographic area in which strategic actions are coordinated by military personnel. The term is widely and diversely deployed; though it is often attributed to Carl Von Clausewitz in his canonical work, On War. The term gained wide recognition during WWII when it was used to broadly designate critical land and sea territories (e.g. the Mediterranean Theater of Operations, Pacific Theater of Operations, and European Theater of Operations) and the accompanying administrative activities needed to sustain operations in each.

In a common U.S. Military diagram from 1940s the war theater of operations is drawn almost identically to that of a proscenium space. The front line demarcates the invisible “fourth wall”, separating the actors (waiting combat divisions) from the “stage” where war is actually occurring. As in a physical theater, the further back one is from the stage — in the drawing these sections are penned just as they would be on a seating chart and marked advance section, intermediate section, and base section — the further removed one is from actual battle. However, the physical conceptualization of a theater of war has changed radically, adjusting to the reconfigured geopolitical, spatial and technological realities of 21st century warfare. In a 2000 RAND publication on commercial satellite applications for the U.S. DoD, the authors describe the evolving geographic and equipment needs in modern theater operations:

To construct a theater network, the theater commander must determine the people, vehicles, systems, and headquarters on the network, and their individual communications needs. […] The distinction between “within theater” and “outside of theater” may become increasingly arbitrary. The use of long-range forces from distant bases and “reachback” support tends to blur the theater boundary. The CRD defines notional major theater war (MTW) and small-scale contingency (SSC) boundaries as “2000 by 3500 km” and “1000 by 1000 km”, respectively. (Bonds et al.: 2000)

As the geographic boundaries and combat communications of the theater have changed — particularly in Iraq where the combat “front” is frequently acknowledged to be everywhere and nowhere at once — so too have the consequences for soldiers who are increasingly networked into global telecommunication systems. Yet it is suspect to conclude that Internet, GPS, and satellite transmissions, all
frequently described as “invisible” technologies because their transfer of data is imperceptible to the human eye at some point in transmission, can be theorized without greater attention to the complexity of their corporeal effects. As argued throughout, their role in drawing geopolitical borders and material cartographies, as well as their embodied consequences, can and should be critically traced. In the current U.S. conflict, they work to transfigure bodily identity, mobility, and performance for U.S. ground soldiers, and present discrete and significant differences in their use and application. For example, the apparatus of satellite technologies have become technically embedded — materially and metaphysically — in military uniform design, strategic operations, and combat warfare, and though they suggest a newly imagined ontology of the body, they also present very real consequences for specific bodies — soldiers, citizens, and their “enemies” — in real and virtual theaters.

The metaphor of a real net will serve us, momentarily, in tracing the relationship between visible and invisible networked technologies and the conceptual lines of thought that inform them. As Latour aptly observes, “Technological networks are nets thrown over spaces, and they retain only a few scattered elements of those spaces. They are connected lines, not surfaces. They are by no means comprehensive, global or systematic, even though they embrace surfaces without covering them, and extend a very long way” (Latour 1993: 118). The nets drawn by current technologies extend in every spatial direction — policing nations and territories with surveillance technologies, sonically patrolling underwater boundaries, surveying atmospheric borders by satellite — and they are continually being redrawn. This is both a phenomenological and practical reality: for example, GPS satellites use atomic clocks to calculate time based on the oscillation of an atom. Depending on your location, national borders, geo-political armaments, and military clearance, targets can thus be redrawn by the trilateration of invisible radio waves with millisecond accuracy. In standard GPS, each of approximately 24-30 satellites broadcasts a unique “pseudo-random” code that is then compared to that of multiple base receivers to ascertain the signals’ travel time. The system does not, however, provide seamless, synchronous readings — that is, it is not a continuous line. GPS communication is plagued by ephemeris errors — inaccuracies caused by gravitational pull as well as by the pressure of solar radiation. And like any wave traveling through space, GPS signals encounter many other unexpected detours: slowed speed from changes in the ionosphere and troposphere; multi-path errors (“ghost” reflections of the original signal); receiver noise; and clock errors. In standard GPS these speed bumps may cause up to 5 meters of inaccuracy.

The metaphor of a net cast wide becomes insufficient when examining many network technologies — not only are the “lines” invisible, they are also perforated and asynchronously interrupted: if it is a net, it has many tears. Ephemeris data, for example, is only updated hourly at some receiving stations. And prior to May
1, 2000, the U.S. Department of Defense intentionally introduced errors, known as SA’s (Selective Availability) into the system, including inaccurate clock (and therefore location/distance) settings. As with physical, unmonitored gaps along geo-territorial borders, the inaccuracy of GPS signals literally draws discontinuous, interrupted mappings and creates blurred, “dark” spaces. Because satellites of any kind must obviously orbit to stay aloft, they are often only capable of gathering data from a specific location for fifteen to twenty minutes, and then sometimes only every few days. Thus, the emergent cartography is composed of many dotted lines (torn netting), and reflects not only the vulnerability of physically contested borders, but the discriminate power of invisible mappings: simply stated, control and surveillance of permeable, invisible borders is as important as that of visible ones. It is not a surprise that the catalysts for early cartographies were generally the result of ecclesiastic or sovereign concerns: maps are power — they provide sightlines for attaining geo-political domination.

The ownership of invisible mapping technologies and the spaces they inscribe has thus been aggressively contested in the last decade, shifting political alliances traditionally found on land into the air. Standard GPS was initiated by the U.S. Department of Defense in the early 1970s, launched in 1978, and was operational for civilian use by 1995. In response, the Russian military launched the first satellite of GLONASS; their satellite constellation reached its zenith in 1994 with 24 satellites, experienced a rapid decline post-Cold War era (as of September 2005 only 13 satellites were functional), and is now being revived by the Russian Aerospace Agency (24 satellites are again projected for 2011). Reflecting European concerns with U.S. governmental and corporate ownership of GPS constellation systems, Europe in turn launched Galileo in 2005, a global navigation satellite system (GNSS) designed explicitly as a civilian (i.e. commercial) system with enhanced error detection, navigational precision, and security protocols.

However, prior to the 2004 EU Summit the U.S. blocked Galileo implementation. Concerned that the system’s Public Regulated Service (PRS) signal — encrypted for European military use and homeland(s) security — would interfere with the GPS M-2 military signal, the U.S. unilaterally refused to discuss other interoperability issues until the PRS-M code conflict was agreed upon. In 2002 Gilles Gantelet, an EU public relations representative for Galileo, declared that as a result of U.S. pressure, "Galileo is almost dead". The EU conceded in 2004 to most U.S. demands and the projected date of activation is currently 2014. In particular, the U.S. military and NATO potentially retained the ability to jam select Galileo signals in the event of international conflict (the U.S. military is currently able to shut down GPS access in the event of a national security crisis). The U.S. insisted on maintaining control of invisible technologies in the event they would need them for destroying more visible targets.

While GPS technologies have invaded atmospheric space under the deliberate guise of surveying activities on land — to watch the target rather than the trajec-
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tory — the lines are increasingly as important as their terrestrial mappings. GNSS systems clearly represent the use of invisible technologies to target visible bodies and borders, but the system itself carves nationalist grids in atmospheric space. U.S. GPS satellites maintain orbital rotations on six planes, 60 degrees apart, with at least four satellites inclined at approximately 55 degrees in relation to the equator, and orbit at an altitude of 20,200km. In contrast, 30 Galileo satellites (27 operational and 3 additional crafts) will operate at an altitude (the line) of 23,222 km, with an orbital inclination of 56 degrees. Both satellite systems “share” the L1 band frequencies, transmitting at 1575.42 MHz, though the U.S. system also utilizes L2 frequency at 1227.60 MHz and has an L3 frequency used to monitor nuclear detonations. While resolution for the modernized civilian GPS system may be less than one meter, Galileo’s technical specifications offer real time resolution capabilities, under advantageous conditions, of less than ten centimeters. While the EU occupies the atmospheric border at 23,222km at an inclination angle of 56 degrees, the U.S. patrols 20,200km at 55 degrees and Russia’s GLONASS system orbits at 19,100km at 64.8 degrees. India’s Airports Authority and the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) have implemented their own independent satellite system. If it becomes fully operational, Indian satellites positioned in the Indian Ocean region between the orbital arc 48 degrees east to 100 degrees east longitude will provide coverage from the coast of East Africa to Australia. India has been hesitant to partner with EU’s Galileo (in part due to security issues and China’s substantial financial backing of $241 million dollars) preferring to maintain their political relationship with officials of Russia’s GLONASS system (Deshpande 2006).

Far from uniformly eliminating spatial borders, as proponents of media and cyber globalization tend to prophesy, invisible technologies simultaneously reinscribe them. It is true, as the editors of Media and Globalization: Why the State Matters suggest in their introduction that, “Although states have been endowed with the task of cordoning off communicative spaces, the control of these intangible borders is seen as a Sisyphean task in the face of media globalization” (Morris et al. 2001: viii). Yet the “intangible” borders the authors invoke can often be traced quite directly from their origin to their target (i.e. GPS surveillance satellite to Iraqi military target), and their apparent intangibility is an illusion — technologies that operate under a rhetoric of invisibility carve out very real geo-spatial-political domains with the shifting, asynchronous permeability of their terrestrial counterparts. Attending to the silhouettes of GPS, satellite, and telecommunication technologies is important to trace their consequences for global citizens and communities. In addition, the persistent trend to emphasize theoretical possibility — a networked, U.S. phalanx of robotically and bio-technically enhanced digital armies — over the day-to-day realities of technological performance advances scientific teleology and obscures political intentionality. And much like the failures of petite squares of Velcro, there have been many pedestrian obstacles for

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GPS and satellite operations for U.S. ground soldiers. In his essay, “The Military Takes Stock in Iraq”, Richard A. Muller, a Jason consultant for U.S. national security writes:

The city environment also neutralizes much of our high tech advantage. GPS doesn’t work indoors, and often fails outdoors in narrow alleys. Our high tech communications also have problems. Some of our radios use frequency hopping (rapid changes in frequency) to avoid detection and location, but they work only when there is good propagation at all frequencies, a condition often not met in cities. So after a few weeks urban fighting, some soldiers (and officers) had their families send them citizen band walkie-talkies from Radio Shack. When you are under fire, it may be more important to be able to call for help immediately rather than maintain covert communications. This experience is reminiscent of Gulf War I, when families sent soldiers cheap GPS receivers. (Muller 2004)

The threats to state sovereignty and individual autonomy from multinational telecommunications and global market economies are by now well tread, though certainly not resolved, arguments. But, following McLuhan, the emphasis is often on the sender, receiver, and the type of media, not on who owns the medium it travels through. The overt juridical and political emphasis has been on the origin of media technologies (e.g. state control by the U.S.) and the positional identity of the receiver (e.g. consumer audiences, military targets, and corporate clients), while the seemingly invisible lines in space that facilitate these networks have received less attention. Like the equation for electricity, which states that the current (line of electrons) is equal to the voltage (or “force” of electrons) divided by the resistance, the current of invisible technologies is imagined to be equal to the force of governmental and corporate power divided by various resistive strategies (of local municipalities, guerrilla militias, NGO’s, consumer groups, etc.). But this equation ignores control of the space through which the current of invisible technologies passes. It has been theorized that media technologies bypass governmental autocrats thereby creating “technologies of freedom” or information democracies (Pool 1983), or conversely, bypass local community interests thereby creating hegemonic, flattening systems of generic globalization. Yet both paradigms may overlook the potential power of the space through which invisible technologies move (atmospheric, oceanic, ionic, etc.). Technologies of globalization may elide facets of state control, but they also offer complex (and potentially violent) opportunities to redraw the borders in atmospheric, oceanic, and satellite space. Various countries have attempted to “cut” these lines of invisible transmission — Iran banned satellite transmissions and Saudi Arabia banned satellite dishes in 1994, China blocked satellite broadcasts of the BBC news in 1993, and the U.S. attempted to purchase exclusive rights to Middle East airspace surveillance for Ikonos-2 — and these strategies all affirm what will become an increasingly complex “space” war of atmospheric territoriality and nationalism.

As suggested at the outset, a general theory of silhouetting suggests it is possible to deliberately map seemingly invisible technologies that target bodies, territories, and spatial borders, creating a visible cartographic project that charts the
technologies’ strategic production and consequences. While this essay has focused on 21st century wearable technologies such as the U.S. Army uniform, the cartographic project becomes increasingly complex as U.S. soldiers are required to “defend” not only terrestrial topographies, but become networked across cyber and atmospheric geographies. Territoriality, borders, and national state-formation inherently rely on linear demarcations — an invisible or literal line drawn in sand or space. And yet the hypostatization of geopolitical demarcations — our failure as citizens to distinguish between the rhetoric of invisibility and the sociopolitical realities it obscures — may impair our ability to critically transform seemingly invisible techniques and technologies into more visible and culturally productive analyses of the silhouettes of war.

Jessica J. Behm is the director of CITYatwork, an organization for technology and science education in New York City. She was on faculty at New York University from 2001-2005 and holds a Masters from NYU’s Interactive Technology Program. She currently works as an interactive engineer and her research includes new media, meta-information technologies, and the development of corporeal U.S. Military technologies. E-mail: jessica@cityatwork.org

Notes
1 Complete Minutes of the Conference in the Reich Chancellery, Berlin, Germany, November 5, 1937, Held From 4:15 to 8:30 p.m. Written by Colonel Friedrich Hossbach on November 10, 1937.
2 Official U.S. Congressional policy has only formally declared war in five instances. Operation Iraqi Freedom was sanctioned as an extended military engagement by the U.S. Congress and is, like Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, not an officially declared U.S. war though it is often referred to as such in U.S. popular culture and media.
3 The term U.S. Military will be used throughout to refer generally to U.S. Armed Forces. It stands in for discrete service branches, including the U.S. Army, U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Air Force, U.S. Navy, U.S. Coast Guard, and corollary Reserve/Guard branches. Each service branch has differentiated institutional cultures, historiographies of technological use, strategic philosophies, funding revenues, operational mandates, and corporate and academic partners that cannot, however, be collapsed.
4 This discussion pertains to technologies that are widely available to the U.S. public, if infrequently read in military and industry journals.
5 See Der Derian 2001, Virtuous War.
6 http://history.amedd.army.mil/booksdocs/wwii/orgadmin/chart12.gif
7 The term triangulation is often used to describe GPS satellite calculations; however, technically it is better termed trilateration (and it generally uses not three, but four satellites).
8 There are a number of GPS protocols and relay systems, including Differential GPS, which has more precise error-correcting capacities.
9 The US Navy-Tycho maintains current constellation configurations of satellites on their website; numbers vary as satellites are replaced. ftp://tycho.usno.navy.mil/pub/gps/gpsstd.txt
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The Tampa “Smart CCTV” Experiment

By Kelly Gates

Abstract
In June 2001, a neighborhood in Tampa, Florida called Ybor City became the first urban area in the United States to be fitted with a “Smart CCTV” system. Visionics Corporation began a project with the Tampa Police Department to incorporate the company’s facial recognition technology (FRT), called FaceIt, into an existing 36-camera CCTV system covering several blocks along two of the main avenues. However, this “smart surveillance” experiment did not go as smoothly as its planners had hoped. After a two-year free trial period, the TPD abandoned the effort to integrate facial recognition with the CCTV system in August 2003, citing its failure to identify a single wanted individual. This essay chronicles the experiment with FRT in Ybor City and argues that the project’s failure should not be viewed as solely a technical one. Most significantly, the failure of the Ybor City “Smart CCTV” experiment reveals the extent to which new surveillance technologies represent sites of struggle over the extent and limits of police power in advanced liberal democracies.

Keywords: CCTV; Smart CCTV; smart surveillance; video surveillance; facial recognition technology; police technology; police power
The Tampa “Smart CCTV” Experiment

In June 2001, Ybor City – an historic-entertainment district in Tampa, Florida known as Tampa’s “Latin Quarter” – became the first urban area in the United States to have its public streets fitted with a “Smart CCTV” system. A company called Visionics Corporation began a project with the Tampa Police Department (TPD) to incorporate their automated facial recognition product, called “FaceIt”, into an existing 36-camera CCTV system covering several blocks along two of the main avenues in Ybor City. Installed for free by Visionics, FaceIt promised to upgrade the existing CCTV system in order to provide the security needed to transform Ybor City into a more desirable tourist and consumer destination. The technology was designed to automatically search images of faces grabbed from video feeds against a database of wanted individuals, enabling the police to target those individuals for apprehension and arrest. The “smart” surveillance system promised to benefit both Visionics and the TPD, serving as an experimental test case for FaceIt and putting the TPD on the cutting edge of new police technology. And Ybor City, an historic part of Tampa once known as the cigar manufacturing “capital of the world”, would be transformed into a sort of “digital enclosure” (Andrejevic 2007) – a virtualized urban space, safe for middle-class consumers.

However, the Ybor City experiment did not go as smoothly as its planners had hoped. The announcement of the system’s installation triggered a heated debate, playing out on the streets of Ybor City, in the local and national press, and in the halls of the Tampa City government. Supporters claimed that FRT would help make Ybor City a safer place and thereby bring new life and business to the area, while opponents countered that it was too Orwellian and would ruin the unique and lively character of the neighborhood. Others suggested that the technology did not work and so was at best a waste of time and at worst a dangerous diversion of police resources. These competing claims plagued efforts on the part of proponents to establish it as a necessary, desirable, and functional “security solution” for Ybor City. After a two-year free trial period, the TPD abandoned the effort to integrate FRT with the CCTV system, citing its failure to identify a single wanted individual.

In this essay, I chronicle the Ybor City “Smart CCTV” experiment and the controversy surrounding it in order to better understand the politics of FRT development and deployment, following Lucas Introna’s (2005) call for a “disclosive ethics” of facial recognition system development. (See also Introna and Wood 2004.) The effort on the part of the TPD and Visionics Corporation to institute “Smart CCTV” in Ybor City provides an opportunity to consider the reasons for interest in new digital or “algorithmic” forms of surveillance and their implications for the role of policing in modern democratic societies. As Graham and Wood (2003) have argued, there are intimate connections between the digitization of police surveillance techniques and the changing political economy of cities. A close look at
the Ybor City case likewise demonstrates that the move to automate the perceptual labor of surveillance should not be viewed as a natural and inevitable process of computerization. Instead, computerization involves processes of social construction, driven and shaped by institutional priorities and with a tendency to serve the more privileged sectors of society, if not always as successfully as intended. Like all technological systems, “Smart CCTV” does not develop as an autonomous force moving forward of its own volition, but instead requires the concerted investment of a host of social actors, and the controversy and competing claims about the technology play a fundamental role in its institutionalization. In addition, just as the development and adoption of digital techniques of CCTV optimization should not be viewed in narrowly technical terms, the failure to integrate facial recognition technology with CCTV in Ybor City was not solely a problem of technical viability, nor does it spell the end of attempts to create functioning “Smart CCTV” systems. Instead, it demonstrates the extent to which efforts to create automated, digital surveillance techniques represent sites of struggle over the extent and limits of police power in advanced liberal democracies.

The Problem with CCTV

Closed-circuit television is a transmission system for television that differs from the broadcast form associated with the popular medium: “live or prerecorded signals are sent over a closed loop to a finite and predetermined group of receivers, either via coaxial cable or as scrambled radio waves that are unscrambled at the point of reception” (McCarthy n.d.). Although commonly viewed as a more recent phenomenon, police use of CCTV dates back at least to the 1960s in the UK (Chris Williams 2003). But it was the 1980s and ’90s that saw an exponential increase in the use of CCTV by police and private security firms in both the U.S. and Europe for monitoring urban spaces, gated communities, workplaces, and capital-intensive spaces such as banks, retail outlets, and casinos. The U.K. has far outpaced other countries in the extent of police CCTV deployments, spurred on by “City Challenge Competitions” that provided significant public funding, but other countries have also experienced significant growth, especially in private security applications (Hempel and Töpfer 2004; Norris, McCahill and Wood 2004). In the U.S., police in at least 25 cities had installed CCTV systems to monitor public areas by 2001, and many more were considering doing so “to give troubled down-town business districts a new lease on life, help public housing communities reduce destructive criminal elements, increase safety in public parks, monitor traffic congestion and catch red light violators” (Norris, McCahill and Wood 2004: 114).

If one takes as given the role of the police as arbiters of law and order and believes that they should have wide latitude in performing that role, there seems little need to question the reasons for police adoption of new surveillance technol-
ogies, beyond concerns about their cost and effectiveness. Similarly, if one accepts assumptions about crime and criminality as being causes of social disorder rather than effects – the prevailing orientation that the police themselves take to defining the problem of crime – then the solutions obviously center on more police power, including more police surveillance. In his study of police power and cultural narrative in twentieth-century America, Christopher Wilson (2000: 5) identifies a “paradox of modern American cultural life”: “that much of our popular understanding of criminality and social disorder, particularly street disorder, comes from a knowledge economy that has the police – putatively agents of order – at its center”. Prevailing police views about crime and disorder that have emerged in the U.S. and the U.K. since the 1970s are not especially sympathetic to arguments that challenge the authority of the police or offer broader social and political-economic explanations of crime and criminality. In the words of William Bratton, current police chief of the LAPD, “It is a great disservice to the poor to say that they lose jobs and so become criminals…The penicillin for dealing with crime is cops. I thought I had already proved this. Criminologists who say it is economics or the weather or some other thing are crazy” (in McCarthy 2004: 56). Bratton’s comments express the predominant view of the police toward the problem of crime, a view (not entirely new) that dismisses social analyses of the “root causes” of crime as detached from the brutal reality of the streets.

The so-called realist view that stepped up policing and surveillance is the solution to the “crime problem” not only shapes police practice but also carries over into both public understandings of crime and policy orientations aimed at dealing with it, and the prevalence of this view makes it difficult to effectively contest police adoption of new “crime prevention” technologies. However, not everyone agrees that increased police power is the answer to the “crime problem”. In fact, police power itself has long been a political problem in modern democratic societies, and not only among radical social critics. For example, the civil rights activist James Baldwin’s charge that the police were the “occupying armies” of the inner city was taken up as a topic of urgent consideration by liberal reformers in the U.S. in the 1960s (Wilson 2000). The debate about the legitimacy of police power and its appropriate limits is ongoing, if often muted, and it represents one of the main reasons why the spread of CCTV systems – and the effort to improve upon CCTV technology – has generated some, albeit minor, controversy.

Part of the controversy is sparked by the research of sociologists, legal scholars and other critical observers, who have raised questions about the causes of CCTV proliferation and its social and political implications. According to this body of research, the seemingly self-evident reasons given for police adoption of CCTV elide more complicated relationships between the spread of video surveillance, the role of the police in modern societies, and the social construction of crime and disorder. A number of scholars maintain that the spread of CCTV is tied to a marked shift in approaches to crime control and criminal justice since the 1970s,
specifically a movement away from penal welfare and rehabilitation, and movement toward more actuarial and punitive approaches (See for example, Simon and Feeley 1994; Simon 2007; Wacquant 2001). David Garland (2001) has argued that crime prevention strategies now take high crime rates as a normal part of life, leading criminal justice systems to experiment with new ways of managing crime rather than assuming crime can be reduced by addressing the social conditions that produce it. High crime rates and the persistence of the crime problem in the face of what appear to be failed law enforcement programs have created new problems of legitimacy and work overload for criminal justice systems. In turn, these problems have led to the adoption of strategies of crime control that seek to offload responsibilities for crime prevention onto individuals and non-state actors, making the avoidance of crime part of the responsibilities of each citizen and organization, part of the built environment, and part of everyday life.

As part of the move to make crime prevention a commonplace part of everyday life, strategic shifts in crime control strategies have also included explicit efforts directed at measuring and managing levels of public fear and insecurity. In the 1980s police officials and policy makers in both the US and the UK began to realize that public fear of crime was to some extent detached from actual crime rates, and so they began to take measures aimed at changing public perceptions, regardless of their impact on crime itself. The reduction of the fear of crime among preferred groups became a “distinct, self-standing policy goal” (Garland 2001: 122). One result of this new orientation to crime control is that CCTV systems now hover over urban centers and shopping malls as a matter of course, extending the gaze of police or private security throughout those spaces, with the visible presence of cameras often standing in for the authorities themselves. CCTV systems are used to target not only criminals and suspects, but also public perceptions about crime. In other words, some of the work that surveillance systems do is symbolic, tied to the symbolic authority of the police. The pursuit of both CCTV systems and new technologies of “Smart CCTV” must be understood in large part as a response to the more symbolic aims of creating the perception of stepped-up policing – attempts to reduce fear of crime among preferred groups by investing police with an image of high-tech surveillance capability.

Still, it would be a mistake to characterize CCTV technology as performing a strictly symbolic function. Surveillance cameras are not just for show – police in fact use CCTV systems – but the ways they use them rarely follow in lock step with the intentions of policy or system design (McCahill 2002; Norris and Armstrong 1999). In a major study of thirty CCTV control rooms in an English city, Michael McCahill (2002) examined the way that various actors involved in using the systems interacted with one another, and through those interactions limited the capacity of system integration. Through various forms of non-compliance or partial adherence to prescribed uses, humans often got in the way of realizing the full potential of integrated CCTV systems. Lynsey Dubbeld
(2005) has likewise studied the limitations of CCTV functionality, focusing not on the human operators but on the ways that material design limits the capacity of CCTV systems. In her study of a CCTV system in railway stations in the Netherlands, “targeted surveillance was made problematic as a result of the particular design of the control room...as well as by the capriciousness of technical artifacts central to the operation of the CCTV network” (Dubbeld 2005: 88).

As a result of combined human and technological limitations, CCTV systems have predictably fallen short of expectations in enabling the police to effectively detect and deter crime and discourage disorder and antisocial behavior in designated spaces. The major limitations and failures of CCTV systems to fulfill their original objectives of crime prevention and public safety has been a major theme in recent critical and sociological literature (Groombridge 2008; Hempel and Töpfer 2009; Murakami Wood 2009; Webster 2009). It is not only critical scholars who have identified problems with CCTV effectiveness. William Webster (2009) has identified a decisive shift in CCTV policy in the U.K. since the early 2000s toward growing concern about the financial cost of managing these systems and a reassessment of their technical capabilities. As David Murakami Wood (2009: 2) noted in a recent Surveillance and Society editorial, CCTV technology “has become the new version of the nuclear ‘baroque arsenal’ identified by Mary Kaldor in the Cold War: massive, increasingly inefficient, complex and intricately connected projects that generate new ‘needs’ whether they succeed or fail”.

Police interest in new technologies that promise to help them make more effective use of CCTV systems stems in large part from the technology’s failed expectations. Rather than abandoning unsuccessful CCTV systems, social actors involved in their deployment and management have pursued other avenues to address their shortcomings, including the integration and computerization of CCTV systems (Webster 2009). Once surveillance systems become part of the material form of police practice, inefficiencies and other organizational problems that they introduce into the everyday work of policing become problems in themselves. As Ericson and Haggerty (1997: 389-390) have noted, the ever-increasing workload of the police – especially the “paper burden” that accompanies their role as “knowledge workers” – leads police agencies to “search constantly for improved computer-based solutions” that promise to fulfill the practical needs of police work while also serving as a source of organizational legitimacy. It is consistent with this self-perpetuating bureaucratic logic to find police turning to “improved computer-based solutions” to deal with the growing video burden.

The Ybor City Experiment

The first urban center to integrate FRT with a police CCTV system was not Ybor City but the London Borough of Newham, and from the beginning, the officials responsible for the Newham “Smart CCTV” project were concerned with creating
the appearance of high-tech police surveillance as much as actually providing a means of apprehending criminal suspects. In 1998, Visionics partnered with a British-based company, Software and Systems International, to upgrade Newham’s extensive CCTV system of 140 fixed cameras and 11 mobile units. In explaining the need for the system, Robert Lack, Newham’s Security Chief, pointed to problems of unemployment and increasing crime levels following the closure of the docks (Lack 1999). “The need was to reduce the public fear of becoming a victim of crime and increase the criminals’ perception of the chance they would be detected”, said Lack (2001). The effectiveness of the new “Smart CCTV” system would not be gauged strictly in terms of the identification and interception of suspects, but also in terms of its effects on public perceptions. Whether the facial recognition system actually worked in practice would be less important than whether people actually believed that it worked. As planned, the system would initially be used to identify muggers and shoplifters, including “members of a shoplifting ring nicknamed the ‘Kenya Boys’ by the local police”, and eventually expanded to include “known or suspected pedophiles” (Thomas 1998: 5). According to a company spokesperson, the technology had distinct advantages over human operators: its eyes never got tired after staring at screens for hours, and “it never goes to the loo, either”. (Oldcorn, quoted in Thomas 1998: 5).

When the Tampa Police decided to try out the technology three years later, it was on a considerably smaller surveillance apparatus, on a system of only 36 cameras, but it was motivated by the same concerns with reducing public fear of crime and the seemingly inherent fallibility of the human element in CCTV system operation. How Ybor City became the first urban space in the U.S. to be fitted with “Smart CCTV” stemmed from a number of converging factors. In many ways, Ybor City represented an ideal test site for such an experiment. David Watkins, the systems integrator responsible for the hands-on work of installation, called it his “living laboratory” (personal communication, August 23, 2003). Perhaps most importantly, the police were already operating a CCTV system in the area, installed as part of stepped-up security initiatives that accompanied redevelopment projects in Ybor City in the 1990s. The neighborhood also had a high crime rate relative to other neighborhoods in Tampa and a bustling weekend party scene that gave it a reputation for being a risky place to visit. According to Detective Bill Todd of the TPD, police use of the new high-tech surveillance technology would “send a message” to the public that they were “committed to enhancing the quality of life in our neighborhoods” and “making Ybor City a desired destination point for our citizens” (“Tampa Police Department Installs” 2001). Like the Newham “Smart CCTV” project, proponents had in mind not only identifying criminal suspects, but conveying an impression about the active role of the police in adopting new crime-fighting tools in order to make the area safer, a “desired destination point” for the mobile consumer.
How Ybor City acquired its party reputation offers some insights into how it became the first public test site for “Smart CCTV”, and why the fate of the neighborhood became indelibly tied to expanding police surveillance. The area known as Ybor City was founded in 1886 at the beginning of a major wave of immigration from southern and eastern Europe to the United States. Named after Spanish cigar magnate Vincente Martínez Ybor, Ybor City became home to a thriving cigar industry. Jobs in the cigar factories brought immigrant groups of Cubans, Spaniards, Sicilians and Italians to work and live in Ybor’s planned community (Mormino and Pozzetta 1987). The cigar industry declined by the mid-1930s, but Ybor City remained a stronghold of the same groups that had been drawn there around the cigar trade. It was the social, political, and economic changes following WWII, including activist federal government policies supporting urban renewal, which radically altered and disrupted the unique immigrant community (Ibid.). Tampa’s first urban renewal agency commenced operations in 1962 with a charter to rehabilitate and redevelop “slum areas”. Bulldozers began tearing down Ybor City in 1965, preparing to create “a tourist attraction second to none in the U.S.”, according to the urban renewal office (Ibid: 309). Soon after, the construction of Interstate Highway 4 split off Ybor City from its northern section. At least 1200 families were displaced, leading to a downward spiral of neglect. Civil unrest followed the police shooting of a young black man in Tampa in June 1967, and although Ybor City was not the site of the protests, media coverage had a damning impact on area, drying up support for urban renewal programs. Renewal programs in another Tampa neighborhood known as “the Scrub” displaced a large number of low-income African-American families, many of whom moved into vacant housing in Ybor City. As financial institutions red-lined Ybor City, the razed land remained vacant, and the blight of the area deepened (Ibid.).

However, by the late 1980s, a new, hip bohemian culture was emerging in Ybor City, with a critical mass of artists attracted there by the cheap rents and unique, old-urban character of the neighborhood (Snider 2003). As one local reporter observed, after two decades of failed renewal efforts Ybor City seemed “to be getting a new lease on life”, drawing tourists and local Tampa residents attracted to the artist studios, street vendors, and live entertainment (Stengle 1988). The distinctive community taking shape in Ybor City began once again to attract the attention of developers. In an editorial titled “Ybor City’s past can enhance Tampa’s future”, a local corporate lawyer advocated for renewed investment in Ybor City in order to help Tampa “become a world-class convention city” that could “compete with Orlando, Miami, and other Southeastern cities for convention business” (Sanchez 1991: 2). The City of Tampa stepped in, renewing its efforts to remake Ybor City, designating it a “Community Redevelopment Area” in 1988, and two years later, Ybor City was named a National Historic Landmark District. The Ybor City Development Corporation (YCDC) was established, devising a plan to encourage “the rehabilitation of the district through the stimulation of the
private sector investment and business activity” (YCDC n.d.). A series of development projects were undertaken in the area, including a $50 million project called “Centro Ybor”, a retail/entertainment complex. Writing in 1995, ethnographer Timothy Simpson (1995) commented on the cultural climate that had emerged in Ybor City, after the cycle of failed urban redevelopment programs and renewed efforts at preserving the unique heritage of the neighborhood:

Ybor City is currently caught in the tension between being a district marked by ‘historical preservation’ and being self-consciously in a ‘state of transition’... Nouveau art boutiques and trendy restaurants compete for attention with the boarded-up buildings and crumbling facades that surround them...The air is charged, though, with the possibility of community, of radical change (702-703).

This charged moment of possibility might have blossomed if the needs of the neighborhood’s local inhabitants were not subordinated to the imperative of making Ybor City a competitive convention, tourist, and consumer “destination point”. In addition to the redevelopment projects that were reshaping Ybor City, the City of Tampa introduced a set of incentives to entice businesses to locate there (Snider 2003). Rules requiring bars to be 1,000 feet apart were suspended, and other standards governing stormwater drainage, parking provision, and transportation impact fees were waived. The business sector that was most attracted by these incentives was the nightclub industry, according to Eric Snider (2003), a local reporter. Bar owners appealed in droves to the Tampa City Council for “wet zonings”, permits that allow alcohol sales, and “the council complied, handing out wet zonings like Jolly Ranchers on Halloween” (Ibid.). While the alcohol permits spawned renovations to buildings that might have otherwise remained vacant, the result was the overproduction of drinking establishments. At the same time, the Centro Ybor complex had managed to attract chain stores like American Eagle and Pac Sun, and needed to attract additional businesses in order to become a profitable retail center. In an effort to “clean up” the area and make it more hospitable to corporate retail establishments, the city ousted the small vendors and street performers that populated the streets in the 1990s, a move that destroyed the bohemian, artistic vibe and “sucked some of the freaky character out of the strip” (Ibid.).

What occurred in Ybor City during the last decade of the twentieth century resembled similar socioeconomic transformations occurring in cities across the US: the redesign of urban public spaces according to corporate-defined redevelopment priorities, leading to the overinvestment in retail/entertainment districts. As a result of economic crises in the 1970s, cities were forced to adopt a heightened competitive posture, vying for position as centers of consumption, among other dimensions of strategic competitive advantage (Harvey 1994). This competitive stance was particularly intense in Florida, a state whose economy depends heavily on tourism and convention business. Tampa was in constant competition for tourist and visitor dollars with other Florida cities, including Orlando just eighty miles east. In the course of Tampa’s effort to gain a competitive edge, efforts were made
to remake Ybor City into a “variation on a theme park”, a privatized space of consumption designed to capitalize on a nostalgic, stylized, and commodified version of the past (Sorkin 1992). What consistently accompanied these commercially oriented urban “revitalization” and “renewal” programs, as Mike Davis (1992: 223, 224) observed of Los Angeles, was an “obsession with physical security systems”, and “an unprecedented tendency to merge urban design, architecture and the police apparatus into a single, comprehensive security effort”.

Given this concerted, if flawed effort to remake Ybor City into a tourist-consumer mecca through a model of competitive, privatized urban redevelopment, it was not surprising to find the Tampa City Council and the Ybor City Development Corporation moving in 1997 to direct public funds for the installation of a CCTV system, to be monitored by the Tampa Police. The area would have to be purged of its undesirable inhabitants and visitors if it was ever going to be a place where people with money would come to spend it. And when the neighborhood failed to generate sufficient consumer dollars to support the demands of corporate-defined redevelopment projects, blame was consistently placed on the problem of crime and public perceptions of the area as too dangerous to visit. Only one Tampa City Council member voted against installing the CCTV system, saying that he did not think there was “a compelling enough reason to ‘whittle away’ at the public’s freedom of movement by recording what bars they frequent or which people they meet” (quoted in Danielson 1996). Tampa deputy police chief John Bushell disagreed: “This isn’t a Big Brother kind of thing…We just want to make it a place where people can come and feel comfortable walking around at night” (quoted in Hathaway 1997).

If one of the main reasons that police gave for adopting CCTV technology was their interest in reducing fear of crime and making middle-class visitors feel secure, another related reason concerned their charge to monitor the crowds that gather in Ybor City on weekend evenings. One of the greatest “operational challenges” police faced in the area, according to Detective Todd, was dealing with the crowds of revelers that spilled out into the streets on Friday and Saturday nights, creating a chaotic scene that pushed beyond the boundaries of policing capacity (Hunter 2002). Every weekend evening in Ybor City the crowd would explode with partying enthusiasm, but always threatened to become a major problem, or many minor problems that overpowered the police officers assigned to patrol the area. Police discourse described the crowd as riddled with “dangerous individuals” – thieves, drug dealers, and especially “sexual predators” – who eluded the police and preyed upon the innocent. With crowds numbering as many as 30,000 people, according to Detective Todd, “traditional police tools break down…. Patrol officers walking in that crowd have trouble seeing what’s going on” (quoted in Hunter 2002: 20).

This eruption of the problem of the crowd in the city has a long genealogy, accompanied by the development of technologies and spatial arrangements designed
to govern the space of the city and make the occupants of the crowd more visible. For nineteenth-century social theorists like LeBon and Sighele, the crowd embodied “a highly emotional, irrational, and intolerant ‘psychic current’…the lowest form of ‘common consciousness’” (Czitrom 1982: 114). The specter of the crowd that haunted social thought inspired “the invention of technologies of spaces and gazes”, explains Nikolas Rose (1999: 72), “the birth of calculated projects to use space to govern the conduct of individuals at liberty”. Town planners envisioned the construction and maintenance of the healthy “liberal city” through the orderly arrangement of public spaces, opening them up to visibility and making each individual the target of “a play of normative gazes”, under close observation not only of the authorities but also of one another (Rose 1999: 73). Foucault (2007: 18) similarly has addressed the moment when economic development made necessary the suppression of city walls, reducing the supervision and control over daily comings and goings and thereby generating new insecurities from “the influx of the floating population of beggars, vagrants, delinquents, criminals, thieves, [and] murderers” who came from outside the city. The lack of physical barriers around the city necessitated new ways of making the space visible and maintaining control over the bodies mingling in that space.

The police attention to the problem of the crowd in Ybor City, and their interest in technologies designed to make the crowd more visible and controllable, suggests a neoliberal manifestation of these earlier efforts to construct the “liberal city”. The Tampa Police expressed familiar concerns about the crowd and the threat it posed to the orderly maintenance of Ybor City. The physical presence of the police was augmented by the presence of cameras and signage throughout the neighborhood. However, the arrangement of video surveillance was soon deemed less than optimally effective, since the “floating population” continued to penetrate the space of the crowd, crime rates continued at unabated levels, and the redeveloped space failed to generate profit. When the CCTV system alone did not do enough to extend the police gaze into the crowd in order to identify and purge undesirables from the space of Ybor City, a new layer of technology was deemed necessary.

The Solution: Interpassive Policing?

Beginning in the late 1990s, the limitations of CCTV as a technology of policing led entrepreneurs working to commercialize the nascent technology of automated facial recognition to pursue what they saw a business opportunity. Facial recognition technology, along with other forms of “algorithmic surveillance” (Norris, Moran and Armstrong 1998; Introna and Wood 2004), promised to provide a means of managing the enormous amount of video generated by CCTV systems without adding hundreds of human observers. Creating “Smart CCTV” would involve integrating a hardware and software system that would automatically grab
faces from video feeds, translate the extracted images into digital templates, and
then match those templates against a mugshot database of suspect individuals.
However, despite the claims of proponents, it was by no means certain that FRT
could be successfully integrated with CCTV to create functioning “Smart CCTV”
systems.

Although no one knew the technology’s limitations better than the developers
themselves, companies like Visionics were eager to move forward with deploy-
ments in urban spaces and other settings, recognizing a potentially profitable mar-
ket. Visionics began marketing their FaceIt system as a solution to the problems
of video overload and suspect identification from surveillance video, claiming that
the technology was an improvement over both existing, “passive” CCTV technol-
ogy, and over the human monitors of CCTV systems. With each new press re-
lease, Visionics declared FaceIt better able to handle larger databases and greater
numbers of images, faster and more accurately than previous versions. In 1997,
Visionics announced the release of “FaceIt Multiface™”, ostensibly “the world’s
first face recognition system capable of capturing and identifying multiple faces in
the same field of view, and tracking these faces continuously” (“Visionics De-
monstrates” 1997). Six months later, Visionics released another new version of
FaceIt, called “FaceIt DB”, claiming that it had the “ability to check every face
that appears in a camera’s field of view in real time”, taking automated surveil-
lance “to its highest level” (“Find Criminals” 1998). In 2001, Visionics released
their “FaceIt ARGUS” system, declaring it “the first commercially available facial
recognition product that can handle an unlimited number of camera inputs and
provide real-time identification” (“Visionics Corporation Announces” 2001). A
brochure for FaceIt ARGUS claimed that it “revolutionizes the functionality of
conventional CCTV”, provides “active, real-time identification for today’s passive
CCTV systems”, and “combats human operational challenges: not affected by
superficial changes in appearance, remembers large numbers of faces, [and] does
not get distracted or fatigued”.

The claims Visionics made about FaceIt were revealing about what proponents
wanted to achieve with “Smart CCTV”, if not what could be realistically accom-
plished. Visionics posited FaceIt as an improvement over both “passive” CCTV
systems and the inefficient, fallible human operators of those systems. They
pitched their technology as a labor-saving device, promising to save CCTV opera-
tors hours of time observing surveillance video and relieving them of the respon-
sibility for identifying criminals and suspects that appear on the screens. At the
same time, there seemed to be an implicit acknowledgment that the kind of labor
it would save users of CCTV systems was never possible in the first place. Human
operators of CCTV simply could not remember the number of faces needed to
adequately monitor the exploding volumes of surveillance video, nor did they
have the attention span needed to identify even those faces they could remember
with sufficient reliability. Facial recognition technology promised to quite literally
do the watching for the CCTV operators, relieving them of the need to pay attention to the screen.

The possibility of delegating responsibility to the “Smart CCTV” system for the perceptual labor of watching video and recognizing faces suggested a paradoxical form of passive media activity, one that Slavoj Žižek (1997) has referred to as “interpassivity”. According to Žižek, “interpassivity” is the uncanny supplement to the celebrated notion of “interactivity” associated with new media technologies. Whereas interactivity implies a user actively engaged with electronic media and taking part in the production of content, interpassive arrangements allow the medium itself to do the work of reception for the user. Žižek uses the example of the VCR aficionado who records hundreds of hours of movies and television shows, knowing that there will never be time to watch it. Instead, the VCR does the watching instead of the viewer. (DVR technology is even more apropos, since significantly more content can be automatically recorded.) Gijs Van Oenen (2006) has considered Žižek’s concept of interpassivity as it applies to the domains of labor and politics. Today, “hands on” work means manipulating a computer interface, Van Oenen argues, and the prevailing tendencies of contemporary work arrangements make workers more alienated than ever from the products of their labor. The “interpassivization” of labor – the automation of both manual and mental activity – is deeply embedded in post-Fordist forms of labor organization, including outsourcing, more “flexible” workforces, and loose, “network” forms of business restructuring. These developments have had a profound effect not only on work arrangements but also on worker subjectivity, as workers are forced, paradoxically, to become both more flexible and more passive at the same time – to be prepared for constant technical retraining, relocation, and experimentation, while allowing machines to perform not only the manual but also much of the mental labor.

The promoted capacity of FaceIt to make “passive” CCTV systems more “active” and relieve human operators from their perceptual labor embodied this logic of “interpassivity”, suggesting that the solution to the problems of CCTV monitoring could be found in the “interpassivization” of police surveillance labor. The “hands on” work of monitoring surveillance video – itself already a mediated form of police supervision – would involve merely responding to computer programs that would do the actual work of identifying dangerous threats to the community. If “Smart CCTV” worked, the human labor of monitoring would require less in the way of specialized police knowledge of criminal identities. This removal of human perceptual capacity from the process of identification was posited as a special benefit not only in its capacity to make “passive” CCTV more “active”, but also as a technically neutral form of identification that would ostensibly counter the prejudicial tendencies of police officers. Not only was the technology tireless, efficient, and memory-intensive, it also promised to function in a culturally neutral way, blind to racial or ethnic differences of faces. In the words
of Visionics CEO Joseph Atick, his company’s product “delivers security in a non-discriminatory fashion. FacelIt technology performs matches on the face based on analytical measurements that are independent of race, ethnic origin or religion. It is free of the human prejudices of profiling” (“Terrorism Prevention” 2001). “Interpassive surveillance” – allowing facial recognition technology to perform the mental labor of watching – would ostensibly bring a measure of objectivity to police surveillance practices.

Of course, this is what was promised of “Smart CCTV”, not what it delivered. The automated recognition of faces from surveillance video presented considerable challenges. Government evaluations of facial recognition algorithms conducted in 1996 showed that dynamic image matching and one-to-many searching of variable quality images resulted in much lower accuracy rates for facial identification. Follow-up testing in 2000 confirmed that the new commercially available systems still had considerable limitations with respect to matching dynamic (video or filmed) images (Blackburn, Bone and Phillips 2000). The performance of facial recognition systems was affected by things like facial pose variations, the amount of time that elapsed between the original facial image and the probe image, distance between the person and the camera, variations in facial expressions, and changes in lighting (Ibid.). Studies consistently found that the quality of images taken from surveillance video was too variable to support reliable automated facial identification. Computers were well on their way to accurately matching faces in standardized photos taken in controlled settings, but still not doing very well at identifying faces from video taken in real-world conditions. In addition, some studies found that for certain algorithms, Asians and African-Americans were recognized at a higher rate than whites (Introna and Nissenbaum 2009).

The claims that Visionics made about FaceIt – which were more than a little overstated – created expectations that would inevitably go unfulfilled, much like the original aims of the CCTV system. Although digitization promised to facilitate “a step change in the power, intensity and scope of surveillance” (Graham & Wood 2003), in fact additional layers of technical integration would not resolve, once and for all, the “urban problem” in Ybor City. Nor was it clear whether and how the technology would fit into police practice. As LAPD Police Chief Bratton stated emphatically, the “penicillin” needed to deal with crime was more cops, not more technology. If the Ybor City “Smart CCTV” experiment is any indication, the cops themselves – at least the ones responsible for trying to make the facial recognition system work in despite its limitations – were not necessarily rushing forward into the brave new world of interpassive policing. At the same time, it was precisely the power that digitization promised to afford the police that generated opposition to the use of facial recognition technology with video surveillance. As we will see, a vocal contingent of local and national observers agreed with Phil Agre’s (2001) contention that people’s faces are not their bar codes.
The Controversy over the Ybor City “Smart CCTV” Project

No sooner did Visionics announce the installation of FaceIt in Tampa than a heated “war of interpretations” (Latour 1996) broke out over police use of the new surveillance technology in the public streets of Tampa. The announcement of the Tampa Police Department’s plans to use FRT in Ybor City attracted attention from the local and national press, from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), from policy makers, and from other individuals and groups representing a range of interests. The debate that played out in the press should not be understood as separate from the project itself. Competing interpretations of the technology would have a role in shaping the form that automated facial recognition would take in Ybor City, or whether it would take any form at all.

Press coverage registered some local support for the project, but also a significant amount of opposition from within and outside of Tampa. For several weeks following the system’s installation, opponents organized street protests in Ybor City, where demonstrators wore gas masks, Groucho Marx glasses, and bar code stickers on their foreheads. The New York Times reported that one protestors “walked by a camera, gestured obscenely and shouted, ‘Digitize this!’” and USA Today reported that another protestor wore a computer monitor with Mayor Dick Greco’s face on the screen (Associated Press 2001; Kasindorf 2001: 3A). References to “spy cameras”, “digital line-ups”, and “facial frisking” circulated in the press coverage, registering specific anxieties about facial recognition technology. A reporter from U.S. News and World Report called the Ybor City experiment a “real-life version of The Truman Show” (Meek 2001: 20). Randall Marshall, the legal director for the ACLU of Florida, argued that it amounted to placing everyone on the street in a “virtual lineup”, and that more public deliberation was needed before police adopted the technology (in Candex 2001: A1). The decision of U.S. House Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-Texas) to join the ACLU in opposition that put the Ybor City FRT experiment firmly on the national stage. “I’m not sure there’s been a case so perfectly Orwellian,” declared Armey; “placing police officers in a remote control booth to watch the every move of honest citizens isn’t going to make us safer” (quoted in McGuire 2001). Armey called for a congressional inquiry into the extent of federal funding invested in the development and deployment of facial recognition and other surveillance technologies, as well as more congressional oversight aimed at keeping the diffusion of surveillance technologies in check. Such vocal public opposition prompted a defensive response from local Tampa officials. Some members of the Tampa City Council began to question publicly whether the project should have gone forward, and there was some indication that several council members had not fully understood what they had approved.

Supporters of police use of facial recognition technology in Ybor City defended it on a number of grounds. The Tampa Police spokespeople dismissed the issue of privacy, making the legal claim that people have no “reasonable expectation” of
privacy in public. Police and other supporters also made the argument that the technology was essentially the same as standard police practice, only the new technology would be more effective, faster, and more accurate than human police officers alone. According to Detective Todd, “this is no different than a police officer standing on a street corner with a handful of pictures, except for that it’s more accurate and stops trouble faster” (quoted in Meek 2001: 20). Todd also suggested that FRT was a labor-saving device and a police force-multiplier, allowing the TPD to “maximize the process of pointing out people we’re looking for without putting 20 more officers on the street” (quoted in Canedy 2001: A1).

City Councilman Bob Buckhorn, who had shepherded the original proposal to install FRT through the approval process, likewise became an outspoken proponent of the technology, defining it primarily in terms of its similarity to standard police procedures and its labor-saving benefits:

I think what we are doing with facial recognition technology is merely applying modern technology to age-old policing techniques. When a police officer goes to roll call in the morning, he’s given what’s called a hot sheet, a list of wanted individuals…What we are doing is just merely dumping a database of known offenders, of wanted individuals, sexual predators, lost children, into what is a modern means of identifying people. So to me it’s no different than what the beat cop used to do, which would be walk around with that hot sheet. We’re just using technology to do it in a more sophisticated, less expensive, less time consuming fashion (personal communication, August 22, 2002).

In advocating police use of the technology, Buckhorn insisted that it was nothing radically new, just a more efficient form of identification, less costly, more high-tech and faster than human police officers. His justification invoked a nostalgic notion of “age-old” policing, appealing to a perceived desire for a simpler, lost moment of cops-on-the-beat, at the same time claiming the superiority of the technology over such conventional forms of police practice. Buckhorn’s defense of the project also suggested that the composition of the criminal watch-list database was a settled matter, and that it contained records only of those in clear need of police apprehension. Although there was no explicit policy about “sexual predators” or “lost children”, these figures became the preferred targets of the system among its defenders, consistently used as a means of legitimating police adoption of the technology. Visionics CEO Joseph Atick reiterated the frightful image of the sexual predator: “Wouldn’t you want to know if a murderer or a rapist is sitting next to you while you’re eating a sandwich? I would” (quoted in Meek 2001: 20).

The technology also had supporters among local Tampa residents, who maintained that police use of FRT was warranted in order to protect their right to security in Ybor City. In a letter to the editor in the Tampa Tribune, Patricia Benton, resident of the suburb of Seffner, expressed her support:

I will not go to Ybor City at any time, day or night, nor will I take out-of-town guests to visit there, because of the crime….a person cannot visit the shops and restaurants anymore without fear of being carjacked, raped, or killed. And now we have
a modern invention that will curtail that activity. But wait! It may infringe on our precious ‘rights.’ I have rights, too. I have the right to go where I please in public without worrying about being harmed. And the police have the right to utilize modern inventions that will secure that end. The framers of the Constitution would hide their heads in shame to know what we have come to, when the rights of criminals are more protected than the rights of honest citizens (Benton 2001: 16).

It is not difficult to read Ms. Benton’s expressed fear of crime as a salient problem in itself, regardless of whether she ever had been or would be a victim of crime. In fact, Patricia Benton saw herself as already victimized by the criminal class that threatened her freedom to shop, visit restaurants, and “go where she pleases”. Of course, the local media’s preoccupation with crime may have given her reason to fear being carjacked, raped, or killed in Ybor City, and overblown descriptions of a fully functioning facial recognition system encouraged the view that the technology could help “curtail that activity”. For Ms. Benton and others like her, the new surveillance technology offered a legitimate means of police protection, violating the rights only of those who do not deserve them. This line of argument reiterated the comments of a politician responsible for the Newham facial recognition project in London, in response to objections from privacy advocates: “Yes, it is a civil liberties issue,” he noted, “Our priority is the liberty of the people of this borough to go about their business without fear of crime. The rights of the majority are the most important consideration, not the rights of criminals” (Corbett, quoted in Thomas 1998: 5).

Pitting the rights of “the majority” against an essentialized class of criminals is a stark dichotomy at the center of punitive forms of actuarial justice that have taken shape in the U.K. and the U.S. since the 1970s. The expressions of Patricia Benton, concerned citizen, fueled a new discourse of crime policy that “consistently invokes an angry public, tired of living in fear, demanding strong measures of punishment and protection” (Garland 2001: 10). The Tampa Police were not simply imposing a vision of high-tech crime control on an unwelcoming public, but were responding to the demands of preferred groups for protection and secure access to public spaces. One can hardly fault Ms. Benton for wanting to move about in public spaces without being attacked. But her claim to the city expressed a sense of entitlement to public space that, far from holding out a vision of open access for all, was infused with contentious politics of exclusion. As Doreen Massey (1994: 168) has argued, “notions of place as source of belonging, identity, and security” are deeply tied to “notions of the self in opposition to the other that threatens one’s very being”. The claim that facial recognition technology targeted only specific dangerous identities belied the more general effort to define and identify the “floating population” that threatened the “security” of Ybor City, the sense of security of people like Patricia Benton from the other that ostensibly threatens their very being. That sense of security was vital to Ybor City’s commercial “revitalization”, and technological projects designed to create that sensibility are not aimed exclusively at maintaining order, but also at re-establishing
the legitimacy of police to decide “which communities are in a community and which are not” (Wilson 2000: 217).

As the conflicting perspectives of the project suggest, the controversy over the Ybor City FRT experiment stemmed from the longstanding tension inherent in liberal governance between “the twin dangers of governing too much…and governing too little” (Rose 1999: 70). Liberalism denotes a certain ethos of governing which must constantly strike a balance between these two poles, writes Nikolas Rose. Governing too much means threatening to distort or destroy “the natural laws” of families, markets, society, personal autonomy and responsibility, on which good government depends; governing too little means “failing to establish the conditions of civility, order, productivity and national well-being which make limited government possible” (Ibid.). The effort to integrate automated facial recognition with CCTV for the mediated supervision of Ybor City was a project caught up in this tension, and whether and how it would be made to work as a functioning technology would depend on whether the acceptable balance could be negotiated, and especially whether people were convinced that more sophisticated police surveillance technologies were a necessary prerequisite to their “freedom”.

“Drawing a Blank”

On September 11, 2001, events intervened to generate support for police use of FRT in Ybor City, at least temporarily. The 9/11 terrorist attacks, coming just three months after the experiment began, instigated a barrage of press and policy attention to biometric technologies. If most federal policy makers had barely paid attention to the TPD’s experiment with “smart” surveillance, it now seemed to require their urgent attention. The Congressional committee hearings that Rep. Dick Armey requested about the use of FRT for public surveillance did in fact take place three months after his request, in October 2001; however, the deliberations were not about the appropriate scope and limitations of police use of new “smart” surveillance technologies, but how rapidly they could be deployed at airports, border control stations, and other sites. Still, the momentum given to the project in the aftermath of 9/11 did not force opponents of “Smart CCTV” to acquiesce to the use of FRT in Ybor City. In January 2002, the ACLU renewed their challenge to the project, releasing a report titled “Drawing a Blank: The Failure of Facial Recognition Technology in Tampa, Florida”. In the report, the ACLU made the case that facial recognition technology simply did not work and so represented a misdirection of security priorities. It referred to federal government tests (the FRVT 2000) where even the best products performed only moderately well in controlled laboratory settings. It also provided evidence, from documents received under freedom of information requests, revealing that the Tampa Police stopped using the system less than two months after they began using it, precisely because of its poor performance. The report had an undeniably negative impact on percep-
tions about “Smart CCTV”, but it did not put an immediate end the experiment. Shortly after the report was released, Visionics announced that the system was being upgraded to run on more than one video, grabbing faces from six video feeds simultaneously and thereby reducing the operator’s need to switch cameras at his or her discretion. Still, no facial identifications materialized, and it is unclear whether the Tampa Police began using the facial recognition system again in earnest. Press coverage of the project waned, and it received little or no public attention for over a year.

Then, in August 2003, the police experiment with facial recognition technology again made headlines: “Ybor cameras won’t seek what they never found”, declared the St. Petersburg Times (Dennis 2003: 1A). In one last move, the Tampa Police issued a statement announcing their termination of their contract with the company, then called Identix. The Tampa Tribune reported that the system was shut down, “having failed in its objective” to recognize “the facial characteristics of felons and runaway children” (quoted in Krause 2003). According to Police Captain Bob Guidara, the facial recognition system “was of no benefit to us, and it served no real purpose” (quoted in Stacy 2003). Others spun the termination of the project differently. Tampa Police spokesman Joe Durkin said he “wouldn’t consider it a failure…You are always looking for new and efficient ways to provide the best service to the community. There’s going to be ups and downs” (quoted in Dennis 2003: 1A). Identix offered a one-sentence statement that defended the company as a responsible corporate citizen and suggested that the public mood was not right for the system’s implementation: “Identix has always stated that this technology requires safeguards, and that as a society we need to be comfortable with its use” (quoted in Stacy 2003). However, TPD spokesman Durkin insisted that police discontinued using the system “because of the lack of arrests, not the privacy issues” (quoted in Krause 2003).

**Smart CCTV or no Smart CCTV?**

The controversy over the Ybor City Smart CCTV experiment was, fundamentally, a struggle over the appropriate extent and limitations of police power, a balancing act that has consistently posed a challenge to liberal democracies and one that seems to lean, in the present climate, toward expanding police power. It would be wrong to assume the initial installation of the CCTV system in 1997 was itself universally accepted, but by the time the “Smart CCTV” project began in 2001, many people had more or less accepted the idea of video surveillance in public spaces. It was the idea of automated facial recognition in particular that generated controversy, invoking competing visions of a brave new technological future. While some nostalgically hoped for the return of a recovered, crime-free community from the mythic past, others saw an urban dystopia in the frighteningly mold of 1984, a prison-like environment devoid of all freedoms where everyone is un-
der the constant gaze of sophisticated police technologies. For opponents, the police experiment with FRT in Ybor City demonstrated a power grab over and above the use of “basic” CCTV, essentially turning every person on the street into a criminal suspect. But while the move to upgrade the CCTV system gave opponents an opportunity to reignite the debate over police surveillance of urban space, it is important to recognize that shutting down the CCTV system itself was never considered as a viable option (which is not to say that no one raised the issue). Although the experiment with facial recognition technology was unsuccessful, the CCTV system continues to generate images designed to keep the area under constant, mediated police supervision.

The effort to integrate facial recognition technology with video surveillance in Ybor City failed for a combination of contradictory reasons. The project suffered to some extent from successful moves by vocal opponents to posit the technology as one that gives the police too much power. Of course, there were others, especially the police themselves, who viewed it as an ineffective technology of crime control, because it never managed to identify anyone. As some pointed out, the lack of positive identifications may have meant that the system was serving as an effective deterrent, keeping wanted individuals away from Ybor City. However, since addressing the fear of crime was as important as actually preventing it, deterrence was an insufficient measure of the technology’s effectiveness. Instead, the police needed a success story in order to sell the “Smart CCTV” system: a narrative of a vile criminal identity – preferably a rapist, murderer, or child molester – being apprehended thanks to the facial recognition system. For reasons that extend beyond the specific technical limitations of the facial recognition system, the police never acquired the material they needed to create such a story. Without such a story, or multiple stories, “Smart CCTV” became more of a liability than a benefit for the Tampa police, denying them the glory of catching the bad guys and leaving them only with the perception of a power grab based on a faulty technology. In short, it offered them neither an immediate practical solution to the “video burden” nor a compelling symbolic display of their technological sophistication.

The experiment with facial recognition technology in Ybor City ended without the permanent adoption of Smart CCTV by the Tampa Police, but spokesman Joe Durkin was probably correct to qualify the term “failure”. The negative attention the project received throughout the process made it impossible for the developers to define either the initiative or the technology on their own terms, and the termination of the project could not help but set back efforts to define automated facial recognition as a viable technology. But from the beginning, people directly involved in the project understood the highly experimental nature of what they were doing, and despite public statements about a smoothly functioning system, they were likely well aware that there was no guarantee the experiment would be successful. To make facial recognition technology work with video surveillance systems in urban spaces, it must be tested and developed in those spaces, and only
through a series of “ups and downs”, advances and setbacks, will the necessary improvements be made that transform “Smart CCTV” from a set of experiments to a functioning technology. As long as the diffusion and use of CCTV systems proceeds apace, fueled by both essentialized notions of the “criminal element” and the persistent pressure on the police to appear in control of “the crime problem”, then experiments with new technologies for optimizing CCTV functionality will likewise carry on. Rethinking this largely ineffective approach will require a full-scale effort at redefining the problem – another kind of legitimation campaign aimed at defining crime not as a cause but as an effect of social disorder, not as a normal part of everyday life and a forgone conclusion for certain “kinds” of people, but a product of deepening social inequalities tied to structural conditions. Without this redefinition, we will witness not only the persistent police pursuit of more sophisticated surveillance technologies, but also the construction of many more prisons and walls behind which to consign the expanding disenfranchised and individuated “criminal” class.

Kelly Gates is an Assistant Professor of Communication, University of California, San Diego. Her research interests are in new media, visual culture, and science and technology studies. E-mail: kagates@ucsd.edu

Notes
1. For an excellent overview of the U.S. government and other FRT technology evaluations, along with policy guidelines and a discussion of moral and political implications, see Introna and Nissenbaum (2009).
2. There were no significant drops in the crime rate in Ybor City during the experiment. Crime statistics by area are available at the Tampa Police website.

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By Henry Krips

Abstract

Joan Copjec accuses orthodox film theory of misrepresenting the Lacanian gaze by assimilating it to Foucauldian panopticon (Copjec 1994: 18–19). Although Copjec is correct that orthodox film theory misrepresents the Lacanian gaze, she, in turn, misrepresents Foucault by choosing to focus exclusively upon those aspects of his work on the panopticon that have been taken up by orthodox film theory (Copjec 1994: 4). In so doing, I argue, Copjec misses key parallels between the Lacanian and Foucauldian concepts of the gaze. More than a narrow academic dispute about how to read Foucault and Lacan, this debate has wider political significance. In particular, using Slavoj Žižek’s work, I show that a correct account of the panoptic gaze leads us to rethink the question of how to oppose modern techniques of surveillance.

Keywords: Film theory, the gaze, Lacan, Foucault, Copjec, Žižek.
Introduction

In her book *Read My Desire*, Joan Copjec launches an ambitious criticism of film theory (by which she means orthodox 1970s psychoanalytic film theory associated with Mulvey, Metz et al.). Film theory, she argues, misunderstands the Lacanian gaze in Foucauldian terms (Copjec 1994: 19). To be specific, she asserts that, while claiming Lacanian roots, film theory draws its concept of the cinematic gaze from the panoptic gaze that Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish*: “My argument,” she says, “is that film theory operated a kind of ‘Foucauldinization’ of Lacanian theory” (Copjec 1994: 19).

In this article I argue that Copjec or at least the film theory from which she draws her account of Foucault, misrepresents his account of the panopticon. In particular, I argue that Foucault’s concept of the panoptic gaze has more in common with Lacan’s concept of the gaze than Copjec allows. This criticism of Copjec is not meant as a defense of film theory, however. On the contrary, I conclude that although film theorists are correct to note the similarities between the Foucauldian and Lacanian gazes, they do so only by misrepresenting both of them. More than a narrow academic dispute about how to read Foucault and Lacan, this debate has wider political significance. In particular, using the work of Slavoj Žižek, I show that a correct, more Lacanian account of the panoptic gaze leads us to rethink the question of how to oppose modern techniques of surveillance.

Copjec on the Lacanian Gaze

Copjec illustrates the Lacanian gaze by an autobiographical story that Lacan tells about his youthful encounter with a Breton fisherman:

> I was in my early twenties… and at the time, of course, being a young intellectual, I wanted desperately to get away, see something different, throw myself into something practical….One day, I was on a small boat with a few people from a family of fishermen….as we were waiting for the moment to pull in the nets, an individual known as Petit-Jean… pointed out to me something floating on the surface of the waves. It was a small can, a sardine can… It glittered in the sun. And Petit-Jean said to me – *You see that can? Do you see it? Well it doesn’t see you* (Lacan 1981: 95; Copjec 1994: 30–31).

In Lacan’s little story, the gaze is grounded in a concrete object: a sardine can that sporadically catches the light and blinds the young Lacan. In and of itself the object is of no significance, a shiny piece of industrial waste floating on the sea. But the physiological discomfort occasioned by the flashes of light from the can blends with and reinforces a qualitatively similar affect in the young Lacan that comes from a quite different source. To be specific, he experiences a feeling of discomfort, which, rather than physiological in origin, is occasioned by a lurking political guilt at his own privileged position in relation to the working class fishermen. As a result, the flashes of light bring to the surface, indeed create in the
young Lacan a palpable and excessive anxiety, even shame, about who he is and what he is doing. (This is what Freud calls “unrealistic anxiety” – an anxiety that is in excess of what its apparent object merits). In short, the discomfort that accompanies the physiological difficulty that the young Lacan experiences in looking at the can contributes to a self-centered anxiety about his identity. This anxiety, in turn, is transformed into an experience of being externally scrutinized – an anonymous look from elsewhere by an invisible other before whom the young Lacan is reduced to anxiety and shame.

In Freud’s terms, we may say that the scrutiny that the young Lacan directs outwardly at his surroundings encounters resistance from the blinding light reflected by the tin can; and as a result the scrutiny “turns around”, that is, reflexively turns back upon Lacan, at the same time as it switches from active to passive voice – from “I look” to “I am looked at”. (Freud, *Instincts and Vicissitudes* 1997: 92–94). To put it in general terms, because it encounters an uncomfortable resistance, a conscious look that is directed outwards transforms into an self-consciousness that returns to its agent as anxiety in relation to the scrutiny of an externalized anonymous Other. Lacan refers to the latter scrutiny, but also to the object that is its source as “the gaze”.

In terms of the example of the sea-faring tin-can, the gaze may be thought of as an external point from which an anxiety provoking look assails the subject. But, and this is crucial, the point in question is definitely not an eye that looks back at the subject, let alone a mirror in which the subject sees himself looking. On the contrary, it is a point of failure in the visual field – in the case of the tin can, a point where perception breaks down and the stuff out of which perceptions are constituted, namely light, becomes visible. Of course, not any such points of failure qualify as a gaze. As Lacan emphasizes, a gaze must also precipitate anxiety (specifically what Freud calls “unrealistic anxiety”) which, in turn, transforms the viewer’s look into a self-directed, passive “being looked at”: “That which is gaze is always a play of light and opacity. It is always that gleam of light…which prevents me, at each point, from being a screen”. The gaze, Lacan then adds, “is presented to us only in the form of a strange contingency, symbolic of…the lack that constitutes castration anxiety…It surprises [the viewer]…disturbs him and reduces him to a feeling of shame” (Lacan 1981: 96, 72–73, 84). More specifically, Lacan points out, the gaze must function as an object around which the exhibitionistic and voyeuristic impulses that constitute the scopic drive turn – in short, the gaze must be an object of the scopic drive, producing not merely anxiety but also pleasure (Lacan 1981: 181–183).

Lacan further elaborates this account of the gaze with a story that he borrows from Sartre:

The gaze that I encounter …is not a seen gaze [that is, not an eye that I see looking at me] but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other…the sound of rustling leaves heard while out hunting…a footstep heard in a corridor…[the gaze exists] not at the level of [a particular visible] other whose gaze surprises the subject looking...
Here the gaze corresponds to a point of failure in the field of the visible not because (as in the case of the tin can) it dazzles the eye, but rather because the subject becomes aware of it aurally rather than visually. This story makes the point that, although in some situations a visible object (or at least a source of light) is located in the place from where the gaze emanates, this is by no means the rule. In the case of Sartre’s story, for example, an aural rather than visual object stimulates the effects of the gaze. To be specific, “noises off” create recognition that, although there is nothing to be seen, there is something present. Thus by totally non-visual means the subject is brought to recognize that there is a hole, a lack, in his visual field – a something that, because it is present but cannot be seen, functions as a point of failure of the visual field.

In terms of these two examples it is possible to understand Lacan’s rather enigmatic remarks that the gaze is “governed” by “the function of the stain” (Lacan 1981: 74). Since a stain blocks vision rather than offering itself as a thing to be seen, it constitutes a disruption, a point of indeterminacy in the visual field, where the subject fails to see. Of course, just as for Freud not any cigar is a phallic symbol, not any stain sustains the function of the gaze. On the contrary, a stain is associated with a gaze only in so far as it precipitates (unrealistic) anxiety but also precipitates the double transformation in the voyeuristic act of looking that Freud describes in *Instincts and Vicissitudes*, through which the stain becomes an object of the scopic drive: first, a transformation into the “reflexive middle voice” – “I look at myself” – followed by a second transformation into the passive “I am looked at”.

**Foucault on the Gaze**

In this section I argue, contra Copjec, that there exist far-reaching similarities between Foucault’s concept of the panoptic gaze and the Lacanian gaze. As a source for Foucault, Copjec takes the position advanced by the feminist branch of (1970s) film theory, according to which the subjectivity of women is “inevitably bound up with the structure of the look and the localization of the eye of authority…she carries her own Panopticon with her wherever she goes, her self image a function of being for another” (Copjec 1994: 13). According to this position, via a simple process of pressing upon individuals an image of how to be a subject, the panoptic gaze has a constitutive impact upon the subjectivity of the individuals in its field of view: “The techniques of disciplinary power (of the construction of the subject) are conceived as capable of ‘materially penetrating’ the body in depth without depending on the mediation of the subject’s own representations…[let alone] though having first to be interiorized in people’s consciousness.” Even in the act of resisting, Copjec continues, “(Foucault’s) panoptic argument…is unable
to conceive of a discourse that would refuse rather than refuel power”. In short, resistance becomes a sham – even where it exists, it is taken into account in advance; indeed, merely serves to incite new and more subtle processes of oppression.

In sum, according to Copjec, despite all of his talk about resistance, the Foucault promoted by feminist film theory turns out to be “ultimately resistant to resistance” (Copjec 1994: 18). In particular, Copjec maintains that, according to Foucault, even as it engages in acts of resistance, the modern subject is determined as a direct reflection – a reflex – of the image that is implicit in the social relations of power in which it participates and through which it is “subjected” – an image that takes into account the acts of resistance through which the subject futilely attempts to resist what it takes to be its image. Copjec argues that feminist film theory extends these ideas to social arrangements in general, including power relations that exist between a cinematic audience and the cinematic apparatus: “the images presented on the screen are accepted by the subject as its own …the image seems…to perfectly represent the subject” (Copjec 1994: 21, 23).

Copjec then goes on to argue compellingly that orthodox feminist film theory, especially Laura Mulvey, wrongly equates this panoptic concept of the gaze to the Lacanian gaze. Copjec argues this point on the basis of Lacan’s *Seminar XI*, according to which the gaze is neither a specular image of the subject, nor the look by another that places the subject under scrutiny. Instead, as we saw in the previous section, it is a point of failure in the visual field, where, because the subject cannot see or be seen properly, s/he is discommoded, made anxious. For Copjec, this Lacanian gaze emerges as not only different from but also far more threatening than the panoptic gaze that orthodox feminist film theory draws from Foucault: “Lacan does not ask you to think of a gaze as belonging to an Other who cares about who or where you are, who pries, keeps tabs on your whereabouts, and takes note of all your steps and missteps, as the panoptic gaze is said to do….The horrible truth, revealed to Lacan…is that the gaze does not see you. So if you are looking for confirmation of the truth of your being or the clarity of your vision, you are on your own” (Copjec 1994: 36).

But, I now argue, feminist film theory’s mistaken account of the Lacanian gaze is coupled with, indeed matches, an equally mistaken account of the Foucauldian panoptic gaze; and whereas Copjec spots the first mistake she chooses to overlook the second – indeed, reproduces it (albeit with the rather grudging caveat that her account of Foucault on the panopticon is “not dispersed throughout Foucault’s work” – Copjec 1994: 5). The mistake in film theory’s account of Foucault is clear from even the most cursory examination of *The History of Sexuality volume I*, where Foucault roundly takes to task the model of subjectivity for which “confronted by a power that is law, the subject who is constituted as subject – who is ‘subjected’ – is he who obeys” (Foucault 1990: 85). Against this, Foucault writes: “We must construct an analytics of power that that no longer takes the law as a
model and a code.” In particular, Foucault is at pains to emphasize that the panopticon works by a process of interiorization that mediates any collective image of how to be in terms of highly personalized preconceptions: “Two different things are involved here: the observing gaze, the act of observation on the one hand, and internalization on the other” (Foucault 1996: 232). As such, and this is the key point, it is clear that for Foucault the panoptic gaze does not in and of itself determine subjectivity. In particular, Foucault denies the politically pessimistic claim that, even in their acts of resistance, subjects are condemned to conform to the same predetermined and limited range of blueprints for how to be and what to do.

Indeed, by driving a wedge between power relations and relations of domination, Foucault leaves open a space for creative acts of resistance – what he calls “practices of freedom”: “The idea that power is a system of domination that controls everything and leaves no room for freedom cannot be attributed to me” (Foucault 1996: 441). To be specific, he insists upon a distinction between, on the one hand, “power relations” that, by being “mobile, reversible and unstable” leave a space for practices of freedom, and, on the other hand, a “system of domination that controls everything and leaves no room for freedom” (Foucault 1996: 442). He argues further that practices of freedom are not only compossible with, but also necessary for the operation of the system of power relations: “power relations are possible only insofar as the subjects are free” (Foucault 1996: 441). Foucault’s central point, then, is that, modern power relations depend upon practices of freedom, but such dependence in no way compromises the status of the practices in question as bona fide acts of resistance. On the contrary, the modern juxtaposition of exercises of power with acts of resistance merely points to the existence of struggle, something that is impossible in older style systems of domination.

What do such practices of freedom look like? In his History of Sexuality volume 1, where his concern is with the system of power relations through which the modern regime of sex has been established, Foucault characterizes such practices in terms of a “different economy of bodies and pleasures” (Foucault 1990: 159) that “counter the grips of power with the claims of bodies, pleasures, and knowledges, in their multiplicity and their possibilities of resistance” (Foucault 1990: 157). Or as he puts it in a later interview: “For centuries people generally, as well as doctors and even liberation movements, have always spoken about desire and never about pleasure. ‘We have to liberate desire,’ they say. [I say] No! We have to create new pleasure. And then maybe desire will follow” (Foucault 1996: 384). Here Foucault contrasts his own radical political project for developing alternative regimes of pleasure with more traditional projects of the liberation of sexual desire, such as D.H. Lawrence’s cri de coeur to liberate sex, as well as its later sixties incarnation (Foucault 1990: 157). Foucault argues that, by focusing on the liberation of sexual desire, neither of the latter projects of liberation end up producing real sexual freedom, but instead merely straight-jacket sexual practices
within new and equally rigid normative frameworks that limit physical practices for producing pleasure.3

Contra Copjec, then, it is clear that Foucault, like Lacan, acknowledges that the established system of law and order (what Foucault calls “the system of power relations” and Lacan refers to as “the symbolic register”) fails to convey let alone impose determinate guidelines for subjectivity. Foucault makes this point in rather different terms than Lacan, however. Lacan indicates that the source of the gaze is a “stain”, a point where what “we try to apprehend…seems to elude us” (Lacan 1981: 93). The term “seems” in the phrase “seems to elude” is key here. What we “try to apprehend” merely seems to elude us rather than actually eluding us. Why? Because there is nothing there to be eluded – to quote a favorite Žižekian phrase: “the real secret is that there is no secret”. In other words, the stain, like a Rorschach ink blot, is indeterminate not in the weak sense that its identity is hidden or uncertain, but rather in the strong sense of totally lacking a precise identity. Indeed, its power to evoke interpretation lies precisely in this indeterminacy, which precipitates viewers into a struggle to read something where, other than an allusion to/illusion of meaning, there is nothing to be read.

Foucault, by contrast, argues that, in the context of the panopticon, because everyone, including the scrutineers, is under scrutiny, there is no absolute certainty, no God’s eye point of view from which a trustworthy picture is revealed: “In the panopticon everyone is watched, according to his position within the system, by all or by certain of the others. Here we have an apparatus of total and mobile distrust, since there is no absolute point” (Foucault 1996: 235). The resultant gaze, Foucault concludes, “is at once collective and anonymous” – carrying instructions from everyone and everywhere and yet from no one and nowhere, a heteroglossia of voices that depends for its appearance of univocality upon a retrospective interpretative gesture by each and every audience member as s/he struggles to make sense of the inchoate stream of signs that assail her/his ears from all sides. Contra Copjec, the effect of this heteroglossia is not a “simple atomization and multiplication of subject positions” (Copjec 1994: 18). Instead, by removing the “absolute point” in relation to which the truth is judged, Foucault renders the truth-content of each and every message indeterminate: where there is no principle for judging the truth, truth becomes indeterminate. This indeterminacy, in turn, creates a need and ultimately a space for the practices of freedom through which subjects resolve the indeterminacies in the messages from the Other that assail them from all sides. In short, by reading Foucault’s reference to a “mobile distrust” as an index of indeterminacy, Foucault’s account of the gaze converges with Lacan’s.

But, and here I come to my key question, does this convergence between the Foucauldian and Lacanian gazes amount to more than a trivial analogy? Remember that the Lacanian gaze is distinguished not merely by its formal properties: not any stain is the site of a gaze. Indeed, as I indicated above, in order to count as a gaze, a stain must precipitate (unrealistic) anxiety but also function as what Lacan...
calls “an object of the drive”, specifically the scopic drive, and as such act a site for the circulation of both voyeuristic and exhibitionistic impetuses that, working together, create pleasure (Lacan 1981: 181–183). But isn’t this also how Foucault describes the panoptic gaze? “The [voyeuristic] pleasure that comes of exercising a power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpates, brings to light; and on the other hand, the [exhibitionistic pleasure] that kindles at having to evade this power, flee from it, fool it, or travesty it…These attractions, these evasions, these circular incitements have traced around bodies and sexes, not boundaries not to be crossed, but perpetual spirals of power and pleasure” (Foucault 1990: 45). As such, the Foucauldian gaze, no less than the Lacanian gaze, seems to be a site of operation of the scopic drive, and, it seems, the two gazes – Foucault’s and Lacan’s – take on a substantial relation of coexistence if not identity.

Conclusion

It is clear that the film theoretic account of Foucault that Copjec uses, misrepresents Foucault’s concept of the panoptic gaze, and that this misrepresentation, in turn, is responsible for her insistence upon a gap between the Foucauldian and Lacanian concepts of the gaze. By correctly representing Foucault, I have closed this gap. A fortiori I have changed the exclusively conservative political valence that, in virtue of its function as a disciplinary tool that supports the status quo, has come to be associated with the panopticon. In particular, I allow that, like the Lacanian gaze, and depending on context, the Foucauldian gaze may have either disruptive, Dionysian effects or conservative, Apollonian effects. Foucault’s “practices of freedom” are one way of thinking the possibility of disruptive effects. Rather than pursuing this line of thought at an abstract level, however, I turn finally to Slavoj Žižek’s work, in particular his concept of overconformity, in order to show that, by reconceiving the panoptic gaze along the lines that I have suggested, new political possibilities arise for opposing modern regimes of surveillance.

Central to Žižek’s account of the modern state is the concept of “an obscene underside of the law ”, namely widespread practices – petty tax evasion, speeding, walking on the grass, etc – which, although strictly speaking illicit, are unofficially tolerated. This network of practices is sustained thanks to what Žižek calls an “ideological phantasy” that keeps them an “open secret” – everyone knows about and participates in them in private, but no one mentions them, let alone publicly flaunts participating in them. Such practices constitute points of failure of the law in so far as they fall in an indeterminate zone in relation to legal categories: on the one hand, in so far as they are tolerated they are not straightforwardly illegal, but, on the other hand, neither are they legal; and as such, constitute a fundamental illegality at the heart of the legal system. Žižek’s point is that, rather than undermining the law, the obscene underside of the law sustains it – the law is tol-
erated because of the little secret pleasures that people derive from its obscene underside. In Lacanian terms, we may say that the obscene underside of the law is the set of necessary but repressed points of failure of the legal system – in short, it is the symptom of the legal system. In particular, in the context of a legal state apparatus that is held in place by a panoptic system of surveillance, the obscene underside of the law is a liminal zone of high anxiety that, like the Emperor’s body under his new clothes, is obscenely visible to each of his subjects in the privacy of their own visual field, yet must be shrouded in a cloak of invisibility in the public realm. This is the site of the gaze.

How are we to oppose such a system, which seemingly coexists with, indeed depends upon its own systematic transgression? According to Žižek, not by acts of resistance, since the system is readily able to accommodate, indeed depends upon such acts. Instead, Žižek suggests opposition through acts of overconformity, which, rather than protesting let alone breaking the law, insist upon it to the letter, even when ideological “common sense” suggests otherwise. In particular, this means a refusal to turn a “blind eye” from manifestations of law’s obscene underside. As Žižek puts it: “Sometimes, at least – the truly subversive thing is not to disregard the explicit letter of Law on behalf of the underlying fantasies, but to stick to this letter against the fantasy which sustains it….Is not an exemplary case of such subversion-through-identification provided by Jaroslav Hasek’s The Good Soldier Schweik, the novel whose hero wrecks total havoc by simply executing the orders of his superiors in an overzealous and all-too-literal way (Žižek 1997: 30, 22, 31).

What constitutes such strategies of overconformity in the context of a modern panoptic regime of surveillance? Answer: openly/publicly sticking to the letter of the law by refusing the cloak of invisibility that shrouds the law’s points of failure; in other words, by refusing to indulge what Žižek calls “the ideological fantasy”, orchestrating a direct encounter with the objet a qua gaze. To put it in Žižek’s terms, it is a matter of “actively endorsing the passive confrontation with the objet a, bypassing the intermediate role of the screen of fantasy” (Žižek 1997: 31). To be specific, it is matter of not merely saying but also acting out publicly what everyone knows in private but dares not say: not merely announcing in public that the Emperor is naked, but arresting him for indecent exposure. By Lacanianizing Foucault, as I have done here, we are able to understand the logic behind such heterodox strategies for opposing modern regimes of surveillance.

Where, then, does this leave Copjec’s bête noir, orthodox feminist film theory? Where too does it leave Copjec’s critique? Answer: Feminist film theory, I have argued, makes two mistakes: first (as Copjec correctly points out) it is mistaken in its account of Lacan; second (as Copjec chooses to overlook) it is mistaken in its account of Foucault as well. Despite this doubling of mistakes, however, feminist theory (unlike Copjec) is correct in equating the Lacanian gaze with Foucault’s. But, I have argued, this is only because the mistake it makes in its account of the
Lacanian gaze matches the mistake it makes in its account of the Foucauldian gaze. By contrast, because she corrects one and only one of these two mistakes, Copjec ends up by erroneously denying the close relation between the Lacanian and Foucauldian gazes. A new film theory seems called for, that correctly analyzes both Foucault and Lacan, and thus recognizes that, despite their undoubted differences, there exist close parallels between their accounts of the gaze.

Henry Krips, Ph.D., is Professor of Cultural Studies and Andrew W. Mellon all Claremont Chair of Humanities at Claremont Graduate University. He specializes in Contemporary European Cultural Theory, Psychoanalysis, and Science Studies – especially the work of Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek. His publications include Fetish: An Erotics of Culture (Cornell University Press, 1999), Der Andere Schauplatz: Psychoanalyse, Kultur, Medien (Turia Kant, Vienna, 2001), Science, Reason and Rhetoric (Pittsburgh University Press, 1995), and The Metaphysics of Quantum Theory (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987). E-mail: Henry.Krips@cgua.edu.

Notes

1 Lacan, it may be surmised, is well aware of the Freudian explanation of this phenomenon. See for example, Lacan’s remarks on sado-masochism immediately following a mention of Sartre’s little story of the gaze, sado-masochism being Freud’s primary example of the “turning around” of the drive and the construction of a reflexive “middle voice” (Freud 1997: 83; Lacan 1981: 182–183).

2 There is a question whether Copjec takes this position as being Foucault’s, or takes it merely as feminist film theory’s account of Foucault. In line with the first alternative she says “The arguments I will critique are not dispersed throughout Foucault’s work” (Copjec 1994: 5, my emphasis). But in line with the second alternative she says unequivocally that she is arguing against ahistoricist tendency that she detects in Foucault, which is represented in “His [Foucault’s] belief that every form of negation or resistance may eventually feed or be absorbed by the system of power it contests” (Copjec 1994:10). Perhaps the best way to respond to this ambiguity in Copjec is to say that Copjec’s project is avowedly a defense of Lacan against a certain line of argument that has been spoken in “the name of Foucault” (if not by Foucault himself) (Copjec 1994: 4). My interest, by contrast, lies in the converse project: namely speaking in the name of a different Foucault, one who, I would argue, is equally present in his texts (especially the later interviews) and has a strong and rather direct affinity with Lacan.

3 In a later interview, Foucault tells us that a practice of freedom means “not being a slave to oneself and one’s appetites;” more broadly it means a “care for the self” that is ethical insofar as it is also “a way of caring for others” (Foucault 1996: 437). In another interview Foucault identifies “practices of freedom” as “strategic games as a source of bodily pleasure” such as S/M sexual practices, in which the roles of master and slave are fluid, consensual and easily reversed rather than constituting fixed positions: “the S/M game is very interesting because, unlike other strategic relations that have been stabilized through institutions,” “it is always fluid” (Foucault 1996: 387).

4 Note, too, that Foucault conceives pleasure not along traditional lines as a secondary spin-off from the satisfaction of desire. Instead, like Lacan, he conceives pleasure as an altogether more fundamental phenomenon. Specifically, he claims that bodies and pleasures find ways
to flourish in any social situation – even, indeed especially, the most repressive; and he uses the term “sexuality” to designate the bodily practices, through which people find such pleasures. He goes on to argue that desire is a secondary spin-off from the embodied practices of producing pleasure. Specifically, since the eighteenth century, desire has been constituted through the discursive processes of retrospectively assigning motives, including desires, to the agents of such practices. Such motives, especially desires, take what amounts to an ideological status as parts of a person’s essential being – his or her “sexual identity” – for which Foucault reserves the term “sex” (Foucault 1976/1990: 19–23, 47–48, 150–159).

5 I owe this point, and much else besides, to Jennifer Friedlander. Lacan argues that, in relation to the viewing subject, the picture always “has a relation with the gaze” (Lacan 1981: 101). But, he continues, the relation in question is not always a matter of “being a trap for the [viewer’s] gaze”. On the contrary, for some pictures, it is a matter of “invit[ing] the person to whom this picture is presented to lay down his gaze there as one lays down one’s weapons. This is the pacifying, Apollonian effect of painting. Something is given not so much to the [viewer’s] gaze as to the eye” (Lacan 1981: 101). In Lacan’s terms, this is a matter of the picture feeding the viewer’s desire to see “You want to see? Well, take a look at this” (Lacan 1981: 101, italics Lacan’s) rather than the picture providing a site of operation for the viewer’s gaze that by providing a point around which the scopic drive turns, enables the production of pleasure. Very roughly, one might say, figural works fall in the, Apollonian category of pictures. By contrast, impressionism (Cézanne’s little blues, little whites, little browns) expressionism, anamorphosis and trompe l’oeil fall in a second, Dionysian category of paintings, which feature indeterminate visual objects (Lacan 1981: 114, 109, 88, 112). For example, in viewing a work of trompe l’oeil the charm – the pleasure – lies in knowing very well that what I see is a fake, but even so (by contrast with a straightforward fake) continuing to be taken in by the illusion (Lacan 1981: 112). The indeterminacy here is a matter of a pleasurably unsettling and sustained conflict between intellectual and experiential engagement with the work. In the case of impressionist works it is somewhat different. From one and the same perspective the viewer can see images as well as the little dabs of colors out of which the images in question emerge (as in a Rorschach ink blot). But because the invisibility of the little dabs of color is a condition of the images taking on focus the images lose a certain degree of determinacy: they haunt the canvas like spirits who have failed to totally manifest.

6 Here, despite Žižek’s at times virulent criticism of Foucault, we see an interesting convergence between Žižek’s Lacan and Foucault. On the basis of this convergence, as well as Copjec’s similar attitude to Foucault, we may speculate that Foucault functions as a sort of obscene underside, even symptom, of Lacan. Here, despite Žižek’s at times virulent criticism of Foucault, we see an interesting convergence between Žižek’s Lacan and Foucault. On the basis of this convergence, as well as Copjec’s similar attitude to Foucault, we may speculate that Foucault functions as a sort of obscene underside, even symptom, of Lacan.
References

Tendencies of Inner Surveillance in Democratic India: Challenges of Establishing Native Ethnographer’s Identity Among Indian Muslims

By Tabassum “Ruhi” Khan

Abstract
The paper analyzes how the native ethnographer’s position within his/her community becomes problematized during fieldwork conditions defined by fear of state surveillance forces. It focuses on the way state’s vigilance activities create new barriers for establishing of native ethnographer’s authority by challenging the ethnographer’s privileged access to his/her research community based on trust and cultural/religious affiliations. The apprehensions for personal safety experienced by the informants unsettle the distinctions between native and non-native ethnography. The paper argues that if anthropology is to progress as a meaningful social and cultural critique then it must elaborate the ethnographer’s experiences of navigating the shifting grounds as insider and outsider. It proposes a “thick description” of the way reticence and distrust of the informants is overcome. The aim is to create scholarship that counters political and social injustices by making explicit voids and gaps and by gleaning a wealth of information in silences.

Keywords: Native ethnography, surveillance, Muslims, India
Tendencies of Inner Surveillance in Democratic India: Challenges of Establishing Native Ethnographer’s Identity Among Indian Muslims

This paper further confounds the native anthropologist’s claims to authority based on cultural, social and historical affiliations with the subject population by situating this problematic within the context of surveillance societies. Native anthropologists are considered best situated to present an unbiased and accurate picture of a community because as members they have access to realms of everyday life structured by language, practices, and ideology that would be denied to other non-members (Bourdieu 1977). Their authority is buttressed by arguments that knowledge is historically, culturally, and socially situated and influenced by conditions and relationships of production (Altorki & El-Sohl 1988; Clifford 1986; Marcus & Fischer 1999). But, the privileged stance of insider ethnography is also called into question on grounds that no society is homogenous. Rather, as differences of class, education, and social mobility define every culture, internal differences qualify whether native ethnographers represent the most just and authentic view of their communities (Aguilar 1981; Corbin & Buckle 2009; Ganiel & Mitchell 2006; Messerschmidt 1981; Narayan 1993). When I approached my fellow Muslims residing in the exclusive Muslim enclave of Jamia Nagar, New Delhi, to investigate the emerging identity of Muslim youth born in the globalized/liberalized Indian society, I was well aware of these counter arguments. I was also sensitive to the way differences of class, education and social mobility could influence my interactions. However, the timing of my entry in to the field and my subsequent experiences in approaching my informants made me realize that a community’s internal dialogues, (in this case between me and the Muslim youth), are not only structured by internal differences or points of convergence but are also dependent on the community’s external dialogues. For example, ambivalent relationships with the state that subject communities to practices of state surveillance can heighten the sense of misgivings among the populations, creating new barriers and challenges for establishing of the native ethnographer’s authority. My experiences drew attention to the little explored dimension that in fieldwork contexts of increased state vigilance a native ethnographer’s privileges and problems of access are not static but have to be constantly and dynamically renegotiated.

The fieldwork was conducted in the Muslim enclave of Jamia Nagar, which has been historically constructed as a distinct living space. The Muslims, who became a minority community in India following the partition of the subcontinent in 1947 into India and Pakistan, have tended to withdraw into such urban segregated living spaces, because they were cold shouldered by the Indian state and regarded with mistrust by the majority Hindu population (Hasan 2002 & 1997; Sachar Committee 2006). The Muslims residents of the well demarcated and differentiated enclave of Jamia Nagar maintain a certain mental distance from the outside
world and harbor a sense of apprehension towards the Hindu population. However, in the summer of 2007, the bombings in Glasgow, UK and other events pushed their relative isolation almost to the brink of social ostracism. In the aftermath of Glasgow terror the entire Muslim population was being framed by media discourses and state actions as being potential suspects. The crisis was particularly severe as for the first time even the small population of middle class educated and other wise upwardly mobile Indian Muslims, who have attempted to participate actively in Indian society, and who had not been hitherto considered to be disaffected (unlike the poor and disposed Muslim living in ghettos), were drawn into a global terror plot. The leading Indian dailies, especially *The Times of India*, were openly suggesting that the loyalty of all Indian Muslims to India was now suspect and that the government should treat the minority Muslim community in India with circumspection (see Swami 2007).

The discourses circulating in the Indian public sphere, resurrecting the specter of suspicion and state surveillance over its Muslim citizens, posed a unique problem for the native ethnographer. While on the one hand, my informants, as residents of segregated Muslim neighborhood or ghetto, were feeling particularly fearful of state scrutiny, and were responding to the situation with a heightened sense of inner vigilance or a reverse surveillance and they were becoming inaccessible to me. And on the other hand, even though it was becoming difficult to gain my informants’ trust, my sense of identification with my subjects’ predilection was sharpening. The general impressions that even the educated and more integrated Muslims were not above suspicion allowed me to keenly feel the sense of persecution experienced by the more disadvantaged Muslims. In this paper, I argue that the external events complicated my insider status and influenced the dynamics of interactions to an extent not accounted for by critics of insider/outsider dichotomy in anthropology. Most researchers have explored how a community’s structure, internal dynamics and differences problematize the definitions of insider and outsider ethnography and proposed that ethnographers occupy a continuum of space between the insider and the outsider (Aguilar 1981; Corbin & Buckle 2009; Ganiel & Mitchell 2006; Narayan 1993; Sherif 2001). However, few have looked at how the larger social and political contexts within which the community exists alter the internal relationships between the native ethnographer and the research subjects.

This essay is an account of the way my credibility as a native ethnographer was negotiated in a situation when socio-political conditions were damaging the community’s internal cohesiveness. It explores the issue of accessibility, based on cultural affiliations and trust, that lies at the heart of the divide between native and non-native anthropologists at a point of time when the community members and research subjects were caught in the middle of a political storm and feared the shadow of the state’s vigilant forces. According to Green (1995) fear and suspicion are corrosive elements that destabilize social relations. My informants ac-
cepted me as a member of the Muslim community, but not as someone whom they could trust. The boundaries between insiders and outsiders in anthropological research became blurred and difficult to define. These experiences call for a shifting of the debate from the analysis of distinctions between native and non-native ethnographers to the process of establishing the ethnographer’s authority. The focus needs to be on how essential differences of class and education are negotiated, and the way hindrances created by lack of trust in a hostile political ambience are overcome. I propose a “thick description” (Geertz 1973) of what Murphy (1999) refers to as “productive discomforts of field encounters”. The approach is evocative of the critiques of traditional ethnography, which stressed the need to accommodate and explore power dynamics shaping the research frameworks in order to create a more critical anthropology (Clifford 1986; Marcus & Fischer 1999). The thrust of my argument is that if anthropology is to progress as a meaningful social and cultural critique, which promotes mutual awareness, diversity and tolerance (see Marcus & Fischer 1999), then ethnographies of contexts of fear, hostilities, and/or suspension of democratic rights must revert to “thick descriptions” of the silences that engulf research subjects and suppress their voices. The scholarship of making explicit the politics of voids and gaps will be ethnography’s contribution to countering political and social injustices.

This paper begins with a description of the discourses circulating in the Indian public sphere that describe and stereotype Indian Muslims following the suicide attack at Glasgow airport in the summer of 2007. These accounts have been reconstructed primarily from the writings of leading columnists of mainstream Indian newspapers, especially the largest selling English language dailies like *The Times of India* and *The Hindu*. A broad assessment of content of other popular media outlets has also been attempted. The elaboration of discourses that heightened the sense of insecurities among the community are juxtaposed with the native ethnographer’s report of establishing her researcher’s credibility by negotiating differences and hurdles created by research subjects’ apprehensions and their reluctance to comprise their safety in conditions of increased state surveillance. The paper concludes with several reflections on ethnographic research. It proposes that if ethnographical accounts are but one among competing systems of representation (see Marcus & Fischer 1999), then contemporary ethnography may benefit by focusing on the dialogic between different systems of representation especially between the prevalent dominant discourses (including the mediated) and the almost inaudible assertions of minorities and/or marginalized populations as has been attempted in this paper.

**Rhetoric of Terror and the Position of Indian Muslims**

I was barely a week into my field research in the segregated Muslim enclave of Jamia Nagar, in New Delhi, when news reports of an attempt to bomb Glasgow
airport first surfaced. The *Times of India* carried the story on July 1st 2007 next to the story of annual flooding of Mumbai. The center inset of cars floating in monsoon floodwaters dwarfed the news of the failed attempt to blow-up Glasgow airport. However, in the next four weeks this story along with the coverage of the arrest of an Indian Muslim doctor in Australia, the siege of the Lal Masjid by fundamentalists in Pakistan, and the trials of Muslim perpetrators of 1993 serial blasts in Mumbai would dominate Indian news media. The images ricocheted off television screens, Internet, and front pages of newspapers and the Muslim citizens of India found themselves, in the words of Ather Farouqi (2007), caught between “increasingly strident anti-Muslim propaganda” and “the equally strident fervour of jehadi Muslims”. The shrillness of the twin discourses left little room for doubt that Islam existed only with reference to global terror.

As an Indian citizen, a Muslim, and an academic I attempt to deconstruct the major themes or frames that emerged in the news reports on Indian Muslims. I believe that the most significant frame was the twist or the unexpected element in the story of Glasgow airport bombing created by the involvement of a middle class Muslim youth in the Glasgow attack. The columnist of *The Times of India* argued that this would be the final straw that broke the proverbial camel’s back (Roshan Lal 2007, July 9). According to Kodkani (2007), Roshan Lal (2007), and Swami (2007), the involvement of middle class Muslims from the cosmopolitan city of Bangalore had rescinded the old stereotypes that only the poor and dispossessed Muslims were prone to disaffection and involvement in terrorist activities. These journalists implied that after Glasgow no Indian Muslim could be considered as being above suspicion and they called for a reassessment of the general impressions about Indian Muslims as a community. Roshan Lal (2007, July 8) writes in almost hysterical terms, “suspend the disbelief and suck back the collective gasp of horror at the emerging profile of the modern Muslim terrorist—average age 26; married; middle-class; white-collar professional” (A.8). Every day the newspapers carried speculative reports about the antecedents of the middle class Muslim youths from Bangalore who had taken the nation by surprise. The columnists and journalists, in their collective horrified endeavor, dissected the history, the lifestyle, and the beliefs of the Muslim professionals who had taken to the path of terror. They juxtaposed photographs of their very ordinary Indian faces with headlines such as “New faces of terror” and insets such as “upper class and upwardly mobile in Britain’s terror plot” to express their outrage at duplicity of Indian Muslims.

Even as the media expostulated, the main accused lay unconscious in a UK hospital with 90% burns on his body, and the UK and Australian governments did not allow access to the other accused. Hence, the media did not have access to the point of view of those accused in the Glasgow bombing, but this did not prevent the media from speculating. Headlines like “Kafeel quit dream job for jehad?”, “New-age terrorists is a techie to boot”, and “Rushdie knighthood last straw?”
were wild conjectures about the circumstances and the ideological leanings that prompted the actions of those implicated in the bombing (see Jayaprakash & Kumar 2007, July 10 & July 11; and Shiv Kumar, Jayaprakash & Ambarish, July 12). The problem with this inept journalism was not only that they were passing assumptions as truth, but they were also insinuating that the entire Indian middle class Muslim population shared the mindset of the accused. The Indian Muslims had clearly become “India’s new untouchables” (Nomani 2008).

The other frame that emerged from this irresponsible and highly emotional reporting was the argument rationalizing the need for increased surveillance of Indian Muslims (see Raman 2007; Swami 2007). According to Swami (2007), “the global jihad might have deeper roots in the India than most people ever imagined” (A 10). Supporting this stance, Raman added that it was clear to him that the Muslim professionals implicated in the terror plot were not dupes of Al-Qaida, but were eager and willing participants. The arguments that discredited Indian Muslims gained support from incidences of negative profiling of Muslims in the West where their actions were seen as “‘suspicious’ which required ‘urgent preventive actions’” (see “Dutch deny” 2007, A 7). The lack of faith in the Muslim position was highlighted even in sympathetic newspaper reports such as Prakash’s (2007), which provided space to the parents of the accused to speak and share their experiences of how they had tried to draw their son away from his fanatical leanings. However, the unconvincing tone of the report and inset photographs of the parents in their very traditional Islamic attire (the father was wearing a flowing beard and the mother was dressed in a veil) sent out contradictory messages and sealed the impression that no sympathy need be shown to Indian Muslims as they were obviously so different from the rest of the Indian population (see Jayaprakash & Kumar 2007; Prakash 2007).

The hostility towards Muslims was palpable in the editorial of The Times of India on July 9, 2007. It severely rebuked the Indian Prime Minister for his statement of two years previous, where he had expressed his faith in Indian Muslims. Dr. Manmohan Singh had stated that Indian Muslims were well integrated and they had steered clear of the extremist philosophy of groups such as the Al Qaida. The editorial denounced his view in no uncertain terms and also upbraided the Prime Minister for expressing his sympathy toward the distraught mother of young Muslim doctor, Haneef, who had been arrested in Australia as a suspect in the Glasgow bombing on the basis weak and circumstantial evidence. The Prime Minister had said that he was deeply disturbed by this development, and that he, as a member of the Sikh minority community, well understood the pain of being labeled. The criticism of the Prime Minister’s compassion for the Muslim community was worded as an oblique query in the editorial, “Why are so many terrorist Muslims, even as most Muslims are not terrorist?”(A16).

The frames adopted by the columnists associating Indian Muslims and terrorism were bolstered by parallel and simultaneous world events, especially the stand-off
between fundamentalists and the Pakistani army at the Lal Masjid in Islamabad and the trial of the Mumbai serial blast accused in Mumbai. In the last week of June 2007, Islamic fundamentalist had laid siege to the mosque in Islamabad and challenged the authority of the Pakistan Government. The bitter battle that ensued between hardliners and the Pakistani state was covered by the world media. The unfolding of the hostilities exposed the dangers posed by extremist Islam to states and also vindicated the strong-arm tactics of the Pakistan Government (see Meh-kri & Agencies 2007). While, the coverage of the trials of the Mumbai serial blast accused was much closer home and had greater significance for Indian Muslims. In 1993, Mumbai the financial capital of India, was hit by a series of blasts that took hundreds of lives and destroyed property worth millions of Indian rupees. The blasts followed the demolition of a historic mosque (The Babri Masjid) and the massacre of Indian Muslims in the senseless violence of communal riots in December 1992. In July 2007, it was extremely ironic for Indian Muslims to observe that the Muslim accused in the Mumbai blasts had been brought to trial and served severe sentences, including the death penalty (see Deshapande 2007b). However, none of those who had incited and committed violence against Muslims (including senior members of Hindu right wing nationalist party) were apprehended or punished with the same vigor. Jyoti Punwani (2007) writes, “these double standards are now part of being a Muslim in India’s ‘vibrant’ democracy”. The front page article in The Times of India with a picture of Yakub Memon’s weeping wife had headlines that read “Justice at home and away” (see Deshpande 2007a). Yakub Memon had surrendered to the Indian Government hoping for a fair trial, but was awarded a death penalty (see, Balakrishnan 2007). The message that went out to Indian Muslims in the light of these developments and their coverage in media was that their transgressions would be severely reprimanded. The Indian state was wary of them and watched them carefully.

Problems of Establishing Ethnographic Authority

In the atmosphere of gloom, disaffection and distrust, the segregated neighborhood that I was approaching posed unique problems of familiarity and distance. I had assumed that since my association with Jamia Nagar area went back to the time when I was a student at Jamia University (situated in the heart of the enclave), I could go back and reclaim my old ties and connections. The Jamia area has grown around the Jamia Millia Islamia University, which was established as a Muslim educational society in 1920s. Though today Jamia University is no longer a Muslim minority institute but a Central University, funded by the federal government in India, the university continues to attract Muslim migrants to the area as the Arabic nomenclature of Jamia Millia Islamia gives them false hope of securing admission. The Muslim population of Jamia Nagar has continued to grow despite the fact that there are few Muslims enrolled in the premium courses like
engineering, architecture, or media arts because as members of a marginalized and impoverished minority population they are unable to meet the rigorous admission standards of a premier University.

However, I graduated from the respected media program at Jamia University and was also employed as a Producer of Educational Television and this gave me a certain credibility within the community. And though my ties had been severed when I moved to the United States for higher education, I believed I could re-establish my links with my acquaintances and colleagues even after a gap of nearly ten years by calling on my warm and cordial relationships. Moreover, as a Muslim who spoke fluent Urdu, and like most members of Jamia University and of the Jamia residential area I ascribed to north Indian Muslim cultural ethos, I was certain that I would have few problems in gaining access to Muslim youth. But, the events in Glasgow and Australia strained my former bonds and falsified my assumptions of assured access.

In the wake of the bombing in Glasgow, an amorphous, indescribable sense of dejection seemed to be engulfing the entire Indian Muslim community. I believe that the sense of fear was compounded in the wake of Haneef’s, the young Muslim doctor, arrest in Australia. The only evidence that the Australian government had against the 26 year old Haneef was that the SIM card of his cell-phone (the one he had used in England before migrating to Australia) was found with his cousin Sabeer. Sabeer’s older brother had been the Glasgow bomber. The Australian authorities treated Haneef as an extremely dangerous suspect and kept him under solitary confinement. The act of generosity towards his extended family had jeopardized Haneef’s life and career, and it also sent out a powerful message to other Indian Muslims. The message emerging from the mishap was that we Muslims must be cautious even in our personal associations as our harmless acts and ties could become suspect at any moment. The writing on the wall was that there was no guarantee of our civil liberties and this introduced an element of uncertainty and negativity in our daily lives.

I believe that the apprehensions that engulfed Indian Muslims were unlike the fears that overcame the community during the communal riots in 1992. The violence that followed the destruction of the disputed mosque by Hindu radicals in December 1992 had instilled a deep fear of physical violence, but the insecurities that plagued Muslim in the summer of 2007 were not associated with physical threat to life; rather, Haneef’s detainment in Australia signified the extreme precariousness of our future and our aspirations. Linda Green (1995) says that fear is not just a response to danger, but also the silent and invisible arbiter of power. The dejection and anxiety that we felt were signs of our utter helplessness and lack of power. There are few Muslims in the higher education stream because as mentioned earlier it is not easy for members of an economically and socially backward community to succeed in the extremely competitive Indian educational system. Haneef’s achievements were exceptional. He not only trained as a physi-
cian in India, but also qualified to do his residency at hospitals in the UK and Australia. Nonetheless, the fact that he could be arrested and regarded as a terrorist on account of his religious affiliation, and that his life and career be destroyed, implied that the chances for social inclusion of Muslims through increased participation in the workforce were slim. I believe that we as Muslims feared the prospect of our continued economic and social disempowerment. Our anxieties were about the number of doors that could be closing on us due to our religion and the stereotypes that defined us.

I count myself as being more privileged educationally than my informants at Jamia University; but we were all plagued by the same sense of unease. I shared with my informants the consciousness of the intense scrutiny that had come to bear on Indian Muslims. In addition to the profiling of all Muslims as potential terrorists, they were also being labeled as a liability to the country and as a spoke in the wheel of its progress (see Karkaria 2007; Roshan Lal 2007). Roshan Lal (2007) writes that in the firmament of shining India, Muslims like Kafeel represented “the dark side of the moon” (A11). Their actions had jeopardized the prospects of India and Indians in the international economic sphere (see Roshan Lal 2007). As a middle class Muslim I paid special attention to these reports and was very conscious of how their presumptions could damage our chances of employment and participation as equal citizens in the economic growth of the country. I believe that the news reports that indicted Indian Muslims for jeopardizing India’s growth prospects were more effective in further isolating the Muslim community from mainstream Indian society than the other discussions on terror. I deeply empathized with the anxieties of my informants—young men and women of the segregated Muslim enclave who were on the threshold of their careers. The scrutiny that they would be exposed to when they went for job interviews would not be very different from the careful inspection of my person at different airports of the world as I crossed over to my space in the Western academia. I, too, feared the glances, the looks, the raised eyebrows, the careful appraisals of travel documents, and the possible hostility that the mere mention of my name may evoke. I imagined that all of us were united by shared sentiments of insecurity and alienation. However, as I progressed with my fieldwork my assumptions of solidarity based on our common concerns were soon exposed as fallacious because the shadow of state surveillance intensified our differences to an unanticipated extent.

Questions of Class and the Assumptions of the Ethnographer

Class affiliations have played a primary role in structuring the relationships of the different strata of the Muslim population with the Indian state and the political order. As mentioned earlier, Indian Muslims who are financially and educationally lacking are seen as more prone to being disloyalty to the Indian state (see Hasan 2004; “New age terrorist, “ 2007). Their congested neighborhoods, segregated enclaves and ghettos are under covert state surveillance and the residents believe
the state’s vigilant activities become more pervasive during conditions suffused
with disaffection towards Islam (see Sultana 2006). However, the more educated
and upper middle-class Muslims are often spared the state’s intrusion into their
lives. Hence, in this situation of compounded ill will towards Muslims, the fact
that my informants lived in an exclusively Muslim domain, and I lived outside,
became crucial in defining my positionality as a native ethnographer. The condi-
tion of my residence in close vicinity to Jamia, though not in Jamia enclave, had
never been a qualifying factor in my relationships with my friends and colleagues
who lived there. Nor had it influenced the research routine in my previous trip
when I interacted with the Muslim youth to select my key informants. However,
the task of reestablishing contact and recruiting informants in an ambience of in-
tense scrutiny of Indian Muslims taxed my facilities as a native ethnographer. I
could not rely on religious and cultural affiliations to secure access to my infor-
mants,

My informants were wary. It was difficult to approach them. I would call to fix
a time to meet but often they would not pick up the phone, or not return my call,
or forget to keep the appointment. I understood that they were exercising caution.
Nobody seemed to know whom to trust. I, as a researcher, studying at an Ameri-
can university was definitely suspect. A family acquaintance openly stated that
they were unsure whose agenda a researcher affiliated with an American universi-
ty was fulfilling. The tension between us was palpable across the barriers of si-
lence that they erected against me. Indeed, my mother’s strong opposition to my
research reinforced the fact that my informants and I were facing each other
across a very wide chasm. My mother not only constantly rebuked me for my in-
terest in the state of affairs of Muslims, but she also went so far as to state “look at
how they are hated, why do you want to get involved” (personal communication
June, 23, 2007). She said over and over again that I should change my research
topic. She feared for my safety, and once the event in Glasgow unfolded she be-
came adamant in her opposition. According to her, my association with Muslims,
no matter how innocuous, would bring harm to my life and my career in the same
tortuous manner as Haneef had been hurt. She added that since I was interested in
studying minorities and their interactions with media, why could I not chose to
study Christians or any other minority in India. Why did I need to focus on Mus-
lims who were distrusted and targeted by the state? It was difficult to explain to
her that this was precisely the reason why I wished to document the experiences
of Indian Muslims.

Green (1995) writes that, “fear divides communities through suspicion and ap-
prehension, not only of strangers, but of each other” (105). My mother’s nervous
state and her references to ambiguous fearful scenarios gave me a better insight
into the conditions faced by my informants. Her reactions removed the dullness of
vision that my absence from India may have engendered. I became conscious of
the acuteness of the anxieties experienced by the Muslim population. According
to Sultana (2006), the mothers of the Jamia spend sleepless nights whenever there is an incident of violence anywhere in India. They worry when and if the police will descend on their doorsteps and detain or confine their children. My mother’s apprehensions reminded me of the insecurities of these mothers. I completely identified with my informants’ circumstances even as I recognized the privileges of my relatively secure upper middle class status, and I vacillated between my position as an insider and an outsider. My position was ambiguous and my claims as being an insider were made even more tenuous by the guarded reactions of my informants. But regardless of the dilemma of how to define my approach, the task was to overcome barriers and establish contact with the key informants.

**Overcoming Silences and Listening through Cracks**

I had to wait two weeks before I could get a response to my emails, my text messages, and my repeated phone calls. Finally, more than a fortnight after the bombing in Glasgow, I got a phone call from Faisal and Fahim. They apologized that they had been busy at work and had been unable to return my several messages. I did not insist nor express any urgency in setting up a meeting. Instead, I casually mentioned that I was going to a coffee house close to my house in the evening, and they were welcome to join me if they had the time. I was pleasantly surprised that both of them decided to turn up.

The conversation that I am about to describe is an example of how the ethnographer’s personal involvement in the ethnography problematizes the question of objectivity and subjectivity in the encounter in a way that it becomes difficult to state whether one is an insider or an outsider, an observer or a participant (see Winkler & Hanke 1995). My intention was to understand my informants’ reactions to the events, yet the events affected me equally. Hence, I was an observer and a participant. My task was to analyze my informants’ perspectives, while being highly conscious of my own reactions. I also struggled to be aware of my shifting position, moving rapidly from the privileged insider’s perspective to that of an outsider, influenced not only by our differences in education, experiences, age and gender, but also by the world events in which we were inadvertently embroiled.

Fahim and Faisal turned up sooner than I expected. I did not dwell over why they had not returned my calls for two weeks. It was the 17th of July, and in the previous two weeks the newspapers had focused on little else but the incident in Glasgow and its various fallouts. As we sat around sipping our drinks and conversing, I could not help but be conscious of how we avoided any mention of the issue that was capturing news headlines and generating a heated debate in Indian media and society. We talked about everything and anything. We discussed at length the SMS (or text messaging) campaign to include Taj Mahal among the eight wonders of world. We discussed the complicity of mobile phone companies
to make money by playing on nationalist sentiments. Faisal confided that he had lost so much money because the phone companies had not declared the terms for casting the vote clearly. We continued to talk about other such innocuous matters and avoided and hedged around the one event that deeply troubled us.

The circuitous dance of our conversation indicated that each one of us was too afraid to trust the other. Green (1995) says that anthropologists working on the battlefront often find it difficult to describe in words the intense and pervasive fear that they experience. It was impossible for me to pin down the gnawing unease that each one of us was experiencing and to describe the awareness that each one of us had of how the other was feeling. Moreover, everyone of us tacitly understood that we were not saying what we wanted to say, and in full awareness of the deception that we were practicing, we continued with our charade of polite banter. My informants were familiar with my research interests in media discourses and in the ways minority populations, especially Muslims, were interacting with them. But referring to media coverage of the current events would mean expressing their apprehensions and their politics. They were not sure if they could be honest with me. While my situation was that though I was committed to my research, my mother’s fears were resonating within me. I was gauging my respondents. I was being careful with my words and I was dithering between not endangering myself and not saying anything that would make my informants suspicious of my intentions.

At last, the tension became too much for me. After an hour and more of coffee, ice-cream, and meandering discussions, I, very obliquely, in very few words, in a very public place, said very quietly, “Look at what is happening around us”. This was a cue for a dam to burst. Suddenly we were on the same wavelength and talking about something that we all felt strongly about. Faisal responded equally quietly, “Karta koi hai bharta koi hai” [Someone else’s misdeeds and someone else has to bear the consequences]. He was saying that Kafeel’s actions had endangered the future of the whole community. Fahim added, “Agar yahan naukri karni hai to bahut sabar se” [If you want to work here, earn a living, then you must exercise a lot of patience]. Faisal responded by uttering almost under his breath, “Sabar, sabar” [Patience, patience] (personal communication, July 17, 2007). In a few words they told me the complete story. These young men were concerned about their job prospects and were anxious that their religious identity would make the going difficult for them. They immediately identified with Ha-neef’s problems. And I could absolutely understand their viewpoint, as I did not know how my Islamic name would affect my future opportunities even though my circumstances as a Muslim scholar in Western academia were different from the Muslim job applicants in India.

Despite the fact that we had finally connected, that a degree of mutual trust had developed among us, and that we had overcome internal barriers, we could not talk about the issue that affected us at length. We could not say beyond a few
words about what weighed so heavily on our minds. We communicated our worries silently. In the two hours of our conversation no more than these few words were exchanged about a matter that was a question of our lives. The fear and power of surveillance hung over us. Nonetheless, I do think, that this was one of the moments when my research subjects and I were in a state of total communication. It was a moment when I could unequivocally lay claim to my identity as an insider. We did not need words. I knew without a doubt that they knew I identified with their plight. And my informants understood without any explanation my own fears and apprehensions. Despite our differences we were all acutely aware of our common identity as Indian Muslims, as a minority community, and as a people who were marginalized in the larger public sphere. Our self restraint, our decision not to dwell on our anguish in a public space expressed our mutual understanding to not draw attention to our identity as Muslims and to not jeopardize ourselves in any way. For example, all of us knew that if we discussed the arrest of Haneef or the events in Glasgow loudly enough for other people in the coffee house to overhear us, we would definitely draw quizzical gazes at the very least. These glances, even if they were without the potential of hostility or physical harm, would set us apart from other Indians, and alienate us further. We all knew and agreed that there were limitations on how far we could express ourselves.

This conversation filled with pauses, silences, and gaps is actually brimming with information. However, such voids are usually not accommodated in the more conventional representations. For example, media will not dwell on why some of the people interviewed refused to comment. The silence will either not be referred to or will be reported as “no comment”. But, as an ethnographer I had to dissect their reticence. My first conceptual leap was to realize that my informants’ silences did not indicate that they saw me as an outsider. However, working in conditions of fear and suspicion entailed that I would not have complete access to my informants. Despite the communion between us, I had to deal with the fact that a certain distance would be placed between the young men of Jamia and me. The strategies of state surveillance are ambiguous and in the extreme uncertainty that surrounded us it was difficult for me to ascertain how the young men of Jamia may be affected if they freely voiced their opinions. My duty as an insider and an ethnographer (as compared to a reporter or a journalist) was to protect my informants from incriminating themselves in any fashion. The constraints created by the surveillance society entailed that I had to find a way of addressing the core concern of my research, and to understand the way dominant mediated discourses were imbricated in the consciousness of minority populations, in a potentially less harmful but effective manner.

**Discretions, Indirectness and Elusiveness in Ethnographic Research**

The opportunity to raise the many contentious issues concerning the Indian Muslim identity without actually talking about them in a society, which was chary of
acknowledging the distinct Muslim identity and harbored misgivings about their sincerity, was provided by a Bollywood film *Chak De India* released in August 2007. The unique aspect of the film was not that the Muslim superstar Shahrukh Khan played the lead but that for the very first time in his two-decade long career, Shahrukh Khan played a Muslim character, Kabir Khan. And as Kabir Khan he explored the complexities of being a Muslim in independent, democratic India. This media text defied the norm of marginalization and symbolic annihilation of Muslims in the Indian public sphere by resurrecting their identity in full public glare. Naturally, the film struck a chord with the Muslim youth, and they eagerly anticipated its release. For me, the ethnographer, the film *Chak De India* became the focal and non-controversial talking point to initiate a conversation with Muslim youth about their identity and the issues that perpetuate their isolation.

I encountered few silences when I opened the conversation with a question like, “what did you think of the film *Chak De India*” or “what was the main theme of the film?” The film centers around the character Kabir Khan, who in a crucial match against Pakistan, India’s Muslim neighbor, fails to strike the penalty goal. His failure is not considered a vagary of the game because Kabir Khan is a Muslim. Instead, it is considered to be a deliberate and devious act to help the opposing team and his co-religionists win the match. Kabir Khan is branded a traitor. He retreats from public life and returns only to take up the job of training the ragtag women’s hockey team that nobody else considered worthwhile. However, for Kabir Khan it is a chance to redeem his lost reputation, and he stakes everything that he has to help the team win the women’s world cup and is thereafter able to reinstate himself in public life.

In my conversations with my informants, I would begin with an inoffensive question about the lead character. In the course of our conversation when we would discuss Kabir’s dilemma, I would ask pointed questions such as, “Did you agree with the film’s depiction of the problems of Indian Muslims?” and “Is the film’s treatment of the discomfort that we Muslims experience realistic?” I could read in their non-controversial answers a wealth of information, because as they discussed Kabir’s situation, they were actually reflecting on their own. For example, Rehman, my informant who more closely represents the opinions of the upper class Muslims, responded to my queries as, “We do get a chance but there is a struggle involved, which is not very evident. . . . Just as in the movie, a small mistake creates a lot of finger pointing” (personal communication, March 15, 2008). According to Rehman, Muslims in their everyday life encounter situations similar to those faced by the character Kabir Khan. They too are not trusted, and they had to confront the mistrust that underlines their interactions with the majority population stoically. The reference to “finger pointing” indicates that Rehman was consciousness of the lack of a level playing field for Muslims in the Indian society. But he was still hopeful about the future because his class advantages (which I recognized) had given him access to superior educational facilities. I could read in
his response an acute desire to participate in the Indian society as an equal. And he was ready to make the concessions demanded of him as a member of a minority community. He also recognized the need for Muslims to be vigilant and to carefully watch their step, because he understood that their rights as citizens were not absolutely secure.

The fact that I could talk with greater ease about reel life, for example the movie *Chak De India* and its characters, as compared to real events, such as the Glasgow bombings and the detention of a Muslim doctor in Australia, and that I addressed the issues circuitously and not directly does not diminish the import of my findings. Instead, it illuminates the power of media discourses and the reluctance of members of minority populations to challenge these discourses because they instill in the Muslim population an awareness of their marginal status, which is compounded by fear of persecution. The media text *Chak De India* had raised awareness about the injustices suffered by Muslims in a sympathetic manner and in a popular forum. The movie was a box office hit, which indicated that it had been well received among the majority Hindu population. Hence, the Muslim youth did not hesitate to discuss this film. However, they steered clear of commenting on media coverage and opinions that condemned them as guilty, not only because they were so overwhelming and pervasive, but because Muslim youth lacked confidence in their rights as Indian citizens. Their situation was particularly compromised by the unfortunate events of the summer of 2007, as the fear of state’s intrusiveness in their lives had increased. The important lesson for the ethnographer was that the successful execution of the ethnographic research in the shadow of state persecution calls for greater sensitivity to silences and the ability to structure oblique dialogues that addressed the core problem without damaging the informant’s safety.

**Conclusion**

My experiences in the course of this research have shown that the distinctions between insider and outsider ethnography are not absolute. Often during the course of a single encounter with my research subjects my position moved from the privileged perspective of an insider to that of an outsider and vice versa. The shifting of vantage points was dictated both by our internal differences of class and education, as well as by the inhospitable political climate where my research subjects and I feared the power of the state’s vigilant forces. The external forces complicated my position within the community and the question of distinguishing whether I negotiated as an insider or outsider became too difficult to answer. This complication, however, did not diminish the ethnographic experience. In fact, my observations and reflections were enriched by the awareness of the points at which the ethnographer’s and the research community’s interests united or diverged and of the reasons that prompted the shifting of positions. I agree with
Narayan (1993) that as factors aligning or separating the anthropologist from their subjects are in a constant flux, negotiating as both an insider and an outsider would enrich an ethnographer’s reflections. I also propose that to create more nuanced scholarship circumstances, for example the fear of profiling and state surveillance, which influence the ethnographer’s position must also be taken into account.

The task of excavating the experiences and voices of a population whose apprehensions about its safety were multiplied many fold by the negative stereotypes that circulated about them can be seen as performance of anthropology as a form of cultural critic (Marcus & Fischer 1999). Marcus and Fischer propose that there is a need for more experimental literature especially if anthropology has to distinguish itself in the competing systems of representations and meet the challenges posed by mediated discourses. My experience in the field has shown that by adopting an eclectic approach and by focusing on the silences and gaps that are not accounted for in dominant media discourses, ethnographers can provide insight into the historical, social, economic and political contexts that lie buried under social injustices and prejudices. My struggles to establish my identity among the Muslim community have also exposed the need for constant innovation in methodological approaches if anthropology has to illuminate the dark spots on the other side of media glare and bring another truth into light.

Tabassum “Ruhi” Khan is Assistant Professor in the Department of Media and Cultural Studies at the University of California, Riverside. Her research focuses on emergent identities of Indian Muslim youth at the intersections of discourses of globalization, liberalization of Indian economy and entrenched religious/cultural practices and beliefs. E-mail: ruhi.khan@ucr.edu.

Notes
1 According to the Sachar Committee Report commissioned by the Prime Minister of India in 2005, Muslims are poorly represented in the mainstream educational institutes on account of their various disadvantages (Sachar Committee 2006).

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Rural Media Spaces: Communication Geography on New Terrain

By Magnus Andersson & André Jansson

From Simmel to the Chicago School and all the way to the current field of urban studies, cities have been at the centre of social and cultural theory. The emphasis on cities is particularly salient in the globalization discourse, where a number of books describe the increased significance of mega-cities in geo-political and politico-economic terms (e.g. Harvey 1990; Castells 1996; Sassen 2001), as well as in cultural terms (e.g. Zukin 1995; Massey 2007). Furthermore, the related field dealing with creativity and creative industries revolves around the city (Florida 2005; Hartley 2005). In addition to cities, the media, or rather information and communication technology, holds a prominent position in globalization discourse. Above all, there are two aspects of the media that are regularly attended to. The first regards the media’s ability to connect and sustain networks, which certainly has increased with the digital development. This view is also an important foundation of the abovementioned theories of Castells, Harvey and Sassen. The second aspect has to do with the new significance of representation, image and symbolic value, resulting in phenomena such as place branding and urban cultural scenes (e.g. Lynch 1960; Blum 2003; Highmore 2005). These two aspects have led to certain intersections between urban studies and media studies, very often via the theories of Henri Lefebvre (Graham 2004; Jansson 2005).

Still, an important set of questions remains mostly unanswered: What happens to the places beyond cities in the processes of globalization and mediatization? What happens to rural spaces and rural societies in terms of connectivity, representation and, subsequently, social significance? How does “the rural”, in turn, affect the very same processes? These questions have been dealt with within the tradition of rural studies but only to a certain extent. Notions such as “the global countryside” (e.g. Woods 2007) and “rural gentrification” (e.g. Phillips 2004) have set an agenda for studying the interconnectedness of rural spaces. Yet although rural studies is a transdisciplinary research field dominated by sociologists, geographers and ethnologists, perspectives on mediatization are rather absent, except from more general references to network society (Murdoch 2006) and arguments about the significance of representation predominantly in relation to the rural idyll (Bell 2006) and to the meaning of place (Halfacree 1993). Similarly, within media studies, there are examples of studies which illuminate the relationship between the media and the rural, for example, the infrastructural aspects of bridging places or the democratic meaning of media in rural societies (Green 1998; Bakardijeva 2008; Hansen 2008). In addition, a more general “spa-
tional turn” within media studies has been recognized by several scholars (e.g. Falkheimer and Jansson 2006; Morley 2000, 2006), demanding more thorough and systematized explorations of “media space” (Couldry & McCarthy 2004).

These complementary viewpoints indicate a potential research agenda for “rural media spaces” – an agenda that we think corresponds to the emerging subfield of communication geography. The potential of this subfield, which is concerned with the dual question of how communication produces space and how space produces communication, has been recognized within media studies (Falkheimer and Jansson 2006; Jansson 2007) as well as geography (Adams 2009). In accordance with these ambitions, this thematic section of Culture Unbound is thus an attempt to bring together an interdisciplinary group of scholars and provide a common ground for research on the relationship between mediation, mediatization and rurality in the global era.¹

Epistemological Points of Departure

In an account of the development of rural studies, Michael Woods (2005: 17-25) depicts a slow but steady transformation from a tradition firmly based on empirical investigation into a “critical rural social science” anchored in conceptual theories, which are primarily derived from political economy and the general cultural turn within social science. This is not an unfamiliar story among media scholars, whose discipline has undergone a fairly similar development. While the sources of theoretical inspiration have multiplied as the media have gained an increasingly comprehensive social status, the media, as a multifaceted phenomenon, have also attained a central position within the cultural turn. Within the context of “rural media spaces”, in our interpretation, the cultural approach (derived from the cultural turn) implies a focus on the interdependence between the settings, practices and experiences of rural everyday life, on the one hand, and the global conditions of socio-spatial restructuring, on the other. This dualistic focus is integral to all the articles of this particular section, including analyses ranging from the everyday responses to rural governance and infrastructural policies to more ephemeral matters of spatial imagination.

The very notion of “rural media space” can be conceived of through Henri Lefebvre’s (1974/1991) triadic model of spatial production, which includes perceived space, conceived space and lived space. These three realms are inseparable as they define the particular interplay between socio-material preconditions, representational patterns and imaginary structures within the production of a certain space and place. Appropriated within the problem area of rural media studies, these realms can be approached through the concepts of connectivity, representation and imagination. In combination, they provide a composite understanding of the contested nature of rural media spaces, which in turn relates to the overarching question of whether (and at what levels) “the rural” is subject to marginalization.
or integration. While all six articles of this thematic section deal with the triadic interplay advanced by Lefebvre, they follow diverse analytical paths, focusing on different sides of the interplay depending on their object of study. While the imaginary realm of rural (and urban) ideologies, myths, and phantasmagoria saturates all articles as a kind of intermediary mental landscape, the structure of the section can be described as a movement from connectivity to representation.

**Connectivity**

Connectivity, to start with, is about the infrastructure of network society. Seeing the advantages of being part of the evolving networks and enabling an ever-expanding amount of practices to be conducted from “anywhere” are easy for rural areas. Digital networks may bring people in rural areas closer to urban nodes and the economic and cultural centres. In addition, communication technologies provide opportunities for teleworking and other forms of professional activities at a distance. In a political sense, the digital ICT networks may contribute to an expansion of the sphere of civic participation and political activism, that is, the foundation of dynamic public spheres. However, in spite of these potentials for spatial emancipation and rural participation, there are tendencies that new communication networks, in fact, boost the acceleration and extension of the urbanization processes and thereby strengthen the urban-rural divide. One must at least conclude that the development is uneven as it depends on a broad range of interrelated social, economic and cultural factors and turns certain rural areas into winners while others into losers.

The first two articles, “Imagining Rural Audiences in Remote Western Australia” by Lelia Green and “Supernetwork on the Praire: The Discursive Framing of Broadband Connectivity by Policy Planners and Rural Residents in Alberta, Canada” by Maria Bakardjieva and Amanda Williams, are about the implementation of new communication infrastructure in rural areas. The first article discusses the social impact of a number of infrastructural developments, from telephone services to satellite television. It uses interview data from qualitative field-work carried out among rural citizens and compares their experiences with institutional visions of connectivity. The second article analyzes a particular process of technological implementation, that of the semi-commercial SuperNet, from the viewpoint of both provincial government and industry policy planners and rural residents. Although the articles deal with different media technologies in different parts of the world, they encompass striking similarities. Both articles highlight the discrepancy between how policy-makers and residents envision connectivity. (Urban) policy-makers in both Alberta and Western Australia deemed their infrastructural projects able to bring a lifeline of connectivity to marginalized communities, able to open a window to the world, and able to break isolation. The residents, however, had other expectations. They wanted connectivity in order to
facilitate, and not to transform, their rural lifestyles. Moreover, they wanted communication technology in the name of spatial equality.

The two articles thus illustrate the ubiquitous political dimension of the urban-rural divide, which is present even in seemingly non-political questions such as infrastructure. While “urban” imaginations of the countryside are indubitably not unitary, they tend to be different from rural ones, largely following what Tim Cresswell (2006) calls a dominant “metaphysic of flow”. And as the case studies from Alberta and Western Australia suggest, politics and policies are predominantly based upon the urban(ized) imagination of the countryside. Getting access to new means of connectivity may even work as a reminder of these dominant distinctions, as shown particularly in Green’s article.

A fairly similar argument is put forward in the third article: “Mediatization, Spatial Coherence and Social Sustainability: The Role of Digital Media Networks in a Swedish Countryside Community” by André Jansson. Analyzing qualitative interview data, Jansson argues that under rural conditions global communication networks contribute to the integration and sustainability of the community as much as to processes of expansion and differentiation. This tendency partly stems from the implications of connectivity as such. Through their capacity of linking people to external realms of interest, while simultaneously reinforcing people’s sense of belonging in the local community, online media promote ontological security at the individual level. But the tendency also stems from representational processes and people’s experience of spatial coherence. As the interview data show, connectivity is turned into a symbolic and narrative asset for the local community as a whole. Jansson’s article thus points to the linkages between connectivity and representation in the making of rural spaces.

**Representation**

As indicated above, imaginations of “the rural” versus “the urban” are an essential aspect of (geo)politics and the (re)-production of the rural. They saturate a broad range of spatial representations (Lefebvre’s conceived space), everything from regional development plans to popular media content, integrating more or less ideological undercurrents. With the exception of local newspapers and certain forms of local broadcasting, the mass media has been an urban affair to a considerable degree. Slightly exaggerated, these dominant media forms can be seen as mediated urban events produced by urban people in urban areas for audiences that are, if not urban, at least willing to engage with urban(ized) matters. In the 1970s, Berger et al. (1973: 65-67), referred to this condition as the “urbanization of consciousness” – a process that allegedly operates in tandem with the mythological construction of the urban as “the mediated centre” (Couldry 2003). Still, this is, and has to be, a dual perspective. It implies that rural matters or areas are being dealt with within the dominant urban perspective, which involves a mythologization of the rural – whether a romantic idyll or a rigid backwater – in terms of “the
anti-urban” (Cloke 1997; Fish 2005; Cruickshank 2009). New means of production and distribution, such as web based media, however, hold a potential to promote a do-it-yourself culture, hence opening up opportunities for alternative representations of the countryside. Village communities, petty producers and municipalities may produce images and texts about life in their environments and form online communities and networks in addition to commercial outlets of various kinds. As demonstrated in Jansson’s and Bakardjieva and Williams’ studies, these new means of self-representation may diverge from the overarching urban ideology of network society, sustaining residual cultures as well as rural cultural complexity.

The last three articles of this special section deal precisely with the construction and negotiation of rural representations and the ideological struggles involved in these processes. Magnus Andersson’s “Provincial Globalization: The Local Struggle of Place-Making”, discusses the encoding and decoding processes involved in the implementation of spatial strategies in a Swedish municipality. Having interviewed both local policy-makers and inhabitants, Andersson shows how local symbolic strategies are marked by the global discourse of urbanism. This is particularly salient in municipal policy-makers’ attitudes towards place branding and policy networks, which they envisage as self-evident components of rural development and future. The inhabitants, on the contrary, crave less rhetoric and more investments in public facilities and services, facilities that should be both scattered and small-scale for present and future inhabitants. This demarcation, Andersson argues, may be conceptualised as a conflict between the “urbanization of the rural” and the “re-ruralization of the rural”.

In the subsequent article, “Reporting an Unsettled Countryside: The News Media and Rural Protests in Britain”, Michael Woods analyzes a site of “rural production” that has not been much studied previously: British newspapers. Woods investigates how a number of newspapers represented rural protests related to hunting and farm incomes during 1997-2007, and how these representations were related to rural campaign efforts. The main argument is that during this period, the homogenous “unsettled” image of the countryside was altered to a more complex set of viewpoints informed by the ideologies of different newspapers. The study highlights the crucial role of the media in framing rural events, discursively constructing the dominant image of rurality. It also indicates that as the amount of coverage increases and rural matters enter the news agenda, a more composite understanding is more likely to evolve. By relating Woods’ findings to the abovementioned discussions of online media, one finds clear reasons to investigate further into how converging modes of self-representation and co-production may affect dominant encodings of the countryside.

The problem of rural cliché images is also addressed in the last article, albeit from a more-theory driven perspective, which focuses on how dominant metaphors may actually open up for alternative readings of the rural. In “Reading
Rural Consumption Practices for Difference: Bolt-holes, Castles and Life-rafts”, Keith Halfacree unveils the internal complexity of three metaphors (those mentioned in the title) that can be used for labelling different styles of rural consumption. Consumption is understood here as both the consumption, or reading, of representations, and the practical enactment and reproduction of rural representations through consumption. Chiefly following Gibson-Graham’s (2006) alternative strategy of “reading for difference rather than dominance,” Halfacree depicts an image of the rural as heterotopic. This means, for instance, that the notion of the rural as a “life-raft” – as articulated through practices such as second home consumption – does not merely represent an escape from a dysfunctional (urban) “rest of the world”. As shown by empirical studies of second home ownership, the “life-raft” is not an isolated entity and must, instead, be understood as an integral, and potentially transformative, component of the home as such, part of what Halfacree calls “dynamic heterolocalism”.

Integration or Marginalization? The Mediation of Distance and Difference

What emerges from the studies compiled in this section of Culture Unbound is a rather contradictory view of “rural media spaces”. These spaces are on the one hand, dominated by urban(izing) modes of connectivity and representation, in which “the rural” constitutes the normative and mythological “other”. On the other hand, it is shown that rural spaces attain a great deal of internal complexity and transgression. What kind of argument may be derived from these observations? The most important point is to acknowledge the diverse and multilayered role of mediation – the constitutive process of rural media spaces.

By its very definition, mediation is about linking and the bringing together of people, places and ideas, which may occur – as discussed above – through technological or representational means or both (Fornäs 2000). But that various entities are linked together does not necessarily imply that the distances and differences between these entities are abolished. As shown by several studies, the opposite may just as well occur, meaning that the increased connectivity between “rural peripheries” and “urban centres” may lead to an accentuated awareness of pre-existing socio-material differences and distances between the city and the countryside (Green). Consequently, it leads to an increased engagement with what is conceived of as typically rural matters (Bakardjieva and Williams). From the rural viewpoint, therefore, the politico-technological promise of participation and integration is also the promise of autonomy and separation. Seen from another reading position, however, it may also be the threat of dominance, alienation and marginalization. The dual implication of “the problem of the last mile” is an interesting case in point here since this infrastructural problem, as it mutates into a problem of representation and identity, may not only foster experiences of mar-
ginalization but also catalyze substantial participatory efforts in order to diminish distance (Jansson).

Here, the articles by Woods and Halfacree provide important illustration of the contested relationship between the urban and the rural. The articles demonstrate that there is always a discursive space for alternative representations and (re)readings, whether in relation to dominant media channels or more specialized domains, as well as an inherent subversive potential within everyday consumption practices to destabilize the urban-rural divide. An understanding of the rural as heterotopic seems essential in this context since it holds that the rural is not only “something else” or “something different” from the urban but also a realm of internal differences that may separate or unite the rural and the urban through mediation. It is important to stress that mediation must be envisioned in much broader terms than matters of “the media”. Mediation indicates that images and understandings are not only represented but also enacted and negotiated through institutional processes as well as everyday practices. The complexity and, therefore, relatively unpredictable nature of these processes are also demonstrated in the articles by Andersson (local governance) and Bakardjieva and Williams (infrastructural development project), which point to an additional type of distance interwoven with the urban-rural divide, namely that between rural residents and institutional actors such as spatial policy-makers and entrepreneurs.

In addition to symbolic mediation processes there are also other flows and mobilities with relevance to the tension field between rural integration and marginalization, for example the mobility of people. Mobilities are generally of central concern for understanding contemporary society (c.f. Urry 2001: ch. 3); obviously, the flows of chiefly middle class people from the cities to the countryside (counter-urbanization) are significant to the urban-rural divide, as are the flows of most young people in the other direction: from the rural to the urban. Although much wider than the field of communication geography, the perspective is intriguing since different forms of mobility may intersect in different ways. For example, whilst media culture might inspire various kinds of movements, itinerant people can also be expected to have a particular relationship to mediated mobility. The intersection of these flows is a theme that is implicitly present in several of the articles (see Jansson, in particular). Accordingly, mobility as a phenomenon – and as a perspective (Cresswell 2006) – further accentuates the complexity and heterogeneity of the rural partly through the travelling of people, partly through mediations, and partly through the interplay between them.

Many complexities and contradictions are unveiled in this theme section; however, what also stands out as a common denominator and key argument is the hegemonic status of the urban-rural dichotomy. Whether we discuss questions of infrastructural development programmes or modes of representation, the spaces in-between, whatever these are, tend to evaporate. According to Halfacree in his article, as the rural constitutes “the other” to the urban, it also becomes something
that is somehow inherent to urban self-identity, whether as an escape or a threat. In addition, the same thing goes for rural appropriations of the city. One may thus argue that the (gentrified) inner city and the countryside are bridged by a spatial hegemony, leaving, for example, suburbs and small towns behind (see also Phillips 2004). The aesthetic dimension of the link can be traced to the aesthetic logic of reflexive modernity with its “econom[y] of signs and space” (Lash and Urry 1994), in which the residuals of former epochs are appropriated and converted to new means. The urban factory (modernity) is turned into an arty café, and the old rural barn (pre-modernity) is refashioned into a second home. As a key figure in the contemporary reflexive modernity stands the creative entrepreneur who thrives in both settings but not often in-between. An indication of the ideological penetration of this entrepreneurial imagination is salient in Bakardjieva and Williams’ contribution, in which some rural residents — that is, not policy-makers — saw the implementation of the communication infrastructure as a chance to draw, in their eyes, ”quality people” to the rural villages of Alberta.

The mediations of the city and the country thus constitute a dualistic imaginary structure in which one side cannot be conceived of without the other. This imaginary structure, which is indeed a lived space, also saturates popular media representations to a great extent, promoting either the volatile urban cultural mélange or the sedimented rural idyll as the principal landscapes of desire (DuPuis 2006). Still, these seemingly opposed representational ensembles constitute one coherent set of modern consumption, excluding modes of consumption that do not “fit” while including non-desired forms of rurality and urbanity. Consequently, as the following articles scrutinize the multi-layered constitution of this interplay, a critical reader must also reflect upon where the real “other spaces” might be located. What is annihilated by the urban-rural divide?

**Magnus Andersson** is postdoctoral researcher at School of Arts and Communication, Malmö University. He has two ongoing research projects within the scope of Communication Geography: one on rural media spaces and one on media and migration. E-mail: magnus.andersson@mah.se

**André Jansson** is a professor in Media and Communication Studies at Karlstad University, Sweden. He currently leads two research projects: "Rural Networking/Networking the Rural" together with Magnus Andersson (funded by FORMAS), and "Secure Spaces: Media, Consumption and Social Surveillance" together with Miuyase Christensen (funded by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond). E-mail: andre.jansson@kau.se
Notes

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References

Imagining Rural Audiences in Remote Western Australia

By Lelia Green

Abstract

In 1979, Australia’s then-Communication Minister Tony Staley commented that the introduction of satellite communications to the bush would “dispel the distance – mental as well as geographical – between urban and regional dwellers, between the haves and the have-nots in a communication society” (Staley 1979: 2225, 2228-9). In saying this, Staley imagined a marginalised and disadvantaged audience of “have-nots”, paying for their isolation in terms of their mental distance from the networked communications of the core.

This paper uses ethnographic audience studies surveys and interviews (1986-9) to examine the validity of Staley’s imaginations in terms of four communication technologies: the telephone, broadcast radio, 2-way radio and the satellite. The notion of a mental difference is highly problematic for the remote audience. Insofar as a perception of lack and of difference is accepted, it is taken to reflect the perspective and the product of the urban policy-maker.

Far from accepting the “distance” promulgated from the core, remote audiences see such statements as indicating an ignorance of the complexity and sophistication of communications in an environment where the stakes are higher and the options fewer. This is not to say that remote people were not keen to acquire satellite services – they were – it is to say that when they imagined such services it was in terms of equity and interconnections, rather than the “dispelling of distance”.

Keywords: Media, rurality, radio, satellite broadcasting, Australia
Introduction

The research upon which this paper is based was conducted against the exciting background of the introduction of satellite television broadcasting to remote Western Australia (WA). Remote WA audiences were among the last “western” populations on earth to receive live television broadcasts. Even though the government’s Remote Area Television Scheme had allowed towns of over a thousand residents in Australia’s outback to receive Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) programs from the late 1970s onwards, this service was not available to many smaller communities, or to isolated homesteads. There were a number of such communities, as Philip Skelton, of the WA Government’s Office of Communications was to make clear in commentary upon the communities outside metropolitan Western Australia. “A population of 200 is not counted as a ‘town’ by the Bureau of Statistics, but there are still real live Australians out there in communities of such smaller size” (1989: 52). Skelton also provided a breakdown of the population distribution among country communities at around the time of the satellite’s introduction:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-metropolitan population distribution WA</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than 25,000</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 – 25,000</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 – 20,000</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 – 10,000</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 – 5,000</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500 – 1,000</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200 – 500</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;200</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Skelton 1989: 52)

Given the 168 communities with fewer than a thousand residents in WA, and the hundreds of people living on rural properties and remote homesteads, remote area residents outside the larger townships found it comparatively difficult to access reliable news and information. They were reliant upon unpredictable shortwave radio reception, two-way broadcast-receiver Royal Flying Doctor Service radio sets, and intermittent face to face contact with neighbours and people in towns who may be hours away; accessible only by gravel roads. Additionally, newspapers were flown into the region and could be only collected on occasional trips to the bigger centres, while mail was also held until it was collected. In 1986 this challenging communications environment was set to be revolutionised by the first AUSSAT-delivered, Remote Commercial Television Service (RCTS) broadcasts. The possible number of Western Australians who could receive (assuming satel-
lite dish connections) television services for the first time following the launch of AUSSAT lay between 100,000 (Regional Television WA 1984: 10) and 150,000 (WA Govt 1990: 4).

Even after the launch of the satellite, many remote area residents were locked out of audience participation. There were a number of issues which had to be addressed in addition to finding the cost of the satellite dish. The thought that the decision would be a straightforward one in these circumstances was often taken as a further sign of how city people were out of touch with the realities of country life:

F 25-39 Alison Graham H: [All interviewee names and identifying characteristics altered.] Not all of us have got three and a half thousand dollars to fritter away on a television dish, and a lot of the people up here are mere employees on stations ... Very, very few places have 24 hour power, and if you’re an employee on a station like most of the families on School of the Air are, it’s not up to them when the power gets turned on, it’s outside their control. It depends on the station manager and station policy about what hours they run their generator, so the station might have a satellite dish and might wish to watch New Parameters, but they can’t because it’s outside their control. You just cannot get that through to people down south or in the city, I suppose. (Green 1998a: 54)

The research reported here which looked at the impact of the satellite services upon remote Western Australia was foreshadowed by the 1985 launch of AUSSAT, Australia’s domestic satellite and the start of RCTS transmissions in 1986. AUSSAT also carried the television services of the national broadcaster (ABC), but this provided undifferentiated programming across city and country areas. For this reason, there was particular excitement throughout the remote northwest of Australia that Western Australia’s regional commercial television service, Golden West Network (GWN), would be providing broadcasts more particularly tailored for non-metro television audiences. For some communities, such as Fitzroy Crossing, it made financial sense to install a downlink and a rebroadcast facility for the new AUSSAT services. For others, such as Sandstone, the community was so small that it was more economic to subsidise the purchase of dishes by multiple individual households, meaning that the structure of reception was via the installation and commissioning of household satellite dishes. Regardless of the delivery arrangements, the advent of AUSSAT services for remote Western Australia heralded the introduction of the domestic reception of live television broadcasts and of a satellite-delivered commercial broadcast culture.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The fieldwork from which this paper is drawn was based upon the ethnographic methodology outlined in Morley’s Family Television (1986) with one important difference: participants were interviewed separately, and not in couples, and included respondents from high school age into their 80s. The ethnographic approach (Green 2003) allows the interviewee to choose the location of the inter-
view: however, since interviews usually average an hour, the interviewee often chooses to invite the interviewer to the family home. This is the space in which the media practices being discussed occur, and where the media of interest are consumed. The invitation to enter the family home offers the opportunity to take field notes about the placement and use of communications technology. The interview format used in this research was the in-depth, semi-structured research interview (Green 1999). The interview format is non-prescriptive in that although the interviewer has a check list of subjects to be covered, the interviewee is allowed to determine the flow of the interview and to give different topics the attention that they deserve: according to the interviewee’s priorities and less driven by those of the interviewer. Shaun Moores described this approach in his study of Satellite television and everyday life (1996):

Interviews were relaxed in manner and conversational in tone – lasting up to two hours – and whilst I kept a mental checklist of key topics to be covered, informants were allowed the space to pursue issues which they perceived as important or relevant. They were actively encouraged to speak from experience and to relate episodes from their everyday lives. My style of questioning was chiefly open-ended, designed to produce narrative responses rather than brief answers (1996: 34)

Prior to the interview phase of the research, the author had been a member of a two-person consulting team commissioned to survey remote WA before (1986) and after (1987) the introduction of satellite broadcasting using volunteer-response mail-back questionnaires. This consultancy, funded first by the WA Government’s Office of Communications, and subsequently supplemented by the federal Department of Transport and Communications, was written up in Green (1988). The field research was carried out two years later, in 1989, while the author was on maternity leave and was part of a doctoral research programme. The interview phase was unfunded, apart from some part-contribution from a university research grant (Edith Cowan University) to the basic expenses of petrol and camp sites, and there was no provision for full transcribing of the 140 in-depth interviews. Interviews were tape recorded, however, and notes made of the subjects raised and issues addressed by interviewees. These notes were then analysed to identify themes arising.

After themes had been identified, the tapes were replayed and relevant portions were transcribed verbatim to create a partial word-for-word record of the interviewees’ contributions. In this way the process had some parallels with Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) Grounded Theory approach to the analysis of qualitative data. The themes arising from the research included: the Australian policy debate about communications provision for remote areas; isolation; the home; gender; family; technology adoption, and the construction of community. Although Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley’s (1992: 15-31) “Domestication of Technology” framework had not been formulated at the time of the 1989 fieldwork, the research was interrogated and analysed using a Domestication of Technology approach.
The Domestication of Technology framework argues that there are four main elements to the means by which a technology is domesticated (Silverstone et al. 1992: 15-31): “appropriation” – when the technology is brought into the home; “incorporation” – when the technology is integrated temporally within the daily lives of the household members; “objectification” – when the technological object is given a physical space within the home; and “conversion” – when the products of using and consuming technology are converted into raw cultural materials which household members use in their social interactions with each other and with their wider community. This paper mainly concerns the “incorporation” and “conversion” phases of the domestication process.

As is implied by the reference in the conversion phase to the consumption of the technology, the domestication framework as used here also addresses Daniel Miller’s Theory of Consumption (1987: 178-217). This argues that when people voluntary consume cultural products they are participating in a process which creates value in both directions. The technology and media delivering the cultural products is valued for its contribution to an individual’s daily life, while the individual can claim an enhanced social presence through converting these cultural products into material used for conversation and other interpersonal exchange. The implication of this process of consumption is, as Hearn et al. argue, that “social identity can be interpreted as a function of consumption” (1997: 106). The media products people consume become an important way in which they develop and express their social identity. This dynamic has implications for those people who are prevented from accessing large amounts of the cultural material circulating in the wider society, for example, by their residence in remote areas and a consequently reduced access to communications channels.

It should be noted here that the broader research project in 1989 (1998a) compared respondents from four remote communities: Broome (B); Fitzroy Crossing (FX); Sandstone (S); and isolated homesteads (H) (even though “homesteads” form an imagined community), with those from two regional communities, Gnowangerup (G) and Esperance (E). The aim was to address the impact of the RCTS upon all six communities. For Fitzroy Crossing, Sandstone and remote homesteads, the process by which commercial television was introduced was also the process through which they first experienced broadcast television of any kind: commercial or the non-commercial public service ABC programming. Before the satellite, there was no broadcast television in these places, with the exception of a few homesteads which were comparatively close to a terrestrial broadcast network. The five hypotheses informing the original research were found to be too blunt to capture or acknowledge the nuanced responses of the interviewees and were discarded in the original study in favour of teasing out the complexities of the reactions of remote area audiences to their improved communications options.

In place of the five original research hypotheses which informed the 150,000 word PhD thesis (1998a), the research question addressed here is: “How did the
domestication of satellite broadcasting by remote area audiences impact upon their subsequent consumption of communication technologies?” The communication technologies to be addressed explicitly in considering this research question are: the telephone; the 2-way (broadcaster/receiver) RFDS radio; broadcast radio and satellite television itself. Each of these will be considered as a mini-case study, and the paper ends with some conclusions about the implications of this research for the provision of broadband services to remote area communities.

Remote Area Communications Prior to the Introduction of Satellite Broadcasting

Interestingly, the start of satellite broadcasting did not mark the introduction of televisual content into the remote household. Even prior to the commencement of remote commercial broadcasting, it had been established that about one-third of respondents already had a television set and video recorder and used this assemblage to play taped broadcast programmes including films, documentaries, records of major sporting events, dramas, soaps and educational broadcasting. As Delia Arnez (F 25-39 B) commented: “There’s always been a high proportion of video use here too [...] It’s probably decreased since the television stations, but you didn’t need TV to get videos – or TV reception, to be able to use videos. A lot of people had TVs and videos before TV came”.

Daily news programs, quizzes, light entertainment and other time-sensitive transient material tended not to be included in the recordings which were generally forwarded from friends and suppliers in the metropolitan core. The importance of the television and video-recorder set-up had been revealed in the before-(1986) and after-(1987) satellite broadcasting surveys of the remote towns of Broome, Fitzroy Crossing, Sandstone and homesteads. These volunteer-response mail-back questionnaires were used to gather some basic quantitative data about the impact of the satellite broadcasting services. The research was non-random and opportunistic, so not generalisable, but it was indicative, and a total of 805 responses were received over the two phases.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>No of respondents 1986</th>
<th>Broadcast services</th>
<th>No of respondents 1987</th>
<th>Broadcast services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broome</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>(Intelsat) ABC TV</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>(AUSSAT) ABC TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ABC radio</td>
<td></td>
<td>GWN TV ABC radio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitzroy Crossing</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>Variable shortwave</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>no change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>radio reception</td>
<td></td>
<td>(introduction of services delayed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandstone</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Variable shortwave</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Multiple purchase</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>radio reception</td>
<td></td>
<td>AUSSAT dishes:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ABC TV GWN TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homesteads</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>Various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of remote respondents</td>
<td>424</td>
<td></td>
<td>381</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Comparison of responses from remote populations 1986–1987 (from Green 1988: 13)

This questionnaire research included some open ended questions which meant that respondents could make comments about the services available to them. Their contributions indicated that while a good television service was overdue (“What’s bloody TV mate?” [Green 1988: 30]), the lack of other communication technologies was judged to be more critical. The kinds of comments made included: “Stop fiddling while Rome Burns! Get comprehensive radio and telephone communications to the bush before TV and other ‘frills’. PS: A decent mail service would also help”, “I value the radio communications a lot more than I do the TV”, “Priority No. 1: decent radio transmission throughout remote areas” (Green 1988: 31, 36). As these responses make clear, for many respondents the pressing issue was not broadcast television communications, but private two-way voice communications and a reliable radio service.

**Telephone**

Unlike almost all other satellite services around the world, there were originally no plans for AUSSAT to provide a domestic telephone service. This was the case even though large numbers of people living in remote areas had no access to a
private phone service, and instead had to use the 2-way Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) radio channel for voice communications. In the face of the lack of satellite-delivered telephony, Skelton (1989: 56) was moved to call for the “eliminating or neutralising [of] Telecom’s paranoia about its monopoly […] thus] allowing the satellite provider to offer all the types of service for which satellites have a natural advantage”. The RFDS was semi-public communication since anyone within range who had the appropriate equipment could tune into the broadcast, and many people had such equipment available since it was the primary means of summoning help in the event of a medical emergency.

As Skelton intimated, whereas most satellite services were sponsored by the relevant national telecommunications provider, in Australia’s case AUSSAT had been set up in the face of opposition from the state monopoly provider, Telecom Australia. AUSSAT was planned and launched in the context of a global move towards service liberalisation, spearheaded by the break-up of American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T, or “Ma Bell”), which had started with a government-sponsored anti-trust case filed in 1974, and which culminated in the company’s court-ordered fracture in 1984. This Regan-era development ran alongside Margaret Thatcher’s UK privatisation of British Telecom in the same year.

It was clear to Telecom Australia that the government’s decision to create a separate company for AUSSAT, rather than place the service under the control of the then-monopoly telecommunications carrier, could ultimately form the basis for competition. Given this, Telecom Australia had gained a commitment from the government that telephony would not be among the services initially provided by AUSSAT, apart from an extremely expensive satellite phone service unsuited to domestic use. Instead of satellite telephony, Telecom Australia was permitted to make good its assurances that its experimental telephony network using the proprietary Digital Radio Concentrator System (DRCS) technology would ultimately deliver a comprehensive and private phone service for the outback. This Rural and Remote Area Program (RRAP) telephone service rollout had been promised for some time, but had yet to be widely delivered when the satellite began transmitting.

Although the DRCS phone network eventually saw service between 1985-91, its introduction in parallel with the satellite launch meant that many outback residents were cynical about Telecom Australia’s commitment to the bush, seeing the eventual delivery of a private telephone network as too little, too late. Some even suggested that the concurrent rollouts were evidence that Telecom Australia was adopting a “just in time” attitude to delay service as long as possible: compatible with ensuring that AUSSAT would be precluded from offering telephony. There was considerable scepticism about whether rural telephone services were ultimately delivered by the most appropriate and cost-effective means available (Paltridge 1990).
As had been suspected by Telecom Australia, 1991 saw the introduction of competition in the Australian telecommunications market. The ownership of AUSSAT was bundled into the sale to Optus of a telecommunications carrier licence as the Australian government followed in the footsteps of the USA and UK towards market deregulation. Most of the comments and vignettes about the absence of a good telephone service that follow in this paper were offered during the 1989 field research and refer to times in the 1980s and earlier, before the introduction of the DRCS telephone network. As remote homesteader Felicity Rohrer noted (F 40-54, H), “It’s made a big difference, telephone. That was the most isolating thing, especially when your children were away at school or your parents are getting older and [...] I think you need [...] That was the worst thing, not having a phone.” (Cited in Green 2005)

Another homestead interviewee was to underline the ways in which private communications were to alter the business of the rural sector; allowing a renegotiation of relationships with the state’s economic and political capital, at the expense of the previously pivotal role of regional hubs:

M 40-54 Arthur Porchester H: We do a lot of our business direct with Perth so if we… Rather than try and use the locals, because, with the modern day telephones, you can pick up the phone and explain to someone in Perth just as easily as you can in Carnarvon. Cut out all the middle person, ordering, etc, so then it’s just a matter of really saying, “yes this is what we want - put it on such and such a transport company”, who we usually have an account with… So I guess this new modern, or efficient form of telephone has enabled us to become a lot closer to Perth… I mean, talking about the stock exchange, I mean, I quite often ring the stock exchange now because I can’t get it on ABC radio, not unless I hear that one national report, I ring the local report in Perth.

Revealing the ways in which new technologies lead to innovation and new possibilities, Porchester went on to say: “Of course the only thing wrong with that is it [...] the Perth Stock Exchange] only lists the shares that are traded in Western Australia. It doesn’t do the total trading for each share that’s traded. We’re limited in what’s really going on”. These innovations altered the individual homestead’s psychological neighbourhood, allowing the development of closer ties with more distant locations at the possible expense of close communications with the immediate geographical neighbourhood.

Andrea Dixon, another homestead respondent, saw very different benefits to the phone, but also located these firmly in rural life:

F 40-54 Andrea Dixon H: [Do you find that the telephone’s altered your life much at all?] Yes. Dramatically [...] In times of crisis it’s – it just gives you so much flexibility. I mean, before, we – sometimes we would fly to Carnarvon or fly up to Nyang or something to use a phone to find out if someone was critically ill or if you’ve had a critical business thing, well, you’d just travel those distances to make a phone call.

In the historical moment represented by this research, through the introduction of a private phone service, a series of isolated people and communities finally felt themselves connected into the mainstream. Technology had been appropriated and
incorporated by remote area residents in a conscious, inter-related way which linked physical, geographical and technological communications channels to patterns of distribution and service provision, and then envisaged all of these elements as held together in an interconnected system. The technological system described here is envisaged by its new users as an improvised, pragmatic ensemble which paralleled communication systems available in larger regional and city communities, and which permitted greater autonomy for remote areas, together with a relationship between those areas and the core.

Within the context of a dispersed but interdependent community, such as operates between remote area residents, it was the privacy of the telephone which made a huge difference to some respondents’ feeling connected in a way which helped protect them against feelings of isolation:

F 25-39 Alison Graham H: During the day it’s not much different when my husband’s here or when he isn’t because I’m tied up with School [of the Air] and he could be out on the bore run anyway [checking water supplies for the livestock], but it’s mostly in the evenings that I feel the loneliness or I want to talk to another adult and I can get on the phone and I can ring up someone and talk to them privately, whereas I could never do that on RFDS. I mean, you might hear all these voices and what have you, and you might have sort of business dealings through the RFDS but [...] you always had to be careful about what you said, whereas now I can ring my good friend at [station name] or wherever and you talk on the phone in station language if you like – “what have you been doing?” “Oh we’ve been fighting fires and having hassles” and you can say what hassles you’re having, which you’d be reluctant to say on the RFDS ... because we’ve got everybody else listening in ... you just don’t like everyone to know your own personal business.

The emphasis upon reduplicating the city-based norm of an individual, private, telephone service, and the lack of such a service in remote and regional areas until the start of satellite broadcasting, tended to obscure the creativity of different strategies to overcome communication barriers. One such was the small number of less-isolated areas served by “private” fence-wire telephones. These allowed “free” (no-cost) communication between those sharing the fence wire, but this branching system could also connect into the main network. Once again, the requirement to share the benefit of the communication option between neighbours in the area was secured at the cost of individual privacy; while the distances covered increased the risk of communications failure:

F 55+ Savannah Kingston H: We used a fence wire telephone system, connected to an operator in Meekatharra, and we were on a five-party line, which broke down fairly frequently, particularly if there was rain or thunderstorms, things like that. I mean a thunderstorm, often lightning would hit the wire and just fuse it, so you got no transmission. That was a hit and miss kind of thing. And also, there was no privacy of course, ’cos there were other people on the line.

Gillard et al. argue (1994: 21-2) that for some people the phone is a way of extending “private boundaries ... beyond their home to family and friends [who] were welcome to call any time”. The impression here is that the phone is used to “capture” a friend or household member and bring them into an elastic, psycho-
logical domain of private space. A “private” call has the effect of relocating the other psychologically within the domestic sphere; a “business” call psychologically propels a home-based individual from their domestic context into the public sphere. “A certain amount of pleasure or in some cases relief, is felt when a familiar voice is heard on the other end of the phone: ‘...like I feel a sense of relief, when I’ve heard mum’s voice, that feels, that’s odd to you, but when mum answers the phone, I think oh well she’s fine I’ve heard her voice’ (Ava)” (Gillard et al. 1994: 21-2, original italics). In contemporary societies, both imagined and psychological communities tend to rely upon mediated communications for their existence and pervasiveness.

For many isolated Western Australians, however, it was the 2-way Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) radio transceivers that had for over a generation formed the foundation for daily communications beyond the homestead, with their local community, and which formed the backdrop against which the new satellite broadcasts were positioned.

2-Way Radio: RFDS

Alongside the incorporation of new technologies into the communication choices of remote area residents ran a keen appreciation of the changes that had resulted. This was evident in discussions about the start of the telephone service, and the consequent, almost total, demise of the RFDS radio community which allowed households within broadcast range to hear exchanges going on, rather like a 2-way citizens’ radio band.

It was this very capacity for ubiquitous monitoring of RFDS broadcasts that has caused such problems for Anne Latour when she tried to keep contact with her children after they left their close-knit station-bound family home for boarding school in Perth, for the years of their secondary education. One in particular had had a number of problems with home-sickness and settling into school life, but for a long time Anne had no idea how this child was faring:

F 40-54 Anne Latour H: [Couldn’t the children have let you know how they were on the [RFDS] radio?]

Yes, but with a great deal of difficulty. You see, when Bree started school, there were actually no telephone calls on the radio. They only came in towards the end of the radio’s existence. In the beginning, the only way they could get in contact with us was a telegram, and that did happen occasionally, you know, but […] that wasn’t really the thing to use, you know, to say things like, how you feel […] Also, the radio having certain times really didn’t fit with a boarding school.

Right. So it must be quite difficult because station families are really very close, aren’t they?

[...] One day we got mail [left the station to collect it, a four-to-five hour round trip] after weeks, and the first letter I opened [Bree] was thinking of committing suicide, the second one she was deliriously happy, and the third one – I’m not quite sure what that was – and I’d actually opened them so I didn’t know whether she was still feeling like committing suicide or happy or you know, and it really becomes..... was rather difficult.
From this exchange it was clear that the RFDS broadcasts had never permitted the communication of real-time uninhibited intimate family exchange, as was enabled by a private telephone service. Even so, over the years, many interviewees had found the RFDS chat sessions a particularly pervasive substitute for company:

F 40-54 Fran Coleridge S: The phone will lead to isolation. There’s an old lady down here, she’s about 80, and she housekeeps for her brother and she’s still wearing – her mother died 50 years ago – but she’s still wearing her [mother’s] clothes. She is so encapsulated in her life. And she used to have her [RFDS] transceiver. Any time, Myrtle would know anything that’s going on. Anything. Birthday party at [local station], she’d know about it. She knew everything. Because she used to have the transceiver on all the time. And now there’s hardly any people on, and she’s a poor little old lonely lady that doesn’t hear anything now. Can you see that? (Cited in Green 2005)

The consumption of the RFDS in these circumstances could act as a means of integrating the individual household within the public social exchange of the local homestead community. The RFDS communications service was used to make a difference in a crisis, such as a health emergency, or a bush fire, but it could also communicate the ongoing conversation of a neighbourhood. One cost of gaining the privacy of a telephone was that community participation in RFDS broadcasts gradually withered away.

F 40-54 Anne Latour H: [When did you get telephone?]
I think it’s two years now, and that was because it didn’t exist up here before that. And yet, in another way, you were more out of touch on the telephone with your community than you were with the radio, which is quite funny but it’s – you know, when the telephone goes off [hang up from a call] you’re really alone, whereas when we had the radio, even if you couldn’t pick up the people close by, there was always someone on the radio.

For people living in cities, that sense of an ongoing community exchange is often supplied by tuning into local radio broadcasts (especially call-back and listener response programmes); watching television; or using the internet. However, even in its role of connecting homesteads into a broadcast community, the RFDS was not always an effective technology. This could be especially true at times when it was most needed: when the weather was extreme.

F 40-54 Felicity Rohrer H: The atmospherics were so bad we couldn’t hear half the people and they’d get sick of it and wouldn’t come.
Right. [Interviewer though this comment referred to shortwave radio] and was reception good on RFDS?
Well, that’s what I mean – it wasn’t.
Oh. I see.
Oh, some times it used to be shocking – you couldn’t get through. I often used to worry before we had telephones if we had an emergency. I had an emergency here one night and I couldn’t get through, couldn’t get through – you know, it was bad weather, and eventually after about an hour Meekatharra [base station] picked me up but it took ages and I was just about hysterical by the time I got through because it was quite serious. Somebody was quite seriously ill. So you don’t always get through.
Alongside the concerns about privacy and reception, which balanced the positives of having access to a neighbourhood on the radio, were comments about control and the hierarchy of status related to RFDS use. According to Greg McGinley, although there might be a large staff on an isolated station or rural property, there was generally only one person with unfettered access to the radio set; the manager’s wife:

M 40-54 Greg McGinley H: A lot of people talk about the community life on radio, how they kept in touch and talked to everybody. But really that was either just the managers or the owners talking to other people. The ordinary worker, he didn’t have those communications, so he didn’t have communications with anybody. Only the manager or the owner, if the owner happened to live on a property, he, they had the communication thing with the radio they talk about. But the ordinary worker didn’t. He had nothin’ [...] It was a necessity which was mainly performed by the manager’s wife, you know, they had big Aboriginal staff on the station in those days, and you know there was a lot of medicals and telegrams going backwards and forth and you know, to me, not often the manager had the time to actually get on it – it was more the manager’s wife – that was her job to talk and communicate on the radio, you know. Most times the manager would, in the wet, would generally listen at seven o’clock [am, when there was a roll call of stations in the area] because he got all the rainfalls, then he knew what was what – but other than that he didn’t spend a lot of time on the radio.

What? Then he’d know which roads were passable?
Oh, which roads are passable or, especially if you live down-river, you knew when a flood was coming.

Can the connections forged in a phone call be differentiated from those pertaining to a RFDS 7.00am roll call? Anderson (1991 [1983]) has written extensively about the imagined community and its contribution to nation building, and comments that “It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (1991: 6). His view is that “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined” (Anderson 1991: 6). Yet what when the “primordial village” is not a village and is not face-to-face? It may be that where people need not “imagine” the members of their community, but instead know them in face-to-face encounters and regularly meet them in mediated communication, it becomes appropriate to talk about the invocation (the “calling up”) of a psychological community.

According to such an argument, a psychological community might be perpetuated through mediated communications which free a smallish group of people to engage in a community-building project regardless of the absolute limitations of geographical co-presence. The boundaries of RFDS radio reception created a number of radio-based communities around each RFDS base station. The daily managers’ roll call, the background exchanges on the radio, and the lack of daily voice contact with people beyond the radio community all helped to construct a sense of community which did not rely upon imagination but upon the limited range of communication technologies available and upon a sense of inter-
dependent reliance at critical times, such as in the face of flood or fire. In domest-i
ticating the RFCS service, each homestead was also incorporated into an RFDS com-munity and its residents learned how to look out for each other’s interests even as they protected their own.

Each specific RFDS broadcast area was typically centred around a hub of medi-cal, social, educational and economic services, such as located in a regional town like Meekatharra or Carnarvon. The psychological community of thirty years ago, created through RFDS exchanges, might have a number of parallels with a small online community today. The definition that Howard Rheingold gives for virtual communi-ties is that these “are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient hu-man feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace” (2000: xx). In effect, community is brought into being through affective investment both in me-diated and face-to-face contexts. People feel themselves connected through emo-tional links forged in communicative exchange, rather than simply through co-

Broadcast Radio

Moving from the potentially-domestic familiarity of the phone, and the psycho-
logical community built around the local RFDS service, the wider context of mass broadcast communications proved highly problematic for residents of remote Western Australia at the start of satellite broadcasting. As one Broome respondent commented in the questionnaire phase of the research (1987):

There’s a deep need for programs that make people feel good about their region; and no need at all for programs (or a program philosophy) that makes people feel like country bumpkins, second-class citizens, or idiots for preferring simplicity and isolation over complexity, clutter and the cancer-inducing madness of the cities. We like it up here; not all Australians think the same; not all Australians need or want the same television and radio programs. Please help. (Green 1988: 27)

This quotation indicates a different “imagining of community”: the perspective of a Broome resident conjuring up a policy maker or service provider intent upon homogenising the wider Western Australian audience, and resolutely determined to position remote area residents as “lesser”, for their preferring not to be city-dwellers. A homestead respondent associated with the remote shire of Sandstone commented upon her perception that remote broadcasters focussed upon radio news and information programs at the expense of the music channels typical of city-based radio. This was interpreted as “an aside” about country people’s igno-
rance and their over-arching need for information.

Rosemary Westlake complains that the ABC: (F 25-39 S) “Think that country people are idiots ... they think that all we ever want to listen to is information about what’s happening in the world. We get very little music ... Virtually from six o’clock in the morning, all we have is talk-backs or interviews and I fail to see
– if the city people don’t need it, why do the country people need it?” (cited in Green 2004). Here, the lack of entertaining radio content was deconstructed as an expression (by city-dwelling decision-makers) that country people are ignorant, if not actually thick. Such constructions were resisted by the remote audience, but they illustrate the importance of understanding the context into which broadcast communications are introduced.

Some young adult listeners could not wait for a “commercial radio” sound to reach towns and communities in remote areas. The loss was particularly acute when the would-be audience member had spent some years in the state capital, and keenly experienced the differences between the commercial radio stations in the city, and the ABC in Broome as a particular kind of loss and longing. With texture, pace, music and advertising, the commercial soundscape has a flavour of its own. Megan Garrard (F 18-24 B): [Did you feel in any way cut off from your old life {in Perth}] “Yeah, and also because of the radio. We only got the ABC radio [in Broome]. We didn’t like that very much. It was good when we could go down to Perth for holidays and we’d tape 96FM [commercial] and bring it back up with us so we could listen to it.” The ephemeral sound track of the city of Perth became this interviewee’s abiding companion on the highways of rural and remote Western Australian communities.

There was widespread appreciation that the situation relating to radio broadcasting was overdue for change. Even while waiting for the commercial radio service to be on offer via the satellite, and at a time when audiences were restricted to the ABC regional radio offerings, the relative disadvantages of the outdated technology were clearly remembered:

F 40-54 Heather Bingham B: When we first came to the Kimberley, the only radio that was available was ABC shortwave and that was only – once the sun came up in the morning – that finished. So it was only available when the sun wasn’t around. So you couldn’t listen to a radio in the daytime.

Oh. I wonder why that was?

Because the atmosphere affected it. And that – it would have only been about five years ahead [of] the advent of television, that radio was available..... And even although there was radio during the darkness, this could go out with atmospherics as well, so it wasn’t pleasant listening to short wave. Have you ever heard short wave? Beep, squeak, squeak. You tend not to listen to it a great deal.

Cedric Maplethorpe agreed (M 40-54 FX): “It was difficult ... I think I’ve destroyed two or three radios in my time. You’d used to be that wild – I’d throw them against the side of the wall.” Some people, such as Stan Cathcart in Fitzroy Crossing, went to extreme lengths to try to set up systems which would deliver broadcast news and (the all-important) sport:

M 55+ Stan Cathcart FX I had seven radios here when I come to town. We used to have them out in the bush and got them all around the bloody joint and they’re all tuned in. There’s a dirty great big mark where Radio 2 was, and you’d switch over at bloody 25 past 7, 5 past 6 at night. They’d cut it out and you’d have to find what-saname, so you’d have two radios sitting there and tune the other one in. You just hit the buttons. But half the people up here never listen to Perth anyway.
In the early days – I’m getting back now – when I listened to the cricket in the old police station, we used to go down there and say to the coppers there, and we’d ring ’em up and we had a dirty great big radio set-up down there, and find out the cricket results. Sit there drinking cans and listen to police reports coming in, and they’d come through to us, listening to what the results were. That’s in the early or late sixties, you know. It’s changed a bit you know, when you think of it.

There was an audience for sport in remote areas long before there was satellite television: F 40-54 Felicity Rohrer H “Did they used to do that [talk sport] before you had the satellite dish?” “Oh, I think so: because we used to get it on the radio.” There are some indications, in the lengths some audience members had gone to in order to secure an audible signal, that some technology consumption reflects the popularity of sports as a program genre, rather than determining it. One of the big advantages of consuming sports news and broadcasts, in a country as keen on sport as Australia is, is that sports programming provides ready access to cultural materials for social exchange. It is likely, for example, that a stranger or newcomer will welcome the opportunity to take part in a sports-based conversation, and a sporting discussion runs less of a risk of polarising a response than with an equivalent exchange around politics. There was some evidence that sports broadcast consumption was used in remote areas, as in some urban communities, to strengthen gendered community:

F <17 Naomi Rowe B: [Do you think most girls and women are interested in sports programs?]
Well I know at our school they are. All the schools I’ve been to, all the girls are really involved in sports.
In watching them as well as playing them?
Yep. Not all the girls, but most of the girls are.
Would you say that they are more interested, as interested, less interested, than the boys are?
Depends on what sport it is. If it’s footy, it’ll be mostly boys. But if it’s tennis or hockey or something like that that involves mainly girls, it’ll be mainly girls that’ll watch it then.

This conversion phase of using the raw materials of sports audience membership to participate in popular culture means that the enjoyment of taking part in the broadcast audience is offered added value in the construction and circulation of “social pleasures and meanings” (Turner 1996: 42) in conversation and exchange.

Satellite Television

A number of respondents had a vision of the entire process of satellite broadcasting from the recording through to the delivery, with the domestic satellite dish itself providing the final link in a near-miraculous chain:

M 40-54 Carl Brunell FX: Then to see, see, the FA Cup Final in colour. I mean that was just – it was marvellous, but you take it for granted now. And then, satellite TV is the same. I mean, to see it instantaneously from Wembley [Stadium in the UK], I mean that was – I’m of a generation that I can remember, I mean I came here by sea when I first came as a kid. It took us five weeks. I mean, and there was a lot of water
between here and the UK and I’ve done the trip two or three times, I might say, see, and then to see it instantaneously by satellite, you know, I still can’t get over that. That to me is a big deal, but for this generation it’s no big deal. For me, it’s still a big deal.

Arguably, it may be the physical experience of the five weeks in a boat crossing “a lot of water between here and the UK” that gave Carl Brunell his keen appreciation of distance, and of the technological feats required to deliver a colour picture live from Wembley.

Because of its importance to some community members, the consumption of sport was used by some respondents as a justification for “indulging” in power generation during the day. At the time of the research, many remote area residents were not on “town power”, the state electricity grid, but used a diesel generator to make their own power to run electrical appliances. For these respondents, the use of electronic technology involved running a loud, smelly, hot, expensive machine, often in the heat of an Australian summer. Sometimes the extravagance implicated in powering up the generator was justified in terms of owners’/managers’ responsibilities to the “staff”, rather than in terms of personal pleasure:

F 40-54 Felicity Rohrer H: [How about the men {working on the station}? Are they keen on sport?]
Oh, yes, they look at the cricket, test, Sheffield Shield and the footy. They all like the footy. Usually on Saturday afternoon we run the motor for a while, while the footy’s on – from 3 or quarter to 3 or whatever it is until 5 – because the staff like to look at it over at the cottage and everywhere. And the Olympics – they like to look at those things.

Such considerations were also relevant when it came to deciding which station to watch, GWN or the ABC. A single feed from a satellite could not be used to deliver ABC and GWN simultaneously, so the person with the power to decide the channel often expressed a responsibility to take into account the (supposed) viewing preferences of other people who may be viewing. This remains a constant difference between consuming television in the city, and in homestead viewing; even after the introduction of satellite broadcasts: F 40-54 Felicity Rohrer H “We don’t look at things that we like looking at as much, because we’ve got to think of the staff. See, they all look at things, so we do look at the commercial channel probably more than I would if there was no one else looking, because they like the … well, we do too – but they like the comedies and the films and things like that” (cited in Green 2004).

The reverse perspective, from one of the residential staff (of a different station) indicates that these good intentions do not necessarily have the desired effect. Instead, Kylie Molkner F 18-24 H commented that it “can be incredibly frustrating if you’re right in the middle of something and the boss doesn’t want to watch it and it just flips over and you’ve got no say”. Given the unpredictability of the programming, Kylie tries not to invest too much in planning or hoping for what she would like to see: “We don’t buy TV programmes [guides] because we know
what we’re missing out on because the big house controls the black box and what they’re watching is what you see” (Cited in Green 2004).

The issue of needing power supplies on top of the expensive investment in satellite technology underlies discussion of radio, television, and VCRs in many remote areas. Tried and true strategies were used to circumvent this problem:

F 40-54 Felicity Rohrer H: We have bought an inverter so that we can have power in our television during the day without having to put the motor on. So we bought that – that’s extra. We wouldn’t have had it if we didn’t have [satellite] television. So that we can pop it on if we want to look at something.....

What’s an inverter?
Well, you charge up batteries – 12 volt batteries – and that’s 12 volt power and then it comes through the inverter which changes it to 240 to run your electrics.

So when you have the generator on you’d be recharging these batteries and then you’ll use them during the day when the generator’s off?
Yes.

How many hours would that give you?
Oh, probably only about four with the television – with radio all day – it all depends what you’ve got.

Throughout the interviews there was a strong awareness of the personal costs of accessing satellite television and the lack of choice in services compared with people in the city. In some ways, even as the satellite broadcasts introduced a link with the capital, they underlined the implications for country people of being located so far from the urban centre, remote from the core.

**Conclusion**

A desire to “consume the city” became clear in some comments from country respondents. One such was by a homestead interviewee, Arthur Porchester (M 40-54 H). “As far as I’m concerned, you’ve got local radios that handle the local area and the last thing you need to have is the ABC that’s going to be handling the local area as well..... Now, the contact that I love to have, mode of media, is to keep in contact with the city. So that I’m not just a country boy, if you like to call it.” Here the city axis is not only an emotional attachment; it is an indicator of “the significant other”. In further explanations concerning the inadequacies of a regional service, Arthur illustrate[d] the empowering importance of understanding the city sufficiently, and having appropriate access to city information, to be able to take on the “others” at the essentially-city game of capital accumulation – and win:

M 40-54 Arthur Porchester H: I’m an avid stock exchange watcher, and at twenty past one every day on ABC [there] used to be a report on the stock exchange. That’s no longer available to the regional listeners and to get that I have to use my dish and go through the Radio National and that’s the only way I can get it [...] I think being, you know, producing an export commodity, I believe anything that’s really happening politically, or to the value of the Australian dollar, affects us. Might not affect us right immediately but it certainly affects us in the long run, and I think it’s very important.
Another benefit of satellite television was a mini-revolution in the daily experience of farming. Bart Cromack (M25-29 H) commented upon how useful it was that “every night you had an update – you could see the weather map for yourself. You could read what was going to happen the next day and also look at cyclone warnings”. But there was more: for Bart, improved communications helped ease the responsibilities of farming well. “It made life a whole lot more enjoyable, really. Instead of having to listen the radio every five minutes to find out what was going on, you could just go to the satellite and see”. The comments of Arthur Porchester and Bart Cromack underline the valuable economic and safety benefits of the satellite technology, particularly as these impacted upon rural life.

Ultimately, as well as making life easier, and more ordered, satellite broadcasting technologies introduced new ways of doing things, and new ways of seeing the world. One respondent commented on a change of outlook that she had noted within farming families:

\[ \text{F 18-24 Kylie Molkner H: The ones that are growing up, too, are starting to see their life as a business as well as a lifestyle. And I think that [a lifestyle] is what a lot of the old traditional farming families have been – you know, the old salt of the earth. And things – like, they’re televising video auctions of cattle now and this sort of thing. That’s bringing technological media into the farmhouse […] that was never there before and it’s starting to become a lot more competitive and I think that’s where media has done that.} \]

The Australian domestic satellite, AUSSAT’s initial subtitle, was commissioned to do more than “domesticate” remote Australia, and bring it into line with communities in regional and metropolitan areas. Even so, the translation of the public world of city politics and current affairs into the context of the remote household had the effect of unifying elements of domestic life throughout the nation, regardless of location, as households in remote areas incorporated the broadcast programs into the rhythms of their daily life and into the content of their conversation. The domesticated media product was then converted into public property in the process of community building.

Prompted by the introduction of satellite broadcasts, many remote area residents worked diligently to protect a distinct way of life and to assert the value of relating differently to broadcasting and its products. The introduction of television delivered directly by satellite became the trigger for a redefinition of what it is to be remote or regional, rather than a lessening of the experience of remote or regional life. In many senses the introduction of broadcast television heightened that sense of difference, sometimes by underlining the challenges of procuring the signal and the lack of choice when compared with equivalent broadcast audiences in the city.

In summary, when considering the research question which informs this paper: “How did the domestication of satellite broadcasting by remote area audiences impact upon their subsequent consumption of communication technologies?” it is clear that the processes by which media products had been circulated in RFDS...
communities were harnessed and adopted to the new media technologies. The big differences introduced by radio and television meant that there was more cultural content to consume and convert into social currency, and that this cultural content was more likely to be shared with urban populations. At the same time, the advent of the private telephone offered a greater opportunity to connect with people beyond the range of the local RFDS base station. One impact of the changes in the communications environments is that there appears to have been some “romanticising” of the benefits of the RFDS two-way radio service: although many respondents were also clear about its disadvantages in challenging weather, when it might be most needed, and in terms of the lack of access for most people living on a station property.

When this research is considered in the light of Australia’s forthcoming rollout of the National Broadband Network (NBN), it is clear that the rationale for the broadband initiative runs into a significant problem. Although Australia’s Prime Minister Kevin Rudd couched the NBN initiative in terms of a unifying vision: “Nation building for the 21st century lies in building a new national broadband network” (Rudd, cited in IPA 2008) it instead runs the risk of re-inscribing the very communications divide that Tony Staley claimed in 1979 (2225, 2228-9) would be dispelled by the satellite. Given the extent of the Australian outback, it is almost impossible to consider cabling all communities and isolated homesteads. Even so, the proposed $Aus43 billion dollar broadband service is built upon a fibre-to-the-home “superfast” 100 megabits per second internet service for 90% of the Australian population, coupled with satellite and wireless strategies to ensure a minimum 12 megabits per second service to the remaining 10% (DBCDE 2009).

There is a pattern of an increasing proportion of the population falling on the wrong side of the proposed digital divide. In March 2008 2% of Australia was to be excluded from the superfast broadband (Conroy 2008); but by April 2009 this proportion had risen to 10% (Conroy 2009). The difference indicates a change in exclusion from the full benefits of the NBN of “remote and very remote” Australians, who account for 2.3% of the entire population (ABS 2010), to include almost all Australians living in “outer regional Australia”.

Given that 498,168 people live in “remote” and “very remote” Australia; while 2,062,966 people live in “outer regional” Australia, the total of number of residents in very remote, remote and outer regional Australia totals 2,561,134: about 11.64% of the population of 22 million (ABS 2010). The indication here is that the 12mps service is going to be the default for almost every Australian not living in “a major city of Australia” or “inner regional Australia”. Policy makers are faced with a significant challenge in persuading Australians beyond the urban and regional cores that any equalisation of communication offered in the past 20 years has not been severely compromised by the relative disadvantages to be faced by rural audiences in the post NBN-future.
Lelia Green is Professor of Communications in the School of Communications and Arts at Edith Cowan University in Perth, Western Australia. She conducted the fieldwork upon which this research is based in the 1980s, and remains involved in remote area communications research. Lelia is a co-Chief Investigator with the Australian Research Council's Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation, and is the author of The Internet: An Introduction to New Media (Berg: 2010). E-mail: L.green@ecu.edu.au.

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Super Network on the Prairie: The Discursive Framing of Broadband Connectivity by Policy Planners and Rural Residents in Alberta, Canada

By Maria Bakardjieva & Amanda Williams

Abstract
This paper focuses on the case of the SuperNet, an infrastructure project designed and sponsored by the provincial government of Alberta, Canada with the objective of providing broadband connectivity to public facilities, businesses and residences in rural communities. The data were collected through individual interviews, focus groups, and town hall meetings in the course of a collaborative research initiative (The SuperNet Research Alliance) that investigated the social construction of the broadband network from multiple perspectives. The objective of the paper is to examine in parallel the discourses in which the concept of broadband connectivity acquired meaning and substance at the levels of 1) provincial government and industry policy planners and 2) the residents of the rural communities who were the intended beneficiaries of the SuperNet. Using actor-network theory as a departure point, this analysis takes stock of the framing devices employed in the two sets of discourses and of the distinctive worldviews that generated them. It looks for the meeting points and the disjunctions between the grand visions and the grounded projections underlying the positions taken by the two respective categories of actors. Differences in the interpretation and appropriation of broadband among rural Albertans themselves are discerned and related to social factors characterizing different situations within rural areas. Rural broadband connectivity thus emerges not so much as a one-dimensional access equalizer for rural people, but as a complex mediator of opportunity, participation and identity.

Keywords: Alberta SuperNet, broadband connectivity, actor-network theory, media space, policy planner discourse, users, sense-making, rural residents.
Introduction: A Rural Media Space in the Making

As the opening comments to this special issue suggest the question of how best to imagine rural media spaces in an increasingly global and technologically driven world has been largely overlooked (Andersson & Jansson 2010). This paper begins to address this absence by offering an empirically situated investigation of how two distinct “discursive communities”, policy planners and citizens, struggled in the early phases of a broadband policy initiative to assess the challenges and opportunities of an emerging rural media space. The term “media space” is employed in the sense proposed by Couldry and McCarthy (2004:2), as a term that:

…at once defines the artefactual existence of media forms within social space, the links that media objects forge between spaces, and the (no less real) cultural visions of a physical space transcended by technology and emergent virtual pathways of communication.

This concept is useful because it allows us to envision a complex and multilayered object of study that encompasses at the same time media technology and the practices of its construction and use along with the concrete physical and social environments that these artefacts and processes originate from and produce. All elements of this definition of media space are present in the case study that we consider in this paper. This discussion closely examines the construction of a broadband communication infrastructure driven by the explicit goal of transforming the political and economic landscape of rural Alberta by forging links with distant places and how that project struggled to fit into the existing physical and cultural spaces of the people it was supposed to serve. With these intertwined dynamics unfolding over a relatively short period of time, some clear observations of a media space in the making emerged, one that to this day is still solidifying.

This contribution begins with a brief discussion of the case in question: the Alberta SuperNet. The theoretical and methodological dimensions of this particular examination are then supplied. In this instance, it is argued that a useful way to begin thinking about rural media spaces is via the theoretical lens of actor-network theory. Following that, in the findings and analysis section, the understandings of the two specific discursive communities we studied are presented and then juxtaposed against each other. This permits not only a greater appreciation of the complexity associated with this case, but also allows us to formulate several general conclusions of practical and theoretical significance which are reflected upon in the final section of this paper.
Some Background on the Alberta SuperNet Case Study

The Alberta SuperNet is an over half-billion dollar publicly and privately funded initiative approved by the Government of Alberta in 2001. The goal of this project was to connect 429 communities (urban and rural) through 13,000 km of fibre optic and wireless infrastructure. Primary partners in the initiative included: the Government of Alberta who funded the construction of an “extended network” linking government facilities in over 400 of the smaller rural communities province-wide; the Bell Consortium that financed and built the privately owned “base network” linking 27 of Alberta’s larger urban communities; and Axia Net Media Limited, a company that took on the responsibility for managing and operating the extended portion of the network on the province’s behalf. Many have positioned the SuperNet as a “precedent setting” case in efforts to promote rural broadband connectivity (Axia Net Media Corporation 2007; Cherry 2004; Dutton et al. 2004; Mitchell 2007). According to its proponents, four contextual factors make the technical dimensions of this initiative particularly noteworthy.

First, the technical infrastructure of the SuperNet itself is an impressive achievement. It has been praised for both the sheer scale and scope of its overall geographical coverage and for the rapid time frame in which it was built (Cherry 2004; Mitchell 2007). The Canadian province of Alberta stretches over 661,848 square kilometres. Its relatively small population (approximately 3.4 million) is concentrated in six metropolitan centres. At the time of the SuperNet’s inception (2001), 80 percent of Albertans lived in urban centres, yet the government acknowledged that a great deal of the province’s economic success was generated by industries such as oil and gas, agriculture and forestry located in rural areas. The vast majority of these areas were still reliant on dial-up Internet services. Consequently, the government believed that rural jurisdictions might benefit from increased access to broadband and in the process help facilitate the province’s overall economic growth (Axia Net Media Corporation 2007: 1-2).

A second notable feature of the SuperNet is its unique business model (Mitchell 2007). As a hybrid enterprise, the SuperNet demonstrates both a “supply side” dynamic associated with the construction of large scale technical infrastructure and a “demand side” component in which specific groups are expected to dictate the scope of development and use (Anderson & Christiansen 2007). The supply side dimension of this project emerged because the province and Bell took on the financial responsibility for building a technical network that links over 4,200 locations across the province including all provincial government offices, libraries, schools, and hospitals. The demand side dimension of the SuperNet project is twofold. First, in order for business and residential users to connect to the SuperNet, an ISP must be present in a specific community. The role of that ISP is to buy bandwidth on the SuperNet and distribute it further to private customers. Once an ISP decides to provide service using the SuperNet, they still require a “last mile” solution (be it wireless, cable, ADSL or fibre) to connect their user
In this way, it is the ISP that secures business and residential connectivity in rural communities and ultimately decides the end price for the customer and the speed of the services they will supply. The second, demand-side dynamic, emerges because despite an initial capitalization by government to be linked to the SuperNet, public facilities (such as hospitals, health centres, government offices, libraries and schools) must still pay for their monthly Internet service. In sum, while the SuperNet’s business model ensured the presence of a main connectivity “trunk” across the province, it also anticipated that ISPs would step in to provide last-mile connections and that social services would be willing to pay the required fees to utilize the SuperNet.

A third point of significance is that the SuperNet represented a somewhat unexpected public investment (Williams 2010). During the 1990s, building an information highway became a major priority for Canada, as it did for many nations around the globe. In 1994, the Government of Canada formed the Information Highway Advisory Council (IHAC) to provide direction about how best to proceed. As a response, IHAC produced two major reports, both of which urged the government to invest in constructing a national information infrastructure. Additionally in 2001, a newly appointed federal committee, the National Broadband Task Force, again reiterated the need for ubiquitous connectivity across the country. Despite these high level policy recommendations, very little federal support was earmarked for making universal broadband access a reality (Matear 2002). While federal involvement in promoting broadband connectivity was underwhelming, several provinces consciously chose to expand and upgrade the telecommunications infrastructure within their jurisdictions. In this regard Alberta was the clear leader; its $193 million investment in the SuperNet, represents almost half of the $545.9 million overall provincial broadband investment from 2002-2006 across Canada (Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission 2007: 129). The interview data with policy planners, discussed in greater detail in the findings section below provide some insight into the factors that motivated this provincial decision. According to respondents, the central reasons why Alberta emerged as a leader in terms of broadband provision included: the presence of a politically savvy minister in a newly formed department (Innovation and Science) who represented a rural constituency (Interview 7); a strong internal bureaucratic team dedicated to making the Minister’s ideas a reality (Interview 5, Interview 7); the existence of surplus budgetary funds, which permitted the initiation of new projects (Interview 4); an articulated need to diversify the Alberta economy and make it less dependant on oil and gas revenues (Interview 1); a desire to introduce some new players such as ISPs as additional telecommunication providers (over the incumbent Telus) into the market (Interview 3); and the presence of general information technology enthusiasm, or “bubble,” that had yet to “pop” (Interview 1, Interview 5).
A final factor that makes the Alberta SuperNet an interesting case study is that it became the focus of a large collaborative academic researcher project: the Alberta SuperNet Research Alliance. In 2003, this multi-disciplinary, multi-institutional team set out to investigate the social, economic, and cultural impacts of the SuperNet on Albertan communities. At this time, members of the research team began to explore user relations through public consultations and survey work, and conducted specific studies of tele-heath, distance education, emergency preparedness, libraries, business, and community sense-making practices (Mitchell 2003, 2007). The authors of this article were involved as researchers in this network, and thus had the opportunity to observe first hand through individual data collection projects, and two public symposia, some of the dynamics emerging across the province of Alberta as various actors tried to make sense of this specific policy initiative. While the findings of our individual projects have been published elsewhere (Bakardjieva 2008; Mitchell et al. 2006; Williams 2010; Williams & Langford 2007; Williams et al. 2007) we felt that an important contribution could be made to the existing knowledge base by exploring our data collectively in a holistic manner.

**Conceptualizing the Rural Media Space**

In deciding how to frame conceptually our understanding of the SuperNet as an emerging rural media space, actor-network theory (ANT) was an obvious choice for several reasons. ANT has been proposed by its key founders (Latour 2005; Law 1999) and those working within geography (Hitchins 2003; Murdoch 1997, 1998) as a theory-method uniquely suited for tracing the emergence of socio-technical ensembles that also holds the potential to radically transform conventional understandings of spatial analysis (Murdoch 1998). In addition, it has been argued that ANT promises new insight into the dynamics of political/policy spaces (Woolgar 2004). Finally, given its roots in both ethnomethodology (Latour 1999) and semiotics (Law 1999), ANT supplies a unique set of concepts that encourages a localized and relational look at the competing sense-making practices of various discursive communities.

One of the most compelling ideas offered by ANT which can be productively applied to the analysis of an emerging rural media space is found in Callon’s (1986) notion of translation. This heuristic provides a way to look at how a specific initiative begins and what sorts of processes might be required in order for it to become a stable network of human and non-human actors (people, technology, ideas, etc.). According to Callon, translation can be understood using four key dimensions: (1) problematization, (2) interessement, (3) enrolment, and (4) the mobilization of allies. During problematization, an actor initiates a network formation by defining a problem and recommending solutions. In this early phase, the initiating actor will strive to position themselves, or another actor, as an indis-
pensable resource for solving whatever problem exists, or in Callon’s words as an “obligatory point of passage” (Callon 1986). Interessement is the stage in which the initiator tries to convince others of the validity of their claims. This is accomplished by making the identities and interests of the other actors seem entirely consistent with the initiating actor’s leading interests, as a form of goal alignment. The anticipated outcome of interessement is to lock potential allies in place, and co-opt those not yet convinced, which might require providing certain incentives. If interessement succeeds, enrolment is possible. Callon suggests that enrolment involves a definition of the roles of the various actors within a specific space. It is a strategic process which entails “multilateral negotiations, trials of strength and tricks” to achieve success (Callon 1986: 211). The final dimension of translation, mobilization, requires the enlistment of a dedicated group of spokespersons who speak on behalf of the many and behave according to the roles that were circumscribed for them, thus supporting the initiator’s interests. Once such allies are mobilized, the socio-technical network begins to achieve stability. This is because its underlying logic (including the problem set, the assigned solution, and the circumscribed roles) are all taken as fact and consistently supported by the spokespersons. A successful, or complete, translation is believed to generate a shared space, equivalence, commensurability and alignment. Moreover, “irreversibility” occurs at the moment when a social investment reaches a point where withdrawal would be unlikely (Callon 1991). In contrast, an unsuccessful translation is one in which actors no longer communicate, they reconfigure themselves in separate places with no common measures or linkages (Callon 1991: 145). However, as Murdoch (1998) has aptly noted, networks can be comprised of multiple overlapping sectors such as “spaces of prescription” that are “heavy with norms”, “predictable”, and “taken to be a fact” and “spaces of negotiation” that remain “fluid” and “provisional” because the links between the actors are “divergent” (362). Murdoch’s qualification is useful because it offers the possibility for socio-technical networks to be imagined simultaneously as sites of coherence and difference.

Callon’s notion of translation and Murdoch’s application of actor-network theory to the understanding of space informed our data analysis in this particular instance. Using previously collected material from 10 focus groups in rural communities, 8 town hall meetings in rural jurisdictions, and 10 interviews with policy planners intimately involved in the conception and execution of the SuperNet initiative, this study was interested in describing the nature of the SuperNet as a newly emerging media space made up of technologies, social arrangements and practices, jointly constructed by a diverse cast of actors. Our central goal was to determine whether this media space was a shared space of equivalence, commensurability and alignment? Or was it rather something more fragile? If so, where did the fragility come from and what were the fractures preventing the harmonious alignment of the different actors’ interests and meanings? Our answers to
these questions were gleaned by examining the qualitative data we had at our disposal with a view to discerning the specific points of potential instability in the accounts produced by the two types of actors. We were concerned with delineating the spaces of prescription (where policy planners and rural communities seemed to agree on their view of this particular initiative) as well as the unsettled spaces of negotiation. Finally, we were interested in elaborating the practical and theoretical insights that could be generated from this sort of exploration.

Findings and Analysis

What follows is a brief analysis of the key themes that emerged in the policy planners’ and citizens’ responses to what the SuperNet ought to accomplish, or of how the two discursive communities problematized the technical infrastructure. Each is presented separately first, after which an effort is made to evaluate what these various themes tell us about the overall nature of the SuperNet network as a constitutive element of a rural media space.

The Birth of a Super Actor: The Policy Planner Discourse

The ten semi-structured interviews reviewed for this portion of the analysis were collected with industry and government representatives from April 2007-September 2007. The sampling strategies for this data set was purposive and snowball in that several key actors were initially identified and after each subsequent interview respondents were asked to recommend other study participants. The people that agreed to be interviewed included the following: a member of the committee that first looked at requests for proposals (RFPs) to build and implement the SuperNet (Interview 2); two deputy ministers whose department sought approval and monitored the build (Interview 1 & 4); the Minister of Innovation and Science of the time who served as a public face for the initiative when it was first announced and presented to the public (Interview 3); the head of the communication team responsible for branding the SuperNet (Interview 5); the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Axia, who bid on the government RFP and won, and now manages the SuperNet on the government’s behalf (Interview 6); the Executive Assistant to the Minister of Innovation & Science, who was instrumental in helping ensure that the SuperNet initiative passed through Cabinet relatively smoothly (Interview 7); two senior civil servants responsible for managing the SuperNet on the provincial government’s behalf as it became operational (Interview 8 & 9); an Internet Service Provider (ISP) whose company was responsible for quality control and assurance during the building of the network (Interview 10).

In examining the interview transcripts several key themes were apparent which can be used to map out the policy planners’ conceptualization of this emergent media space as well as to delineate the sources of both its stabilization and fragil-
ity. Each of these themes is identified, bolded, and discussed below in the context of the SuperNet as a translation attempt by the Alberta government.

First, at the level of problematization (the definition of the problem and the recommendation of solutions) the policy planners struggled with a key dilemma: determining the role of government versus that of the local/global marketplace. On the one hand policy planners presented the SuperNet as a way to promote a more equitable form of access across the province so that urban and rural jurisdictions had equal opportunities, or as a bridge over the “digital divide” (Interview 1, Interview 6). As one participant claimed the SuperNet was best imagined as “a made in Alberta solution for getting ubiquitous service in virtually every community” (Interview 1). Another asserted:

If I can be so bold as to sum it up in one statement, there is absolutely no reason why people in the rural parts of the province should not receive the same government services, access to the same business opportunities in the province… where you live should not matter… you can continue to enjoy your quality of life without moving into the big city. (Interview 7)

On the other hand, the SuperNet was also positioned as a way to promote innovation and growth in the telecommunications industry as articulated in the following claim: “we need[ed] to come up with a model that does not take anything away from existing ISPs… we did not want a monopoly but we also did not want the innovators… in small communities to suffer… we are not in the business of being in business, we are in the business of creating an environment where business thrives” (Interview 5). Or in the words of another respondent there was a hope that the government could create a “marketplace” where “businesses would lead” (Interview 6). In this sense, two somewhat incompatible goals were key to the problematization of the SuperNet: a desire to provide universal access as social welfare (where the free market had failed to do so) and a hope to foster the role of the market through new opportunities for growth. The crux of the dilemma was nicely captured in a comment made by one of the civil servants interviewed: “How do we enable and not compete? How do we ensure that Albertans have access to services while we don’t take business out of the game” (Interview 8)?

The desire to promote both these objectives simultaneously explains why the SuperNet’s business model was structured the way it was and also why right from its inception this network was fated to remain a precarious achievement. In hindsight, policy planners recognized the challenges in balancing these competing pressures and critiqued the assumptions of the business model intended to meet the two goals that proved to be rather contradictory. Several respondents argued that the government should have in fact “done more” in terms of satisfying first and last mile concerns (Interview 1, Interview 4, Interview 9, Interview 10) as ISPs are motivated to make money and thus in very small communities they might not see it as economically feasible to provide connections to business and residential users. As one respondent noted, “there is no money in it. You have to have a lot of customers to make it work. It is a tough business model for ISPs” (Interview...
10). Ironically, the SuperNet managed to leave those potential users whom the market had not served in the first place at the mercy of problematic market forces once again.

Strongly linked to the policy planners’ perception of the SuperNet itself as a solution to the rural and urban connectivity gap was the idea of bringing a global economic dynamic into rural Alberta. Policy planners spoke of the SuperNet as a catalyst of economic growth and as a driving force in making Alberta a “player on the world stage” (Interview 1) and “nudg[ing] the province forward” (Interview 4). This initiative was also connected by some participants (Interview 1, Interview 5) to the “Alberta Advantage” a provincial branding campaign designed to showcase why Alberta is a desirable environment in which to invest. These aspirations were unsurprising given the wider socio-historic context in which they were formed: amidst the excited rhetoric of the information highway (Interview 4) and in the presence of a still very much intact “e-bubble” (Interview 1, Interview 5).

An explicit technological determinism underpinned these expectations of global economic grandeur. The technical network was construed as a powerful “super-actor” (Williams & Langford 2007; Williams 2010) that would engender automatic loyalty and alignment among the other parties involved. It was expected to draw isolated Alberta rural areas into global information flows thereby transforming rural businesses, governmental and educational bodies into active players on the international stage. The characterizations of the technical network contained multiple images of the SuperNet’s extraordinary powers and abilities. Among the things the SuperNet was professed to accomplish were: “elimina[ting] geography” and “mak[ing] everybody connected” (Interview 1); “bring[ing] immediate benefits to Albertans… to build business opportunities” (Interview 4); “help[ing] rural development as it evolves” (Interview 8). It appears that, possibly led by their mandate to convince other actors this was indeed an “obligatory point of passage”, policy planners had managed to convince themselves that the technology was going to produce transformative effects by virtue of its mere presence. Their comments suggested that this radical transformation could happen in a relatively short time span if rural communities were sufficiently receptive to such possibilities. Community residents and businesses were prescribed an enviable role in these stories as recipients and beneficiaries of the gifts brought about by the infrastructure. However, little attention was given to the demands and the challenges of their role as key inhabitants of the nascent media space and major players in whose hands it would be to determine the success or failure of the initiative. In other words the strategy of interressement employed by the government actors was to promise the advantages of an information economy and a new rural media space as something that could transpire unproblematically for citizens. While this strategy likely reverberated with numerous aspirations and perceived interests already present in rural communities, it fell severely short of envisioning and de-
scribing the concrete steps that community members would need to take for these promises to materialize.

Interviewed two years after the network had been “lit up”, policy planners displayed a shared disappointment with the project’s outcomes, and particularly with the fact that rural residents had not yet decisively embraced the SuperNet as the saviour it was intended to be. Their comments betrayed the regret they felt due to the lack of uptake by specific user groups and the rural population at large:

The original promise of SuperNet, part of the promise, was that it would also be a great help to research … The SuperNet has been of very little value so far to Alberta’s researchers private and public… There are research projects out into rural Alberta, carbon sensors in various locations, biodiversity carbon monitors in several places, highway sensors, sensors Crowsnest Pass and… to my knowledge not one of them is using SuperNet. (Interview 2)

But it is now just a matter of you have this interesting tool, how do you use it to take advantage of it? At the business level I am really disappointed that apart from an increased use of the agricultural community for watching commodity prices and hedging, and issues like that, there is still relatively little use in terms of building business opportunities in rural Alberta and things like that… to take advantage of the system. (Interview 4)

If you ask me, ‘did SuperNet live up to its promise”? I would say probably not yet. I think it is still simply a possibility. (Interview 7)

This shift from bright-eyed techno-optimism to disenchantment occurred within the span of about two years and helped reveal the temporal assumptions that policy planners had tacitly made. These actors, it seems, had taken it for granted that the transformation of rural Alberta into a vibrant site of the global information economy could occur within a relatively short timeframe. Consequently, they were disappointed by a presumed lack of interest by citizens and the absence of any visible signs of economic growth or qualitative change in the ways rural Alberta did business and positioned itself in the global marketplace. The “nudge,” they believed, had been given, however the province had failed to jump forward. This realization led some interviewees (even the former Minister and chief champion himself) to express measured regret about the millions of taxpayer dollars that had “gone to die” (Interview 3) in the initiative because the opportunities it offered had yet to be realized.

In retrospect, the impatience and disillusionment of the policy planners seems somewhat paradoxical given the fact that they themselves had chosen a business model that depended on the market to take care of the final and decisive step of bringing broadband into the actual living spaces of rural Albertans. As will be demonstrated in the next section, this oversight was the source of frustration for many in the SuperNet’s anticipated user base. On the policy side, however, this specific choice was based on confidence in the automatic and instant capacity of market forces to recognize and grab opportunities when such are offered to them. In a large way, this unsubstantiated faith made rural citizens captives of the ability and willingness of local service providers to live up to the role set for them and
bring connectivity to isolated homes and businesses. A temporal and conceptual fracture in the stabilization of the network appeared when ISPs failed to jump to the task. Along with the overly ambitions definition of the local commercial providers’ role, another reason for their disinterest was the lack of substantive financial incentives compelling their involvement.

To be fair, the policy planners who were interviewed were not oblivious to the problems associated with their enrolment efforts. For example, several respondents revealed that the government did not do enough to reach out to rural citizens regarding the SuperNet’s potential: “there was a community engagement group but I think it got disbanded…. I think it should have been the next level of provincial investment” (Interview 1); “to realize those economic opportunities, the province has not done enough to date to promote that culture… we have the infrastructure, we just have to know how to utilize it” (Interview 5); and “the government has to put money into education….they have not done this” (Interview 3).

The Minister argued that much of this outreach oversight was because the government became so caught up in building the infrastructure that they failed to develop a long-term vision for the project that might have increased user engagement. He claimed: “…our energy was taken up on the implementation of the project. That was probably my fault. While I did understand the technology I did not conceptualize what we would go through in four years…. and what this is going to look like in four years” (Interview 3). Several other respondents drew attention to the fact that the government remained highly pre-occupied with managing the internal tensions with the immediate actors in the network such as the telcos, the ISPs and other government departments (Interview 1, Interview 4, Interview 6, Interview 7).

Finally, some of the policy planners also felt that this initiative struggled in the last phase of translation (mobilization) because it lacked a compelling champion within government committed to success (Interview 1, Interview 5, Interview 7). A leadership issue emerged because there was a Cabinet shuffle and the Minister who conceptualized the SuperNet moved portfolios quite soon after the build began. According to one interviewee, “the new Minister did not have the understanding of what this meant for Alberta and for rural communities… he looked at this as a government infrastructure project… it never really regained momentum after that” (Interview 5).

In sum, the SuperNet struggled to solidify as a predictable network. The project was problematized using two incompatible goals, which resulted in a business model that depended primarily on market forces (the ISP community) and a powerful technological presence (a super actor). This was considered sufficient to entice the rural population to embrace the project without delay. The specific interest- esment and enrolment efforts needed to engage the rural communities fell to the wayside as the government became exclusively preoccupied with ensuring the construction of the technical infrastructure and with accommodating the interests
of the immediate project actors. This oversight was further exacerbated when a shift in leadership pushed the initiative outside of the government’s immediate priorities.

**Little Voices on the Prairie: The Discourses of Rural Citizens**

We now turn our ear to the discourses of ordinary rural Albertans that our project elicited and collected over a period spanning three years. The material analyzed in this section comes from a variety of sources. It includes eight town hall meeting transcripts from 2003 that our research team conducted in rural jurisdictions just after the SuperNet was announced and the build began. The goal of these town halls was to engage potential users in a conversation about what the technology might do, and how communities might “define [their] distinctive needs and aspirations” in relation to it (Mitchell 2007: 10). An effort was made in selecting locales for these particular town halls to represent the diverse types of rural communities in Alberta (such as bedroom communities, truly remote locales, and those jurisdictions located on and off major transportation routes). The locations chosen (and codes deployed for the purpose of this discussion) were: Athabasca (ATH), Canmore (CTH), Drumheller (DTH), Grand Cache (GTH), Morinville (MTH), Pincher Creek (PTH), Rocky Mountain House (RTH), and Vulcan (VTH). The next set of data comes from a series of focus groups, which took place in 2004-2005, and involved discussions with rural business community members regarding the feasibility of a set of specific scenarios. The communities visited for this investigation included: Canmore (FG1), Drumheller (FG2), Grand Cache (FG3), Morinville (FG4), Rocky Mountain House (FG5) and Vulcan (FG6). The final set includes four focus groups conducted in 2004-2006, in which the central aim was to explore how rural citizens made sense of Internet technology, and how these existing notions and experiences prepared the ground for the conceptualization of the SuperNet. The communities selected in this round of data-collection were: Drumheller (FG7), Pincher Creek (FG8), Rocky Mountain House (FG9), and Thorsby (FG10).

This large body of discursive material allowed us to chart a wide spectrum of meanings through which rural citizens related to the *super actor* constructed by policy planners. Importantly, rural Alberta presented us with a complex canvas of differently situated and differently informed human actors who made sense of the SuperNet project in very distinct ways. Age, economic status, occupation and education were predictably among the central factors suggesting different positions in the debate, but the vicissitudes of geography including landscape, distance from central points, population density and even forestation emerged as situational features with high significance to residents. Residents’ experiences of Internet connectivity were shaped by these factors and so were their projections and expectations with regard to what the SuperNet might bring about. Rural Albertans living in small towns already had some type of more or less affordable Internet
provision. Standard broadband in the form of ADSL or cable had become available to these communities in recent years. The farther one lived from such a hub of relative population density, however, the harder, more expensive and problematic it was to obtain quality service. Spread-out farms and residences had signed up for wireless provision where possible, but in some cases a hill, or even a bunch of big trees, could erect an insurmountable barrier for the signal. Depending on how badly the rural resident’s livelihood depended on being connected, some farmers and entrepreneurs had invested in their own wireless towers or had subscribed for a satellite connection. Added to the Internet service subscription, the cost of the tower, and the satellite link, made these solutions unaffordable to many. The left-out people had to rely on their dial-up connections for whatever use of the Internet they had. From these diverse situated experiences and pragmatic interests came different questions and concerns regarding both the SuperNet and the Internet.

In terms of the problematization of the government initiative itself, many respondents rejected the SuperNet brand while still recognizing the value of high speed Internet versus dial up. Early on in both the town hall meetings and the focus groups, the utility of asking questions about the SuperNet and the Internet separately became apparent. There were significant differences in how these two notions were construed. The set of questions concerning the SuperNet itself typically elicited images of a nebulous entity with no clear features, purpose or application: a set of puzzling construction activities observed by the roadside on the way home; a spout of confusing tech-talk; a pompous rhetoric stemming from government press releases:

> It seems the more I hear, the more confused I am getting… we were discussing between us what we thought the SuperNet was, I had at least three different versions in my mind and now I have four or five. It seems to me the marketing of it, the “be all and end all” of it… it’s coming to your doorstep…it’s like the new coming. (ATH)

> I don’t see an awful lot of demand for the speeds that the SuperNet claims to deliver for what they do… it is basically a government service, a service for the government not for communities. (FG1)

The invocation of “high-speed Internet”, on the other hand, was often greeted with excitement and impatience, with accounts of little victories and substantive gains in one’s capacity and action scope, and with hopeful projections as to what these minute gains could spell for the future of rural Alberta as they accumulate and proliferate. There were several distinct areas in which the benefits of high-speed Internet were clearly recognized and the need for it, where it remained inaccessible, was pressing.

First, those on the “more professional end of agriculture”, as one participant put it, had discovered the possibilities of advertising their cattle online:

> Those people have been able to promote their breeding through the Internet. You want people to buy the semen from your bulls. You can buy semen from bull right from Alberta. You can buy them from France, or you can buy them from England or whatever. And that is definitely very big time. The things with purebred horses, the
quarter horses, all that agricultural end, right down from getting a German Shepard to guard your farm. You can get those kinds of things off the Internet. (FG9)

This approach was bringing direct economic returns as recounted by one of the participating ranchers:

… So now about two years ago we had a sale and two days before the sale people were telephoning: “Could you send us a digital picture on the Internet from front to front, back to side…” And [I] went outside and took the pictures and ran them on the Internet and people ended up driving up for our sale and there were figures up to about $10, 000… That was the highest selling that we had ever had in our sales. (FG8)

But it felt very stressful to do this kind of trade over dial-up. A rural web-site designer explained:

All of my sites involve lots of pictures of cattle and horses mostly cattle pictures. On a regular 56K dial up modem they will not download right away and that’s a big problem when people go to your site and want to see a picture and they have to sit and wait, wait, wait, wait… But in order for them to make it a useful tool it needs to be faster, it needs to be more information, it needs to be more accessible to people. (FG8)

In a second important area of economic activity, rural entrepreneurs who were trying to run a business over dial-up felt the stranglehold of low speed and constantly busy phone lines. Many of the home-business operators we spoke to were in that position:

Um, I’m on dial-up so it is quite painful and especially when you’re talking to someone from Calgary, they don’t understand why, “Oh did you get that email?” … They don’t understand that you’re still on dial-up and there’s, you know, we don’t have the same opportunities as them. … I don’t know, but everybody just can’t understand why I can’t, I don’t want files that take forty-five minutes to download; why you can’t do that two minutes before deadline… (FG10)

Another focus group participant needed high-speed in order to more effectively develop and use her business website to sell the parrot toys that she herself designed and made. Interestingly, this retired farm lady had learned the skills and created that website herself. A small business owner offering accounting services out of her farm summed up this need for speed thus: “Like, the dial-up has to go, or else I’m going to have an ulcer ‘cause now my business is depending upon the Internet.”(FG 10)

Bigger business had gone their own way of ensuring adequate connectivity such as wireless towers and satellite connections, but many of their professional employees did not have the luxury of high-speed when they went back home at the end of the working day. There, they had to put up with the “kerchunk, ker-chunk” of low speed as one outspoken farm woman described the experience (FG 9).

In a third and broader-stroke conceptual move, rural people envisioned high-speed connectivity as a condition that would help expand their personal and professional horizons and lifestyle choices as well as change the makeup of their
communities. One vocal participant and community champion shared his vision of a new set of possibilities opening up to rural areas:

… I can relate back to my experience of being in the city when I was still working there and a lot of people who I was interacting with at that time came from rural communities; that tended to be the peer group that I was associated with. And they all wanted to come back to rural communities because that is where they grew up and that’s where they felt most at home, but they were making a living through the knowledge economy somehow, the digital economy, and therefore unable to come back home because it would limit their opportunities to such an extent. … It used to be just the major urban centers and now with high speed Internet through DSL and cable into those small towns you get some opportunity there and that allows you to participate to certain extent in the digital economy. (FG8)

This reverse migration to the rural area had already happened in the case of a highly trained computer programmer, currently website developer. She shared that finally, with the availability of high-speed, she had been offered a ticket out of the city and back to “small town rural life,” that “place of sanity”, as she saw it: “I live in Rocky not because I chose to do business here, but because I chose to live here. And finally I do business” (FG9). Importantly, for this woman and other professionals in our groups, high-speed connectivity allowed them to stay in touch with their professional peers and helped them be actively involved in their area of knowledge, mostly through participation in virtual communities and discussion forums. More powerful broadband could add voice- and video-conferencing opportunities to facilitate real-time meeting attendance, one business manager suggested (FG9). Thus pursuing professional careers and maintaining professional identities out of the rural heartland was becoming practically feasible.

Finally, if cases like these proliferated, rural residents surmised, “quality people” would be attracted to rural areas, which will transform into “exurbs.” That would diversify rural communities’ economy and brighten up their social and cultural life. Not the least, better integration and mutual understanding between rural and urban populations may take place. Not only new-comers or returning sons and daughters, but also the current dwellers of rural areas would have the chance to contribute to this positive change by starting new businesses (FG10) and telecommuting (MTH). Families would not need to leave for the sake of the education of their children, if a variety of online courses and other educational opportunities were offered to rural young people to help equalize their chances with those of urban kids (CTH, FG7, FG10, see also Bakardjieva 2008)

Given these numerous applications that some rural people had found for high-speed Internet in their thoughts, and in their daily lives, they could not wait to see broadband connectivity extended to all corners of the province, including the far-out farms and residences, at affordable prices. How did, then, the government-sponsored and promoted SuperNet infrastructure figure into these grounded needs and aspirations? Not well enough at the time we conducted our research. The business model selected for the SuperNet caused frustration. The crucial “last mile” connection, being left to theoretical free market players as discussed in the
previous section, was missing. This threatened to make the whole SuperNet enterprise irrelevant to many ordinary people. Needless to say, this absence stirred an outcry among those left out:

When they say last mile they mean last 300 miles... Where did the $400 million go? If anything, a lot of it should have been subsidizing the end. Not just saying “here is a line, deal with it”. (FG1)

Okay but so why isn’t the government helping, like instead of sending [another] local company in the patchwork of who knows who, you know what I mean, why aren’t they working our provincial phone company to bring it to the masses? (FG10)

All it is a wire in the ground that you might have seen this summer.... It gets to your door, but it is like when you are standing in the car dealership and they say “want that car over there? Well you can have it but the keys are over here and you can’t have the keys”. (PTH)

Well, if everybody else decides that okay I’m going to go with satellite or go with a service provider who [does not use the] SuperNet, it was kind of a waste to put SuperNet in, if nobody’s going to use it or it takes so long to get to us that we spend the money, or the satellite technology comes down and then you’ve got all this optic fiber in the ground that we’ve spent I don’t even know how many millions or billions on was a waste because people will find other ways around it. (FG10)

In some instances, citizens were not satisfied with simply criticizing the government’s choices, but offered alternative models they felt the government could have considered such as making broadband services analogous to a public utility and building upon the existing co-operative structures which offer natural gas and electricity to Alberta’s rural communities (FG2); or endorsing a demand side model that began in the rural communities and connected only those with an expressed need and desire for this sort of connectivity (FG1). A strikingly astute comment from one of our focus group spelled out an approach fundamentally different from that taken by the government:

They should have taken the whole budget and started the other way. Not try and build this network because the network is already there. If anything, [the government] should go to the small communities that don’t have anything and ask them what they want and connect them to the major centres. Not go the other way. By leaving the last mile they still have not solved anything. (FG1)

Considered as a process of translation (as per ANT), this discrepancy between the visions of policy planners and rural residents demonstrates the difficulty SuperNet builders had tuning their message to the perceived interests and aspirations of Alberta citizens; or put differently they could not convince rural communities that the SuperNet was truly an obligatory point of passage. Although technically the SuperNet could be deployed to meet the pressing needs of rural people, because of its specific commercial model and hyped image, it missed the target both in terms of problematization and timing. Thus it alienated instead of winning over these very important actors.

As documented in the previous section, policy planners were quick to view the SuperNet singularly as a super actor, as a powerful presence with the potential to
improve Alberta’s economic and cultural environment on its own. Rural citizens were not quite so ready to make that leap of faith. Our town hall and focus group discussions were interspersed with expressions of measured skepticism about the SuperNet as a transformative force. As one respondent noted the SuperNet was best imagined by community members as a “double-edged sword” (PTH) with the potential to enhance their daily lives while also possibly compromising many of the things they held dear. Rural community members were not prepared to ignore what they perceived to be the damaging edge of the SuperNet sword. A fear that the initiative aroused was the possibility of creating new inequalities of access and opportunity within the rural areas themselves. One respondent noted: “If the SuperNet is only developed as far as the terminal nodes in rural towns, it may accelerate the present exodus from the land to the cities” (PTH). Others worried that rural spaces as we know them could be undermined and lose their unique features when they get engulfed in information, activities and cultures originating elsewhere. This is well articulated in the following comments: “Rural people by definition are isolated and I’m wondering…whether or not this broadband experience is actually isolating people even more as their need for using the computer suddenly increases” (ATH); and “In small communities, we’re losing the population, and I still think, in the end, we’re still going to need that one-on-one contact” (VTH). Additionally, the idea that the SuperNet might create less connected and “less resilient communities” (FG7) was raised. Urban people assume a certain fabric of social connections and services that they can rely on in crisis situations. This was not the case with farmers scattered across the prairie. For them a migration to the virtual world did not feel too safe. As one participant stressed:

In case of a disaster, what happens if you do not know your neighbour? As neat as it may be to be able to e-mail people across the world instead of writing them letters, what do you do if your house is on fire? …E-mail your friend in New York? I am sure that is not going to help. (FG7)

Finally, it was suggested the SuperNet itself could be used to harm communities by encouraging technical solutions as opposed to promoting human involvement in the workforce:

There are very, very few professional level jobs in a town of this size, and if we start eliminating potential teaching jobs [with technology], they are going to be cutting the throats of people who do want to live here and love this community. (PTH)

Unlike the policy planners, these participants were not easily swayed by the allure of a technical super actor. There were aspects in their pre-technology life that they cherished and wanted to preserve. They knew that some of the impending changes could be undesirable or destructive. The one-dimensional discourse in which policy planners couched the SuperNet project did not help address or assuage residents’ very real and often concrete concerns. This suggests that facing and diffusing actors’ anxieties around a technical innovation represents another critical moment in the translation process.
In summary, the citizens we spoke to were thoughtful, articulate and reflective actors who highlighted additional sources of fragility in the formation of this new rural media space. Citizens though not spokespersons for the SuperNet brand itself, were vocal proponents of the need for high-speed Internet connectivity over dial-up (not necessarily broadband). They were also acutely aware of both the benefits new technical capacities could introduce into their daily practices and the dangers that such developments potentially posed to their rural lifestyle choices. Like the policy planners, they were disappointed with the project’s outcomes in its early phase. Paradoxically, their discontent stemmed not from lack of interest in what the SuperNet could potentially offer them, but from dissatisfaction with the timing and form in which that potential was being rolled out. Note, however, that the hopes they held out for the SuperNet were firmly embedded in the ongoing lives and situated projects of their families, their business and communities. It thus seems fair to claim that at the time our data were collected, in actor-network terms, citizens were still actively questioning the problematization of the SuperNet since it did not speak to their pressing issues in an adequate way. Moreover, they resisted accepting the SuperNet as an obligatory point of passage (a necessary step, if interessement is to be a success). They remained unimpressed with the government’s existing enrolment strategy as it had very little real meaning to them. That is not to say they believed such enrolment attempts could not be improved. In fact, in some cases rural respondents urged the provincial government to become a model user in order to demonstrate exactly how the initiative could or should have meaning to them. In other words, they demanded from the planner to create a liveable media space rather than to simply construct an infrastructure, no matter how advanced and powerful it appeared to be.

Conclusion: A Tale of Two Discourses

As much as rural folks had to say to the “high uppers,” their voices trailed away in the vastness of the prairie. But even if they were heard, from the elevated standpoint of policy planners, the expectations of ordinary residents may have looked too modest and unimaginative. Yes, residents did not care so much about the super qualities of the SuperNet. Their virtual undertakings were tightly intertwined with the actual spaces of their family life and work. Their journey into the media space of the Internet had certainly began, but with small and very practical steps. No big leaps of ambition, faith, or investment were registered in our focus group records. However, exactly by being small, practical and meaningful, the initiatives undertaken by rural citizens built a steady momentum for change.

This was obviously not the momentous change that policy planners had hoped for. One of them described the situation thus:

I use the analogy of you take somebody out of a fairly comfortable sedan and you give them a jet fighter and then you say “go fly,” it shouldn’t really be surprising
that people don’t understand it and [don’t] know what it can do for them, and there is an educational component that needs to be there. (Interview 1)

In other words, instead of initiating or luring in high-tech ventures to take advantage of the “real broadband,” residents were doing things such as building websites and virtual stores, showcasing their local character, starting parrot-toy businesses, and trading bull semen online. But those parrot toys and bulls represented the grounded reality of rural Alberta. They were the practical projects that constituted the everyday lifeworlds of rural residents. The fact that these projects were finding their way into the media space of the Internet had high significance that politicians failed to recognize to their own detriment. Following a political logic marked by technological and market determinism, policy planners had anticipated that the very arrival of the optical trunk into the frozen soil of the prairie would rapidly transform the horizons of rural people’s lifeworlds. It might have been much wiser, we suggest, to start the project by taking stock of the content and dimensions of these ultimate actors’ lifeworlds and the material situations that generated them, an approach recommended by those that endorse constructive technology assessment (CTA) as the best way to make policy (see Genus 2006; Schot & Rip 1996)

Furthermore, we discovered that relevant actors reside in different strata of the social world and making translation work across these strata often requires a quantum leap and poses a major challenge. In the case of the SuperNet, the network builders, in their professional roles and perceived mandates, operated on the basis of instrumental rationality that, according to Habermas, is characteristic of the systemic relations underlying markets and bureaucracies (Habermas 1984). Accordingly, these actors were preoccupied with the mobilization of other actors functioning by the logic of market and bureaucratic systems: government offices and figures, legislative bodies, companies, industries, and markets, and employed their main “steering media,” power and money. They underestimated, if not completely ignored, the need for taking their enterprise into the realm of the lifeworld of potential users and enrolling them by means of communicative understanding. In the best case, network builders thought of their possible outreach to rural Albertans as education, or informational campaigns, which would flow from the top down and would eventually help bind rural residents’ activities into a set of systemic relations. Little consideration was given to the possibility of engaging rural citizens in communicative interaction, of tapping into their situated knowledges and hearing their messages, of which there were many as the quotes from our focus groups demonstrate. Interestingly, and perhaps somewhat comfortingly, the holdup of SuperNet adoption proved system rationality powerless to remodel the lifeworld at will to its own specifications.

Whatever future the SuperNet and the media space of rural Alberta might have, it will most likely be decided in the interplay between the systems of market and government on the one hand, and the lifeworld of users, on the other. From a theo-
retical perspective, then, we believe that highlighting the distinction between these two types of rationality and their pertaining strategies using a Habermasian view offers an important refinement to actor-network theory. The work of translation proves to be particularly challenging and uncertain across the rift separating these spheres of action. Thus specific strategies designed for closing that rift may be a critical area for actor-network scholars to focus on.

Finally, a parallel analysis of the two discourses reveals two distinct programs with regard to this emergent media space. The media site that policy planners had envisioned and worked to create was akin to what Lefebvre (1991) calls “abstract space” (50), an instrumental territory open for colonization, a space welcoming the formative flows of money in the form of investment, commodity and labour exchange, and power exemplified by efficient communication between the government and local administrations. This colonization prospect did not remain unnoticed by rural residents who spoke of the SuperNet as a “double-edged sword.” For their part, residents envisaged a media space conducive to cultivation through meaningful action. They imagined an environment that was tightly intertwined with their lived material spaces, yet also widened their horizons by enabling practices that would transcend the entrenched rural and urban identities. In short, they construed the media space as one of action, a space that would allow them to establish new connections with the wider world on their own terms.

Thus, in contrast to the preoccupation with “abstract space” characteristic of policy planners, rural residents conceived of the nascent media space as texture, which Jansson defines as the “dominant paths and patterns that are (re)produced through the repetition of practices within a more durable spatial structure” (Jansson 2007: 197). This texture of recursive practices is what the cultivation process evoked in citizens’ discourse would eventually produce, but it could not materialize overnight. Especially given that the infrastructure builders had devoted scarce thought to its creation. At the same time, the development of a media space with a dense and lively texture can be seen as the best way to stabilize the infrastructure’s otherwise precarious actor-network.

Unfortunately, due to resource and time limitations our research did not follow the developments surrounding the SuperNet in these rural communities past the end of the SuperNet Alliance project. Thus, we are not in position to provide a happy ending with a definitive moral. Our account thus remains, as the section title above indicates, a cautionary tale of two discourses that have, each in its own way, shaped the cultural and media landscape of rural Alberta.

To conclude, in this discussion we have used the case of the Alberta SuperNet project to demonstrate how the close examination of the diversity and complexity associated with emerging rural media spaces offers insights with potentially broad practical and theoretical significance. We intend our work to encourage scholars to pay attention to the dynamics of the policy environments in which such spaces are conceptualized, designed and implemented. The allure of new technologies
seems to be something that policy planners have trouble resisting, yet technology-centred projects are costly and sometimes yield disappointing results. As we have shown, it should not be forgotten that the enrolment of various actors in socio-technical networks is hard work. Consequently, a larger and more inclusive blueprint of media spaces, as well as communicative involvement with the diverse actors expected to populate them, should be considered before substantial investments in technical infrastructure are made.

Dr. Maria Bakardjieva is Professor at the Faculty of Communication and Culture, University of Calgary, Canada. She is the author of *Internet Society: The Internet in Everyday Life* (2005, Sage) and co-editor of *How Canadians Communicate I and II* (2004 and 2007, University of Calgary Press). Her research has examined Internet use practices across different social and cultural contexts with a focus on the ways in which users understand and actively appropriate new technologies. She has also published on the topics of online community, e-learning and research ethics. Her current projects investigate the various forms of civic engagement emerging in the new media environment. E-mail: bakardji@ucalgary.ca.

Dr. Amanda Williams is an instructor at Mount Royal University and the University of Calgary in Communication Studies. Her experience as a policy practitioner informs her research interests which include: the role of metaphor in knowledge translation, information and communication technology policy, and public service innovation. E-mail: awilliams2@mtroyal.ca.

Notes

1 The term “discursive community” is used within this context to suggest that knowledge is often produced, shared and appropriated locally within a specific group; it also implies that an exploration of communication practices within such a group may yield some fruitful research findings (Gberardi, 2000). It is however acknowledged that people may be a member of many sorts of different “discursive communities”; thus confining them to simply one for analytic simplicity has some limitations.

2 The term policy planner is used to refer to all those involved in the formulation and implementation of a policy idea, it thus includes industry representatives and other actors along with the traditionally expected policymakers.

3 Modern dial-up modems generally have a maximum theoretical speed of 56 Kb/s, the latency period of connectivity makes certain applications, such as videoconferencing, nearly impossible at slower speeds thus making broadband a more attractive option.

4 The performativity aspects associated with coherence and difference as concurrent spaces is explored by both Mol (2002) and Law (2003) in their discussions of “multiplicity”.

5 For more details on the Alberta Advantage one can consult the Government of Alberta’s website on this topic: [http://alberta.ca/home/43.cfm](http://alberta.ca/home/43.cfm).
6 We realize that Habermas’ concepts are based on a social ontology very different from the one informing actor-network theory. We do not fully embrace the theoretical premises of either of these schools of thought. We are therefore treating them as useful heuristics and sources of conceptual tools for systematic analysis of social phenomena. Seen from this perspective, the two distinct registers can complement and inform each other.

7 Though SuperNet project has been operational for almost five years, a review of the Axia website in late 2009 indicated that over 185 communities of the 422 in Alberta still do not have an ISP offering service in their community (Axia Net Media Corporation 2009). Put another way many communities have yet to really see if the SuperNet will make a real difference in their lives.

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Mediatization, Spatial Coherence and Social Sustainability: The Role of Digital Media Networks in a Swedish Countryside Community

By André Jansson

Abstract

What does the implementation of new communication networks mean for the spatial coherence and social sustainability of rural communities? This paper takes its key from Wittel’s discussion of network sociality, understood as the opposite of Gemeinschaft. Wittel’s argument may inform our understanding of how communicative patterns in rural communities are partly re-embedded through ongoing media transitions. But it must also be problematized. Relating Wittel’s discussion to Halfacree’s model of spatial coherence and Urry’s notion of network capital, as well as to findings from an ethnographic study in a Swedish countryside community, a more complex view is presented. It is argued that global communication networks under rural conditions contribute to the integration and sustainability of the community, as much as to processes of expansion and differentiation. The results show that network sociality and community constitute interdependent concepts. Through their capacity of linking people to external realms of interest, while simultaneously reinforcing their sense of belonging in the local community, online media promote ontological security at the individual level, thus operating as a social stabilizer.

Keywords: Media, rurality, community, networks, space, network capital
Introduction

The overarching aim of this article is to provide an empirical and theoretical account of the social role of information and communication technology (ICT) networks for the production of a global countryside. This particular notion of rural change has been stated within rural studies during the last decade, but it attains a focus on social and economic processes rather than on media and communication. Nonetheless, there are a growing number of articles that underscore the role of new networks in a broader sense (see especially Woods 2007) and thus implicitly highlight the need for rural media studies. As a contribution to the development of such a research field, this study seeks chiefly to ascertain whether the ongoing production of a global, networked countryside implies a growing sense of spatial coherence, following Keith Halfacree’s (2006) Lefebvrian model, and sustainability, or leads to increasing disintegration. Based on qualitative interview data from a Swedish countryside community, it will be argued that the former scenario is the more likely consequence of rural mediatization.

The article begins with a theoretical discussion of how mediatization might affect the spatial coherence of the global countryside, and more specifically, whether the expansion of new forms of network sociality, defined by Andreas Wittel (2001) as the opposite of community, constitutes a potential threat to the social sustainability of rural areas. Next, presenting the empirical results from the Swedish countryside community of Granby (a fictive name) (where the expansion of new networks is an ongoing social and political issue) the article addresses the symbolic role of ICT networks in maintaining a coherent community image and narrative, as well as the social significance of possessing what John Urry (2007) calls network capital.

Studying Mediatization and the Global Countryside

In a recent article, Michael Woods (2007) suggests ten defining criteria of the global countryside: (1) dependence on elongated commodity networks; (2) corporate integration with transnational networks; (3) exposure to (global) migrant labour; (4) exposure to global tourism; (5) non-national property investments; (6) discursive commodification of nature; (7) containing commercially exploited landscapes; (8) increasing social polarization; (9) new sites of political authority (e.g. the World Trade Organization); and (10) collisions of interests, resulting in social and political conflicts regarding the development of rural spaces. While these ten characteristics together “reflect an idealized condition of global rural integration” (ibid: 494), their more exact implications must be studied at particular sites and in relation to their particular historical contexts. Accordingly, site-specific amalgamations (or hybridizations) of the processes suggested by Woods produce a multitude of global countrysides.
While the significance of the media and new ICT networks is not explicitly listed here, the expansion of such institutions and networks is clearly given as a precondition for several of the other processes. As Woods puts it, what is new about this particular stage of rural transformation “is the intensity and immediacy of the global networks of connections and flows into which rural localities may be enrolled” (Woods 2007: 500). Furthermore, there is a representational dimension to the role of media and ICT networks, according to Woods. Through discourse they produce the imaginary structures of rural spaces and places, which are in turn “conveyed through global networks, such that certain rural locations acquire a global significance in that they are known and have meaning in contexts geographically distant from the locality” (ibid: 501). I will, in this article, use the term mediatization to analyze the role of the media within this kind of social re-embedding processes (Giddens 1991). The term mediatization refers to a complex process through which the media (institutions, technologies and representations) disembed social practices and experiences, while simultaneously making these practices and experiences dependent upon the media as such, which means that a new kind of embeddedness is taking shape (see Lundby 2009, for an extended discussion of the mediatization concept).

For those who want to pursue the kind of situated explorations of the global countryside that Woods propagates, understanding the social dynamics of mediatization is a quintessential task. Such explorations, I argue, must be both critical and multidimensional. By “critical” I mean that rural media studies must try to engage with the ideological battles that surround the mediatization of the countryside, especially when it comes to detecting those dominant discourses that reproduce given “truths” about the consequences of new media. For instance, critical studies must not pertain narrowly to either a metaphysic of flow (nomadism) or a metaphysic of fixity (sedentarism) (see Cresswell 2006, for an account of these competing metaphysics). Full access to new media networks can never be a panacea for threatened rural forms of production nor sociality; nevertheless, a number of potentials can be opened-up (see Park 2004, for a visionary account). In addition, it cannot be assumed that “genuine” rural places and ways of life, seen from the sedentary view, will be swept away by media-sustained forms of post-productivism (see Halfacree 2007, for various scenarios of post-productivism). Social realities tend to unfold somewhere in between these two extremes in relatively contradictory ways.

This is also why rural media studies must be multidimensional. The best way to analytically grasp the spatial multidimensionality of mediatization, I suggest, is to apply Henri Lefebvre’s (1974/1991) triadic structure of social space. According to his viewpoint, the complexity of spatial production depends upon the interplay between (1) people’s activities in material landscapes (perceived space); (2) the circulation of spatial representations (conceived space); and (3) spatial imageries in the shape of ideologies, myths, and so on (lived space). A full understanding of
any given space can be reached only when these three realms are analytically inter-connected. This, in the case of rural media space, means that one must attend to (1) material media infrastructures; (2) media representations (whether development plans, place marketing, or popular culture); and (3) lived media experiences and imageries. Furthermore, one must attend to how these are embedded in various ideological formations (see also Jansson and Falkheimer 2006). A similar three-fold model, inspired by Lefebvre, is suggested from a rural studies perspective by Keith Halfacree (2006; 2007), who argues that rural space must be interpreted as a processual entity evolving through the relationship between three constitutive realms: (1) rural localities, (2) formal representations of the rural, and (3) everyday lives of the rural. Although Halfacree does not provide any separate account of media and communication, it is quite axiomatic that, as shown above, mediatization affects all three spheres.

An integrated triadic model of rural media space will help us to articulate the ways in which mediatization contributes to the production of a global countryside as understood, for instance, in terms of the ten key features listed by Woods. Moreover, it will show to what extent such mediatized processes involve conflicts and ruptures between (and within) the three spaces. Halfacree (2007: 127-8) points out that one might then distinguish different formats of a rural coherence from one another, based on whether a certain region or place is marked by congruence and harmony between the three spaces; or at the other extreme, chaos and incoherence. He states that: “In a congruent and unified coherence, with localities, representations and everyday lives internalizing each other, a clear degree of stability is suggested, at least in terms of spatiality; what is conceived is perceived is lived” (ibid: 128).

Following this Lefebvrian framework, I will in this article pay particular attention to how new global media networks affect rural everyday lives and the people’s understanding of their own local municipality. A key-question therefore addresses the level of coherence persisting in the area under study. I will argue that the access to and the use of new media networks have a significant positive impact upon the level of spatial coherence. I will also argue that this coherence, in turn, is an important indicator of social sustainability. By social sustainability I am referring to the enduring potential of a particular community to maintain the social and cultural interests of its inhabitants, including equal access to various services; good opportunities for political and cultural participation, expression and integration; and an enduring sense of community. Social sustainability, which has been adapted in similar ways within rural studies (see e.g. Scott et al 2000; McKenzie 2004), can thus be analyzed through the triadic model of spatial production and points to a particular balance between social continuity and change.

My key point is that the new socialities, which are enabled through ICT networks, are crucial for maintaining a sense of social continuity. I will thus problematize some of the ideas on the expansion of network society which have invoked
an opposition between network sociality and community (see especially Wittel 2001). Before turning to my empirical data, I will briefly present the theoretical discussion which implicitly suggests that the implementation of ICT networks and social media, particularly in rural areas, would lead to incoherence and conflict.

**Rurality Versus Network Sociality**

The division between the city and the countryside – between urban and rural – overlaps with other fundamental social dichotomies, such as global versus local; flow versus fixity; and transition versus tradition (cf Cresswell 2006). As several theorists have pointed out, this division is deeply rooted in modern history. It also has a tendency to get reproduced through mediated public discourse in which the countryside, in general and in terms of particular locations, is typically understood as either a romantic idyll or a rigid backwater (see e.g. Bunce 1994; Fish 2005; Short 2006; Juska 2006; Cruickshank 2009). This imaginary structure was statistically confirmed in a recent Swedish survey. While city life among the Swedish population connotes more cosmopolitan characteristics such as openness and global engagement, the countryside is associated with for instance solidarity and local engagement (see Jansson 2009a). In other words, the people’s understanding of the countryside conforms to Ferdinan and Tönnies’ (1887/2001) classical concept of *Gemeinschaft*, which is a particular type of social communion that stands in opposition to both modern ways of administrative social organization (*Gesellschaft*) and social modes that more recently have been associated with network society.

In this context, I want to pay particular attention to Andreas Wittel’s (2001) discussion of network sociality, which he explicitly defines as counterposed to *Gemeinschaft*. According to Wittel, who is inspired by thinkers such as Giddens and Castells, social organization is disembedded in the information age (in which knowledge and experiences are exchanged through globalized networks). “Networking” becomes a key social practice which occurs more and more often over large distances and which implies that social relations become more fleeting, transient and commodified. However, it must not be understood as a general and evenly distributed phenomenon. Wittel stresses that the rise of network sociality is especially visible in urban (post)industrial spaces and among the new middle classes of media and computer-literate people (ibid: 53). Network sociality is thus an emergent social mode, an aspect of mediatization, that negates the lived space of ”rurality as *Gemeinschaft*”, both conceptually and demographically.

This does not mean that Wittel’s analysis is entirely pessimistic. He does not argue that network sociality automatically eliminates the social significance of *Gemeinschaft* or that network sociality is something inherently bad as such: “Instead of perceiving this process as de-socialization, I suggest a shift away from regimes of sociality in closed social systems and towards regimes of sociality in..."
open social systems” (ibid: 64). This would also imply a shift away from those community forms based on what Robert Putnam (2000) calls *strong ties* (relations marked by reciprocity, trust and mutual obligations), towards those based on *weak ties* (more loosely associated networks). Putnam argues that strong ties condition the accumulation of *social capital*, since people’s ability to successfully pursue joint projects must always rely on a sense of personal trust and a shared knowledge horizon. Such conditions are, according to him, foremost at hand in small scale communities – an argument that has been articulated also in public debate, e.g. by the Slow City movement.

In what way does the potential expansion of network sociality affect rural settings? While Wittel’s analysis revolves exclusively around the urban classes that were up-and-coming at the turn of the millennium, almost a decade later the spread of mobile telephones and the popular use of networking platforms (such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, etc) ask us to broaden his research scope. We must direct our attention to society at large, including the most remote and most recently connected regions of society, in order to grasp what the social intersection of traditional communities (closed systems) and an expanding order of network sociality (open systems) may look like. The empirical results below suggest that once we take a closer look at concrete sites of rural life, we find that network sociality often is a much more complex and socially embedded phenomenon than Wittel’s study suggests. This is not only because the empirical setting is different from the one that he studied, but also because there are certain components within the logic of network sociality that nurture, and are nurtured by, social proximity and trust. John Urry’s (2007) concept of *network capital*, which I will return to later on, is useful for apprehending how new technological networking resources in countryside regions may contribute not only to network sociality, but also to social capital, a sense of stability and spatial coherence. This occurs at two principal levels: firstly, at the level of local community maintenance for which the very introduction and appropriation of new infrastructures may enhance the sense of symbolic and social integration; and secondly, at the level of social agency and everyday life in which network sociality may actually evolve through ritualized social practices, which hold a time-binding function and contribute to the individual’s sense of ontological security. While these two levels are mutually dependent, testifying to the complexity of mediatization, I will discuss them separately for the sake of clarity.

**Community: ICT Networks as a Symbol of Continuity and Integration**

The current research has taken place in a small countryside community in the region of Värmland, Sweden. The region is located at the same latitude as Stockholm and Oslo and borders Norway. I have chosen to use fictive names through-
out this analysis, calling the community Granby and the broader municipality Storvik. The study is based on qualitative interviews with ten persons who live and work in the area, as well as several periods of ethnographic observation. Four of the informants have been interviewed in their professional capacities as leaders and administrators within the local authorities. The rest of the interviewees have participated as residents.

The municipality of Storvik has been, and still is, dependent on a few mechanical industries. It has been heavily affected not only by the general transitions of (post-) industrial society, but also by the economic crisis that began in 2008. However, the Storvik municipality is well-known for its rich cultural heritage and attractive surroundings. It hosts several major cultural events, especially during the summer season, and is a popular shopping destination among Norwegian visitors. Granby is marked by the transition from traditional forms of production to a more service oriented, or “post-productivist”, economy (Halfacree 2007), involving for instance wilderness tourism and innovation industries. Compared to many other similar countryside communities, Granby has experienced a positive development during the last decade due to increasing tourism and the establishment of successful businesses. While the entire community was under threat around the turn of the millennium, when several local services closed down, the situation has stabilized. The school has expanded, and the area is catching up with infrastructural developments. People in the central parts of the community have broadband access, and the mobile network covers a growing area. However, this does not mean that the new digital networks reach all inhabitants. There is still a split between people within the reach of ICT networks and those beyond. The boundary in regards to the mobile coverage is fleeting, but when it comes to broadband there is a distinct split between those who have access and those who have not.

The transition of Granby can thus be understood through a combination of factors that affect both social structures and the population’s sense of belonging. Ronny Johansson, who is the chairman of the Storvik municipality council, points to this interplay in terms of a new “mental position”, but he also stresses the key role played by mediated symbolic components.

Ronny Johansson: Previously, when a new entrepreneur came to Granby people were skeptical – they did not expect anything else than “yet another fucking allowance applicant”. But now when people see what has happened they have raised their shoulders and heads in a fantastic way. “We are indeed something.” It shows how different phases affect people and people’s reactions. […] Ten years ago the attitude was extremely negative out there. […] People’s mental position changes, and that is very important when thinking of the media and its role. […] It is very easy to make the media write about economic cuts and misery, but when it comes to new employment and new opportunities, it is much more difficult to get the conversation going.

The affirmative community narrative of Granby has found its way into local and regional news media and has gained a much deeper significance than ordinary political clichés or media management formulas. The story is vividly retold by the
rest of my informants, and the strength of the story is reinforced by the fact that many people characterize change as an outcome of both fortunate coincidences (unexpected new industries) and collective work, rather than of “artificial” political programmes. Social change is thus understood as “real change” and something that people want to identify with. The expansion of broadband and mobile telephone networks is a case in point and has evoked civic engagement at various levels. Different actors, both private and corporate ones, have tried to bring about this development during a long period of time; and they have succeeded to a great extent. However, there are still people and businesses “on the border” whose interests are too expensive to satisfy, both for the municipality and for private telecom companies. Under such conditions it becomes obvious how the realization of new infrastructure affects people’s overarching sense of spatial coherence. For instance, the tourism business of the wilderness camping in Fors (a small community some miles away from the centre of Granby) is in great need of digital networks but must still operate under highly ambivalent conditions. Nina Eklund, the director of the wilderness camping, points out that insufficient ICT networks lead to a perceived lack of services among their customers.

*Nina Eklund (director):* Mobile coverage… we get lots and lots of questions about why it doesn’t work as it should. Last year it got better when they set up three new masts in the area, but unfortunately they don’t cover Fors, and that’s where our guests are most of the time. It’s crazy! We have been writing for years about this, mentioning our work needs and also the security of our guests if there are accidents in the forests. […] Now when they set up these masts, we thought that it would cover enough, but not Fors […] it’s a disaster. Obviously the mast is too low!

These conditions threaten the long-term sustainability of Fors as a whole. Firstly, if there is no broadband connection (which there is not yet), the main office (including booking administration, marketing, etc) cannot be moved to Fors but has to stay in its present location in Storvik. It will also not be possible to make wilderness tourism a year-round business, even though such a development is much requested. Secondly, most guests are international (coming from Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands), and their demands for wireless internet service and mobile coverage on the campground are steadily increasing. Altogether, Nina Eklund’s statement points to an enduring sense of dissonance between ambitions and resources – an experience of being somehow marginalized within the overall narrative of the Granby community. The general mediatization of society has thus resulted in a sense of lack at the local level, which could even be seen as an integral component of mediatization as such. The situation is also paradoxical from a spatial point of view; while wilderness tourism generates global mobility of people and information, those in charge of the business can neither develop their market concept as they would prefer, nor keep up their work at the very “site of production”.

In my material there are also examples of how the practical and symbolic appropriation of new communications infrastructure corresponds to an increased...
sense of local belonging and integration. Erik, who lives with his family in an old house beyond the limits of the broadband network, describes a long period of fruitless battles with the municipality representatives. Erik and his neighbor, John, eventually made contacts with a private company that is developing a new analogue transmission system for mobile networking. Starting out as test pilots for this new system, the households of Erik and John now have permanent access to the internet and other networking services.

Erik: We were among the first who got this, so then we skipped the local authorities. Instead we could be part of building up this new system. John, who is a real enthusiast, was in contact with the company director almost every week in order to increase the speed of the connection. The boss even went here to study our specific conditions, because they were so unique. […] Previously John and I had even said that we could have dug down the cable ourselves, because I can get hold of an excavator, and those [other households] who wanted to connect along the way could have done that.

This example characterizes the cooperative tradition and do-it-yourself culture that flourishes in many rural areas. During the past years, there have been a great number of similar cases in Sweden. Rural interest groups have "rolled out" the cables themselves and thus ensured more equal access to the new means of communication where the local authorities had failed to do so. Similar events have taken place earlier in history, for example, during the first years of the telephone era in the late 19th century America. News reports from that time and context describe how farmers sometimes created local neighborhood networks by using the middle-wire of pre-existing barbed wire fences. Many of these local networks were eventually connected to main lines and large companies (see Kline 2000; Zimmerman Umble 2003). There are also similar examples from more recent times (see Green’s article in this journal issue). As shown by the interview extract above, the experience of having found one’s own solution to the problem of connectivity contributes to a sense of local pride and becomes a symbolic confirmation of local sustainability in times of social transition.

An important point here is thus that the very quest for obtaining access to networks reinforces a shared identity and commitment among those households and entrepreneurs which are located beyond the regular networks. Furthermore, in successful cases like the one just mentioned, collaborative efforts have wider consequences than the reproduction of social capital; they lead to practical consequences such as new opportunities for carrying out private and professional duties at-a-distance. As will be shown in the forthcoming section, these new opportunities may actually affect people’s decision to remain in geographically “peripheral” regions.
Everyday Life: The Integrating Force of Networking

Moving to the theoretical level of everyday life, there are two points I want to make in regards to the role of new communication networks in rural areas. Both points entail a problematization of Wittel’s (2001) argument as to the rise of network sociality. While my first point (a) is to prove the usefulness of network capital as a term for grasping how new ICT networks contribute to spatial coherence, my second point (b) highlights the time-binding role of network sociality.

(a) The Key Role of Network Capital

As shown in the previous section, among the people I have interviewed, social capital is a prevailing resource that ties the individual to the local context. Most interviewees are also active in local organizations and interest groups related to, for example, sports, music and religious matters – a condition that further express the commonalities between their identities and Putnam’s understanding of social capital. The rise of new mediated forms of interaction has clearly affected the ways in which this local orientation is embedded, also involving the potential for network sociality, that is, contact making within open social systems. However, in the rural setting the social mechanisms and implications are not as clear-cut as in the urban area that Wittel (2001) studied. Among my interviewees, the social role of new media is constituted through a process in which network sociality intertwines with the acquisition and expression of social capital. Network sociality is thus integral to community building at the local level. The following extract from my interview with Thomas, who plays in a band with members from the wider municipality of Storvik, provides a good illustration.

Interviewer: How do you use the Internet?

Thomas: Email is very much used, partly for communicating with the others in the band, and we also have a MySpace page that we maintain. And then… for a while it was much downloading of movies, and now I have discovered Spotify, if you know what that is, and I’m all excited! I can put on exactly the music I want to hear. And browsing through different radio stations is also a very nice thing about the internet, I think. […] We’ve gotten a lot of friends through MySpace… It’s very good to have that page which we can refer to. And people can go in there and have a look. […] It’s a contact network. Soon we’ll give a concert at Royal, and before that we can communicate through MySpace.

Thomas’s glocal repertoire of online practices highlights the problem of analytically separating network sociality from community. As John Urry (2003) argues in his discussion of the relationship between networking and meetings, these two forms of interaction are not substitutable but tend to reinforce one another within the process of mediatization. More networking in general means more meetings, whether we look at the local community level or at the wider geographical context. Similarly, John Tomlinson (1999, 2001, 2008) points out that it is problematic to believe that people lose their general sense of local community only because they start using a wider range of communications media. Tomlinson en-
encourages us to also consider the opposite viewpoint: many new media (perhaps especially networked ones) operate as “technologies of the hearth”, through which close relations are maintained rather than challenged (Tomlinson 2008: 67-8; see also discussion in Morley 2007: Ch. 7).

The interview with Thomas also shows that the dual potential of online media (to operate simultaneously as “technologies of cosmos” and “technologies of the hearth”) is realized only through a process of social shaping, that is, through the exercise of a particular habitus and lifestyle, which this kind of technology both reproduces and is culturally defined through (see Bourdieu 1974/1984, on the cultural mechanisms of social classification). At the structural level we may conclude that increasing internet access in rural areas affects the likelihood for people with a more cosmopolitan outlook (like Thomas) to nurture and exercise their interests. It further enables them to sustain bonds with others who may not be located within the immediate proximity, but in the adjacent regional context. Accordingly, the centrifugal impetus of networking (partly articulated through different forms of network sociality) may encourage people to stay where they are and to become more deeply involved in their local communities instead of moving to more central areas or nodes. This can also be understood as a socially extended consequence of the phenomenological “doubling of reality”, or “doubling of place” (Scannell 1996; Moores 2004, 2008), which the media enhance.

At this point John Urry’s (2007) concept of network capital becomes useful. It helps one to understand the intermediary, stabilizing role of digital networks and especially social media. Network capital refers to all those resources that enable people to move and make contacts in smooth and controllable ways, notably in the global context. Expressions and sources of network capital are, for instance, efficient communication devices, appropriate travel documents and visas, as well as access to convenient meeting places. What makes network capital such a useful concept is its dynamic nature. Firstly, network capital entails a dual movement between separation and integration. The possession of network capital refers to a capacity of letting go and to integrate with distant others, while not being forced to do so. In contrast to social capital, Urry (ibid: 200) argues that “the more general concept of network capital brings out how co-presence and trust can be generated at-a-distance”. The concept thus bridges the epistemological gap between network sociality and community.

Secondly, network capital is not merely about mobility as such, but just as much about the experience of being potentially mobile and connected. While grounded in very concrete spatial resources (Lefebvre’s perceived space), network capital largely operates through spatial imagination and experience (Lefebvre’s lived space). Even though a person like Thomas may not be a frequent traveler, access to global communication networks enhances his sense of connectivity and global orientation (even “exitability” (ibid: 201)) and thus his sense of possessing an adequate amount of network capital. In this case, the perceived resonance be-
between spatial attitudes and possibilities may be interpreted as an aspect of spatial coherence even though many (presumably most) possibilities will never be explored (see also Jansson 2009b). The following story of Erik further underscores how the gaining of network capital, although we are here dealing with very moderate amounts, entails a glocal re-composition of lived space.

**Erik:** My daughter got married and my wife was worried: "I don’t have any clothes!", but I said "let’s have a look on the web". And we could browse through and look at all kinds of dresses and shoes and so on, so I sat there with the Internet and saved all the images that I thought were nice, because she wanted me to do that, and when she came home she glanced through them… and she was very satisfied. […] Finally, we got in touch with a woman in Skåne (Southern Sweden) who made her own clothes, evening dresses and so on, in her own design, which we thought was nice, and through email we got exactly the color and size we wanted. It was perfect! […] But the most funny thing, we thought, were the shoes. We bought them in America! [laughter]

Erik further describes how he could track the exact location of their order through DHL’s online system, which revealed that it took two days to transport the shoes from the USA to the city of Karlstad (in the nearby region) and then another eight days to get them delivered to the pick-up spot in Granby. Erik’s story expresses a contradictory spatial experience: network capital provides access to a plethora of online spaces of sociability and commerce, engendering an entirely new image of a “world within reach”, while it is partly corrupted through the inescapable unevenness of material infrastructures (the well-known “last mile problem” – see Bakardjieva and Williams’s article in this special issue). While this condition highlights an enduring problem of spatial incoherence, the most important conclusion from a sustainability perspective is that the access to a networked space of flow makes it easier to carry out rural everyday life – in its traditional as well as in more innovative forms. This suggests that network capital, as opposed to mere network sociality, is a key asset for sustaining the cultural diversity of rural communities in times of mediatization.

**b) The Time-Binding Function of Network Sociality**

My second main point comprises that network sociality in itself attains an important time-binding function, and thus may operate as a social stabilizer under conditions of volatility and uncertainty. In his characterization of network sociality, Andreas Wittel (2001: 66-8) points to a shift from durable to ephemeral relations and from narration to information. Both aspects seem to identify a new temporal regime in which longstanding relationships based on trust, regularity, and shared life biographies are replaced by rapid alterations in loyalty and affection. Similar transitions have been extensively discussed in Zygmunt Bauman’s books about liquidity (e.g. Bauman 2000). As Wittel and Bauman argue, networked media hold a great potential to reinforce this new regime of liquidity which also reproduces itself through the ideology of urban nodes (see e.g. Sassen 2001). However, while the hegemonic interpretations of network society (sometimes blatantly
echoed in critical academic discourse) depict it as an increasingly flat space of immediacy (or amnesia), the actual appropriation of networking technologies in everyday life is a much more multi-faceted process; one in which the desire to nourish one’s life biography is often just as significant as, or even stronger than, the wish to expand one’s network.

In the early 1990s, Silverstone and Hirsch (1992) presented their groundbreaking ethnographic study of how the uses of television and other electronic devices where shaped through, as well as shaping, the “moral economy” of the household – a concept pointing to the enduring, largely inherited normative structures through which economic and other practices are socially regulated. Similarly, scholars like Bakardjieva (2005) have more recently pointed out how computer technologies are incorporated in household time-spaces and how online virtual sociality may not only provide an expanding network, but also enhance existing bonds of community and transform anonymous sociality into more intimate and enduring forms of togetherness. Bakardjieva (ibid: 176-80) mentions how interviewees who had gone through what we may call “fateful moments” in their life biographies (Goffman 1967; Giddens 1991) – facing a particular medical diagnosis or trying to cope with the disruptive experience of being an immigrant – could find support and a new meaning through online contacts that were anonymous from the very beginning.

In a similar manner, it is obvious that the online practices among those of my interviewees who use social networking platforms on a regular basis are both routinized and attached to the narrative of the self. They are thus time-binding in a double sense. Richard, who after many years of dwelling in other parts of Sweden moved back to Granby to live in the inherited family house with his partner, describes how MySpace and Facebook now help him tying together the time-space slices of his life biography – while simultaneously opening the gates for new acquaintances on a global level.

Richard: I use MySpace because it’s fun, and for meeting friends and listening to their music. They are everywhere from Istanbul to Japan. It’s a little exciting. […] I have one page of my own, and then I have one page with each band, and then all members have their pages. […] In the beginning, I was online on a daily basis but now it’s perhaps twice a week. Now I’m also forced to be part of Facebook… it fills a little function because I can talk to old friends, and post some sentences, chat a little. One of the old members of the band who is in Stockholm, I chatted with yesterday. […] And we are also a group who has created a community on Facebook with the name Young in Storvik 1965-75 with nostalgic pictures and so on.

While Richard’s networking practices are largely interest driven and circle around music and culture, they also represent an ongoing ambition to create continuity – a meaningful narrative of the self. His statement provides an interesting illustration of how different temporal layers intersect through online spaces of practice and thereby contribute to a particular biographical rhythmicity and resonance within everyday life. This sense of continuity and resonance is important to the establishment of ontological security and thus an important groundwork for coping
with uncertainty and social change (conditions that often characterize rural areas to a much greater extent than what is suggested by popular clichés of slow-paced traditional communities). Even though the community of Granby is currently undergoing a period of mostly positive social transformations, the daily incorporation of glocal networking routines and rituals must be regarded as a means of coping with future ruptures and threats to the lifeworld.

Conclusions

This study has looked at one particular aspect of mediatization; the ways in which new ICT networks affect the spatial coherence of a “global countryside”. If we reconsider Michael Wood’s (2007) ten forces for the making of a global countryside that I presented in the beginning of this article, we may easily envision spaces of fragmentation and rupture where the inflow of competing interests and experiences, paired with the uneven distribution of resources, threaten the sustainability of small communities. While new ICT networks are clearly not the sole solution to the negative side effects of globalization, this article has illuminated their socially stabilizing and intermediary potential. Applying a Lefebvrian model of rural media space, I have argued that new networks attain great symbolic significance for small communities in times of globalization – greater than in urban areas, where media infrastructure is not as scarce a resource. In the empirical case of Granby, new ICT networks have contributed to a more coherent narrative of positive structural change where one of the potential causes of incoherence has been (and to some extent still is) the limited reach of these networks themselves. This situation underscores the multilayered character of mediatization as a process of social re-embedding.

I have also argued that networking resources in general and social media in particular are a potential key to the socio-cultural sustainability of countryside communities, as the interest driven interaction patterns of these resources comply with the intersectional and narrative character of identity creation. Networked interaction sustains the production of glocally defined life stories, and thus contributes to the socio-cultural diversity of the countryside (if other spatial means of attraction are also at hand, that is to say). In this context I have particularly pointed to the analytical potential of John Urry’s (2007) concept of network capital, through which we may conceive of the networked production of a global countryside as a dynamic interplay between community and network sociality. The possession of network capital provides a sense of connectivity as well as direct networking abilities. This means that network capital contributes to the coherence of perceived, conceived and lived spaces. An important future path of study would be to establish a more exact understanding of how the distribution of network capital interacts with concrete patterns of mobility among countryside populations – locally and globally. Furthermore, it is important to analyze to what extent the possession
of network capital, as this study indicates, contributes to making the “global countryside” a “cosmopolitan countryside”.

**André Jansson** is a professor in Media and Communication Studies at Karlstad University, Sweden. He currently leads two research projects: "Rural Networking/Networking the Rural" together with Magnus Andersson (funded by FORMAS), and "Secure Spaces: Media, Consumption and Social Surveillance" together with Miuyase Christensen (funded by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond).

E-mail: andre.jansson@kau.se

**Notes**

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2 Before and during the research period, I have spent several week-long stays in the community. This enabled me to gather a broad understanding of people’s life conditions through observations and everyday conversations, which I have followed up in the interviews.

**References**


Provincial Globalization: 
The Local Struggle of Place-Making

By Magnus Andersson

Abstract

This paper focuses on the global presence in the local processes of place-making in a rural area in Sweden. As a result of increased competition – fueled by a reorganization of global capitalism – between places, symbolic strategies (i.e. place marketing and place branding) have become a central dimension of both urban and rural governance. As a consequent, places – while still being sites for the residents’ day-to-day life – are being turned into commodities in the market of potential investors and tourists to a great extent. Subsequently, this paper deals with how this global agenda affects a rural municipality in the Swedish countryside suffering from depopulation. The paper confirms earlier statements (Woods 2007) that globalization processes should not be considered as external forces reshaping and homogenizing rural villages; rather, globalization processes are locally negotiated. This, however, does not mean globalization has no impact on rural places. In these negotiation processes global and local virtues are intertwined but not evenly. In some municipal strategies, the impact of global discourses is more explicit, for example, policy-makers accept and incorporate strategies of place branding and policy networks while they neglect other aspects of a relatively standardized “place marketing tool kit”. Furthermore, the study shows that rural residents, also, consider the village and its global future carefully but differently from the policy-makers. The residents dislike expressions of urbanity and advocate a general small-scaleness as a strategy for the future.

Keywords: Rural, globalization, symbolic strategies, mediation, encoding/decoding
Introduction

Rural restructuring due to globalization has been on the agenda of rural studies for a while. There are several reasons for this, one being socio-economic transformations in which an economy based on agricultural production is turned into a service-based economy, including a view of landscapes as consumable (Marsden 1990; Cloke 2006; Fløysand & Jakobsen 2007; Halfacree 2007; Conradson & Pawson 2009). Another reason is spatial complexity as a consequence of time-space compression – fuelled by communication technology (Cloke 2006; Woods 2007; Paniagua 2009). This paper anchors these sometimes rather sweeping theoretical statements in an empirical case study of a rural village. It depicts the geopolitics of place in the context of cultural globalization; how local place is contested, but also negotiated and given meanings. Following Michael Woods’ (2007: 502) call for place-based studies highlighting the micro-processes in which politics of the global and the rural become entwined, the article pays particular attention to the symbolic dimension of this global – local intertwining. More specifically, the focus is on the global-local mediation of the symbolic; how rural municipal symbolic strategies are adopted and enacted against a global backdrop, and how they are perceived by the residents. This mediation is a multilayered process; different actors – in this case municipal policy-makers vis-à-vis residents – relate to diverse strands of a multi-faceted globalization and ”pull” the rural place in different directions.

After a brief presentation of the case study beneath, the article sets out with an unfolding of the concepts of globalization and post-industrialism, and how they bring symbolic practices to the fore. That is followed by a discussion on symbolic strategies and their route from urban to rural settings. The review of varied aspects of symbolic strategies is thereafter turned into arguments for theoretically approaching rural transformation as processes of mediation, in which Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding model can be deployed. The following sections present the empirical findings on the local negotiation of globalization, underscoring that global discourses are decoded and negotiated at several levels; by policy-makers as well as by residents. The article ends with some concluding remarks: Theoretically, the article argues for the continuous relevance of a cultural perspective focusing the (ideological) struggles of meaning in which symbolic as well as material resources are at play. Empirically, the article opens up for a discussion on a rural future in which ”re-ruralization” may be an alternative.

The Case Study

To illuminate the amalgam of local and global processes constituting a rural locality, the study is based on interviews with residents of a small village – let us call it Svenvik – in a rural municipality in Skåne, the southernmost province of Sweden.
Svenvik has about 280 inhabitants. It is within commuting distance from larger towns and it is about 120-140 km from Malmö-Copenhagen, the centre of the transnational Öresund region. Svenvik is idyllically placed by a lake with rich animal life, making it a quite popular tourist site, to which a camping and a canoe centre also contribute. There are a few small enterprises in Svenvik; most of the inhabitants commute to towns and villages in the vicinity. Historically, stonemasonry has played a vital role for the village and the whole municipality. Today, some old abandoned quarries remain in the surroundings, and there is a stone museum, established and administered by the local village community. Svenvik is situated in, and governed by, a municipality with 13,661 inhabitants, which is small by Swedish standards. In addition, the municipality suffers from depopulation related to industrial closures (displacements) and rationalizations. Manufacturing industry has long been the dominant sector of employment. Hence, problems associated with post-industrialization, more commonly linked to urban areas, have some relevance here. The municipal council has a Social Democratic majority.

In these settings I have interviewed seven residents in Svenvik, three women and four men, all of them between 35 and 60 years old. In the group there is a mix of locally born residents and in-migrants coming from villages in the vicinity or cities or towns in the province. In addition, I have interviewed three local policymakers: the chairman of the municipal council, the administrative director of the municipality, and a project manager responsible for local development issues.

The Multifaceted Globalization

There is a vast literature on globalization, especially since the 1980s. Over the years the focus has shifted from an emphasis on a quite uniform process to something more nuanced, multiple and multifaceted (cf. Tomlinson 1999; Savage et al. 2005: 2-7; Woods 2007: 491-2). A dialectic perspective has emerged and become dominant within social and cultural theory, emphasizing the articulation of global and local processes. A dialectic perspective means that globalization is not considered as an external force, homogenizing everything in its way. Instead, as Ulrich Beck claims, “‘Globalization’ is a non-linear, dialectic process in which the global and the local do not exist as cultural polarities but as combined and mutually implicating principles” (2002: 17). Also John Tomlinson recognizes the relational character of globalization and defines it as “complex connectivity”, referring to “the rapidly developing and ever-densening network of interconnections and interdependences that characterize modern life” (1999: 2).

Connectivity also means the involvement of power. Not everyone is connected to the same distant agents or nodes; some connections are truly inter-connections, while others are typical one-way connections or they are accessible to just a few. Relational thoughts on place are elaborated by Doreen Massey (1994, 2005) who
considers interrelations as essential in geography. These interrelations constitute a global power geometry in which access to the networks is very unevenly distributed:

This point concerns not merely the issue of who moves and who doesn’t, although that is an important element of it; it is also about power in relation to the flows and the movement. Different social groups have distinct relationships to this anyway differentiated mobility: some people are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don’t; some are more on the receiving-end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it (Massey 1991: 25-26).

Arjun Appadurai (1990, 1996) has also made valuable contributions to a nuanced concept of globalization, stressing the disjunction of processes. Globalization is complex; it cannot be reduced to transnational economic flows between global financial centres in the world. Besides flows in financescapes, there are movements of people in ethnoscapes, global circulation of images and symbols in mediascapes, diffusion of technological devices in technoscapes, and a global spread of political ideas, narratives and key words in what Appadurai calls ideoscapes. These flows are not parallel, they do not emanate from the same centre and they do not reach the same nodes. Although interlinked they constitute five different network structures with different centres and peripheries, where the tension and friction between them contribute to the complexity of globalization.

The mediascapes and the ideoscapes are of particular interest in the context of provincial globalization. Considering the impact of globalization on rural localities, it is easy to “fall back” on a functionalistic model of diffusion in which globalization trickles down from the top, reaching lower (institutional) levels in order of scale. Such a model would imply that rural residents encounter globalization first and foremost from above, i.e. through the governance of their municipality or through external forces. However, current transformations of mediascapes blur boundaries. Globalization cannot be regarded as a huge linear communication model of sender-receivers in which rural societies are the last link. In the mediatized and media-saturated world there are always communication collaterals making connections in a non-linear and asymmetrical manner. Hence, people get in touch with, and experience, globalization in many different ways. This relates to Appadurai’s discussions of the global imaginary and the work of imagination. Appadurai insists on the importance of electronic mediation and migration to produce a global imaginary – not just to the few, but to everybody (1996: 2-9). Thus, people’s daily interaction with “non-local” images, people and technologies contributes explicitly to the re-definition of the local place itself (Savage et al. 2005: 7). It is not hard to imagine that this process of re-definition is pertinent for residents as well as municipal leaders.

These different arguments about globalization as relational, dialectic, mediatized and multifaceted illuminate two aspects of certain pertinence for this study. First, the local dimension of globalization and its negotiated deployment means that globalization is best studied locally, in place-based studies where the
different threats and interconnections are followed (Woods 2007). This is particularly relevant on the basis of the argument that for most people globalization is primarily experienced from home ground (Tomlinson 1999: 9). Second, emphasizing flows, connectivity and interrelationships as the core of globalization, there are no theoretical warrants for the sometimes taken-for-granted association between globalization and cities (cf. Savage et al. 2005: 4; Cloke 2006; Woods 2007; Cruickshank 2009). The vast literature on "the global city" deserves a counterpart.

After Industrialism

Post-industrialization is a theme related to globalization, which describes the reorganization within capitalism itself. The concept refers to a new global division of labour in which the Western world to a large extent is drained of manufacturing industries, since the same industries are now to be found in low-wage countries, very often in the east. Hence, from a Western point of view post-industrialization is associated with (among other things) an increased focus: on production of services and experiences, on consumption, and on the significance of image (Lash & Urry 1994). In such a context, place is considered as a commodity – something to be consumed (Urry 1995). These processes concern rural areas as well, which have been transformed “from landscapes of production to landscapes of consumption” (Cloke 2006: 19).

In an often cited article, “From managerialism to entrepreneurialism”, David Harvey (1989) describes the consequences of post-industrialization for urban governance. He argues that post-industrialization has contributed to new competition between places. To survive, places must attract investors, creative entrepreneurs and tourists: “The task of urban governance is, in short, to lure highly mobile and flexible production, financial, and consumption flows into its space” (Harvey 1989: 11). To do that, public facilities and provision of services for the urban inhabitants have to stand back for local economic development and the creation of an attractive public image. External judgements are more important than ever. This brings to the fore how reflexivity and self-monitoring are of central concern in late modernity – not only to individuals as Giddens (1991) argues, but to institutions as well (cf. Lash & Urry 1994: ch. 4).

Such transitions have paved the way for place marketing, city-branding and (public) image management. These are related terms, sometimes used synonymously, although place marketing is a broader term including practices of regeneration, branding and advertising. Branding is symbolic practices; a marketing strategy to ascribe certain features to things (products, services, organisations) in order to define them for intended target groups – and create emotional bonds between them and the consumer (Hemelryk Donald et al. 2009: 7). Hence, place branding is about the production of a public image, charging a place with sym-
bolic value in order to curb and govern the construction of meaning of the place. To do that, both discursive and material components are used; slogans are produced, as are spectacular buildings. The discourses of place marketing and image management are good examples of how ideoscapes – the global diffusion of ideological frameworks – are working. In a post-industrial society marked by neoliberalism, commodification and marketing are taken for granted and consumable places become self-evident. Urban and rural development are part of a general image culture (Jansson 2001), continuously reproduced by the symbolic work of commercial as well as non-commercial institutions, like planning departments, tourist boards, marketing agencies, creative industries, media industries and many others. However, to consider image management as a global discourse spread in ideoscapes does not mean it is diffused evenly in the world. Image management represents a power geometry in which the central nodes are placed in the wealthy Western world from which the strategies are diffused.

To summarize, post-industrialism is a significant process behind rural restructuring which highlights symbolic strategies. The global agenda of these symbolic strategies is to a large extent dictated by Western metropolitans. The question is, then, which strategies are "offered" to the places beyond the metropolitans?

**Post-Industrial Governance and Symbolic Management**

City-branding, i.e. the symbolic packaging of cities in order to reconstitute them, started as a metropolitan phenomenon but has spread also to towns and smaller places (Nyseth & Granås 2007). Branding may have different aims. In some cases it is used to create a new region, for example the transnational Öresund region (Ek 2003; Falkheimer 2006), or to market whole nations (Roosvall & Salovaara-Moring 2010). In other cases image management is part of coming to terms with an industrial past: in the service economy of the Western world, no place wants to be depicted as a centre of manufacturing industry. Old factories have to be "funkified" (Waitt & Gibson 2009: 1224) – turned into something spectacular such as a cultural arena, or fancy offices for companies within, for example, the symbolic industry (cf. Willim 2005).

To carry out these procedures of image management, resources are required: symbolic experts as well as economic means. Very often these projects involve policy networks, i.e. formations of public-private partnerships as a kind of governance networks, implying an obvious risk that political questions are turned into administrative or technical ones, which means de-politicization (Harvey 1989; Scott 2000; Ek 2003). The development of place-marketing as a professional field has led to certain standardization of deployed strategies and of themes brought to the fore. Richard Ek (2003: 29) distinguishes four typical development strategies: the physical upgrading of the territory; exploiting local history and local culture in cultural strategies; spectacles; and marketing. A ”catchy slogan”, a waterfront, an
industrial area turned into designed cafés and bars, a spectacular building working as a landmark, a big sport event or a festival with a historical theme are all common means in these processes – which can be encountered in all parts of the world. Thematically there are particular themes that have acquired global impact, for example creativity, cosmopolitanism and sustainability. Manchester (Young et al 2006) and Nuremberg (Macdonald 2009) are just two examples of cities aspiring to appear as "the cosmopolitan city". Likewise, in the wake of Richard Florida’s theories on the creative class as the key to urban development, there are many cities describing themselves as "creative cities", for instance Amsterdam (Oudenampsen 2007) and Wollongong (Waitt & Gibson 2009). These examples hint that image management works as both a means and consequence of globalization.

History is often a usable component in place marketing, not least due to its flexibility. Specific details can be highlighted, while others are neglected, quite similarly to the way history is used when the narrative of a nation is created (cf. Hall 1992). In Difficult Heritage (2009) the anthropologist Sharon Macdonald studies how the city of Nuremberg relates to its Nazi past, including its Nazi architectural heritage. The city’s relation to this has swung over the years, which indicates the historical shifts concerning the ideas of place and heritage management. During certain periods the heritage has been seen as a burden obstructing the symbolic work of projecting the image of a “lively, modern and creative city” (Macdonald 2009: 99). In the latest phase of image management, however, the city has adopted the slogan “the City of Peace and Human Rights”, manifested with a new Documentation Centre on the Nazi regime (Macdonald 2009: ch. 6).

Within the discourse of image management there are tendencies which can be read as reactions towards a global urbanity. In American urban planning a neo-traditionalist trend is identified, which attempts to create places – through architecture and published "historical newsletters" – echoing of an America long gone. "Authenticity", "community" and "the good life” become the symbolic values the policy-makers evoke, in order to attract people who find the globalized world scary (Till in Cresswell 2004: 95-6). This should be related to what has been called "the ruralization of the urban”, which Cloke (2006: 19) describes as a “striving for a set of virtues in the city which are more commonly associated with the rural – seemingly fundamental and permanent virtues such as protection, solidarity, community spirit and identity”. A current example is the emergence of urban village communities in many Western cities today. Altogether, this illustrates that there is scope for local negotiations and options beyond the global symbolic main roads, in spite of certain global standardization of symbolic strategies.
Symbolic Strategies and the Meaning of (Rural) Place

All these efforts and investments shed the light on the relationship between image management and the meaning of place. With a point of departure in Lefebvre’s (1991: 38-39) conceptual triad of produced space, constituted by spatial practices (perceived space), representations of space (conceived space) and spaces of representation (lived space), one may conclude that the image management operates within the representations of space, which obviously is not the full story of the meaning of place (cf. Halfacree 2006, 2007). The produced public image has to compete with other representations, such as journalistic ones and representations produced by others – residents themselves, for instance. In addition, there are contributions from cultural practices such as literature, film and music (Cresswell 2004: 82). Besides representation of space, there are spatial practices and the lived space of everyday life. As Cresswell puts it: “Places are never finished but produced through the reiteration of practices – the repetition of seemingly mundane activities on a daily basis” (2004: 82). Thus, the meaning of place is never fixed; its permanence is imagined, carved out through the processes producing space (Halfacree 2006: 50). Place is always contested, a battleground for struggles of meaning.

From this it follows that places have to be considered as multilayered cultural formations. And again, this includes urban as well as rural places. Structural transformations take place in both settings: the majority of manufacturing factories are displaced from the cities in the West – as is the majority of farms in the countryside. Extrapolating that sentence, one may say that while the factory has become the fancy office of a marketing agency, the farmhouse is turned into a second home for the marketing manager. Halfacree’s (2006: 44) definition of rural space as a “socially produced set of manifolds” emphasizes that the rural has to be considered in social, cultural and economic contexts. This implies, according to Cloke (2006: 19), that “rurality is characterized by a multiplicity of social spaces overlapping the same geographical area, so while the geographic spaces of the city and the countryside have become blurred it is in the social distinction of rurality that significant differences between the rural and the urban remain”.

Thus, while there are blurred boundaries between the city and the countryside due to, among other things, mediation and mobility, there is still an imaginative structure of rurality, defined to a large extent in opposition to the urbanity. The question is how this imagination is related to the symbolic work of the post-industrial rural municipality. For example, do rural municipalities through their symbolic work reinforce or undermine that distinction? It is particularly interesting in times of mediatization, when global mediascapes provide the most “peripheral” municipal policy-maker with the image management strategies of the global metropolitans. There are some empirical studies that illuminate these questions. Swedish municipalities – especially rural ones – have increased their investments...
in place marketing to attract in-migrants, according to Niedomysl (2004). He concludes that these efforts have had poor effects, at least in quantitative terms, and suggests further qualitative explorations. One such example is the report *Place reinvention in the North* (Nyseth & Granås 2007), in which the authors summarize how places and municipalities in the north of Scandinavia have dealt with, and adapt to, globalization processes. They identify many strategies similar to those in the cities, for example, short-term flagship projects (often with cultural connections) and branding campaigns (Nyseth 2007: 148-50). In line with Harvey’s argument about the new entrepreneurialism, Nyseth argues that the competition between places is a significant reason behind the transformations: “This competition has been partly forced and stimulated by new indexes produced by researchers and consultancies, e.g. creativity indexes, sustainability indexes, urban indexes, and so on” (Nyseth 2007: 151). The authors of the report also found a range of different economies in the regions, from Fordist economies to economies based on knowledge, service and consumption. Worth noting is that these differences did not correlate with the transformations: some places were in the middle of reinvention processes – with an economy based on manufacturing industry (ibid.). In line with the logics of post-industrialism, the researchers also found many examples of image management projects in which public, civil and business actors co-operated in governance networks (Nyseth 2007: 153). Another interesting feature of the study, directly related to image managing, is that it is possible to discern very different directions among the applied strategies. Some places work in extension of the rural and invest in nature, offering either the ”authentic” experience of peacefulness or a site for spectacular and exotic adventures, like extreme sports (Granås & Gunnarsdotter 2007). Either way underscores that nature is there to be consumed. Other places, however, have adopted very ”urban” approaches, giving rural places almost metropolitan silhouettes with ”culturalized” old industry plants (Benediktsson & Aho 2007). In relation to the previous discussion on blurred boundaries, these could be regarded as tendencies to blurred boundaries also on an imaginative and representational level.

**Rural Transformation Through the Lens of Mediation; an Analytical Approach**

To empirically grasp the symbolic aspects discussed, there are good reasons to turn to the term ”mediation”, since, as Woods argues, “globalization processes are mediated through and incorporated within local processes of place-making” (2007: 494, *my italics*). An obvious advantage of the term is that mediation means something else than transmission. To think in terms of mediation, as media scholar Roger Silverstone argues, “requires us to consider it as involving producers and consumers of media in a more or less continuous activity of engagement and disengagement with meanings which have their source or their focus in those
mediated texts, but which extend through, and are measured against, experience in a multitude of different ways” (1999: 13).

Inspired by Macdonald (2006), who has deployed this rather media-specific way of thinking on tour guides in Nuremberg, I want to deploy it in a rural context. That implies a focus, not only on rural place, but on its ”production” as well as ”consumption” – which connects to Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding model, originally intended for studying ideological reproduction through television news (Hall 1980a). The model has been deployed outside media studies, for example in urban development (Jansson 2005) and, as mentioned, in the context of tour guides (Macdonald 2006). It has, as I see it, three qualities rendering it particularly relevant in the context of provincial globalization. First, Hall makes a point that the produced ("encoded") meaning and the consumed ("decoded") meaning are two separate things; there are no such things as behaviouristic responses or passive transmission in processes of mediation; there are interpretations and appropriations of symbolic material. Hence, the municipal encoding of an area through material and symbolic means has to be interpreted by, in this case, the residents and visitors. Second, since the interpretation is not determined, there will always be a struggle of meaning. This means that ideology is always at hand in processes of mediation. Strong interests want to pull the interpretation in different directions. Through theorizing, Stuart Hall identifies different positions of reading, constituted according to their relation to the dominant ideology. This further denies communication processes as transmission of meanings. It also indicates that the meaning of place is negotiated and struggled over (as is further discussed later). Third, the theoretical model is cyclical and thereby processual. The encoding is preceded by a decoding, which in the rural case means that the municipal staff are not only encoders – they are also decoders of globalization discourses.

Governing a Rural Municipality

To scrutinize the mediation of global processes, and the rural negotiation of globalization, I have studied a small municipality in the south of Sweden. The social and demographic statistics are not happy reading for the municipal council. The population decreases yearly by 90 persons, and in January 2008 it was down to 13,661. Of the residents, 19% have post-secondary education, compared with 35% for Sweden as a whole. The proportion of unemployed is 8%, slightly over the national average of 6%. The manufacturing industry is the largest sector, employing 39%, which is over twice the national average of 17%. The average income in the municipality is 235,000 SEK (~22,000 Euro) per year, whereas the Swedish average is 252,000 SEK. In addition, the municipal composition of age compared to the national average shows that the municipality has an under-representation in ages between 25 and 35, whereas the ages over 60 years old are somewhat over-represented.6
According to Sven Svensson, the Social Democratic chairman of the municipal council, the municipality is in the middle of a third critical structural transformation in a short span of time: the first was the closure of the textile industries in the 1960s, and the second was the closure of the large paper mill in the beginning of the 1980s. And quite recently they have experienced the displacement of a larger factory supplying the car industry, which was employing 550 people. The largest company today is in the wood industry. The company is doing very well, steadily increasing its production. Still, due to modernization, it has reduced the number of employees by more than 50%. When describing the municipality and the challenges it is facing, Sven Svensson considers the lack of railways in the municipality as a huge problem, especially since the public transport is underdeveloped. It means that commuting residents are more or less dependent on private cars. He also mentions the lack of a regional centre, a main town with public and commercial facilities. Instead these services are scattered among the handful of villages in the municipality. The public image of the municipality is a great problem perceived by all the interviewed policy-makers. It has a reputation of being dreary, as they put it. In addition, an extensive survey study, carried out by Statistics Sweden, shows that the residents are more dissatisfied than in other Swedish municipalities.

The interviews with the municipal staff reveal that they do take these problems seriously. They have initiated a range of activities, on different fronts, to come to terms with the structural problems, especially the depopulation which they consider the key problem. Following the analytical approach discussed previously, these activities can be considered as encoding practices. First, they have made staff recruitments; an administrative director from the business world and a project manager responsible for development issues were employed in 2008 (and both have been interviewed). In addition, they are planning to recruit a marketing director, who partly is going to replace the information officer they had earlier. The new administrative director considers this replacement as a central matter for a more offensive marketing strategy. Second, the new administrative director has started the implementation of a new organization structure inspired by Lean in order to provide better services to local enterprises and to citizens. Third, the municipal council has launched a long-term vision; in six years (2015) the municipality should have 15,000 proud residents. Education, communication and transport, housing and enterprising are prioritized areas. In addition, civic engagement and participation are central in the municipal program – as well as knowledge, creativity, culture and marketing, according to the press release. Fourth, the municipality officials have intensified their networking activities. They are highly aware of the conditions of the network society. To cope, Sven Svensson says that his strategy is to appear everywhere and in all kind of networks: “because you never know where the opportunities emerge”. Hence, he and his colleagues participate in a number of different networks, crossing geographical as well as political bounda-
ries. This is a necessity, he says, and continues: “The key to our municipal development is not to be found within the municipality”. Their networking activities mean that the municipality has: developed strong bonds with local enterprises, for example through arranging a lunch for industrial people every month; established diverse contacts with universities in the region; developed cooperation with other municipalities in the region; and revitalized contacts with their twin towns in northern Europe. They also keep themselves informed of what happens in the EU regarding rural development. Not least, they have made surveys among the residents (and plan to do so regularly) to improve their relationship.

Thus, a lot of “encoding” activities are going on or have been initiated, or are still in the planning stage. So far no evaluations have been made, but the interviewees experience a vast difference compared to how they used to work. They realize that they have to do something because if they cannot turn the depopulation around, the revenue from taxation will decrease steadily. Some investments have already paid off. For example, the network engagement of the chairman of the municipal council has put them in contact (almost accidentally) with a Danish architectural firm, which has subsequently bought attractive land in one of the villages (Svenvik) for building a large housing area (80 houses) with ecological houses. Another achievement is that they have succeeded in getting a regional LEADER office (Woods 2005: 150) placed in the municipality. Of particular interest for this paper are the explicit and implicit symbolic aspects of the municipal strategies. By “explicit symbolic aspects” I mean discursive symbolic strategies, i.e. marketing and media strategies, whereas ”implicit symbolic aspects” refer to the symbolic meaning of other processes. For example, fundamentally the whole process of reconstitution has an implicit symbolic value. It signals: “In times of crisis this municipality does not become completely powerless to act”. In this perspective the new Lean-inspired organization is interesting – originally an idea that the administrative director brought from the industry. The main goal is rationalization of the municipal routines and daily business, but the symbolic effect is not innocent. For example, the reorganization has led to a number of invitations to gatherings and workshops – some organized by the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise – where municipal representatives have presented the municipality and the implementation of Lean. There are also symbolic aspects on home ground. In the local newspaper there have been articles in which representatives of the local industry comment on the municipal reorganization in a positive way. The representatives especially appreciate that they themselves, the local industries, appear explicitly in the organization plan. The long-term vision also has virtues of image management. The launch was a big thing, described by the administrative director in the following way:

We used a method, frequently used within business, where you try to see things from above, partly your own organization, partly the surrounding world. This process provides issues which then are discussed in different workshops. Hence, a group of us went away for two and a half days with loads of data of different kinds. Com-
munication was central in the setup; you have to be able to communicate your conclusions. Immediately when we got back – it was a Friday – we called our local newspapers and said that on the following Wednesday, we would present our long-term municipal vision. It’s probably the fastest visionary work process in Sweden ever!

Regarding the symbolic, the vision is successful. It is a recurrent subject in local newspapers, it appears on the municipal website, and most of the residents are aware of it. Problematic, however, is that there is no earmarked budget for the project, and there are no strategy documents on how the goals are to be fulfilled. The modest concrete content so far indicates that the symbolic value may have been the top priority.

From implicit to explicit symbolic aspects: as noticed in the quotation above, contacts with the media are an important strategic aspect of the municipality’s work. The administrative director considers the local media as key actors in ”encoding” the municipality’s public image – which is not without problems for the image management:

The newspapers are quite critical here. There is competition in the newspaper market, which I think is an important reason for that criticism. From my industrial background I know the importance of getting access directly to your target group, without the distortion of middlemen. Right now, the residents experience the municipality mainly through the local papers, but we are going to start a small community paper. Thus, our message will reach every citizen in 9000 households, four times a year. It will be financed through ads, so the costs are no problem. And the funny thing is that it is the local newspaper that will produce it – they are usually very keen to criticize us!

The media, and in this case journalism, may provide means as well as obstacles to the image management. Hence, media strategies have a key function in symbolic work since media attention is a goal in almost all its practices. The development of media and communication technology has undermined traditional media enterprises’ monopoly of media production, allowing more agents to be producers. Bypassing traditional media could be important for subcultures – as well as municipal councils.

Place marketing is another explicit symbolic aspect. Until now marketing has been an activity with relatively low priority in the municipality, but a shift is at hand. When the new marketing director takes up his/her duties, his/her main task will be to brand the municipality. Until then, it is a matter for the project manager. The lack of economic resources is a problem, however, and her plan is to turn the marketing project into a LEADER project – an EU-supported project in cooperation with the local industry and associations of the civic society (cf. Woods 2005: 150). This would guarantee a proper budget, because, as she says, it is too important to end up in any half-measures: “I’m not talking about producing brochures or putting a film on YouTube. The top priority is to figure out what we are going to market! If that isn’t clear we can put in an endless amount of money without any results”. The first step in the marketing project is to prioritize potential inves-
tors and potential residents. Tourism is downplayed at the moment, not least since the competition is so hard. The project manager is a bit sceptical towards the “rural trend” of idyllicism: “every rural municipality with self-respect makes an effort to get tourists – it seems like everyone has beautiful nature, peace and quiet and some tourist sites”.

What, then, does this say about the globalization in the rural municipality in southernmost Sweden? Summing up the municipal actions, one may say that these different strategies illustrate quite well Woods’ argument that globalization is “incorporated within local processes” (Woods 2007: 494), rather than penetrate the local. Yet it is important to stress that even though globalization is negotiated and hybridized locally, a rural municipality does not have a central position in “wider power-geometries” (ibid.: 497). Local policy-makers are more often on the receiving end of globalization than being the initiators of flows and movements. In spite of that, the study brings the aspects of negotiation to the fore, a central term in the encoding/decoding model. Global discourses are not mediated passively through local policy-makers. They are decoded (interpreted) and thereafter appropriated and practised – encoded – in a locally adjusted form. A quotation from the chairman of the municipal council illustrates this:

Google is fantastic! If you just curious you’ll find all you want. Browsing the web, creating networks and using your own lived experience – that’s the way one works today! […] You have to be careful with trends, but there are always tendencies that need consideration; do they mean problems or benefits for the municipality? As a local politician you need to take account of what is happening in the surrounding world; you have to read a number of books and newspapers – and keep informed of what is happening on the web.

The statement can be connected with the presence of buzzwords, drawn from global discourses, in the municipal long-term vision. At the same time, however, it is important to note that the main goal of the vision is not an increased amount of visitors and entrepreneurs, which would be the case if determination or imperialism were involved. The present goal of an increased population and of changing its attitude towards the municipality (“proud residents”) illustrates the presence of negotiation in the global-local relationship.

If the project of the long-term vision is characterized by negotiation and locally shaped appropriation, there are other aspects in which the reproduction of dominant ideologies is more explicit. In these cases the policy-makers make a “preferred reading” of the global discourse and its ideological content. The municipal engagement in policy networks is such an example. The municipal staff has no (political) doubts about running projects or cooperating with industry. Collaborations are taken for granted. As discussed earlier, governing through policy networks implies certain risks of de-politicization, since questions tend to be treated as technical rather than political. Embedded conflicts are played down in favour of the appearance of consensus (Zukin 1995: 271). As an expression of a global discourse, the principle of policy networks is particularly strong due to the explicit
support from the political establishment. It is, for example, possible to consider LEADER, the EU programme for rural development, in which representatives from municipality, industry and the civic society have to cooperate in order to qualify, as a strong support for network alliances within rural development. A remaining question concerns the residents, their relationship to the surrounding world, and their decoding of the municipal strategies.

**Living in a Rural Idyll**

A common denominator among the interviewed residents is an engagement, to varying extent, in a local village community, to which more than half of the population belongs. The village community marks the village in different ways, which become obvious in the interviews.

When the residents talk about Svenvik, almost all of them express an appreciation of its peacefulness and of having nature right at their doorstep. Both locally born residents and in-migrants are pleased with the village and its environment, and many of them convey negative feelings about cities and city life. Some of the in-migrants from cities emphasize that nature is not enough for moving to the countryside; it has to be a socially vital village where you can make friends and experience community. The small-scaleness seems to attract. Ulla, a woman in her 30s, originally from a larger city, puts it thus: “In wintertime you meet everybody when skating and everyone helps to shovel the ice. And in summertime you meet at the same place while bathing. To know everyone provides a special kind of feeling”. She also talks about the disappointment she felt when the small school in the next village closed down. Today her children have to go by bus to a larger school farther away. Ulla has her own marketing agency with several clients around Malmö (where she lived earlier), something she comments upon with a smile: “I don’t like to go to Malmö – it’s too hectic and too many people”.

Since the residents care a lot about Svenvik and its future, several of the interviewees are very engaged in the village community. The association does not solely focus on local heritage, which otherwise is common in the Swedish countryside; instead they arrange different activities – a cooking course for men, for example – and they act as a pressure group in questions about local development. Hence, the residents and their activities are a significant aspect of the character of the village. They make the place/village through their routinized practices and their daily interactions – the spaces of representations in Lefebvre’s terms. In addition, they contribute symbolically to the village (representations of space) through different representations, creating links to the past as well as to the future. Their “symbolic work from below” includes, for example, a yearly arranged music festival and a local portal on the Internet, including a community paper. Furthermore, they have established a museum to display the local heritage of stonemasonry and a track where one can see the old quarries. Yet their top priority dur-
ing recent years has been their engagement with the development plan of Svenvik. With the help of an acquainted architect, the village community has produced a new detailed development plan which they have handed over to the municipal council.

The negotiation with the municipality over the detailed development plan has proceeded for several years, and a certain bitterness with the policy-makers is evident among the residents. They are not content with the way the municipal council governs: they think the municipality should be more attentive to the local residents, especially the engaged village community which, in spite of its members’ deep engagement, never had received any credit. The municipality’s administration of the detailed development plan – which has been “unprofessional” according to the residents – was an upcoming subject in almost all of the interviews. Still, after many years of civic work, the work with the plan is not yet initiated. But the residents are not only criticizing and complaining. Some praise the small-scaleness, which makes it possible to negotiate directly with the municipality, something they realize one cannot do everywhere. Just like the municipal policy-makers, the interviewed residents realize that their village is a rural idyll with huge potential for exploitation. They recognize the potential improvements also for them: opportunities for better public service and facilities, maybe even a country shop. But the residents seek a restricted or at least controlled exploitation, so that local resources – for example the view over the lake and the open spaces in front of the lake – are maintained, since these are central in the community life. When asked explicitly about the municipality’s work in relation to Svenvik, most of the interviewed residents are sceptical for different reasons. Some are scared that Svenvik will be over-exploited, whereas others think the local governors talk too much and act too little. Ingvar, a man who was born in Svenvik, is upset with the municipality’s aesthetic prioritizations:

Instead of providing public facilities the municipality puts money into rebuilding streets, pavements and bus stops and they put up designed streetlights in the larger villages [...] If the facilities are okay and you feel secure in your day-to-day life, then I think people might accept a road that is a bit bumpy. The municipality has reconstructed all the centres in the larger villages – with the help of expensive consultants, of course. In one of the villages it turned out that buses could no longer pass the central roundabout, because it had become too small. So I maintain that they invest in the wrong things.

The reconstructions Ingvar mentions were carried out some years ago; but also more recent municipal activities, like the long-term vision, are met with a certain scepticism, even though the reactions are blended. There is appreciation that the municipality does something, and several of the interviewees think the visionary goals are relevant. As Alan, very active in a local development group (subgroup to the village community), puts it:

I can see how they [the policy-makers] think: they need to anchor their work among the citizens, and they have to start with something positive. Overall, the basic idea is
good, I believe – it’s a citizen perspective. But the vision has to be filled with content without being daft. That’s the challenge!

The municipality’s weakness with taking action is a recurrent theme in the interviews. A woman, Eva-Britt, describes how she has searched for an action plan for the long term-vision on the municipal website, but she could not find any. That confirmed her general view of the municipality: “It’s a lot of catch phrases and buzzwords, whereas I want something tangible. I’ve even written a letter to the editor about that”. The interviewees’ earlier experiences of the municipality explicitly mark their attitude towards the new vision. They have long experience of municipal lack of money. Stig has lived in the municipality since the 1970s, when he and his family moved to Svenvik in an act of counter-urbanization. He has been engaged in the village community almost since then:

We’ve seen too many projects – initiated with red carpet and all – go down the drain. They have all vanished as soon it becomes serious or starts to cost. Once, for example, we were appointed municipal ambassadors, getting pins, badges, flyers and stuff; and we took part in a lot of meetings. But it all vanished after a while. The new vision sounds good, but over the years I’ve learned not to have an opinion until I see something really happening.

As mentioned, however, the residents do not only sit back and grumble; they also take action. They have strong opinions on local development which they convey through the village community. The residents advocate a development strategy that enhances in-migration – while taking present residents into consideration. They welcome tourist flow – as long as the tourists respect the nature and spend money locally. The residents are positive towards the new building project, which they think may enrich the village – and they appreciate the ecological focus. However, some hesitation is expressed about the target group: who are going to afford moving to these rather expensive houses? Ulla really appreciates the ecological line, but at the same time she is afraid the houses will be turned into second homes for wealthy people from Copenhagen. If so, their chance of getting a country shop and other public facilities will decrease – as will the municipal tax revenues.

In any case, their long-standing engagement and their acting as a pressure group have resulted. For example, the public transports have been improved and it seems that their proposed detailed development plan for the village will get through without too many modifications. Ingvar has a clear idea of the municipal strategy – and how it differs from his own view:

If you are going to invest in Svenvik – and I know the municipality wants to do that – it has to be in something substantial. It’s not enough telling potential residents that “the view over the lake is marvellous – and you can paddle canoe!” No one today has the time or the money to move to a place just because of the view! Well, maybe pensioners, but they’re not the target group in this case. For ordinary people, working five days a week, the view is just the icing on the cake; useful when you have guests, but you can’t live on it. But the municipality is convinced that the peace and quiet and the environment in itself will attract people. Instead, we try to convince
them to invest in a small day nursery. That’s what attracts families with children! The municipality has to be pro-active in this case – one can’t wait and see if families move in. Good service already in place is fundamental to a modern family! That’s the basis of day-to-day life, and then comes the rest. I think that’s the way to draw people from the cities.

This is a different view of the strategies for the local development. Less rhetoric and symbolic, more focused on public improvements, to support present residents as well as future ones. The residents do believe in marketing, but also in this case they have a different view than the municipality. As Stig, who is partly working with marketing, puts it:

I think the municipality should invest in less badges and glossy brochures and do more proper marketing to attract more residents. Why not going on a serious recruitment tour in Malmö? There’s the place to tell about the nature, the environment, the atmosphere and the low housing prices!

Svenvik – a Relatively Contested Place in the Swedish Countryside

A local place is contested. There are many forces pulling it in different directions and, as discussed earlier, there is a manifold of social spaces “overlapping the same geographical area” (Cloke 2006: 19). Svenvik is at the same time an exploit-able rural idyll, as the municipal policy-makers like to view it, and the site of the residents’ daily business. The residents experience, maybe not a clash, but at least friction between these two spaces. Picking up a theoretical thread from earlier, it could be expressed as a disjuncture between the symbolic meanings created (“encoded”) by the policy-makers and those experienced (“decoded”) by the residents. There seems to be a mismatch between their imaginative representations of a future Svenvik. It is not that the residents do not see post-industrial threats that globalization is bringing, i.e. the threats the municipality acts upon. It is rather that the residents interpret them differently. This could be traced, among other things, to different access to globalization, which brings us back to the role of mediation and the “global diffusion of global discourses” in mediascapes. Roger Silverstone comments on the dynamic and multifaceted character of mediation in a vivid way:

Mediated meanings move between texts, certainly, and across time. But they also move across space, and across spaces. They move from the public to the private, from the institutional to the individual, from the globalizing to the local and personal, and back again. They are fixed, as it were, in texts, and fluid in conversations. They are visible on billboards and web-sites and buried in minds and memories (1999: 15).

There are many ways – mediated and non-mediated – to experience globalization for the rural residents, and many of these ways bypass the municipality. On the basis of the amalgam of their lived experience and mediated meanings, the resi-
dents create their own accounts of Svenvik and its future in a globalized world – and they take action to realize it. Their action in turn may cause ripple effects and have consequences in other parts of the global network. In this way the residents may, if not change, at least alter sections of the power geometries of globalization, which justifies a term like provincial globalization. Furthermore, this conflict is the consequence of overlapping social spaces – associated with different media spaces. The making of Svenvik is a struggle, although a relatively calm one, and as Chantal Mouffe (2000) claims, such conflicts are productive. Consensus is not a goal in itself; the conflict is a sign of a vitality in public life and a deliberative democratic process.

Concluding Remarks

When Paul Cloke discusses the future of rural studies, especially vis-à-vis the cultural turn, he is concerned with “the depoliticizing tendencies of a cultural focus” and argues for a repoliticizing:

> [W]hen the conceptual fruitfulness of the cultural turn is pursued in conjunction with a more critical analysis of power relations there is a potential to add significantly to the broader understandings of, and critical importance of, rural policy agendas (2006: 26).

I believe that a focus on mediation; the struggle and interplay of meaning between the symbolic and the material, an approach with roots in the Centre of for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham (cf. Hall 1980b), is a passable – and relevant – road to go. This could be the ”cultural” crossroad where Rural Geography and Media and Cultural Studies meet for mutual inspiration – as Peter Jackson (1991) once proposed. Such a perspective has in this study led to valuable insights regarding the “micro-politics of negotiation and hybridization” which is the core of globalization’s re-fashioning of rural places (Woods 2007: 502).

Finally, a comment on the rural future. Concerning Svenvik, three distinct municipal strategies are discernible in the study, all of them connected with the interplay of meaning between urbanity and rurality on a representational/imaginative level. First, it is possible to market the municipality in general and Svenvik in particular as the rural idyll; the peaceful and quiet antithesis to the urbanity discourse. In such representational imagination the qualities of beauty and closeness to nature are brought to the fore, which in turn are associated with the virtue of authenticity (cf. Bell 2006; Granås & Gunnarsdotter 2007). Second, another route is to affirm urbanity and create a ”sense of the city”. This is an expression of the much-discussed ”urbanization of the rural” (Cloke 2006: 18; McCarthy 2008; Woods 2009). It is, for example, possible to trace urban aesthetics in rural rebuilding projects (cf. Benediktsson & Aho 2007), communicating some kind of aesthetic up-to-dateness. A very different example is the emphasis on the possibilities of commuting in the municipality’s marketing material. In this case, the rural vil-
lage becomes similar to suburbia: a place for private withdrawal and family life – in contrast to the city with its professional connotations. It seems that the municipality in the present case study blends these two strategies, on the one hand asserting the beauty of, and wilderness around, Svenvik, and on the other hand reconstructing village centres in an urban fashion. There is a third strategy, however. Some essential similarities exist between what has been called ”ruralisation of the urban” (Cloke 2006: 19; Woods 2009: 853) and the residents’ views on the local development. Both can be seen as reactions to (urban) large-scaleness due to rationalization processes. In both cases there are demands for community spirit and small schools and day nurseries in the neighbourhood. In short, what is pursued is a general small-scaleness, which is not “gated” or closed, but serves as a solid and secure ground for the practices of everyday life. Just like the first alternative, this one is heavily marked by the imaginative city, shaped as the latter’s antithesis as it is. Is it time for a re-ruralisation of the rural?

Magnus Andersson is postdoctoral researcher at School of Arts and Communication, Malmö University. He has two ongoing research projects within the scope of Communication Geography: one on rural media spaces and one on media and migration.

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Notes
1 This study is part of ”Rural Networking/Networking the Rural”, an ongoing research project financed by Formas, the Swedish Research Council for Environment, Agricultural Sciences and Spatial Planning.
2 The number is from 2001-01-08, according to the municipality’s website.
3 The interviews were carried out during the spring of 2009. All interviews were between 50 and 150 minutes, following previously designed interview-guides.
4 As Patrik Åker (2008: 92) notes, a linked document on Latvia’s official webpage contains an open invitation to industrial investors – emphasizing the low wages and the low commitment to the trade union in Latvia (http://www.tartu.ee/data/SMARTolocationFinal.pdf 2010-01-10). Thus, poor working conditions may be used in the marketing of a nation.
5 There are many similarities to ”gated communities”, despite the absence of gates.
6 All figures are from 2008-01-01, except those regarding unemployment which are from March 2009. Source: Municipal Facts, Statistics Sweden [Statistiska centralbyrån], www.scb.se/kommunfakta.
8 The city of Malmö has almost 300,000 residents and is about 110 km away.
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Reporting an Unsettled Countryside: The News Media and Rural Protests in Britain

By Michael Woods

Abstract

Most analyses of the role of the media in shaping and reproducing popular discourses of rurality have focused on film, television drama and literature. Comparatively little attention has been directed towards the role of the news media in framing perceptions of contemporary rural issues through reportage and commentary. This paper examines the engagement of the news media with a series of rural protests that developed in Britain between 1997 and 2007 around issues such as hunting and farm incomes. The news media had been complicit in maintaining the previous discursive construct of the countryside as a settled and almost apolitical space, but the emergence of major rural protests forced a shift in the representation of rural life. News coverage of rural issues and rural protests increased with the adoption of a new discourse of the "unsettled countryside". In adjusting to shifting news values, the news media initially bought and reproduced the frames promoted by the major rural campaign group, the Countryside Alliance, including tropes of the "countryside in crisis", the "countryside comes to town" and the "countryside speaks out for liberty". Over time, however, a more complex web of representations developed as the perspectives adopted by different media outlets diverged, informed by political ideology. As such, it is argued that the news media played a key role not in only in mediating public reception of rural protests, and thus modulating their political significance, but also in framing the rural protests for participants within the rural community, and as such contributing to the mobilisation of a politicised rural identity and an active rural citizenship.

Keywords: News reporting, rural protest, discourse, rurality, Britain
**Introduction**

At the end of the twentieth century, the countryside became big news in Britain. For decades, rural news and countryside issues had occupied a marginal position – if any – in the national news media. Stories about farming and agricultural policy, hunting and field sports, or the challenges faced by rural communities, were largely the preserve of the specialist farming press, regional newspapers and field sports magazines. Only occasionally did stories of rural conflicts or politics infiltrate into the mainstream national media, usually as novelty items, positioned as curious exceptions to the prevailing discourse that the countryside was a somehow "apolitical" space (see Woods 2005). To be taken seriously, rural news stories had to transcend their rural setting, latching on to wider concerns about the environment (as in the case of anti-roads protests) or food safety (as in scares over salmonella and bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE)).

Things changed in the summer of 1997. That July, over 120,000 pro-hunting supporters rallied in London, and rural politics were suddenly taken seriously. Through the next decade, British "broadsheet" newspapers frequently carried news reports, feature articles and commentary pieces following the political struggles over hunting, the future of farming, and major developments such as windfarm construction, as well as other issues affecting rural communities. At the peak of the trend in 2002, the *Daily Telegraph* newspaper carried nearly 100 articles concerning rural protests or political issues.1

The most prolific coverage concerned the prospect of a ban on hunting wild mammals with hounds following the Labour election landslide in 1997. Starting with the Countryside Rally in July 1997, opponents of a ban, led by the Countryside Alliance, organised a number of high profile demonstrations over the next seven years, including two large marches in London, and a plethora of smaller protest events and campaigns around the country. These protests received substantial media coverage, with editorial space also devoted to the parliamentary debates on hunting and to tensions over the issue within the Labour government (see Woods 2008a). The passing of the Hunting Act in November 2004, and the introduction of the resulting ban in February 2005, were both heavily covered; and many newspapers have continued to periodically publish articles charting the impact of the ban and the attempts of hunts to operate within the law.

Moreover, once the concept of the "countryside in crisis" had been established, the news media began to pick up other stories that corresponded with this theme. Articles appeared on the fluctuating fortunes of farming and about localised conflicts over windfarm developments, house-building, new supermarkets and the closure of schools and post offices, all presented as further tales from an unsettled countryside.

This explosion of coverage of rural politics in part reflected the proliferation of rural protest events that occurred in Britain in the decade since 1997. The pro-
hunting Countryside Rally, Countryside March and Liberty and Livelihood March were major political events involving an unprecedented mobilisation of a traditionally conservative rural constituency. Protests by farmers at ports in December 1997 were similarly unusual, and when farmers later blockaded oil depots in September 2000 they nearly starved the country of fuel and came close to bringing down the government (Woods 2005). The Foot and Mouth Disease epidemic in 2001, meanwhile, cast a shadow far beyond the farming community as exclusion zones were established, public rights of way suspended, tourist attractions closed and events cancelled.

However, it can be argued that the news media did not simply report these events, but that they also played a significant role in creating and reproducing them. Without mainstream national news coverage, the pro-hunting protests would never have mobilised the number of participants that they did, and would not have had the significant political impact that they did. The media hence became complicit in reproducing the interpretative frames of the countryside lobby, and in so doing they helped to reshape popular and political discourses of rurality in Britain.

This paper examines the engagement of the British news media, and in particular national "broadsheet" newspapers, with the rural protest movement in Britain and investigates its role in the frame alignment of rural protest. It also identifies the subsequent emergence of frame dissonance, as the stance of different newspapers began to diverge according to ideological position and readership, and as the government struggled to assert its own alternative political construction of the rural. The paper draws on research funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council, including interviews with key activists in the rural protest movement, a survey of Countryside Alliance members in four districts, and analysis of media coverage.2

The Construction of Rural News

The role of the media in producing and reproducing discourses of rurality is well established in rural studies. With most people in countries such as Britain living in urban areas, information and impressions garnered from the media are influential in shaping individuals’ perceptions of the countryside, its people and its problems. Even for rural residents, messages received through the media can be important in reinforcing, explaining or challenging personal experiences, thus helping to convert individual positionality into collective identity.

Television dramas and films are particularly influential, with their capacity to present stylised representations of rural life to large and diverse audiences (Bell 2006; Phillips 2008; Phillips et al. 2001). The fictionalised countryside they portray tends towards one of two polar, stylised caricatures. In some cases media discourses draw on the historic association of rurality with wilderness to present
the rural as an anti-idyll: an isolated, insular, desolate, backward and dangerous place (Bell 1997). More commonly, however, the countryside is portrayed through the prism of the "rural idyll": as a safe, comfortable, tranquil, unhurried and untroubled place, where life proceeds in harmony with nature, free from the hustle, bustle and stresses of city living. The prevalence of the rural idyll myth in media representations has had a material impact in stimulating the growth of rural tourism and counterurbanisation and informing the expectations of visitors and migrants; in disguising the existence of rural poverty and class conflict; and in promoting benign and anthropomorphic representations of animals and nature that have helped to shape public opinion on issues such as farming, animal welfare and hunting.

Whilst studies have analysed representations of rurality in the entertainment media, far less attention has been directed toward the news media. To some degree, this bias has reflected the relatively limited coverage of rural issues in the mainstream print and broadcast news media. One study in the United States, for example, found that network news programmes on the three major television networks (ABC, CBS and NBC) featured only 48 rural-themed stories in 2004, and that only 481 rural-themed stores appeared in seven national newspapers and magazines (including the New York Times, USA Today and Time) in the same year (Harper 2005). Moreover, only 3 per cent of these stories mentioned farming, and only 1 per cent directly concerned agriculture. The large majority focused on the perceived threat to rural landscapes from urban expansion, and thus presented rural America from a nostalgic perspective informed by the rural idyll (ibid.).

Indeed, the relative absence of rural news not only corresponds with the rural idyll myth, but helps to reproduce it – the countryside being implicitly constructed as a place where nothing happens. As Bunce (2003) observes, rural news stories frequently only break through into the mainstream media when they concern events that appear to threaten or disrupt the rural idyll – disease, such as an E.coli outbreak (in Bunce’s example), or the BSE or Foot and Mouth epidemics in Britain; the incursions of new age travellers, environmental protesters, or music festivals; or village political disputes initiated by the obduracy of urban incomers. In reporting such events as exceptions and anomalies, the news media reinforces the imagined normality of the rural idyll.

At the same time, however, elements of the media with a stronger tie to rural areas – regional newspapers and the farming press, for example – have also latched on to the rural idyll as a means of promoting a positive image of rural life (see for example, Hidle et al. 2006, on the portrayal of the rural "good life" in the Norwegian Nationen newspaper). Yet, changing perspectives informed by the rural idyll within the rural population, particularly those of in-migrants, have also presented a challenge to rural regional newspapers that have traditionally championed primary industries such as farming, forestry and mining. Newspapers have been forced to reflect the increasingly complex web of opinions in rural society,
but at the cost of being able to present a coherent platform of regional interests to
external audiences (MacDonald 2004).

The emergence of a new "politics of the rural" as a consequence of rural re-
structuring, in which the major foci of conflict concern the meaning and regula-
tion of rurality (Woods 2003), has also begun to chip away at the neglect of rural
coverage in the mainstream news media. Initially picked up as novelty items, the
politics of the rural has been taken more seriously when it assumed significance
for national politics or for urban populations. In Lithuania, for example, coverage
of rural issues fluctuated with political interests during the post-Communist transi-
tion. As Juska (2007) shows, during the 1990s the pro-reform newspaper Lietuvos
Rytas significantly increased its coverage of rural stories, but did so in a manner
that drew on urban prejudices about rural society and presented rural populations
as scapegoats for the spatially uneven outcomes of liberal economic reform. How-
ever, after 2000, as Lithuania began to prepare for entry to the European Union,
with the prospect of significant investment in rural development, the newspaper
adopted a more positive tone, emphasizing the potential for rural entrepreneur-
ship. As such, Lietuvos Rytas acted as a conduit for rural news to the urban popu-
lation and thus helped to produce and reproduce the shifting discourses of rurality
in Lithuanian political debate.

The British News Media and the Countryside

Britain has a distinctly centralised news media, with ten London-based national
titles accounting for three-quarters of all daily newspaper sales. These include
both mass-circulation tabloids, with an emphasis on entertainment news and sen-
sationalist content, and more serious "broadsheets" with more extensive political
coverage (from divergent standpoints) but more limited sales (Table 1). As table 2
indicates, there are notable differences in the geographical distribution of these
titles. The Daily Telegraph and the Daily Mail have a disproportionately large
readership in significantly rural regions, whilst the readership of the Guardian,
Independent and Times is more strongly urban. Tabloid newspapers, however, are
the largest selling titles in both rural and urban regions.\(^3\)

Reflecting these patterns, Petrie and Wainwright (2008) observe that, "in very
recent times, the Guardian was something of a rarity in many parts of the English
countryside. A copy or two in the village store would be overshadowed by a pile
of the shires’ apparently preferred choice of reading, the Daily Telegraph" (vii).
Petrie and Wainwright go on to note that the circulation of the Guardian
has broadened with the recomposition of the rural population, but their initial observa-
tion continues to hold true for rural residents engaged in traditional pursuits such
as farming, hunting and shooting, who have formed the bedrock of the country-
side protest movement. Our survey of Countryside Alliance members in four dis-
tricts of England and Wales found that half read the Daily Telegraph. Only one
per cent apiece read the Guardian and the Independent, and only three per cent
read one of the mass-circulation tabloids (Table 3). Specialist farming, hunting and field sports publications were also widely read within this community, with two-fifths of survey respondents reading *Horse and Hound* magazine, and a third *The Field* magazine (Table 4). As such, activists in the rural protest movement largely received news from a fairly narrow section of the print media which broadly shared common conservative values.

Yet, at the time of the start of the rural protest movement in the late 1990s, the rural-urban differences in newspaper readership were not prominently reflected in the coverage of rural issues by the national titles. The *Daily Telegraph* and the *Times* may have carried more rural stories than the *Guardian* or the *Independent*, but they generally shared the same idyllic perception of the countryside as an essentially apolitical space, as was reflected in their news-gathering structures. The *Daily Telegraph* employed an "agricultural editor", but its coverage of rural issues as the protests gained momentum was led by its "environment editor". Reports on rural issues and protests in the *Guardian* and the *Independent* similarly have tended to be covered by either environment reporters or regionally-based reporters. Only the *Times* has a formally designated "countryside editor", a position created following the mobilisation of the rural protest movement, and combined by its first incumbent with the post of consumer editor.

Similarly, whilst all the "broadsheet" newspapers have carried regular "countryside" features, such as the *Guardian’s* long-running "country diary", these have tended to focus on nature, landscape, rural property and recreation, and have only rarely acknowledged social and political concerns. Thus, the positioning and presentation of "countryside" features and articles in the British national press has conventionally reinforced the rural idyll discourse. A recent anthology of articles on the countryside from the *Guardian* records examples of the newspaper reporting political stories from an anti-corn-law meeting in 1843, through mass trespasses on private land in the 1930s, to farmers’ protests in the 1970s, but these are a minority alongside articles on country walks, wildlife, rural customs, angling, agricultural shows, and landscape conservation, as well as occasional reports on social and economic changes in agriculture (Petrie and Wainwright 2008). Only in the selected articles from the last twenty years does coverage of a politicised countryside become more apparent.

**Framing RuralProtests**

The stimulus for the mobilisation of the contemporary rural protest movement in Britain was the Labour election victory in 1997. The hunting of foxes and deer with hounds had been a controversial issue for over a century, with repeated unsuccessful attempts to introduce a ban. The anti-hunting majority in the new parliament signalled a clear opportunity for animal rights campaigners to finally achieve this ambition (Woods 2008a). With hunting popularly perceived as an
out-dated, elitist and arguably cruel sport, hunting supporters realised that they risked being isolated and overwhelmed in a debate. To have any chance of resisting a ban, hunting supporters needed to turn public opinion, and to turn public opinion they needed to capture the attention of the news media.

The media, however, had shown little interest in promoting the pro-hunting case during previous attempts at legislation. The most recent attempt, in 1995, had prompted debates on television and comment pieces in newspapers, as well as some coverage of regional rallies in support of hunting. Yet, as George (1999) observed, “there had been no visible presence in London while the Bill was being debated, and although the Rallies had attracted considerable local press and some fair coverage in the nationals, the cheering antis outside the House and the anti-hunting barge on the Thames dominated Friday night’s television news” (81).

The scale of the challenge was brought home to the individual recruited by the British Field Sports Society (BFSS) to coordinate the pro-hunting campaign, Simon Clarke, at an anti-gun-control rally in London in February 1997. As Hart-Davis (1997) reports, Clarke was enthused by the atmosphere of demonstration, attended by 22,000 protesters, yet “he was dismayed to find that the demonstration received minimal press coverage: tiny, single-column reports in the Times and Daily Telegraph, and a little bit more in the Daily Mail” (4).

The response of the pro-hunting lobby was two-fold. On the one hand, the lobby moved to increase its organisational capacity. The BFSS recruited additional staff with campaigning and logistical expertise, and joined with two smaller organisations in a new coalition, the Countryside Alliance. Volunteers were also engaged in helping to organise two major demonstrations in London, the Countryside Rally in July 1997 (attended by 127,000 people) and the Countryside March in March 1998 (attended by 250,000), as well as a plethora of supporting initiatives such as long-distance marches and beacons. Central to this organisational strategy was the strengthening of its media work. Shortly after the failed 1995 Hunting Bill, the BFSS expanded and professionalised its press team. Among the initiatives of the new Chief Press Officer, Janet George, was establishing contacts with the tabloid and left-leaning broadsheet press, which had not existed previously (George 1999). Relations with the media were used to refute anti-hunting claims, promote positive pro-hunting stories, and build the interest of the news media in the Countryside Alliance’s planned protests. The success of this strategy is demonstrated in George’s own account of the Countryside Rally:

The day of the Rally was fine and the day started with the usual dash around the studios, before I headed up to Hyde Park for a live interview with Michael Foster MP [sponsor of the anti-hunting legislation]. Then it was back to the VIP area where press (and VIPs) were queuing for their passes. We had to grab extra hands to cope with the numbers and eventually ran out of passes and press packs when more than 500 journalists had been dealt with. While staff in the press area juggled interviews, found “celebs” for journalists (and journalists for celebs) Alison Hawes spent most of the day doing the studio circuit. When the media report arrived, it was clear that staff and volunteers had participated in more than 300 radio and television inter-
views in the UK on the day – with dozens more for overseas radio and television crews and a multitude of journalists. (George 1999: 125)

At the same time, these organisational developments were entwined with and reliant on a parallel discursive strategy, aimed at re-framing the hunting debate and shifting media, public and political perceptions of the contemporary countryside. In the language of social movement theory, the discursive strategy enabled the emergent rural protest movement to achieve "frame alignment" (della Porta and Diani 2006; Snow et al. 1986) – bringing into line the interpretative frames of the protest organisers, the potential participants and the media to promote the protagonists’ interests. As Snow et al. (1986) describe, frame alignment can take different forms, three of which are evident in the case of the rural protest movement.

Firstly, the discursive strategy aimed to re-frame the hunting debate away from the question of animal welfare by connecting the fate of hunting with the wider fate of the countryside as a whole. This was an example of "frame extension", in which the specific interests or goals of a social movement organisation are linked to much broader concerns in order to make the campaign relevant for a larger number of potential participants (Snow et al. 1986). This strategy was reflected in the adoption of the name "Countryside Alliance" for the coalition organising the initial pro-hunting protests, the branding of the first two mass demonstrations as the "Countryside Rally" and the "Countryside March", and the positioning of both events (and other related activities) as being protests not just about hunting, but also about other rural concerns including farm incomes, housing development, property rights and the closure of village services. At the same time, hunting was presented as being central to rural life, thus suggesting that a ban on hunting would affect the whole social and economic structure of the countryside.

Secondly, in order to maximise the mobilisation of rural participations, the strategy appealed to their core values, beliefs and identity in a process of "frame amplification" (Snow et al. 1986). Emotive language was used to describe the meaning of hunting to rural communities and the desperation of people who felt that their way of life was under threat. A sense of rural identity was invigorated by constructing the notion of an urban-rural divide in which opposition to hunting, disregard for the problems of agriculture, and other perceived threats to rural interests all stemmed from urban "ignorance" and "intolerance". Moreover, the rural lobby also tapped into values of tradition and patriotism by presenting the proposed hunting ban as a modish act of unnecessary modernisation and as being "unBritish". Crucially, in evoking these representations, the rural lobby connected with the core values of the conservative newspapers that were mostly widely read by their target rural constituency, which consequently became enrolled as vehicles for achieving frame amplification.

Thirdly, to be successful in blocking the proposed hunting ban, the pro-hunting lobby needed not only to mobilise sympathisers in protest activity, but also to change public and political opinion. This meant converting erstwhile opponents of
hunting, including more liberal elements of the news media. To pursue this objec-
tive, the pro-hunting lobby attempted a process of “frame bridging” (Snow et al. 1986), connecting hunting to conventional liberal causes, particularly civil liberties. Supporters of a ban on hunting were presented as being “illiberal” and “intolerant”, whilst opponents of the ban were presented as the defenders of liberty. This message was reinforced in the branding of the third mass demonstration in London, the “Liberty and Livelihood March” in 2002, as well as in speeches, articles and publicity materials that positioned the countryside protests in the tradition of libertarian protest and evoked Ghandi and Martin Luther King.

The achievement of frame alignment involved the repetition of certain key tropes, including ideas of the “countryside in crisis”, the “countryside comes to town” and the “countryside speaks out for liberty”, explored further below. These tropes were articulated in the publicity materials and press releases produced by the Countryside Alliance, as well as in speeches and articles by hunting supporters. However, they also came to be independently reproduced by the news media, as the interpretative frame promoted by the Countryside Alliance was implicitly adopted by newspapers and news programmes in the reporting of rural politics and in columns and feature articles.

The Countryside in Crisis

The notion of the ”countryside in crisis” was an important trope in the reporting of the early rural protests, both endowing the protests with a sense of urgency, and hence newsworthiness, and offering the media an explanation for the sudden emergence of protests from a countryside that they had conventionally represented as tranquil and ”apolitical”. By referring, implicitly or directly, to a present or predicted “crisis”, the news media constructed the mobilisation of rural people in protest events as an emotional responses, rather than as an act of political calculation. Coverage of beacons lit around the country in February 1998 before the Countryside March, for example, carried headlines of ”The countryside burns with anger” in the Daily Telegraph (27 February 1998) and ”Flames of rural anger stoked” in the Guardian (27 February 1998). Whilst the Telegraph’s coverage was more prominent and extensive than the Guardian’s, both reports emphasised the emotion of the protests:

Across Britain last night 5,000 beacons lit up the skies signalling the anger of coun-
try people at Government policies on farming, foxhunting and public access to pri-
vate land (Daily Telegraph, 27 February 1998: 9)

The countryside is under attack. The town is out to get us and a way of life is being threatened, from the BSE crisis to the banning of beef on the bone (Beacon organ-
izer, quoted in the Guardian, 27 February 1998: 9)

The trope of the countryside in crisis also contributed to the process of frame ex-
tension, connecting the threat of a hunting ban with other rural concerns. This was articulated in part in reporting on the motivations expressed by protest partici-
pants, as in a Guardian article on long-distance marchers from Wales to London ahead of the Countryside Rally in July 1997, which quoted one marcher explaining that,

The hunting thing is just part of the problem. We’re treated like nothing. They’ve closed our hospitals, cut back on our services, everything is more expensive for us. The countryside is becoming a sink for the poor. They are pushing us further and further (Countryside marcher quoted in the Guardian, 5 July 97: 3).

However, the media also drew these connections in banding together coverage of various rural issues and protests, especially once militant farmers started to mount pickets and blockades during the winter of 1997/8 in protest at falling farm incomes, in parallel with on-going hunting protests. As discussed further below, this approach helped to legitimise and attract media coverage for smaller rural protests, organised without the professional resources available to the Countryside Alliance. The trope was arguably pushed to its extreme by the Welsh regional daily newspaper, the Western Mail, which published an issue with multiple tagged with the strapline ”Rural Wales in Crisis”, which included not only stories about farming and school closures, but also a rumoured threat to axe the long-running rural-set BBC radio series, The Archers.

The Countryside Comes to Town

A key component of the Countryside Alliance’s strategy was that pro-hunting demonstrations needed to be held in London if they were to attract media coverage and be taken seriously. This spatial dislocation, however, also assumed a symbolic significance in the trope of the ”countryside comes to town”, which featured in newspaper headlines for the Countryside Rally (”The country comes to town”, Daily Telegraph, 28 July 1997: 1) and the Countryside March (”Hunters carry torch to London”, Guardian, 28 February 1998; ”The day the city became a shire”, Guardian, 2 March 1998: 1). The trope intrinsically reproduced the conceit of an urban-rural divide, enabling issues around hunting, farming and access to private land for recreation to be presented a clash of cultures. Thus, the Daily Telegraph stated in its front-page report on the Countryside Rally that:

This crowd wanted nothing banned, repealed, subsidised or paid for. But the gradual encroachment of city authority into country life, epitomised by the proposed ban on foxhunting, had gone far enough. A line had to be drawn and it was. (Daily Telegraph, 28 July 1997: 1).

The left-leaning Guardian, less instinctively sympathetic to the rural protesters than the Telegraph, nonetheless reported the articulation of the urban-rural divide in its coverage of the early countryside protests, one article for example carrying the sub-heading, “John Vidal listens to the lament of rural marchers who see their way of life threatened by ‘arrogant metropolitans’” (Guardian, 5 July 1997: 3).

The trope of “the countryside comes to town” not only constructed a binary divide between city and country, but also exaggerated the homogeneity of the two elements. As such, its use in reports on the Countryside Rally and the Countryside
March implicitly suggested that rural communities had come en masse to London for the demonstrations. Most newspapers carried maps showing the number of participants in the Countryside March expected from different regions of Britain – based on coach charters registered with the organisers, and giving the impression of a nationwide movement. Similarly, the Daily Telegraph reported in its front-page coverage of the Countryside Rally that,

In their tens of thousands they had come, from farms, moors and fells, emptying villages and leaving nature to its own devices for a day in order to let the urban majority know that the rural minority wishes to be left alone. (Daily Telegraph, 28 July 1997: 1)

Moreover, in representing the countryside as a homogenous entity, the trope of the "countryside comes to town" suggested that the protesters were representative of the rural population. Whilst the Guardian and the Independent carried articles critiquing this notion, it was explicitly reproduced in the coverage of conservative newspapers such as the Daily Telegraph and the Daily Mail. The Telegraph coverage of the Countryside Rally, for example, included an article headlined "Pack instinct cuts across class barriers to preserve way of life" (Daily Telegraph, 28 July 1997: 4), featuring examples of a landowner, a hunt servant and a gardener who had participated in the rally; whilst its coverage of the Countryside March included a report on "socialist hunt stalwarts" from the former mining communities of South Wales.

Similarly, in accepting the construct of an urban-rural binary, the media coverage exaggerated the naiveté of countryside protesters. In spite of an opinion poll finding that fifteen per cent of participants in the Countryside March lived in towns or cities (reported in the Guardian, 3 March 1998), several newspapers found individuals for whom it was their first visit to London. Unfamiliarity with the big city was further associated with political inexperience (perhaps accurately as our survey of Countryside Alliance members found that 90 per cent had not participated in a political protest before 1997), which in turn allowed the demonstrations to be represented as being different to previous political protests. As the Daily Telegraph again reported for the Countryside Rally:

There has certainly never been a cleaner multitude in [Hyde Park]. These were country people and, even here in the heart of the baffling metropolis, they applied the country code rigidly. Clapham Common may have required days of rubbish gathering after Saturday’s Gay Pride march but just an hour after yesterday’s rally, litter was scarce and Hyde Park’s grass looked its normal self. (Daily Telegraph, 28 July 1997: 1)

**The Countryside Speaks Out for Liberty**

The tropes of the "countryside in crisis" and the "countryside comes to town" contributed to frame extension and frame amplification respectively. The third trope, "the countryside speaks out for liberty", sought to advance both frame amplification and frame bridging. It did this by presenting the countryside protests as
patriotic acts in defence of traditional British values of freedom. There has historically been a strong association of the countryside with British national identity and in invoking this tradition the trope appealed to the conservative values of hunting supporters and reassured them that their actions were respectable and mainstream. The patriotism of the countryside protests was articulated in their dramaturgy, with the use of flags and other national symbols, the singing of jingoistic songs and the plotting of routes and venues around iconic national landscapes. It was also reproduced in the coverage of the protests by conservative newspapers. A week before the Countryside March, the Daily Telegraph published a comment piece by the Conservative Party leader, William Hague, which appeared with the headline ”Marching for Freedom” beneath a cartoon that showed a harmonious crowd of tweed-suited country folk and farm animals bellowing at Big Ben under a banner reading ”Wake up Westminster”. In the article Hague claims that,

If you believe that the particular British ability to change gradually and peacefully contributes to the quality of our life; if you believe that institutions should grow organically and not be imposed according to the latest blueprint, however ”cool”; most of all, if you believe that your life is your responsibility, and not that of a minister or civil servant, then you should know that the Countryside Marchers are marching for you as well. (Hague 1998).

The message was reinforced following the march in comment piece by the Telegraph editor, Charles Moore. Suggesting that, “We have grown so used to rent-a-mob that we have forgotten what a genuine mass demonstration is like” (Moore 1998: 20), Moore asserted that, “I was not marching with sadists yesterday, but with tens of thousands of good true British people” (ibid.). Developing the theme, he drew together the threads of patriotism, liberty and solidarity, observing that, “We are dealing with an aspect of the British character which is common to all classes. This is a phenomenon which has led our country to win wars. It is summed up in the phrase ‘Leave us alone’” (ibid.).

In a swipe at attempts by the Labour government to re-brand the image of Britain, Moore concluded his article with the reflection that,

I was struck even more forcibly than before with the utter absurdity of Cool Britannia. Among the 280,000 or so smiling faces, with caps above them and tweed below, I could see not one single person who answered the Mandelson depiction of our nation. Warm, yes; cool, no. (Moore 1998: 20).

The Times, however, in its editorial on the day before the March reached out to the ”one nation” vision of Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair in a further act of frame bridging:

An England where the pink [hunting] coat vanishes from the village green, the landowner is shorn of rights and thus neglectful of obligations, and the din of the city shuts out the countryside’s cries may be moving with the times. But it is less ”one nation” than a nation needs to be. The marchers who meet in London this weekend are treading, in the proper sense, a traditional pathway. And their voices, if not all their demands, should be heard. (The Times, 27 February 1998).
The patriotism played less well with the left-leaning press. An article in the *Guardian* reviewing the limited-licence radio station, March FM, broadcast during the Countryside March, ridiculed the selection of rousing patriotic music: Land of Hope and Glory, Souza’s Dambusters theme, Rule Britannia, I Vow to Thee My Country. The playlist, the article commented, seemed “to suggest that you can only be truly British if you live in the countryside and like to kill animals” (*Guardian*, 2 March 1998: 5).

Yet, shorn of patriotism, the theme of liberty was considered by Countryside Alliance officials to be a mechanism that could resonate with liberal opinion. They claimed to detect a moderating in the position of newspapers such as the *Guardian* and the *Independent* during the months of the first countryside protests. It was in a comment piece in the *Guardian* that the then Countryside Alliance chair, John Jackson, articulated a case for supporting hunting supporters who engaged in civil disobedience by ignoring a hunting ban that they considered to be unjust (Jackson 2002: 20). Countryside Alliance officials credit this strategy with changing the position of liberal newspapers:

> If one thinks about the left-wing commentators they realise that… this hostility to rural interest has not been for well-founded and intellectual reasons, that it’s not soundly based. That’s why the commentators in the *Guardian*, the *Independent*, the *Observer*, or whatever, have not been persuaded by left wing parliamentarians of people of the left in parliament who have taken a view on this particular piece of legislation. (Countryside Alliance Deputy Chief Executive, interview)

> Now it’s a situation where, say, papers like the *Independent* and the *Guardian* may not be pro-[hunting], but they are opposed to the [Hunting] Act on libertarian grounds. (Countryside Alliance Regional Director, interview)

**The Frame Splinters? From the Countryside March to the Liberty and Livelihood March**

The voluminous press coverage of the Countryside Rally and the Countryside March marked a clear departure from the previously limited coverage of rural politics in the British news media. The shift did not occur organically, or as a news-values-driven decision, but rather was orchestrated by the Countryside Alliance and its press department. The strategy was aimed at using the sympathetic conservative press to energise and mobilise instinctive supporters in rural communities, whilst at the same time reaching out to liberal opinion through the left-leaning media. Initially, at least, it appeared to be successful in both respects.

That the Countryside Rally and Countryside March should have received sympathetic coverage in the conservative press is not surprising, but the scale of the coverage was unprecedented. The *Daily Mail* published a seven-page special section entitled "Save our Countryside" two days before the Countryside March (the cover of which was used as a placard by numerous protesters), followed up by a four-page souvenir supplement with a colour poster. The *Daily Telegraph* simi-
larly produced an eight-page souvenir supplement two days after the march, in addition to three pages of news coverage, an editorial and a comment article on the day after the march. As such, the conservative press moved beyond simply functioning as a conduit for the publicity put out by the Countryside Alliance, to being active agents in the production and reproduction of the new media discourse of an unsettled countryside. In particular, by the scale of their coverage and the production of souvenir supplements, the Mail and Telegraph discursively positioned the Countryside March as an historic event, not just another political protest.

Equally notable was the extent of coverage in the tabloid and liberal broadsheet press. The Guardian, for example, ran nearly three pages of news coverage of the Countryside March the next day, plus an editorial. The tabloid Daily Star, Mirror and Sun all carried illustrated reports of the march, with the Sun evoking the discourse of an urban-rural divide in its headline, “Townie Blair gives in to country marchers” (Sun, 2 March 1998). Reports on the Countryside March in all newspapers tended to reflect the key tropes of the countryside in crisis, the country comes to town, and the countryside speaking up for liberty. However, this was balanced in the liberal broadsheets by more critical perspectives. The Guardian’s report on the beacons lit around the country by Countryside Alliance supporters in the week before the march, for example, included a comment from a spokesperson for the little-known "Countryside Protection Group” which claimed that the march did not reflect the interests of the rural majority (Guardian, 27 February 1998); whilst its coverage the day before the march highlighted a critical quote from the Ramblers’ Association suggesting that participants had been manipulated by landowners, alongside a quote from the National Farmers’ Union declaring agriculture to be in crisis (Guardian, 28 February 1998). Columnists and letter-writers in the Guardian and the Independent also presented more critical perspectives, including David Aaronovitch who caricatured the discourse of a rural-urban divide in the Independent:

[In this discourse]… the city is degenerate, addicted to fashion, a sink of vice, a destroyer of health and corrupter of morals; it makes men effete and women adulterous. Removed from any connection with a “natural” world that it cannot understand, it nevertheless reaches out tentacles of pollution and development to destroy the peace and happiness of Arcadia (Aaronovitch 1998: 21)

These critical interventions advanced an alternative representation of rural Britain, which did not contest the notion of the countryside being unsettled and mutinous, but questioned the attribution of blame. Rather than representing rural people as a minority oppressed by urban interference, it portrayed a countryside still dominated by a privileged elite that had exploited and manipulated the working classes. The Guardian and the Independent both carried stories suggesting that the Countryside March had been “hijacked” by hunting interests (Guardian, 28 February 1998), or by the Conservative Party (Independent, 27 February 1998), and reported that landowners were forcing tenants and employees to participate in the
march ("Yeomen get marching orders", *Guardian*, 21 February 1998). This alternative representation was further reinforced by a cartoon in the *Guardian*, which showed a peer with crown and ermine robes being pulled along in a range rover with the slogan "The Countryside March – Be there or be sacked" painted on the side, by a "country bumpkin" figure wearing a sweatshirt reading "Preserve the Forelock" (*Guardian*, 27 February 1998).

**The Unsettled Countryside**

Coverage of the countryside protests replaced the previously dominant perception of the countryside as a harmonious and "apolitical" place, with a new representation of the unsettled countryside seething with discontent. This new discourse positioned rural protests as newsworthy events, ensuring continuing coverage not only for the hunting debate and the Countryside Alliance campaign, but also for other protests and conflicts that reinforced the impression of the countryside in crisis. In doing so, it altered news values and facilitated news coverage for protest groups that lacked the professional resources of the Countryside Alliance.

When militant farmers in North Wales spontaneously decided to picket Holyhead docks in protest against cheap beef imports from Ireland, they did not have a media strategy. Yet, as the picket was repeated night after night and spread to other ports, the protests were picked up by the national media as evidence of a new front in rural politics (Woods 2005). Individual farm activists developed contacts with journalists that were later used in planning further protest actions. Local campaigns against new supermarket or windfarm developments, or the closure of rural schools and post offices, also received publicity as evidence of the unsettled countryside; with e-mail and mobile phones enabling campaigners with limited resources to gain access to journalists who were already attuned to the newsworthiness of their cause. Whilst such local conflicts were primarily reported through the local and regional media, occasional examples penetrated the national press, especially where individual journalists had been successfully courted.

At the same time, however, the newsworthiness of rural protests rested in part on their perceived novelty, and news coverage hence decreased with repetition. This presented a particular challenge to the Countryside Alliance, which needed to maintain its level of media coverage in order both to sustain pressure on politicians and to meet the expectations of its supporters:

> One of the dangers … was that anything not on the front page of the *Telegraph* was perceived as a failure from then on. And that’s quite a challenge … that’s how it was measured by our supporters. If they went to Parliament Square and held up a placard and it was on page 17, it was a failure. (Countryside Alliance activist, interview)

In response, the Countryside Alliance varied its protest methods, with regional rallies, pickets at party conferences, and long distance marches, as well as softer campaigns such as "countryside in the town” information stalls. Nonetheless, frustration at the decreasing media coverage of these activities led some hunting activ-
ists to form more militant breakaway groups committed to direct action. One of these, the Real CA, in particular, effectively harnessed the power of the media with limited numbers, but significant financial backing and good media contacts. Its use of publicity stunts such as placing a giant paper-mâché hunter on the ancient “White Horse of Uffingham” chalk figure, and hanging a banner reading “Love Hunting” from the Angel of the North sculpture on Valentine’s Day, achieved a series of news articles, which commonly quoted anonymous sources warning of more disruptive actions such as attacking electricity pylons and reservoirs to generate a sense of menace that exceeded their actual capacity to act (see for example, *Daily Telegraph*, 27 May 2002; *Times*, 28 May 2002; *Northern Echo*, 6 June 2002; *Guardian*, 22 July 2002; *Times*, 28 August 2002; *Guardian*, 30 August 2002; *Daily Telegraph*, 17 November 2002).

Farm protesters similarly found that the newsworthiness of their demonstrations dwindled with repetition, and as with pro-hunting supporters, frustration at the lack of media coverage prompted a change to more militant tactics, notably the blockade of oil depots in September 2000 (Woods 2005). The impact of the blockade in disrupting oil supplies, prompting panic buying and provoking a national political crisis, secured print and broadcast news headlines for the protests for several days, but the fuel blockades also marked a threshold in the coverage of rural politics. Whilst the campaign to reduce fuel prices was vociferously supported in populist newspapers, other newspapers adopted a less sympathetic representation of a small minority holding the country to ransom.

The outbreak of a Foot and Mouth Disease epidemic in February 2001 also became a key event in the evolving news discourse about rural Britain. The spread of the epidemic to over 2,000 farms, the severity of control measures including the closure of all rural footpaths and many tourist attractions, the imposition of exclusion zones and a precautionary cull of livestock, the seven months taken to eradicate the disease and the total cost of £2 billion to public funds (Woods 2005), all made the outbreak the major news item of the year, with over 19,000 articles in the national press. Superficially, at least, coverage of the epidemic and its impact revived and reinforced the discourse of the “countryside in crisis”, articulated through headlines such as “Farms: yet another crisis” (*Guardian*, 22 February 2001), “The Killing Fields” (*Mail on Sunday*, 25 February 2001), “Funeral Pyre for British Farming” (*Sun*, 26 February 2001), ”Flames fan the fears of traumatised community” (*Daily Telegraph*, 27 February 2001), ”Rural Fear and Loathing” (*Guardian*, 28 February, 2001), ”The day they closed the countryside” (*Daily Telegraph*, 28 February, 2001), and ”The land where spring went up in flames” (*Times*, 25 April 2001).

Beneath these headlines, however, a more complex set of representations developed. Protests by individual farmers and communities against the cull of healthy livestock or against disposal pyres and pits were widely reported, but they lacked the clear anti-urban narrative of the earlier countryside protests. The Ob-
server (a liberal Sunday newspaper published by the Guardian), reported calls by militant farmers’ leaders for resistance to the cull by observing that “Once more the countryside is in revolt” (18 March 2001: 9), but also noted that the National Farmers’ Union had backed the plan. In different articles farmers were presented as both victims and villains in the crisis. The Observer again reported news of the economic impact on rural tourism of the precautionary measures with the headline, "Now our tourism industry faces ruin. All because of farming” (11 March 2001: 1); whilst columns, letters and leaders in several newspapers blamed farmers for the outbreak (Daily Mail, 28 February 2001; Express, 28 February 2001; Independent, 28 February 2001), or argued that the epidemic presented an opportunity for reforming agriculture and rural policy (Guardian, 29 March and 4 April 2001). An erroneous over-payment of compensation to farmers was reported by the Times with the headline, ”Government to blame on payout” (7 August 2001), but more provocatively in the Observer as ”The millionaire farmers who made a killing” (5 August 2001).

Over time, therefore, reporting of the “unsettled countryside” in the news media became increasingly nuanced, with diverging perspectives on the workings of power and politics in rural Britain. These tensions, which broadly reflected the ideological leanings of different newspapers, came to frame coverage of the Countryside Alliance’s Liberty and Livelihood March in 2002, and the final stages of the hunting debate.

The Liberty and Livelihood March

In September 2002, the Countryside Alliance held its last, and largest, mass demonstration in London. Timed to respond to a renewed determination by hunting opponents in parliament to push for legislation introducing a ban, publicity for the rally nonetheless again drew on themes of the countryside in crisis and the countryside comes to town to embrace other rural concerns. However, in explicitly branding the demonstration as the ”Liberty and Livelihood March”, the Countryside Alliance prioritised frame bridging and the goal of reaching out to liberal opinion ahead of the anticipated new hunting bill. The different name and format of the march, and the targeted higher number of participants, were also aimed at maintaining media interest.

In both of these respects, the Liberty and Livelihood March was only partially successful. As table 5 indicates, coverage in national newspapers was significantly more uneven than for the earlier Countryside March. Whilst the Telegraph carried 53 articles about the march during the fortnight before and after, the Daily Mail printed only seven articles (in sharp contrast to its special sections on the 1998 Countryside March). The Sun mentioned the march in two articles, one of which was in characteristic style a ”page 3” semi-nude photograph of three models it claimed had been on the march. Its Sunday stablemate, the News of the World,
mentioned the march only in passing in coverage of an anti-war demonstration the following week.

Much of the coverage of the Liberty and Livelihood March reprised the same tropes as employed for the earlier protests (see also Anderson 2006). The Sun, for example, stated that “everyone from farm labourers to lords of the manors are furious at the destruction of country life, the loss of rural post offices and shops, the foot-and-mouth disease fiasco, the collapse in farm incomes and the loss of jobs if hunting is banned” (Sun, 20 September 2002). The Times and the Telegraph similarly echoed earlier coverage with headlines including, ”Townies prepare to host their country cousins” and ”How townies turned me into a troublemaker” (Times, 21 September 2002), ”Heart of the capital beats with undying spirit of the country” (Daily Telegraph, 23 September 2002) and ”Something must be done. Rural life is eroding away” (Daily Telegraph, 17 September 2002).

The Telegraph also faithfully reproduced the trope of the countryside speaking out for liberty, arguing in one article that “everyone who believes in liberty should march. Those who stay at home on Sunday because they oppose hunting are missing the point” (19 September 2002: 28), and described the march as “the biggest civil liberties protest in British history” (23 September 2002: 1). Moreover, the Telegraph actively promoted the march through editorials, features and news articles. In the weeks preceding the march it carried several stories featuring individuals explaining why they would be joining the march, including celebrities, prominent rural campaigners, farmers and both rural and urban residents. A week after the march, its leader column declared simply, ”The March Worked”, noting a poll showing that public opinion on hunting was evenly divided (Daily Telegraph, 28 September 2002). The coverage cemented the newspaper’s position as a key actor in the rural movement in its own right, as signalled earlier in the year when the editor had told the UK Press Gazette that he was “determined to ‘ginger up’ countryside organisations to be tougher with the Government” (Press Gazette online, 30 May 2002).

In contrast, coverage in the Guardian and the Independent was distinctly more negative than for the earlier Countryside March. Both newspapers questioned the march’s objectives in leader articles and carried stories featuring rural residents opposed to the march (Guardian, 21 September 2002; Independent, 21 and 23 September 2002). In another report, the Independent described the march as “the rural revolt that began with dinner at a top London restaurant” (21 September 2002: 3). Through these articles, the Guardian and the Independent, together with the Guardian’s stablemate the Observer, consolidated an alternative representation of rural Britain that had started to emerge in earlier coverage – with the countryside presented as a society beset with problems, but the Countryside Alliance protests portrayed as sectional actions focused on the wrong issues and not representing real rural interests.
The respective articulation of these representations became itself a focus of argument between sections of the media. *Telegraph* columnist Tom Utley attacked a "nasty" cartoon in the Guardian, that he claimed portrayed all march participants as ridiculous, ugly, arrogant and stupid (*Daily Telegraph*, 28 September 2002: 24), whilst *Independent* columnist David Aaronovitch criticised the partisanship of right-wing columnists (*Independent*, 1 October 2002). Both interventions were framed by controversy over a *Guardian* column written by Rod Liddle, editor of the flagship BBC Radio morning news programme *Today*, in which he had suggested that glimpses of “the forces supporting the Countryside Alliance” reminded him why he voted Labour (Liddle 2002: 5). Liddle was subsequently forced to resign as the editor of *Today* by a *Telegraph*-led campaign that claimed his expressed views on the march compromised the political neutrality of the programme.

Indeed, the *Telegraph* had already repeatedly criticised the BBC’s coverage of the countryside protests. It had pointed out that the Countryside Rally in 1997 had been only the third item on the BBC evening television news, and that the Countryside March in 1998 had received only five minutes of coverage (*Daily Telegraph*, 13 September 2002). Following the Liberty and Livelihood March, it reported criticism of the amount of coverage by the BBC, and the broadcaster’s equivocal statement that the march “has been described as one of the biggest demonstrations in Britain in modern times” (*Daily Telegraph*, 24 September 2002: 4).

Although presented as evidence of BBC pro-government bias, the BBC’s coverage was little different to that of other broadcasters and reflected the difficulty of broadcast news in reporting the countryside protests whilst maintaining political balance. The apparent solution was a third representation, in which the sense of change in rural Britain was reported but largely depoliticised. This representation was reproduced not only in news reports, but also on non-news programmes such as the BBC’s weekly rural magazine programme, *Countryfile*, and its farming-based radio soap opera, *The Archers*. Similarly, whilst the new frame of the unsettled countryside was reproduced in a number of documentaries – including "The Hunt" (BBC2 1998) "Beastly Business" (BBC2 2001), "Countryside at War" (BBC1 2002), "Countryside: Death of a way of life" (BBC2 2002), "A Very English Village" (BBC4 2005), "The Hunt" (BBC2 Wales 2006), "The Last Tally Ho?" (BBC1 2006) "The Lie of the Land" (More4 2007) and "Power to the People" (BBC2 2007) – these programmes tended to present themselves as social history records of inevitable rural change, divorced from political context, or to portray rural campaigners as bumbling amateurs ("Blood on the Carpet", BBC2 1999; "The Big Day", BBC Wales 2000) in a manner that drew implicitly on established rural stereotypes.
Conclusions

The volume of news media coverage of rural politics in Britain increased sharply in the late 1990s, as issues such as hunting, the future of farming and access to rural services gained prominence on the political agenda, and as various protest movements were mobilised around these issues. The change in media coverage was not just quantitative, but also qualitative. Prior to 1997, the predominant representation of the British countryside in the media was of an idyllic, untroubled and largely "apolitical" society. National news coverage of rural political issues was limited, and when the occasional local conflict was reported, it was generally presented as an anomalous intrusion of urban-style politics into the rural idyll (Woods 2005). After 1997, the media performed an apparent about-turn, representing the countryside as an unsettled place, seething with discontent, yet this new discourse also evolved, becoming more complex over time.

Initially, during the period from 1997 to 2000, the news media’s framing of the "unsettled countryside" continued to be informed by the tradition of the rural idyll, as well as by the perspectives spun by the rural lobby. Accordingly, reports and commentary generally accepted the underlying frame of an urban-rural divide, and suggested that conventionally uncomplaining rural folk had been compelled to protest by a growing countryside crisis that was the result of urban ignorance and interference. Only a few articles in the more liberal press dissented from this representation. From late 2000 onwards, however, the perspectives advanced by different sections of the news media began to diverge more markedly. Although the discourse of the unsettled countryside continued to be widely reproduced, opinions differed on the causes and solutions. Whilst newspapers such as the Daily Telegraph became more entrenched in their representation of a beleaguered rural population fighting against urban intolerance, others such as the Guardian and the Independent increasingly presented the Countryside Alliance as a sectional movement that failed to represent the real interests and problems of rural Britain.

Neither was the growth of news media coverage of rural issues a purely reactive and news values driven response to independent events. Rather, the mobilisation of the rural movement and the shifting media representation of rural Britain were co-constructed and mutually dependent. The Countryside Alliance’s demonstrations would never have achieved the scale that they did, or had the political impact that they did, without the support of the media. Equally, the media were amenable to being enrolled into the Countryside Alliance’s frame alignment strategy because their existing frames did not allow them to interpret the new phenomenon of rural protests, and because the Countryside Alliance was offering explanations that corresponded with their own wider values.

Thus, as in the case of Lithuania described by Juska (2007), the shifting representation of the countryside in the British news media must be understood in terms of the media’s own political and commercial interests, and the wider politi-
cal context. The Countryside Rally in 1997 was the first significant act of opposition to the Labour government elected earlier that year (Woods 2008b). For the conservative press, coverage and promotion of the rural protests became a way of putting pressure on the new government, not just over hunting and farming, but also on its wider modernisation agenda, its attempts to rebrand British identity, and its priorities. For Labour-supporting newspapers, the rural protests were similarly newsworthy as a test for the government, but more emphasis was placed on the government’s response. Some individual journalists on the left bought the framing of hunting as a libertarian issue and opposed a ban as part of a wider concern about the erosion of civil liberties. More significantly, however, exposing the sectional interests of the Countryside Alliance became a way for the liberal press to attack the Conservative opposition as elitist and old-fashioned at a time when the government’s popularity was beginning to slip.

Moreover, by 2002 the prospect of war in Iraq had replaced rural discontent as the media’s preferred focal point for opposition to the government, and the volume of coverage of rural issues accordingly decreased, tailing off to close to pre-1997 levels after the eventual introduction of the hunting ban in 2005. The one exception was the *Daily Telegraph*, the newspaper with the strongest readership among Countryside Alliance supporters, for whom continuing to promote the “countryside” cause made good commercial sense.

There is little doubt that the intensity of news media coverage of the early countryside protests amplified their political impact, causing the government to prevaricate on its support for a hunting ban and to work on articulating its own political construction of the countryside (Woods 2008b). There is evidence too, of some impact on public opinion, with polls showing an increase in support for hunting, although the protests ultimately failed in their objective of defeating a hunting ban. More broadly, however, the effect on popular perceptions of rurality in Britain is questionable. The notion of an “unsettled countryside” has now become embedded in news media discourse, and will most probably be resurrected as appropriate issues arise in future; yet, it is unlikely that the adoption of more nuanced perspectives on the changing British countryside in the news media will have done much to dent the overwhelming influence of the rural idyll reproduced through the entertainment media.

**Michael Woods** is Professor of Human Geography and Director of the Institute of Geography and Earth Sciences at Aberystwyth University, in Wales, Great Britain. His research examines contemporary change in rural areas, including work on rural politics and protests. He led a project on ‘Grassroots Rural Protest and Political Activity in Britain’ for the UK Economic and Social Research Council, on which this article is based. E-mail: m.woods@aber.ac.uk
Notes

1 Data obtained from analysis of Lexis/Nexis online newspaper archive.
2 "Grassroots rural protest and political activity in contemporary Britain”, funded by the British Economic and Social Research Council (RES-000-23-1317), 2006-7. The investigators on the project were Michael Woods and Jon Anderson, with Steven Guilbert and Suzie Watkin as research assistants.
3 Percentage figures are approximate due to overlap between some television regions. Regions with a mixed rural-urban population (Central (Midlands); Tyne Tees (North East England); and Yorkshire) are excluded from Table 1 for clarity. The data is published by television region as it is primarily made available for marketing purposes.
4 Between 1 January and 31 December 2001. Data from Lexis/Nexis online newspaper archive.

Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Base</th>
<th>Politics</th>
<th>Average daily sales (July-Dec 2007)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Sun</td>
<td>Tabloid</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>3,117,679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Mail</td>
<td>Mid market</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>2,349,782</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mirror</td>
<td>Tabloid</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>1,545,245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Telegraph</td>
<td>Broadsheet</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>884,601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Express</td>
<td>Mid market</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>790,198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Star</td>
<td>Tabloid</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>Right-leaning</td>
<td>782,790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Times</td>
<td>Broadsheet</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>Right-leaning</td>
<td>637,776</td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial Times</td>
<td>Broadsheet</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>Pro-business</td>
<td>439,710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Record</td>
<td>Tabloid</td>
<td>Glasgow</td>
<td>Left-leaning</td>
<td>402,757</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Guardian</td>
<td>Broadsheet</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>Left-leaning</td>
<td>360,263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Independent</td>
<td>Broadsheet</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>Left-leaning</td>
<td>239,244</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regional evening newspapers (15 titles)</td>
<td>Generally mid market</td>
<td>Various regional centres</td>
<td>Varies</td>
<td>2,629,193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional morning newspapers (72 titles)</td>
<td>Generally mid market</td>
<td>Various regional centres</td>
<td>Varies</td>
<td>656,243</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 1: Daily newspapers in Britain. (Sales figures from the Audi Bureau of Circulations)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>The Daily Telegraph</th>
<th>The Daily Mail</th>
<th>The Guardian</th>
<th>The Independent</th>
<th>The Times</th>
<th>The Mirror</th>
<th>The Sun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglia (Eastern England)</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>581</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>802</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Border (Cumbria &amp; S Scotland)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales &amp; West</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grampian (Northern Scotland)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meridian (South East England)</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>780</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Country (South West England)</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significantly rural regions –total</td>
<td>913 (48%)</td>
<td>1983 (41%)</td>
<td>340 (30%)</td>
<td>245 (36%)</td>
<td>686 (38%)</td>
<td>1279 (36%)</td>
<td>2847 (36%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Granada (North West England)</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>571</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Scotland</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>791</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>616</td>
<td>1279</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>754</td>
<td>930</td>
<td>2393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predominantly urban regions –total</td>
<td>852 (45%)</td>
<td>2087 (43%)</td>
<td>677 (59%)</td>
<td>398 (58%)</td>
<td>956 (54%)</td>
<td>1615 (45%)</td>
<td>3725 (46%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total national readership</td>
<td>1898 (43%)</td>
<td>4853 (36%)</td>
<td>1147 (58%)</td>
<td>688 (54%)</td>
<td>1812 (45%)</td>
<td>3529 (46%)</td>
<td>7956 (46%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2: Estimated readers (thousands) of British national daily newspapers by selected television regions, 2009.*
*Source: National Readership Survey and [www.nmauk.co.uk](http://www.nmauk.co.uk).*
### Table 3: Newspapers read by surveyed Countryside Alliance members (n=1207)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Daily Telegraph</td>
<td>50.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Times</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Daily Mail</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Times</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Express</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racing Post</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sun</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Guardian</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Independent</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mirror</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4: Rural, farming and field sports publications read by surveyed Country-side Alliance members (n=1207)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Horse and Hound</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Field</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers’ Weekly</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country Life</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Shooting Times</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers’ Guardian</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countryman’s Weekly</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Countryman</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5: Articles and letters mentioning the Liberty and Livelihood March, published between 8th September and 8th October 2002 in British national newspapers. (Source: Lexis/Nexis)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Neutral or minor reference</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily Telegraph and Sunday Times</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Mail</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail on Sunday</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mirror</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sun</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Observer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 5: Articles and letters mentioning the Liberty and Livelihood March, published between 8th September and 8th October 2002 in British national newspapers. (Source: Lexis/Nexis)*
References

Reading Rural Consumption Practices for Difference: Bolt-holes, Castles and Life-rafts

By Keith Halfacree

Abstract

Based mostly on evidence from the UK, this paper challenges the rural’s usual association with predominantly conservative politics and practices. It advocates showing awareness of ambiguity in how representations, and specifically in this paper rural representations, and their numerous associated consumption practices are interpreted. A focus is given on the possibility of interpreting these practiced rural representations in the context of responses to the negative features within everyday life identified by writers such as Lefebvre. Drawing specifically on the “postmodern Marxism” of Gibson-Graham (2006), and particularly beginning to deploy what they term “reading for difference rather than dominance”, the paper introduces three “styles” of consuming the rural. These are expressed via the metaphors of bolt-hole, castle and life-raft, and it is argued that they can be read as expressing critique of urban everyday life. In the concluding section, the lessons learned from reading rural consumption practices for difference in this way are brought together to suggest that not only can the rural today be regarded as an active “heterotopia” but that this alternative status could be used to underpin an urban-focused social movement for reclamation of what Lefebvre termed “everyday life”.

Keywords: Rural, reading for difference, representations, consumption practices, everyday life, social movement
Introduction: Beyond the Conservative Rural

Apart from the sensory deprivation of nothing to do, whenever I’ve ventured into the rural wonderland I always seem to land up in some small-minded little England. A bad-taste, intolerant, prying land that time forgot, where everybody looks and thinks and dresses and moans and eats the same. …the fact that everybody looks the same because everybody is pretty much the same is one of the reasons why I find the countryside dreary and rather depressing. But I also fear that it’s one of the reasons some people are attracted to it. Those who sing the praises of rural over urban life always point out that there is an annual exodus from cities to towns, as if all those people upping sticks to move to the sticks can’t be wrong. Well, some of those people may well be moving for what I would definitely consider to be the wrong reasons. … A retreat into the uniform monoculture of old England because of an inability to accept the challenges and pleasures of genuinely multicultural cities, is, I’m sure, one of the reasons why some people choose to relocate in the laager of the shires.

(Elms 2001: no pagination)

Representations of rural England as negative as that in Elms’s polemic are relatively rare but tap into a popular representation of the countryside as almost irredeemably “conservative”. This sense of the rural being somehow out of kilter with the urban mainstream has a long history (Williams 1973). It is, for example, one of the evaluative legacies of the dualistic spatialisation of Tönnies’s developmental Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft concepts into rural and urban, respectively (Savage et al. 2003). This paper, however, mostly drawing on UK material, challenges this predominant conservative reading of the rural and its consequent disparaging by radical thinkers. It argues that many rural consumption practices, appearing at first conventional and conformist express innate critique of aspects of everyday life and experiences when read differently, making denigrations such as that by Elms one-dimensional at best.

The paper explores how one can view rural consumption practices not only through a lens set within the predominant contours of the capitalist consumer society but also through a more critical lens observing from a different topography of everyday life. The premise is that even within seemingly mundane and mainstream acts there may lurk more subversive currents:

The ordinary can become extraordinary not by eclipsing the everyday… but by fully appropriating and activating the possibilities that lie hidden, and typically repressed, within it. (Gardiner 2006: 207)

To develop the argument, the paper’s next section advocates awareness of ambiguity in how representations – rural representations specifically – and their associated consumption practices are interpreted. It calls for deploying what Gibson-Graham (2006) term “reading for difference rather than dominance”. This disposition is made relevant in the following section in respect of interpreting rural representations in the context of responses to negative features within everyday life. Bringing these previous two sections together, the paper next introduces three
“styles” of consuming the rural, expressed via metaphors of bolt-hole, castle and life-raft, that can be read as expressing critique of everyday life. In the concluding section, the lessons learned from reading rural consumption practices for difference are brought together to suggest that not only can the rural today be regarded as an active heterotopia but that this status can underpin an urban-focused social movement for reclamation of what Lefebvre termed “everyday life”.

Interpreting Rural Representations and Consumption Practices

Practicing Rural Representations

Understanding the rural as (partly) representation is established within rural studies. For example, several years ago the present author defined “rural” as a “social representation of space”, one of the:

organizational mental constructs which guide us towards what is “visible” and must be responded to, relate appearance and reality, and even define reality itself. ... Social representations consist of both concrete images and abstract concepts, organized around “figurative nuclei”. (Halfacree 1993: 29)

However, besides not overstating the social character of representations, their structured, thereby relatively fixed, cognitive character should be questioned (Halfacree 2006a). They are to be seen not as sitting tout court in the background – “out there” (Hanna et al. 2004: 477) – subsequently dictating actions but as mutable and always enmeshed with the actions they partly inform.

The danger of setting up representations and practices in binary opposition has been taken up in a study of heritage tourism, where Hanna et al. (2004: 461) depict representation as “work”, with “representation and embodied practices… inseparable aspects of the reproduction of tourism spaces… not… binary opposites… but… mutually constitutive”. Expressing similar sympathies, Del Casino and Hanna (2006: 36) depict “maps and mappings… [as] both representations and practices… simultaneously”. Expanding this depiction but substituting “rural” for “maps”, the following summarises how rural representations are understood through consumption practices (see below) in the present paper:

the [rural] representation can always be exceeded and used in different ways as individual social actors mark the [rural] with… new objects of their own personal… interest. As such, [rural representations] are never fully complete nor are they ever completely inscribed with meaning through production. Rather, consumption is production. [Rural] spaces are processes, fluid and contested, although they find themselves temporarily fixed through certain practices of consumption that (re)produce these objects in new and unique ways. (after Del Casino and Hanna 2006: 50)

Within rural studies, the link between representations and practices is widely acknowledged (Cloke et al. 2006). Conceptually, for example, a Lefebvrian model of rural space presents rurality with three facets related to representations, practices and everyday lives (Halfacree 2006a). Reiterating, connections between the
elements should not be interpreted as representations “defining” practices but as representations providing, for example, rules and resources (Giddens 1984) implicated in actions. For example, rural walking can be linked with but not reduced to Romantic representations of the rural (Edensor 2000; Wallace 1993), in turn reproducing such representations, and counterurbanisation migration is underpinned by often unexamined “idyllic” representations of rurality (Halfacree 1994; van Dam et al. 2002).

Reading Rural Consumption

With rural representations linked to practices, how these practices are to be read comes via Bauman’s (1992: 106) advocacy of an “interpretive” stance to yield “enrichment” of one’s own tradition, through incorporating other, heretofore inaccessible, experiences. In other words, it is accepted that one may know – whether as academics or members of the public – a great deal about the rural practices concerned but also that this knowledge can be added to.

As a first stage in this reading, “practices” will be re-scripted and narrowed as “consumption”, or the purchase and use of goods and services. Within this characterisation, emphasis will be given to usage rather than to acts of purchase. Following Miller’s (1987) Hegelian perspective, consumption is not “only… an aspect of the general problem of commodities” (189), in terms of alienation especially. Instead, focus is on “the period of time following the purchase or allocation of the item… [as] the situation is radically transformed upon obtaining the goods in question” (190). Through consumption, that which is being consumed can – but, as Miller stresses, does not always – turn on and seek to negate the alienated market-based relationships within which it was originally set. This can serve positive transformative ends:

far from being a mere commodity, a continuation of all those processes which led up to the object... the object in consumption confronts, criticizes and finally may often subjugate these abstractions in a process of human becoming. (Miller 1987: 191-2)

Talking of rural consumption practices rather than simply rural consumption also seeks to bypass a priori distinctions between, for example, (urban) consumption of the rural, (rural) consumption in the rural and other conceptual distinctions, such as the regulationist (Goodwin 2006) idea of “rural consumption regimes”. This is not in any way denying that these distinctions are often extremely useful but an emphasis here on practice seeks to develop analysis more in the direction of the emotionally-charged everyday ways of living with which the consumption acts are enmeshed, rather than on the “colder” terms of the what, how, when and where of specific acts of consumption.

Although Miller’s insights into consumption suggest exciting potential for rural consumption practices, reading these practices initially takes a more conventional line. This is because probable first response, and likely most commonplace, is to place such consumption within the “consumer society” mainstream (Clarke 2003).
Countryside consumption bears many of the well-known hallmarks of consumption within mature capitalist society generally. This reading, implicit or explicit, underpins the idea of the countryside as commodity (Cloke 1992) and “consumption countrysides” – where the rural “fulfils a role of socially providing a variety of marketed goods and services to non-rural people” (Marsden 1999: 508) – replacing erstwhile production countrysides.

In media terms, for example, rurality’s prominent role within both advertising and popular drama merits attention, wherein idyllic representations of rurality (see below), in particular, are often vigorously deployed. Thus, in advertising, “Rural images are central to the marketing of a huge diversity of products, ranging from biscuits to home wares, weekend retreats and ecotourism” (Winchester and Rofe 2005: 269; also Bunce 1994; Hopkins 1998). Similarly, rural places that have been or still are sites of popular television series or feature films, in particular, have become very popular tourism sites (Halfacree forthcoming c), a development which in part reflects the still growing popularity and importance of explicitly mediated ruralities (Phillips et al. 2001).

Reading rural consumption practices within a consumer society rubric fits initially, for example, “mainstream counterurbanisation” (Halfacree 2008), an example which further suggests the often seamless connections made between academic, media and promotional discourses. Mainstream counterurbanisation comprises largely middle-class flows of residents to rural areas within much of the global North, drawn especially by high quality of life associations with the rural (Gosnell and Abrams 2009). It is, on the one hand, strongly represented and often satirised within the media and popular culture but, on the other hand, also badged with promotional normativity through being institutionalised in and through facilitating networks comprising agents such as banks, building societies, letting agencies, mortgage providers, removal companies, decorators, utilities companies, and further underpinned by norms of migration discourse such as quality of life, accessibility, retirement, or children’s welfare (Halfacree forthcoming a).

In contrast to reading rural consumption as general consumption practice, an alternative reading places it in a reactionary light (though still involving capitalist consumption). This came through in Elms’s opening quote and is linked to longstanding ideas that the rural – and associated practices – is somehow stubbornly resistant to the status quo or “progress”. Presented “positively” as nostalgia, the idea of the rural as timeless runs deeply through the rural idyll, discussed below, for example, but a more negative sense of reaction is reflected in various anti-idyllic rural representations, from the imbecile British “country bumpkin” beloved of cartoonists, through the imagined Appalachian who is “white, poor, rural, male, racist, illiterate, fundamentalist, inbred, alcoholic, violent” (Stewart 1996: 119), to the “rural horror” of the Texas Chain Saw Massacre (Bell 1997). From this perspective, which is also clearly highly amplified by the media, consuming the rural
can be read as somehow anti-modern and backward-orientated, if not plain unintelligible.

However, the interpretive operation now returns to Miller’s (1987) emphasis on the openness of consumption to argue that reading rural consumption does not have to fit within the with-the-flow / against-the-flow binary suggested thus far. Instead, it can express a more sublatory role of superseding yet preserving what this binary encompasses. In short, one can identify within rural consumption a third set of readings neither fully complicit with the status quo nor simply a reactionary non; that articulate the consumer society context, whilst expressing critique of that same context. This builds on Marsden’s (1999: 508) quote given earlier, which goes on to suggest consumption countrysides allow “non-rural people” to “distance themselves from the pathologies of urban life, either temporarily or permanently”.

An excellent way into appreciating these other readings is through Wright’s (1985) recognition of the potential for multiple, often contradictory, readings of mundane or even seemingly conservative phenomena. Wright’s subject was “heritage”, typically like rural often seen as underpinned by conservative or reactionary politics (Hewison 1987). Whilst not refuting this, Wright (1985: 78) also tellingly observed how:

Like the utopianism from which it draws, national heritage involves positive energies which certainly can’t be written off as ideology. It engages hopes, dissatisfactions, feelings of tradition and freedom, but it tends to do so in a way that diverts these potentially disruptive energies into the separate and regulated spaces of stately display.

Taking this perspective further connects to the work of Gibson-Graham (1996, 2006). For Gibson-Graham, the idea that capitalism in all of its dimensions is literally “everywhere” and “inescapable” is, simply, one of the great myths of the modern age since, as Holloway (2002: 187, my emphasis) expresses it, capitalism is really “a society of non-correspondence, in which things do not fit together functionally”. Gibson-Graham (1996) criticise predominant modes of thinking that distance the economic from politics and which reify, totalise and make holistic the former. Rejecting the idea of any singular capitalist system, they call for “a new political imaginary” (Gibson-Graham 2006: xix), contributing to this left renovation with illustrations of alternative economic set-ups.

For the purpose of this paper’s interpretive focus, within Gibson-Graham’s (2006: xxix-xxxiii) “thinking techniques”, anti-essentialism can be expressed through “techniques of rereading” (xxxi). Methodologically, one way to disrupt any ideologically inscribed totality is to undertake “Reading for difference rather than dominance” (xxxi-xxxii), which seeks to uncover “what is possible but obscured from view” (xxxi). Rejecting “masterful knowing” (6) and “refusing to know too much” (8), one can acknowledge “future possibilities [that] become more viable by virtue of already being seen to exist” (xxxi).
Returning to rural consumption practices, the insights from Miller, Wright, Gibson-Graham and others suggest the need for extreme wariness in only acknowledging the predominant story of human practice within a capitalist society that these practices represent – although such acknowledgement is nonetheless essential. Instead, within these practices, possibly – even probably – both highly obscured and inevitably battered and compromised, may be detected other stories that when pieced together and read express a degree of substantive critique of that society.

**Rurality and the Critique of Everyday Life**

Reading for difference may thus enable interpretation of at least some rural consumption practices as expressing radical critique. The target of that critique, as Marsden (1999) suggested, given that these practices are often relatively mundane and ordinary, is likely to be elements of the similarly mundane experiences of urban everyday life. Therefore, this section briefly considers everyday life and its critique, before outlining how rural representations associated with consumption also speak critically to conditions of everyday life.

*Everyday Life and its Critique*

An upsurge in studies on everyday life and on ordinariness and the mundane generally (for example, Eyles 1989; Gardiner 2000, 2006) is inspired in part by perception that everyday life has more to tell us than just what seems obvious and banal and is traditionally lambasted by “legislative” (Bauman 1992) voices from across the political spectrum. In other words, everyday life is duplicitous (Hal-facree 2007a), with much of its seeming openness and lack of guile profoundly misleading.

One of the first to examine everyday life as crucial for understanding the contemporary human condition was Henri Lefebvre (especially Lefebvre 1991/1958, 1984/1968). He understood everyday life and the academic challenge it poses as follows:

_work, leisure, family life and private life make up a whole [everyday life] which we can call a “global structure” or “totality” on condition that we emphasize its historical, shifting, transitory nature. [In] …the critique of everyday life… we can envisage a vast enquiry which will look at professional life, family life and leisure activities in terms of their many-sided interactions. Our particular concern will be to extract what is living, new, positive – the worthwhile needs and fulfilments – from the negative elements: the alienations. (Lefebvre 1991/1958: 42, my emphasis)*

Everyday life is so important because it is where people are constituted (Gardiner 2000).

Within contemporary “neo-capitalism” (Lefebvre 1984/1968), everyday life has been broken-up and reduced to mundane and unrewarding routines underpinned by the logic of commodities and their exchange values. Consequently, people in-
creasingly “do not know their own lives very well, or know them adequately” (Lefebvre 1991/1958: 94, emphasis removed). However, people are not passive. They seek to (re)capture what they sense is lost, especially through leisure and other forms of consumption, although this is largely unfulfilling due to the alienated character of such consumption, not least within neo-capitalism’s increasing reliance on images and sign, fantasies and make believe (Lefebvre 1984/1968). However, and showing some affinity with Miller, Lefebvre had “faith in the regenerative capacity of everyday life” (Gardiner 2000: 99). Although everyday life remains thoroughly rooted within and inscribed by neo-capitalism, with its sustained class character, for example, this is never a done deal. In short, utopian expressions of “real” need continue to leak out; the system is never sealed, no matter how well lubricated its workings. For example, leisure activities “contain within themselves their own spontaneous critique of the everyday. They are that critique in so far as they are other than everyday life, and yet they are in everyday life, they are alienation” (Lefebvre 1991/1958: 40). For Lefebvre (1984/1968: 172), desire “refuses to be signified” as it is far too alive.

**Rural Representations as Critical Resource**

As a final primer for reading rural consumption practices for critique of everyday life, attention is now given to characteristics of rural representations that may be conspirators within this critique. With space tight, attention will just flag the content of two families of rural representations, although, for a full appreciation of rurality’s critical potential, other representations, rural practices and embodied rural lives also require scrutiny (Halfacree 2006a, 2007b).

The first family of representations are summarised by the term “rural idyll” (Halfacree 2003), a family conventionally seen in a conservative light but of considerable significance to rural consumption practices, not least in the UK (Lowe et al. 1995) but also across much of the global North (Bunce 1994). As Bunce (2003: 14) expresses it with reference to a Canadian newspaper story:

*Picturesque, farming, community, recreational, bucolic: these are the words of the conventional rural idyll, of the aesthetics of pastoral landscapes, of humans working in harmony with nature and the land and with each other, of a whole scene of contentment and plenty.*

Irrespective of this representation’s actuality, and it is of course widely critiqued (for example, Cloke 2003), its resource potential is clear.

Looking more closely, the social aspect of this selective representation imagines peaceful, unchanging, small-scale, fundamentally communitarian landscapes, within which people experience:

a less-hurried lifestyle [and] follow the seasons rather than the stock market, where they have more time for one another and exist in a more organic community where people have a place and an authentic role. (Short 1991: 34)
Besides this link with community, idyllic rurality is also integrally linked to a strong sense of place and placeness. Additionally, and tying community and place aspects tighter together, it is also strongly associated with a form of dwelling based on “interactive productivity” (Falk and Kilpatrick 2000: 93) and engagement. From this depiction, one can thus appreciate why Bunce (2003: 15) observed that “the values that sustain the rural idyll speak of a profound and human need for connection with land, nature and community”.

The content and implied sympathies of a second family of rural representations demonstrate similarities with the rural idyll but express them in a different accent. These representations are associated with a “radical rural” (Halfacree 2007b). On the one hand, they imagine the countryside as a diverse home accessible to all but, on the other hand, such accessibility requires considerable effort within distinctive and challenging lifestyle choices.

Two anchors of radical rural representation are, first, “localisation”, “a set of interrelated and self-reinforcing policies that actively discriminate in favour of the more local whenever it is… reasonable and conveniently possible” (Lucas 2002: unpaginated). Expressions of localisation tend to start with farming and food, before moving outwards to encompass normative everyday life generally. The second key anchor is the idea of rural as rooted in land-based activities. This was well expressed in a polemical pamphlet, where Fairlie (2001: 9-10) mourned the eclipse of the rural by an urban interest and asserted that:

> rural means land-based… A rural economy, if the term has any meaning at all, has its foundation in the land and what it produces – animal, vegetable and mineral. A rural culture is distinctive because it grows out of the land. … Rural culture is rooted in the earth. (Fairlie 2001: 9-10)

Other important elements of the radical rural representation include: strong “community” discourse; promotion of meanings of land beyond that of means of production; ecocentric and deep ecological beliefs; and celebration of the values of physical labour as a way of attuning to and appreciating one’s humanity and place in the world (Halfacree 2007b). This illustrates clearly the overlap between the claims of both idyllic and radical representations in celebrating a particular suite of interlinked social-environmental relationships.

From this brief discussion of rural representations, one can posit the rural as “unfinished” (Neal and Walters 2007), duplicitously expressing a seemingly conservative socio-spatial imagination but one whose internal resonances may be read as critical of urban everyday life. Hence, one can begin to appreciate how rural consumption phenomena such as counterurbanisation, engaging as they do with these representations, may express such a critique by seeking an engaged dwelling within the subtle, less pacy, more distanced yet inscribed “sophisticated simplicity” of the communitarian, place-based countryside (Halfacree 1997). This is an understanding commonplace within media stories (for example, Guardian 2004). It can be appreciated still more by noting how community, place and dwelling have become strongly imaginatively spatialised into the rural, just as their sup-
posed expulsion from the urban is frequently mourned (Swyngedouw and Kaïka 2000; Thrift 2005).

Finally, Lefebvre muses on how his critique of everyday life could be expressed spatially. First, he talks of the desirability of a “differential space”, where the “produced” difference of a counter-space relative to mainstream abstract space could thrive (Lefebvre 1991/1974: Chapter 6). Second, within his desired “city as play” (Lefebvre 1984/1968), themes such as festival and creative communities feature prominently. Taken together and playing with Lefebvre’s terminology in the light of the rural representations just outlined, one can suggest that sometimes, in some places, and through some consumption practices, a quasi-counter-spatial ludic city (sic.) might be located imaginatively within the rural, as representations imaginatively displace out of the city and (re)place into the rural Lefebvre’s desired “urban” characteristics:

Urban society is not opposed to mass media, social intercourse, communication, intimations, but only to creative activity being turned into passivity, into the detached, vacant stare, into the consumption of shows and signs; it postulates an intensification of material and non-material exchange where quantity is substituted for quality, and endows the medium of communication with content and substance. (Lefebvre 1984/1968: 190-1)

**Reading Rural Consumption Practices for Difference**

Reading rural consumption practices for difference, this section sketches three metaphorical “styles” of consuming the rural that incorporate critical responses to mainstream everyday life. Their critique should not necessarily be seen as explicit, intentional or even acknowledged by those involved but as often predominantly immanent and implicit. An “external’ reading and subsequent framing of a diverse set of practices (re)presents them in a new light. The three styles should also not be seen as providing complete high-order interpretations of the consumption practices concerned as this would go too far towards the “soliloquy” of legislative reason (Bauman 1992: 126), Gibson-Graham’s (2006: 6) masterful knowing.

The three metaphorical styles, especially the first two, have been named with a deliberate nod to how the practices they engage with have been represented within the popular media. They deliberately hope to provoke some emotional resonance in the reader, as the practices they seek to represent need to be seen as alive, meaningful and impassioned enough both to bear and to merit a reading for difference.

Moving through the three metaphorical styles, one shifts from the rural presented as some “separate sphere” from the urban to seeing it intimately connected to the urban but, crucially, not somehow the same. Moving through the styles also reveals something of a paradox. On the one hand, one seems to move away from radical resistance to the status quo to consumption practice congruent with it. Yet,
at the same time, the latter has perhaps the most radical political potential, being best attuned to contemporary everyday socio-spatial conditions.

1. “Bolt-Holes”

The first style through which rural consumption practices critique everyday experiences starts from the idea of the rural as both a relatively distinct space and as somewhere one can “escape” into: down nameless roads to be lost in the nooks and crannies of the countryside, somewhere outside of or beyond urban society. In other words, the rural is a “bolt-hole”, with the practices associated with it those of flight and disappearance.

The best example of the rural as bolt-hole is that of people moving to the rural in a quest for a self-contained “back-to-the-land” lifestyle (Halfacree 2006b). Whilst those engaged in such actions usually have some normative goal of making a living from the land or gaining artistic inspiration, flight and disappearance elements are clearly strong. This was demonstrated strongly by the 1960s counter-culture, within which by as early as 1970 a back-to-the-land trend was observed in the UK (Young 1973), US (Hedgepeth 1971) and elsewhere.

The dominant reading of this trend is encapsulated in one term: “dropping out” (implicitly from the city and/or industrial capitalist society). “[O]pting out of the mainstream society and living in the interstices and backwaters of the system or in enclaves of kindred spirits” (Zicklin 1983: 26) seemingly heeded Timothy Leary’s 1966 call to “turn on, tune in, drop out” (Leary 1983). Such a reading could note of course that those involved may be “pushed”:

In the light of the mounting frustration at the recalcitrance of the rest of society to embrace and support [their] vision, faced with the open hostility of those in power and the fear and contempt of much of the straight world… hundreds of young people began moving to the country to make and preserve a world of their own. (Zicklin 1983: 27-8)

Nonetheless, the reading is usually one of crisis or failure, and in conservative or even mainstream hands this easily fed into popular cultural and media stereotype of the feckless, filthy, free-loading “hippy”, despoiling the countryside and consuming it in anti-social and highly irresponsible ways. It is a representation that persists, reappearing recently in popular depictions of “new travellers”, for example (Hetherington 2000).

However, just as Leary’s call to drop out was not to “‘Get stoned and abandon all constructive activity’… [but] meant self-reliance, a discovery of one’s singularity, a commitment to mobility, choice, and change” (Leary 1983: 253), reading “dropping out” for difference can emphasise instead, first, how the desire for such a rural existence had a long historical and cultural pedigree and typically also formed part of a more general radical social critique, with elements of “normal” life rejected in favour of “alternative” living arrangements (Howkins 2003). Second, these experiments often attempted to consolidate a utopian rural alternative,
in both their communal and individual forms (Halfacree 2006b). They aimed to establish forms of living as models for a new social order that would gradually emerge (Rigby 1974); a paradoxical dropping-out to create a new society. As Nelson (1989: 124, my emphasis) gleaned from analysis of contemporary “alternative” media:

> communal living is not about achieving a sudden change in the nature of society, but is a gradual process with revolutionary potential, being the first essential step towards the wider, more fundamental revolution, in that communal living involves individuals taking a firmer control... over their own lives.

Looking at rural Wales, its current lively “alternative” character has been moulded strongly by the consequences of what at first might seem merely attempts to drop out (Halfacree forthcoming b). For example, the Selene Community that coordinated, through *Communes* magazine, the Commune Movement settled on rough land in Carmarthenshire in 1966 (Nelson 1989; Rigby 1974), before upgrading to a hill farm and becoming a key alternative magnet for fellow travellers, many remaining in the area. An even better example is the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT) near Machynlleth, Powys. Now a highly respected pioneering site for “alternative technology”, it was founded in 1973 on a disused slate quarry by urban drop outs. It has since spun-off companies promoting environmental technologies and forged strong links with the formal university sector (CAT 2009).

For an individual, too, dropping-out could be a constructive life experience. A good example comes from the life of singer-songwriter Vashti Bunyan. Disillusioned with her life and stalled musical career in late 1960s “swinging” London, she undertook a lengthy migration with horse, cart, dog and partner Robert Lewis to a remote Scottish island and beyond (Halfacree 2009). Although having setbacks, the experience was overwhelmingly positive personally as Bunyan got to live her dream of “be[ing] self-sufficient as possible and rear[ing] dogs, horses and children” (Bunyan, quoted in Dale 2001: 7). Furthermore, it proved inspiring through heightened appreciation of “nature”:

> Living outside changed the way I saw the world to the extent that the trees, hills, roads and everything took on personality. ...living close to the ground I think had this effect. I felt I was part of my surroundings. It made me more careful of them. (Bunyan, quoted in Dale 2001: 9)

Nonetheless, dropping out did not – and still does not – always take heed of what exactly a new rural life entails. Life often proved very unsatisfactory very quickly, breaking down for a myriad of reasons, from homesickness to lack of resources to being unable to cope with the rigours of an often tough rural existence. Thus, Riviers (1978: 25) stresses how potential back-to-the-landers should have no illusions about the challenges of rural living, cautioning against “the hollowness in... popular motives for ‘dropping out’”, whilst Nelson (1989: 130, my emphasis) drolly noted how:
the idea of community was strong and attractive, but the reality of... harsh living conditions, and mundane labour such as hedging and trenching, had a dispiriting effect.

Consequently, popular cultural stereotypes of the hippie seeking “to get his/her head together in the country” all too often has as sequel the equally stereotypical “failure” of this life change and subsequent return to (urban) “straight” existence (Halfacree 2009).

More fundamentally, the underlying socio-spatial imagination behind the rural as “escape” has to be substantially critiqued. Firstly, as the structured character of the rural idyll (Bunce 2003) illustrates, rurality can be far from infinitely malleable and this must be come to terms with. More fundamentally, the idea that the rural exists as some world entirely apart from the urban is unsustainable. The conceptual and socio-cultural inseparability of urban and rural has long been a strong critical strand within debates about defining rural (for example, Copp 1972; Hoggart 1990). It is one that even populist guides to starting a new life in the countryside acknowledge:

Much as you might like to fool yourself, you’re not going to change personality just because you change locality. (Craze 2004: 88)

2. “Castles”

The second style through which rural consumption practices critique everyday experiences display initial echoes of the reactionary reading noted earlier. It positions the rural once again as both a relatively distinct space and as somewhere one can “escape” into, but this time the sense of separation is less certain and accompanied by an often intense sense of threat or challenge. In short, the rural is represented less as secure bolt-hole but as “laager” (Elms 2001) or “castle”, to be fortified as (urban) threats are without, albeit possibly still not in sight. The ensuing practices are those of defence and insulation through vigilance and reinforcement.

This style, again widely reproduced within popular culture and the media, will be illustrated through consideration of counterurbanisers’ association with various forms of anti-development politics. The association is widely acknowledged by the literature from which this brief sketch is drawn (for example, Murdoch and Day 1998; Murdoch and Marsden 1994; Murdoch et al. 2003; Short et al. 1986) and has developed particularly strongly since the 1980s in the UK (Woods 2005). Focus will be on opposition to house-building but resistance is also manifested towards various other forms of development (Woods 2003, 2005).

The dominant reading of the involvement of counterurbanisers, middle-class counterurbanisers specifically, with anti-development pressure group politics is encapsulated again in a popular term: “pulling up the drawbridge” having attained one’s “rural idyll”. People become, in the equally well known expression, NIMBYs (Not In My Back Yard), resisting any development perceived as having po-
potential negative impacts on their quality of life. Ambrose (1992: 186-7) illustrates this dominant reading well:

The group [NIMBYs] has come to these “rural areas” primarily to enjoy leafy seclusion. The last thing they want is another group of arrivals. In other words they are rigidly opposed to any more housebuilding if it will spoil their view or possibly have an adverse effect on property values. They may well be in favour of more development in the general vicinity … but they will often use their considerable expertise to organise resistance to development in, or within sight of, their particular village.

Of course, academic work has investigated more deeply the NIMBY impulse and rapidly moved on from simple status defence to detailed appreciation of how resistance to further development is linked to class identity and formation. Savage et al. (1992) asserted that class formation does not take place on the metaphorical head of a pin but is always implicated with place. This idea was developed by Lash and Urry (1994) to draw out the importance of “aesthetic reflexivity” for middle-class identity and, within this, the prominent position of the countryside as representing somewhere both rich in “the past” and, through “tradition”, resonant with “community”. The resulting overall thesis, itself resonant with Elms (2001) at the start of this paper, can be expressed as follows:

The rural domain is reassuring to the middle class. It is a place where gender and ethnic identities can be anchored in “traditional” ways, far (but not far enough?) from the fragmented, “mixed-up” city. Within the rural domain identities are fixed, making it a white, English, family-orientated, middle-class space; a space, moreover, that is imbued with its own mythical history, which selects and deploys particular, nativistic notions of what it is to belong to the national culture. That this is what attracts middle-class in-migrants to the countryside is rarely made explicit. Instead, the rural is extolled for the virtues of peace and quiet, of community and neighbourliness. (Murdoch and Marsden 1994: 232)

Consequently, understanding middle-class resistance to development becomes readily apparent (Woods 2005).

Yet, within both the previous quote and this body of work more generally can be seen traces of a different reading of middle-class defence of place. Specifically, the motivational either/or between fixed conservative identity and rural tranquility can be queried. As Woods (2005: 186, my emphasis) puts it, “the politics of development in the countryside have increasingly been framed around the consequences of middle class investment in the countryside under counterurbanization”. This investment is fiscal and emotional (Woods 2003, 2005) and related to class/identity formation and reproduction. Staying with Woods’ terminology, it is an holistic and multi-sided investment that the middle-class make through “aspirational ruralism” (Woods 2003: 318). Although class identity is vital, it does not provide the full picture. From the emotional angle, “virtues of peace and quiet, of community and neighbourliness” should not be so readily dismissed.

One gets more sense of this multidimensional middle-class investment when anti-development pressure groups are investigated in detail. For example, whilst Ambrose (1992) outlined three groups of conservationist –“genuine”, “social” and
“‘pull-up-the-ladder’ group of recent arrivals the ‘born again conservationists’ or NIMBYs” (186) – these are ideal type abstractions. Powerful groups such as the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) in practice represent a coalition of all three groups and, furthermore, express “a trenchant critique of the neo-liberal free-for-all mentality” (Ambrose 1992: 187). Similarly, in depicting the “preserved countryside”, Murdoch et al. (2003) emphasise “preservationist networks” (81) or a “preservationist coalition” (82) and the discursive operation of these groups through “local conventions associated with neighbourhood, community and environment” (87) indicate the aspirational importance of a quasi-idyllic rural “moral geography” (Woods 2005: 171).

Overlaying this multi-stranded, entangled sense of anti-developmentalism, adopting a more affective perspective (Halfacree forthcoming c) draws attention to the lived consequences of counterurbanisers’ “attempt[s] to ‘escape’ the social through an immersion in ‘country life’” (Murdoch et al. 2003: 71). Such immersion, no matter if based initially on overtly romanticised representations of rural life, may well lead to changed priorities, awareness of place, and so on. Embodied encounters with rurality involving physical, social and emotional aspects – encounters which inevitably implicate the seemingly indelible association between rural and nature (Halfacree forthcoming c) – may enhance celebration of and thus the defence of the rural for its own sake and as a bulwark against negatively experienced features of (urban) everyday life.

Articulations of rural as “castle” may contain radical critique of everyday life but, like its articulation as “bolt-hole”, one must end on critical reflection. First, and clearly demonstrated by studies of rural pressure groups, defence of metaphorical castles re-states the predominant conservative picture of the rural and its politics. Second, the metaphor of rural as castle remains rooted in a limited socio-spatial imagination. Whilst not now seen in the separatist terms of the bolt-hole, a rural separate identity to that of the city still features. Third, the links between the actions of anti-development groups and class reproduction with its consequent exclusion can never be overlooked. There is “always… a strong dose of class conflict” (Woods 2005: 186) in rural middle-class pressure group politics and their success inevitably, if usually unintentionally, enhances rural social exclusion (Murdoch and Marsden 1994). Thus, this section ends with an ambiguous reflection on “rural community” that expresses the ambiguity of “castle” style rural consumption generally:

rural communities yield conflicting perspectives… stable arenas in which social relations and identities can be forged in ways which exclude, to some degree, market and economic relations, while, on the other, they exhibit defensive and exclusive tendencies which reproduce some of the most pernicious forms of social closure. (Murdoch and Day 1998: 196)
3. “Life-rafts”

The third style through which rural consumption practices critique everyday experiences again begins with the rural as both a relatively distinct space and somewhere one can “escape” into but this time connection with the urban (“rest of the world”) and the everyday remains centre-stage. The rural becomes a space from which critical engagement with a dysfunctional world becomes grounded. It is represented as a life-raft in a stormy sea, with associated practices of existential and potentially critical empowerment more than flight or insulation.

This third style could be illustrated again with reference to consumption around urban-to-rural migration, as counterurbanisers might be seen as using the rural as predominantly neither bolt-hole nor castle but as a life-raft within everyday life (Halfacree 1997, 2007a). However, instead, focus is on practices of second home consumption (Halfacree forthcoming a).

Second homes are “an occasional residence of a household that usually lives elsewhere and which is primarily used for recreation purposes” (Shucksmith 1983: 174). They are found across the world (Bendix and Löfgren 2008; Hall and Müller 2004a), in urban as well as rural environments, numbers growing through the past century. In many countries, second homes are generally regarded, within popular discourse as well as academia, as an elite form of consumption and this informs strongly the dominant reading. Within British studies of second homes, for example, their consequent political sensitivity is an over-riding theme (for example, Coppock 1977). In contrast, in Scandinavia the political shadow over second homes is less intense, due to spatial separation from first home settlements and, most strongly, because second home ownership is far broader sociologically; recent estimates suggesting 40% of Norway’s population have access to an estimated 420,000 second homes (Overvåg 2009).

In terms of reading for difference, Scandinavian studies of second homes reveal considerable intensity and diversity of engagements between owners and both their properties and the surrounding environments. Whilst, on the one hand, leisure use is a predominant theme (for example, Hall and Müller 2004a; Kaltenborn 1998; Vepsäläinen and Pitkänen forthcoming), on the other hand, their less controversial, arguably normative cultural position has promoted fuller investigation of everyday usage. At first sight, consumption can be read as the second home providing an “escape” or “vacation” from predominantly urban modernity (Kaltenborn 1998). This could position their consumption in the bolt-hole style. However, the adequacy of such a perspective has increasingly been questioned, with second homes being seen as an integral part of everyday existence or dwelling (Bendix and Löfgren 2008; Overvåg 2009; also Gallent 2007).

For example, Garvey (2008) and Quinn (2004) accept at one level the role of the second home as providing an “escape” but note how any nominal escape from urban daily routine is always accompanied by much of this same life; existential issues accompanying everyday life stay with the second homeowner. Desires to
“create a sense of connectedness” (Quinn 2004: 118) with people, place, and everyday experiences are (imagined as being) facilitated at the second home, where one can “achieve some dimension of lifestyle that is not available at [the] primary residence” (Hall and Müller 2004b: 12). Thus, “peoples’ desire to escape is strongly tempered by an attempt both to re-connect with experiences from their past and to strive for a continuity that will strengthen into their futures” (Quinn 2004: 118). The overall result is “more a negation than flight from everyday existence” (Garvey 2008: 205). Consequently, life in the second home and its “appreciation of what is not achieved within [the rest of] daily life” (Garvey 2008: 218) can provide a life-raft to revitalise “home life in the primary place” (Quinn 2004: 117); “first” and “second” homes are mutually supportive rather than antagonistic. Significantly, therefore, second homes comprise an integral element of home, not somehow existing outside and independent of it (Overvåg 2009).

In an increasingly everyday condition of normalised circulation (Quinn 2004), a key component of any emerging “era of mobilities” (Halfacree forthcoming a, after Sheller and Urry 2006), “work, home and play are separated in time and place, and meanings and identity are structured around not one but several places” (McIntyre et al. 2006: 314). From this, second home consumption can be associated with “double homes, double lives” (Bendix and Löfgren 2008: 7) or “dynamic heterolocalism” (Halfacree forthcoming a, after Zelinsky and Lee 1998). This posits the idea of an emergent identity / home / dwelling routed through and emergent from everyday connections between places of diverse “everyday texture” (Conradson and Latham 2005: 228). A dynamic heterolocal reading of rural second home consumption thus does not assume rural and urban to be “the same”, even as it acknowledges their intrinsic entanglement. Furthermore, the recognised “need” for the everyday texture seen as provided by the rural can be read as potentially radical critique of the inadequacy of urban dwelling, or what this paper has termed, after Lefebvre, everyday life. The promises of consumer society are unable to deliver on needs for “things” (objects, experiences, affects, emotions, and so on) accreted to the rural environment. By accessing such things, albeit initially through the market but also through more embodied, affective engagements, an increasingly dynamic heterolocal existence provides through rural consumption practices aspects of “being human” at best animated only in watered-down form within the rest of everyday life (also Garvey 2008).

In summary, rural consumption read differently in the style of life-raft presents the rural not as a fundamentally separate realm from the urban but as its complement; a place where stability-within-movement (Sheller and Urry 2006) may be attainable.\(^2\) It presents an Other to the urban, not as its opposite but as expressing qualities of difference – “different moods and modes of domesticity” (Bendix and Löfgren 2008: 14) – to the experiences of everyday life the urban offers. The latter is seen as inadequate in many respects and is challenged by values ingrained both within representational expressions of the rural and within less representa-
tional, more affective encounters. Whilst this suggests a wellspring of potential radical critique, one must again end on three critical reflections. First, consumption is once again initially attained through the market, with all the economic and class exclusions and limitations this implies, even if the affective “reality” of rural living, in particular, can suggest that the eventual full consumption experience (Miller 1987) can often go on to “exceed” its commodified form. Second, dynamic heterolocalism suggests a political compromise, partially accepting the existential dilution of urban everyday life with the promise of rural “re-enchantment” (Maffesoli 1987; Thrift 2003). This accommodation, inaccessible to many, is only challenged if dynamic heterolocalism attains political form with transformative intentions, a potential considered in the conclusion. Third, as indicated recently in a special edition of *Ethnologia Europaea* (Volume 37: 1-2, 2008), “[t]he materiality and emotionality of living in two places” (Bendix and Löfgren 2008: 14) can prove immensely challenging, with the potential threat of “a double homelessness” (Bendix and Löfgren 2008: 8) a real possibility.

**Conclusion: From Heterotopia to a Social Movement for Everyday Life?**

To think of opposition to capitalism simply in terms of overt militancy is to see only the smoke rising from the volcano. … People have a million ways of saying No. …being a revolutionary is a very ordinary, very usual matter, …we are all revolutionaries, albeit in very contradictory, fetishised, repressed ways. (Holloway 2002: 159, 205, 211)

Through adopting a reading for difference perspective when considering rural consumption practices, one sees that whilst these practices can be either complicit with or crudely reactionary towards the predominant, mainstream experiences of urban everyday life (arguable both examples of reading for dominance), they also speak of varied styles of resistance to these same experiences (reading for difference). Thus, something quite extraordinary can lurk within the seemingly ordinary (Halfacree 2007a). Moreover, whilst these styles of resistance through consumption may be critiqued on the basis of being rooted in the very consumer society they supposedly ultimately critique (arguably they cannot be otherwise; Clarke 2003), such as being often aligned strongly with class positions, and whilst some are also rooted in naïve ideas of socio-spatial difference, in alliance they tell a different critical story and indicate different everyday priorities. Together, they present the rural as heterotopic (Halfacree 2009; Neal and Walters 2007), with heterotopic places being “real places . . . which are something like countersites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia” (Foucault 1986: 24), especially active during relatively disjunctive “slices in time” (26), demonstrated by the life-raft reading of second home consumption, for example. (Indeed, Foucault (1986: 27) represents the “ship” as “heterotopia par excellence”, keeping “dreams” alive as it floats across an often troubled sea.)
However, moving on from representing or even experiencing the rural as heterotopia, as was concluded in the last section there is scope for political work to forge an alliance, possibly some kind of rural social movement (Woods 2003, 2005), that critically interrogates the urban everyday life of Lefebvre’s neo-capitalism, positively engaging the “misanthropic city” (Thrift 2005: 140). Such a movement, almost inevitably “decentred, multi-leadered, amorphous and often contradictory” (Woods 2003: 324), would not be like the UK’s Countryside Alliance, for example, with its conservative ideology of rural separatism, nor even centred on the “politics of the rural” (Woods 2003, 2005), although it necessarily also involves the latter to maintain the critical rural everyday texture. Instead, this movement can be orientated towards the politics of everyday life. In short, the everyday textures of the rural are to be deployed to turn and face the city and, ultimately, take it back; perhaps realising Lefebvre’s (1996) “right to the city”, with its renewal of everyday life.

It is not easy to suggest practical terms for forging this rural social movement but relevant sensitising comes first from Miller (1987). He suggested that for consumption to work for dis-alienation purposes we must cultivate an appropriate cultural context. This is not guaranteed and we should not replace Romantic disparaging of the everyday with “an alternative Romanticism about modern consumption always acting to create inalienable, highly sociable communities” (Miller 1987: 206). Clearly, media representations can play a major role in developing this context, just as they do in respect of representing rural consumption practices more generally, as noted earlier. There is a need both for “self-education” and for helping people become “thinkers of theorized possibility” (Gibson-Graham 2006: xxvii). This suggests a tactic of (re)iterating the readings of difference to be found within rural consumption practices so as to popularise, normalise and proselytise the movement’s basis and facilitate its required coalition character. It also suggests the importance of especially valorising the life-raft style, rooted as it is more fully within our contemporary era of mobilities and not grounded within any, at best, redundant urban/rural dualism, whilst at the same time acknowledging that those consuming rurality may sequentially or even simultaneously be involved with all three styles as they live their lives. A final suggested route for developing a sympathetic cultural context is through more fully acknowledging practical examples or lived attempts, with all their messiness, uncertainties, false starts and blind alleys, that chip away at “negating that which exists” (Holloway 2002: 23) so as to let alternatives come through (Gibson-Graham 2006). And here it is important to observe how satisfying rural consumption practices can be for those involved. Contra Elms (2001), this does not solely reflect joy at leaving behind the “multicultural city” – although this can be an element – but is indicative of the continued representational, affective and existential critical vitality of the rural today.
Keith Halfacree is a Senior Lecturer in Human Geography at Swansea University in Wales. His research interests are many and varied but focus on a number of overlapping areas: discourses of rurality in the global North, radical rural futures, human migration, and what he loosely terms “marginal geographies”. E-mail: k.h.halfacree@swansea.ac.uk

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Notes

1  The metaphors also clearly come from the author’s British background, and alternatives may be far better suited to other cultural contexts and readers are thus encouraged to develop these as appropriate.

2  Likewise, as one referee suggested, urban consumption may also act as a life-raft but this time providing a place where movement-within-stability (Sheller and Urry 2006), in contrast, may be attainable in response to a too stable rural.

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Commercialization of Lesbian Identities in Showtime’s The L-word

By Martina Ladendorf

Abstract
The article discusses recent developments in media culture through one case study: The L-word, the first television series narratively centered around lesbian and bisexual characters. The business discourse surrounding the series’ production is examined together with the televised text itself and the merchandize connected to The L-word brand. The main research question is why lesbians, a target group previously deemed uninteresting by advertisers and international media conglomerates, have suddenly become demographically desirable. Media producers show increasing interest in the active audience, and encourage fans’ own creativity, for example through social web 2.0 media productions and events, and intermedia storytelling. This is made possible through the televised text’s discursive re-positioning of lesbian identities. The article argues that lesbian identity is a social construction and that it can be seen as an empty or floating signifier, which is filled with new meanings. It also analyzes the immersive online communities and various other merchandize connected to the series as an aspect of thingification, a process where the media is increasingly occupied with things and brands rather than stories and representations. The result is the branded lesbian, or the lesbian brand, which can be seen as an appropriation of lesbian identities.

Keywords: Lesbian identities, intermedia storytelling, thingification, television merchandize, The L-word, discourse analysis
Introduction

The audience of Showtime's Emmy-nominated series THE L WORD® is one of the most demographically desirable to advertisers. According to a February 2005 online survey conducted by the network, 76% of the show's website audience is between 22-45 years old; and, over 50% earn over $50k annually and have completed college or more. The show's viewing audience skews female 18-49. THE L WORD® also has one of the most active online fan communities, with multitudes of users spending countless hours each month on THE L WORD®-themed blogs, message boards and fan fiction sites. (Business Wire, Dec 5th, 2005)

All gay characters on television exist because of capitalism; it is the force that makes them possible and the only agenda allowed. (Avila Saavedra 2009,17)

The aim of this article is to discuss some recent developments in media culture through one case study, The L-word (Showtime, 2004–2009), the American cable network Showtime’s successful television series about a group of predominantly lesbian and bisexual women in Los Angeles. First aired in 2004, the series became very popular worldwide. After its sixth season, aired in January 2009, it was cancelled, which makes it the longest running series on Showtime to date. The main research question is how lesbians, a target group previously deemed uninteresting by advertisers and international media conglomerates, could suddenly become demographically desirable to them. Jennifer Vanasco (2006) suggests that The L-word’s “glamour factor” could have harmful effects on lesbians and make them more obsessed with looks and traditional feminine beauty. According to her (2006: 184): “One of the most incredible, freeing aspects of being part of the lesbian community is the absence of the beauty culture.” Even though I am critical of her idyllic description of the lesbian community, and skeptical about the discourse on harmful media effects, Vanasco makes an interesting point. In this article, I will deconstruct a commercial discourse, and examine how lesbian identities are appropriated in media culture.

In modern media conglomerates, finance departments and economic personnel are increasingly having a say on what the artistic department will produce (Caldwell 2008: 232), a development that can be seen as one of the components of the trend media scholars have called marketization (Murdock & Wasko 2007). Today, TV and film producers’ decisions are heavily influenced by the prospects of expanded storytelling on several media platforms, including possibilities for user participation, the selling of spin-off products, and last but not least the shelf life of artistic content in international syndication and re-runs. Media convergence and intermedia storytelling direct increasing attention to media content as trademarked products targeted at demographically segmented consumer markets and audiences. After the cancellation of the series, the executive producer of The L-word, Ilene Chaiken, said: “The brand and the social network community, OurC-hart.com, will continue to live and be a destination for lesbians everywhere and a lasting tribute to what ‘The L Word’ has accomplished” (Nordyke 2008). An In-
ternet spin-off series has also been produced starring Leisha Hailey (playing Alice) (Nguyen 2009), and the making of a movie is discussed. Early on, the series got the attention of independent lesbian fan sites like *Afterellen.com*, but producers also used expanded storytelling on the Internet and produced sites for user-generated content such as different forms of blogs, discussion boards, and web communities.

Producers’ increasing attention to fan discussions highlights both cultural studies’ celebration of the active audiences and political economy’s more pessimistic views on the pervasive power of media producers. In a theoretical discussion about the user-generated content site *YouTube*, cultural theorist José van Dijck (2009) productively criticizes one-sided celebrations of “participatory culture” (Jenkins 2006) and argues that it is important to be guided by consumer sociology, political economy and cultural theory to understand phenomena like “wikinomics” and user-generated content.

The potential for niche marketing has been further enhanced in the Internet era; advanced digital technologies facilitate the tracking of individual social behavior. The already close relationship between content producers, advertisers and consumers has become even more intimate. (Van Dijck 2009: 47).

Today, traditional media such as television are interlinked with new media, mainly the Internet, both by television fans’ own viral (“word of mouth”) marketing and producers’ intermedia storytelling. Furthermore, as prospects for syndication are becoming increasingly important, to create a cult TV series, like *Seinfeld* (NBC 1989-1998) or series with a huge cross-cultural audience, like *Baywatch* (NBC 1989-1999), is of course to hit the jackpot. An easy way to do this is using niche marketing to target minority audiences or marginal lifestyles. Caldwell argues:

> Contemporary media conglomerates have, in effect, commercially “mainstreamed” difference, hijacking the very issue around which critical scholars once developed feminist or race studies as progressive, culturally resistant forms of identity-based criticism and activism. This trend is sobering, given the consumerist (rather than truly resistant) goals of modern conglomerates. (Caldwell 2008: 235)

As commercial TV’s first drama series narratively centered on lesbian and bisexual characters, *The L-word* has received some attention from scholars. The studies have mainly focused on textual analysis, for example in an anthology exclusively dedicated to the series (Akass & McCabe 2006). There is however one small reception study, using focus groups (Ladendorf 2007; 2008), and a study on public viewings of the show (Moore 2009). The latter is relevant for my own study, as it focuses on the power dimensions of production and reception and on how producers negotiate with the fans to make them embrace the *L-word* brand. The concept worldmaking, which will also be used in this article, is used in the concluding discussion by Moore.

Much of the work discusses how successful its representations of LGBTs (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered) are in terms of political recognition of dis-
advantaged minorities, for example bisexual women (Moorman 2008), queer femininity (Douglas 2008) or issues of race (Muñoz 2005). In a highly interesting piece, Aviva Dove-Viebahn (2007) analyzes some L-word story arcs through the concept of visibility and lesbian fashion, particularly the upper middle class fashion style commonly referred to as “lesbian chic”. According to Rebecca Beirne (2008), The L-word has much in common with the lesbian chic of the 1990s (Clark 1995; Ciasullo 2001). She also discusses femme or lipstick lesbians as both hyper-visible and at the same time not seen as real lesbians in the series’ narrative. Candace Moore (2007) has analyzed the viewing positions offered by The L-word narrative in a reading which critically converses with film spectatorship theory, seeing these as inviting a tourist gaze. These studies are all highly relevant for my own project. There is however a urgent need to see The L-word’s construction of lesbian identities in the light of theories of media production, and recent developments in the media industry, a project that has already been started out by Moore (2009).

Method, Theories, Concepts, and Outline
The term identity/identities is used frequently in this article, and I will therefore describe my understanding of it. Coming from a poststructuralist perspective, I see both individual and collective identities as social constructs. Even if the expression lesbian identity is sometimes used, I do not think there exists one monolithic lesbian identity. To make visible the heterogeneous qualities of lesbian identities, I will whenever possible use the plural form. Being a student of the media, I often talk of mediated representations of identities, and this could be misunderstood as constructing an opposition between media constructs and social identities. My position is quite the opposite; I see both representations and individual and collective identities as socially and culturally produced, exercising influence on each other.

As strategy of analysis, critical discourse theory (Laclau & Mouffe 2001) was used to interpret the different materials. By discourse theory I mean the ontological thought that humans constantly relate to and position themselves through or against a number of discourses and that there is no meaning outside discourse. According to Laclau and Mouffe (2001; see also Jørgensen & Phillips 2002), discourse is an attempt to fix meanings, something which is impossible, because meanings and identities are forever changing and under negotiating. It is some of these negotiations, regarding lesbian identities, that will be examined here, through readings of the business discourse surrounding the TV series’ production, the televised text itself, and the expanded storytelling on the web. The L-word can be seen as a product that is offered to an audience, constructing meanings that will make sense to them. However, in the business discourse, it is the audience itself, or rather the attention and interest of the audience, that is the commodity.
What follows is an outline of the article. The next three sections: “Women, lesbians and consumption”, “Active audiences”, and “Consumption and non-heterosexual visibility” provide a background for the analysis and an overview on previous research relevant for my argument. Also, a background for the production of *The L-word* is introduced.

The section following next, named “The (re)construction of lesbian identities and sartorial style in *The L-word*” analyzes a story arc from the series. To understand what makes it attractive and intelligible to the audience, Laclau & Mouffe’s concepts nodal point, master signifier, chain of equivalence, and the discourse theoretical term “positioning” are used. Nodal points are in the words of Laclau and Mouffe (2001: 112) “privileged signifiers that fix the meaning of a signifying chain.” They constitute centers around which a certain discourse is constructed. Nodal points that describe social identities are referred to as master signifiers, and are used in discourse to fix the definition of social identities. These signs are in themselves empty or floating signifiers, and therefore other signs are used to define and fix them in so-called chains of equivalence, for example like this: woman – sensitive – maternal – wears dresses – wears makeup (where “woman” is the master signifier). The example given is of a particularly conservative discourse; in another discourse the master signifier “woman” could be given other kinds of meanings through another chain of equivalence, and therefore the master signifier can be seen as an empty or floating signifier (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 113). To study the signs in these chains is to deconstruct and analyze the meanings that is given to the master signifier. My use of the concept positioning draws on Bronwyn Davies (2000, chapter 6) understanding of the term. Discourses offer different subject positions; people are positioned by discourse or use it to position themselves and others. Davies is mainly using the term to analyze narratives in conversations and everyday talk, but sees this as similar to the positions offered by literary works. In this article it will be used to understand which subject positions are offered by the televised text (Talbot 2007), in ways that has similarities to the literary term reader formations (Bennett 1985), which offers a post-structural view on texts as open for different readings and reading positions. Also, queer theorists who are critically engaging with spectatorship theory (Mulvey 1975), are helpful for understanding the positionings and interpelleations performed by media texts (Aaron 2003; 2007; Moore 2007).

Next come two sections that analyze the business discourse surrounding the series. “The ‘branding’ of lesbian identities” draws on research on brands and trademarks, connecting this to both identities and recent research on television production. Here, previous research and theoretical concepts from Lash & Lury (2007) and Jenkins (2006) are used to understand a new development in media production. Lash and Lury’s concept “thingification” describes a situation in the media industries were products, things and brands take priority over narratives and representations, using examples from contemporary media culture such as
football, Wallace and Gromit and the Swatch watch to make their point. Thingification together with Jenkins’ concept “worldmaking” (originally coined by Goodman 1978) are helpful for understanding and analyzing both the production of *The L-word* and contemporary television production. “The active audience as desirable demographic” analyzes the business discourse and intermedia storytelling, drawing on Jenkins (2006) concept convergence together with 1990s research on active and resisting audiences (Jenkins 1992). This is followed by a concluding discussion.

**Women, Lesbians and Consumption**

According to feminist cultural theorists (Thornham 2000: 126-154; Radner 1995; Bowlby 1985, 1993, 2000), consumption has traditionally been associated with women and femininity. Female consumption is however closely intertwined with heterosexuality. This linkage among femininity, heterosexuality and consumption has made lesbian consumption invisible (Clark 1993; Martinsson 2005) and therefore the connection between lesbians and consumption has previously been weak. According to an often cited article by Danae Clark (1993), to make a group visible as consumers, they must be 1) identifiable, 2) reachable 3) measurable, and 4) possible to profit on. Lesbians have been hard to define through factors commonly used by advertisers, such as age, class and ethnicity. Another problem is that they often have chosen not to be visible to outsiders because of fear of discrimination and homophobia. However, they commonly seek to make themselves identifiable as gay or lesbian to other non-heterosexuals through special codes in behavior and appearance. In the early 1990s, advertisers started using these codes in what Clark calls a dual marketing strategy, where they tried using covert gay codes to reach a homosexual audience without alienating heterosexuals. This strategy could for instance be seen in Calvin Klein advertisements for cotton briefs (for males), who made use of a gay sensibility but also catered to a straight female audience and helped increase heterosexual males’ interest in fashion, bodily adornment and beauty products (Bordo 1999: 179). The ads encouraged queer readings, but did not restrict the readings to homosexual relationships or identities, creating open texts that could be read differently by different groups. Clark analyzes fashion spreads from the early 1990s where the models could be read as either lesbian or straight. A development can be seen from these images to the open lesbian representations in *The L-word* in the 2000s.

**Active Audiences**

Lesbians and other non-heterosexual persons are disadvantaged in heteronormative societies. This subordination is visible in the mainstream media both as negative representation and stereotyping, and as silencing and exclusion of non-
consumption and non-heterosexual visibility

The starting point for the modern gay movement is often dated to 1969, the day when LGBT-patrons at the Stonewall bar in New York rioted against police harassment. One of the reasons for the gay clientele being at the bar as a clearly recognizable social group was the bar owner’s intent to earn money. The urban metropolis was a prerequisite for bigger groups of non-heterosexuals to gather, thereby creating a gay bar scene (and later on, a gay community), a development dependent on late-capitalist society. This forms a parallel to commercial TV, where visibility and representation of homosexuality are driven forward by commercial interest. Lesbians are a group previously not seen as demographically desirable by advertisers, but as rather poor consumers (Martinsson 2005). However, gay men have earned (fairly or not) the reputation of “earning like men but consuming like women” (Liljestrand 2003; see also the popularity of TV shows such as Fab Five. Queer Eye for the Straight Guy, Bravo 2003–2007). This has
led a large part of the gay media as well as mainstream media, to be more interested in representing gay men than lesbians. However, with *The L-word*, this seems to have changed. In an interview with Ilene Chaiken, executive producer of *The L-word*, she speaks of a dramatic development in the media when it comes to lesbian stories and how lesbians are perceived by marketers:

> Attending black tie parties, giving speeches and having to “represent,” Ms. Chaiken said, were not developments she had anticipated when, in 1999, after writing a magazine article about same-sex couples with children, she pitched a drama based on her life as a lesbian mother in Los Angeles. “There wasn’t a shred of receptivity,” she recalled. “I got comments like, ‘Wouldn’t it be nice if we lived in the sort of world where this show would be possible?’” She temporarily shelved the idea and returned to screenwriting. In the meantime, lesbianism became hip. Reality dating shows revealed girls necking in hot tubs. Rosie O’Donnell came out. Girls went wild. Madonna planted one on Britney. Ellen DeGeneres’s sexuality, once viewed as toxic enough to sink a sitcom, morphed into a nonissue benign enough for her to have her own daytime chat show. “From 1999 to now, gay issues entered the political zeitgeist and the television landscape changed drastically,” Ms. Chaiken said. “Stories that before weren’t being told started being consumed avidly.” (Glock 2005)

How, then, could a previously “toxic” group suddenly become demographically desirable? One reason could be the increase in niche marketing and narrowcasting in the 1990s. Another could be the brand building efforts of cable TV networks (Caldwell 2008: 245) through daring representations, breaking taboos concerning sex, violence, swear words and drugs, and catering to ethnic, racial and sexual minorities. As mentioned before, Caldwell even talks about the TV trade’s “hijacking” of minority identities. Therefore, the lesbian collective’s need and craving for representation fit industry needs hand in glove. The odds were high that a series focused on lesbians would instantly become a cult series. Because gays and lesbians are online to an even higher degree than heterosexuals (Harris interactive and Witeck-Combs Communications 2007), there are also great opportunities for fan-based viral marketing and expanded intermedia storytelling. Lesbians being a previously untapped consumer market increases the prospects for spin-off products. This is all made possible by cultural knowledge of the group. The executive producer Ilene Chaiken being an out lesbian and some of the directors and actors coming from “New Queer Cinema” gives the project high credibility in the lesbian community. But as Avila Saavedra (2009) argues, capitalism is the condition of commercial TV, something that is illustrated by Chaiken’s statement in an international press tour interview: “The premise I had set up for myself: Los Angeles, lesbians, fashionable, glamorous, interesting. I knew that I wanted to tell this story.” (*OurChart.com*). It is telling that the first word after lesbian is “fashionable”. With *The L-word*, Chaiken constructs and makes popular a partly new identity in the media: The fashionable lesbian. This is also exemplified by her cooperation with the “L’Ement of Style fashion line, the Love and Pride *L-word* jewellery collection and numerous other business ventures. This development is in line with recent expressions like “the pink economy” (Liljestrand 2003) and “the gay index” (Florida 2002), which paints a picture where LBGTs are increasingly
being seen as a profitable group, both as a creative workforce and as affluent consumers. In the next section, I will demonstrate how the representations of lesbian identities are discursively displaced and the identity position “lesbian” is partially filled with new meanings in the televised text of *The L-word*.

### The (Re)Construction of Lesbian Identities and Sartorial Style in *The L-word*

- **"Alice" Sheer Lipstick** - A warm, rose with champagne shimmer inspired by Alice's quirky fashion-forward look.
- **"Bette" Sheer Lipstick** - A sophisticated red that's as passionate and powerful as Bette.
- **"Kit" Sheer Lipstick** - A saucy raisin with copper shimmer that's as fiery as Kit.
- **"Shane" Sheer Lipstick** - A creamy, natural tone to enhance your lip color, inspired by Shane's no-nonsense style.

Entering *The L-word* site on Sho.com in 2009, one can among other things try solve the Jenny murder mystery, not resolved in the series’ narrative, discuss with other fans, and upload pictures, but also purchase various products, such as *The L-word* board game, CDs, DVD boxes, different types of clothes, mugs, a candle, and lipsticks in four different shades, the latter named after the most popular characters (see citation above). The selling of lipsticks to lesbians does not quite fit in with earlier views on lesbian consumption. This could be seen as a sign of discursive re-positioning of lesbian identities, and to illustrate my argument, I will analyze a storyline from *The L-word*. In one scene in episode three (named “Let’s do it”) in the first season, Shane, Alice and Dana, three attractive women in their twenties, are sitting at a café, the Planet, gossiping about an acquaintance. They seem relaxed, but at the same time very interested in the conversation.

_Alice:_ What is it with Jenny and Marina?

_Dana:_ I thought Jenny was straight?

_Shane:_ Most girls are straight until they’re not. Or sometimes they’re gay til they’re not. And then there’s those that never look back, and you can spot them from a mile away.

_Dana:_ How?

_Shane:_ You read the signals.

_Dana:_ That’s my problem.

_Shane:_ It’s not a problem, sexuality is fluid, whether you’re gay or straight or bisexual, you just go with the flow.

_Dana:_ But that’s my problem, I don’t feel the flow, that thing, I ain’t got it.

_Alice:_ You don’t have gaydar! That’s right, you don’t got it.

_Shane:_ But everybody’s got it!

_Alice:_ I’ll prove it to you! See that girl that just got in?
Alice asks Dana if the girl that just entered the café is straight or gay, based on style codes such as short or long nails, if they are natural or polished, and choices of dress. According to Alice, tapered jeans with high-heel sandals symbolize “heterosexual” in existing cultural codes. This is something the naive Dana, who doesn’t have gaydar, is oblivious about. This poses a problem, as she is interested in sous-chef Lara, and does not know if Lara is gay or straight. In this episode, the Chart (intertextually connected to the website OurChart.com), a virtual online map showing sexual connections between lesbians, is introduced. The friends help Dana search the Chart for Lara, without finding her. They therefore visit Lara’s place of work to look for signs of lesbianism, with no clear conclusion. In a last desperate attempt they send forward Shane, the series’ Casanova, without any reactions from Lara. Apparently, Lara is lacking lesbian markers, style codes and desires, and deemed by the friends not to be a lesbian. Anyhow, later on it seems that she is a lesbian anyway, and she wants to go on a date with Dana. Once again, the friends take a tutorial stance, lecturing Dana not to wear a sundress on the date. Dana is positioned as ignorant of lesbian style codes. This particular story arc is discursively centered on sexuality and sexual identities, and these discourses are organized around the difference between gay and straight. The difference between heterosexuals and lesbians is not physiological or directly noticeable. Therefore, the ones interested in seeing the difference need gaydar. The master significant (Laclau & Mouffe 1985) in the discourse formation is the lesbian. In the narrative a chain of equivalence is formed, looking like this: a lesbian – a person on the Chart (a person that has had sex with other lesbian/s) – a woman desiring Shane – a person dressing according to certain style codes – a person not dressed in a (sun) dress. It is however important to point out that masculine or androgynous styles are not privileged in the TV series, even though there are characters that play with masculine attributes such as ties etc, but instead a feminine and highly glamorous ideal, which in some cases borders on the androgynous. The characters have often been accused of being unrealistically good looking and expensively dressed and styled, and they often wear feminine attire such as dresses, skirts, blouses and high heels.

Dana follows her friends’ advice and wears slacks to her date, but when she picks her up, Lara is wearing a summer dress. Lara is thereby positioned as a lesbian subject who does not follow the norms of the lesbian chain of equivalence. “The lesbian” can therefore be seen as an empty or floating signifier (Laclau & Mouffe 1985), that lacks essence, and is filled with different meanings dependent on what it is put up against. In this way, the lesbian codes are at the same time constructed and deconstructed in the television series. According to sociologist Arlene Stein:

[L]esbian/gay boundaries, identities, and cultures are negotiated, defined, and produced. The history of lesbian social worlds is in part this production of boundaries, identities, and cultures. These symbolic struggles construct female homosexuality as social reality; they create images, myths, and fantasies of lesbian love, desire, and
fulfillment; and they shape the composition of the group of women called lesbians. (Stein 2006: 24)

Media representations of lesbians are a part of this symbolic struggle, creating powerful constructs that help shape queer women’s social reality. Why then this particular (re)construction? One answer could be that this is a way for TV producers to successfully interpellate a heterogeneous queer collective. Both women who desire and do not desire Shane, and follow or do not follow the lesbian style codes, are here positioned as potential lesbian subjects. *The L-word* (re)constructs lesbian identities, but there is an openness in this construction. This openness leaves room for different reading positions, firstly what we could call “the real dyke”, a subject that lives by the lesbian chain of equivalence. According to these norms, the lesbian woman is often positioned as “masculine”, something that is a remnant of the theories of Sigmund Freud and scientia sexualis. In Foucauldian terms, powers’ production of knowledge of a certain identity position also produces these subjects’ self-knowledge. The other possible identity position interpellated by the text is the feminine lesbian, the “femme” or “lipstick lesbian”, often made invisible as lesbian by an older discourse (Walker 2001), but being of huge interest for media producers and advertisers who want to position lesbian women as consuming subjects. Recent queer theory has reclaimed the “femme” as a rule breaker, an aesthetic of “too much” that challenges norms of middle-class straight femininity (Lagrace Volcano & Dahl 2008), but these “femmes of power” do not have much in common with the respectable traditional beauty of *The L-word* cast. The feminine subject position is prevalent in *The L-word*’s televised universe, something that can be interpreted both as a strong connection to consumerism and a discursive displacement of lesbian identities. According to Rebecca Beirne (2008), this is however in line with previous popular media representations of lesbians, especially the feminine “lesbian chic” representations of the 1990s. She also sees similarities between the series and the lesbian pulp novels of the 1950s, which show a very dark picture of lesbian lives and relationships. In an analysis by Candace Moore (2007: 17), it is pointed out that *The L-word* offers different viewing positions, because “[t]he show positions lesbianism as a sensibility, not a sexuality. This is particularly important because as a sensibility, lesbianism can potentially be co-opted by straight viewers.” Moore proposes the term ”heteroflexibility” for the straight viewer of *The L-word*.

**The “Branding” of Lesbian Identities**

Today, brands and the immaterial and symbolic capital these have attached to them are seen as more valuable than a company’s physical or material assets. Well-known and high status brands give the consumer added value, an experience and a point of identification. This development is mirrored in the ways individuals look at and express themselves in postmodern society (Featherstone 1991). Con-
sumer products and brands are increasingly being used to signal identity, lifestyle choices and group memberships (Holmberg 2002: 83). The aspect of choice, to choose or not choose different kinds of products or brands, could also be foundational in the lifestyle project of the individual. Branding work has become increasingly important in the culture industries, especially the music industry, film and television. Some (Lash & Urry 2002: 137) even claim that these industries function more like advertising firms, focusing on brand building, and outsourcing media production. When *The L-word* was registered as a trademark, the media producers used already existing identities, the lesbian. These identities were partly formed in opposition to heterosexual identities and a society where heterosexuality is the norm. Also, both in lesbian self-identities and in common lesbian stereotypes, the connection between lesbians and consumption has previously been weak. *The L-word* brand is filled with meaning through the stories and the points of identification the television series offers its viewers. It is then used to sell different types of products. The show also creates a glamorous backdrop that encourages consumption, for example through the characters’ glamorous designer outfits, makeup, hairstyles and the interior decoration (the settings are often the characters’ own homes, places of work, cafés, restaurants and bars). One example of how *The L-word* brand is used to sell consumer products is the scent L Eau du Perfume, which went into retail just before Valentine’s Day 2006 (Cole 2006). Scents and perfumes are products connected to glamour, luxury and lifestyle. Another example is the “L”ements of style limited edition fashion line on sale on Showtime’s website and in selected stores in the US in 2006 (Scott 2006). Lash and Lury (2007) suggest the term “thingification” when describing a process in which western media are increasingly highlighting things and consumer products. As products become brands, and thereby signs with a certain meaning, rather than necessities, and the media are increasingly being preoccupied with these branded products, the media become a system of things rather than representations of ideas or the world. Through the consumption of goods, it is also possible for the media audience to enter a world created by the media. Henry Jenkins (2006: 21, 114; see also Goodman 1978) proposes the concept “worldmaking” when describing how forms of media convergence and spin-off products create a world where media producers no longer just create a story or a character, but also a fictitious universe that the audience can immerse themselves in. Together with Lash and Lury’s term thingification, this suggests increasingly tactile or haptic dimensions to contemporary media consumption. I would not therefore suggest that the world created by the media is completely cut off from social reality, but rather that social worlds and fictitious universes are productively influencing one another.
The Active Audience as Desirable Demographic

In 2005, “The L-word Fan Lib Event” took place, where fans were invited to write a scene for an episode for the coming fifth season, under strict guidance by professional writers. The event was successful and it was repeated for the sixth and last season. It took place over the Internet, where the fans could vote for the scenes they preferred and it also got the attention of the American webzine Business Wire (Dec 5th 2005):

THE L WORD FanLib event is a tremendously sticky and interactive way for marketers to reach one of the most coveted demographics in television,” said Chris Williams, co-creator of FanLib and a former Yahoo! executive. “FanLib's technology is a quantum leap in the effort to link brand marketing initiatives to consumer generated media. For the right sponsors, this event is a great opportunity to reach a coveted audience and to tap the potential of the booming consumer generated media phenomenon.

To create one’s own stories about the characters of a favorite television series is common in fan communities. In written form, these fantasies are called fan fiction. These texts and other fan activities have been seen as forms of resistance and struggle over textual meanings (Jenkins 1992). Fan fiction was also originally opposed by the producers of popular culture, for example in the case of Star Trek “slash fiction” where female fans dreamed up a love affair between Captain Kirk and Dr Spock, who in the original Star Trek narrative are strictly heterosexual. This art of “slashing” same-sex characters is today very common in fan culture, something that can be seen in an excess of material on the Internet (see for example Jenkins 1992). The L-word’s producers kept a close eye on the fans’ cultural production, and also used the active audience as an argument for attracting advertisers. This is another example of transmedia production, and of The L-word becoming something more than just a popular television series. Other spin-offs are the online community OurChart.com (cancelled in 2009 and redirected to Sho.com, Showtime’s web page), and a virtual world in Second Life (Ves: 2008).3

For Showtime, creating a virtual L Word for fans and Second Life players in general gives them the chance to gain exposure for the show and its affiliated products (such as the “L’ements of Style) to people from all over the world—which will hopefully convert into real life purchases of those products and subscribers for Showtime. In addition, by creating in-world products (L Word clothing, real estate, apartments, etc. are in the works), Showtime can tap into the virtual economy of the game to earn cold, hard cash in an entirely new kind of marketplace. With online gaming now a multi-billion dollar industry populated by die-hard gamers willing to shell out insane amounts of cash for virtual goods, it could turn out to be a very smart (and profitable) move. (Ves 2008)

The L-word community on Sho.com has blogs, a wiki, a shop, and you can download the episodes via Itunes or Amazon unbox for $1.99 per episode, or watch previews for free. The obsolete website OurChart.com used the television series’ storyline about “The Chart”, a virtual web which symbolizes the connections and sexual relations between lesbians and bisexual women. OurChart also exists as an
online community owned by journalist Alice Pieszecki in *The L-word* narrative. *The L-word* season six starts with a murder, which is not solved, and this murder mystery (Who killed Jenny?) is used in intermedia storytelling on Sho.com, where the users can choose between possible suspects and vote. These various texts create an L-world, which is inhabited by different characters, relationships, events and situations the audience can use to create their own stories and fantasies. Here, the boundary between production and reception becomes blurred, even though the power relation between executive producer Ilene Chaiken and the audience is an unequal one, with Chaiken controlling both the narrative and the brand. In her blog at OurChart.com (posted in March 10, 2008), Chaiken hinted that a big group of fans called TiBeters, who wanted the broken up couple Tina and Bette to re-unite, had influenced the narrative (they indeed got back together in season five), and that season six was going to be even more interactive, using the Fan Lib technology.

**Conclusion**

After a long history of misrecognition, lesbians are now seen as demographically desirable, partly because of recent developments in the media industry and commercial culture. The market is arranged in segments, according to demographics or lifestyles. Therefore, already existing identities and a global LBGT culture can be used to obtain both economic gain and artistic and political acclaim in the culture industry, not least when it comes to the brand building efforts of cable networks. Creating a cult series for lesbians suits contemporary media conglomerate’s wishes and needs perfectly, giving them a chance to reach one of the most coveted demographics. Lesbians as an active audience possess many of the qualities that were celebrated by “new revisionism” cultural studies (McGuigan 1992) through notions like resistance (Hall 1980; Hebdige 2001) and participatory culture (Jenkins 2006), characteristics at the same time increasingly sought after by contemporary advertisers. This is made visible in business discourse by buzz words such as user generated content and wikinomics. Media user behavior earlier described as resistance by cultural studies scholars is now deemed to be “a booming consumer generated media phenomenon” (*Business Wire* Dec. 5th 2005). This would of course not be possible without new digital technologies tracking user behavior, providing increased opportunities for media producers to control and survey the audience.

In queer studies, scholars have discussed LBGT representation in popular media as associated with normalization. When representations of identities are adjusted to fit the narrow matrix of the market, there is a risk that less attractive groups in the LBGT community are left out. Ann Ciasullo (2001) describes the exclusion of the masculine woman in media representations of lesbians in the 1990s, a conclusion that *The L-word* with few exceptions confirms. José Esteban
Muñoz (1999) shows that there is a white norm in representations of LBGTS, whereas *The L-word* made efforts to include Latin-American and African-American characters. In a reception study of *The L-word* (Ladendorf 2008), informants criticized its middle class norms. To trademark lesbian identities could be seen as making successful or attractive forms of queer identities visible at the expense of other groups. An earlier study (Ladendorf 2007; 2008) shows that *The L-word* successfully communicates to gay women, and that the show is seen as important, both as a tool for recognition and as a point of identification. An important aspect is the thingification of the media in a media industry where things and brands have sometimes become more important than narratives and representations. The immersive, brand-building qualities of TV series *The L-word* confuse identity work with consumption. The selling of lifestyle products intimately connected to glamorized femininities such as lipstick and perfume indicates a discursive re-positioning of lesbian identities and could encourage its viewers to go out and buy themselves a “lesbian identity kit”. The selling of lesbian lipstick to lipstick lesbians could be both enabling and constricting for the identity work of queer women in the future. *The L-word* characters form strong points of identification and role-models for lesbians, even if the viewers make oppositional readings of them (Ladendorf 2007; 2008). In my view, *The L-word’s* “hi-jacking” of lesbian identities is however doing more good than bad when it comes to creating a place for queer women in both popular culture and the media industry, even though it is important to discuss what price has to be paid for this visibility.

**Martina Ladendorf** is Assistant Professor in Media and Communication Studies at the Department for Music and Media, Luleå University of Technology. She has previously published articles on *The L-word* in *Lambda Nordica* and *Tidskrift för Genusvetenskap*. E-mail: martina.ladendorf@ltu.se

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Notes

1 Examples of such series are Sex and the City (HBO 1998–2004), Dexter (Showtime 2006–), Weeds (Showtime 2005–), Nurse Jackie (2009–) and Queer as folk (American version) (Showtime 2000–2005).

2 This particular story arc has previously been analyzed by both Aviva Dove-Viebahn (2007) and Rebecca Beirne (2008).

3 Second Life is an online game where the players are represented through avatars, and where one can exchange real life money for virtual (but also earn money inside the 3-D world), to buy all kinds of virtual products. This is in itself profitable, and at the same time Second Life-players are an attractive demographic for advertisers.

References


Nostalgia Spaces of Consumption and Heterotopia: Ramadan Festivities in Istanbul

By Defne Karaosmanoglu

Abstract

Contemporary city cultures are often defined in relation to the processes of late-capitalism and commodification. Today, in various parts of the world, the previously dominant industrial cities have been replaced by cities of consumption (Urry 1995: 123). Cities are treated as sites for representation, masquerade and sociability (Featherstone and Lash 1999: 3). National and religious celebrations and culinary festivals are parts of the dynamism of city life where nostalgia becomes a marketing strategy. This article looks at the nostalgia industry in the contemporary city of Istanbul in connection to the Ramadan festivities and iftar tables as everyday spaces of spectacle and consumption. It examines the ways in which the Ramadan space is articulated in everyday practices not only as a site of spectacle formed by both global and local discourses, but also as a form of sociability that brings people together.

Keywords: Ramadan festivities, nostalgia spaces, Istanbul, spaces of consumption, spaces of sociability
Introduction

In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation. (Debord 2004: 83)

The period of Ramadan in Istanbul creates a carnival atmosphere. Mosques are illuminated and nostalgic Ramadan space prevails while local celebrities perform in the festivities. The ritual of fasting during Ramadan is indeed a very popular activity in Turkey even among “the nonbelievers” (Gülalp 2003: 385). At sun-down, the iftar meal (means “breaking the fast” in Arabic) is the main entertainment activity. Iftar which used to be a homebound and family-centred activity, has been carried to the restaurants and guidebook-rated hotels in Istanbul during the 1990s. The “past” has become a very important element at such tables. From five-star hotels to decent restaurants, iftar tables are decorated with Turkish/Ottoman dishes. Menus are presented to bring back the “traditional” and “authentic” Ottoman tables. Five-star hotels such as Ritz Carlton, Hyatt Regency, Mövenpick, Conrad, Çırağan, Eresin Crown Hotel, The Marmara, and Swissotel introduce a mixture of traditional (known) and exotic (unknown-forgotten) Ottoman dishes in their pricey restaurants (see Sarıtaş 2003; Sabah 2007a; 2007b).¹ Waiters wearing traditional folkloric costumes serve dishes in traditional Ottoman copper pans. In such spaces, from the presentation and décor to the serving style and the name of the dish, a nostalgia space of consumption is created (Zengin 2004).²

This is followed by other developments in the commercial sector of Istanbul in Ramadan. For example, supermarkets have started to sell reasonably priced iftar packages, which include many of the traditional components, including different kinds of cheese, olives, date, butter, sucuk,³ honey, rice, green lentils, and tea. Moreover, Burger King prepares an iftar menu called “the Sultan’s Menu”, which has a variety of iftar foods such as soup, pita with hummus, tomato, sucuk, chocolate palace sarma (dessert), date, and tea, while McDonald’s serves tulumba dessert (a Turkish/Ottoman dessert). Internet technology has also become a part of Ramadan. Yemeksepeti.com (foodbasket) takes online orders for iftar deliveries. Simply, Ramadan is now celebrated through a simple adaptation of local traditions to global technologies and discourses. Reference to the Ottomans is evident in these developments. For example, one of the supermarket iftar packages includes a label of Turkish coffee called the Ottoman Kahve⁴ (Ottoman coffee). Also, supermarkets organize events, which attempt to reveal the Ottoman past. Migros Beylikdüzü Shopping Center, which was decorated to look like old Istanbul, with Ottoman fountains, street vendors and sema performances⁵ in 2001, provides a perfect example (Milliyet 2001).

How can we understand such a boom in Istanbul’s consumer culture in the month of Ramadan? Can we understand it through the processes of commodifica-
This article argues that notions such as “commodification of the past” and “latecapitalism” can only describe one part of the whole picture of Ramadan spaces in Istanbul. The other part of the picture has less to do with consumerism, but more to do with the formation of a temporalized space, which produces new discourses and new experiences of life.

In this article, first, I look at the extent to which “Islamists” play a role in the revitalization of the Ottoman past as a form of heritage. Policies of the Municipality of Istanbul under Islamist political parties are significant in the revival of the Ottoman past. Then I move to the commercial sector and explore the ways in which “the Islamist” and “the secularist” market, which are discursively constructed as separate in the mainstream media, in scholarly works (see NavaroYa-shin 2002) or as a part of public opinion, meet during the month of Ramadan. Even though constructing a separation between “the Islamist” and “the secularist” market seems to be problematic, I occasionally use the terms for strategic reasons to show that there is another reality, which defies the idea of a clear separation. In that regard, focusing mainly on media representations, I look at the extent to which Ramadan celebrations produce spaces of kitsch and spectacle regardless of the “Islamist” and the “secularist” political constructions. An approach that looks at the festivities from a commercialized and latecapitalist point of view is followed by another one, which is based on the politics of “heterotopia”. Here I perceive those commercial spaces as alternative spaces, which produce a utopian future for diversity, tolerance, and friendship. In the end, I explore the relationship between commodification and history, spaces of consumption and lived spaces of time and nostalgia.

The Islamist Versus the Secularist Market?: Or an Alternative Approach to Polarization

According to Taner Akçam, in contemporary Turkey, religion has ceased to be an overall unifying identity and a fundamental border between collective groups such as Muslims and nonMuslims. Instead “religion has become a political identity of a subgroup within society”. Therefore the unifying character of religion in the early Republican period has broken down (Akçam 2004: 120). Religion is being pushed to the culturalcivil sphere, where “political Islam” emerges. In other words, distancing from religion is “a determinant in the redrawing of the borders among the various ethnic groups”. The Alevi, the secularists, and the Islamists separate themselves by claiming to possess different characteristics of Islam and embrac-
ing their own unique particularities (Akçam 2004: 122, 123). As Akçam argues, AKP’s (Justice and Development Party) success in the general elections of 2002 lies in the fact that it emerges by “setting religion in its proper place in the civil/social order” (Akçam 2004: 120). Debates over presidential elections and AKP’s success in 2007’s general elections caused suspicions and fears among secularists on AKP’s sincerity about the preservation of secularism in Turkey. Polarization of Islamists and Republican secularists has become visible with the secularist demonstrations against AKP in major cities of Turkey in May, 2007.6

However, as opposed to those demonstrations that are based on a violent perception of polarization, there happens to be a different reality, which is brought by Şerif Mardin and his notion of “Turkish exceptionalism” (Mardin 2005). According to Mardin, rather than claiming the revitalization of religion in modern times (separating religion and modernity for that matter), we have to develop a dialectical approach where opposites recover in a historical setting. Therefore, we can talk about “a peculiar mix of state and religious discourse in the Ottoman Empire” which promoted “a modern Turkish Islamic ‘exceptionalism’ with distant Ottoman roots” (Mardin 2005: 146). Here, the specifics of Turkish history lie in the characteristics of Ottomans and Turkish Republic which have worked to create “a special setting for Islam, a setting where secularism and Islam interpenetrate…” (Mardin 2005: 148). In this case, we may understand Turkish exceptionalism through the interpenetration of “Islamist” and “secularist” discourses. This study intends to show how and why we should move from the idea of polarization (of “Islamist” and “secularist”) to the idea of Turkish exceptionalism.

May 29, the day of the conquest of Istanbul in 1453, is not an official holiday, but it is officially recognized as a day of historical significance. Each year military representatives, the Municipality of Istanbul and the Governor’s Office organize a small official ceremony, which is about visiting the tomb of the conqueror Sultan Mehmet. Even though the Islamist circles have celebrated the day with large demonstrations and parades, these ceremonies did not attract any media attention until 1994 (Çınar 2001: 366). The Ottoman past has been embraced and managed by the government policies following the victory of an Islamist party, the Refah Partisi (Welfare Party) in the 1994 Istanbul Municipal elections.7 The Welfare Party has acted as the true guardian of the Ottoman/Islamic political heritage and Istanbul has been promoted as a global Islamic city. Istanbul’s conquest is celebrated as a promising event that led to the formation of a global city with an Islamic image.

In 1994, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan from the Welfare Party was the winner of the local elections for the Presidency of the Municipality of Metropolitan Istanbul. Since then celebrations have been organized by the Municipality itself and been widely noticed. Even though the Turkish State has not played a major role in these organizations (since the day is not recognized as an official holiday), the ceremonies target “a national/public audience”, rather than the “Islamic commu...

The ceremonies reflect an alternative history, which not only glorifies the Ottoman past, but also makes the event a part of Islamic history. According to Alev Çınar, “these Islamist performances of history serve to construct an alternative national identity which is Ottoman and Islamic” and centred in Istanbul, as opposed to the secular Republican identity centred in Ankara. In these performances, Ottoman history is incorporated into national memory, and Istanbul is depicted as an “OttomanIslamic” city (Çınar 2001: 365, 366).

The Ottoman past is also reflected in the Ramadan celebrations. Especially since 1995, the Municipality of Istanbul under the Islamist parties (Welfare Party, Virtue Party, and since 2004, Justice and Development Party) has paid special attention to Ramadan celebrations. The Municipality organizes iftar tents, conferences, exhibitions, plays, and concerts in different parts of the city. Moreover, Ottomanstyle Ramadan festivals, which attempt to emphasize the Islamic identity of the Ottoman Empire, have been organized.

To see how the Ottoman past is embraced and managed by different groups, not only the policies of political parties, but also the capitalist consumer market should be examined. Yael NavaroYashin’s argument, problematic as it seems, is also based on a clear separation of “Islamist” and “secularist” market. She looks at the ways in which together with secularists, Islamists in Turkey have become active in the making and shaping of the consumer market. With the emergence of a new Islamist middle class, an Islamic consumer market has developed. Both secularists and Islamists have found ways to exhibit their conflicts in the cultural realm. Commodification, in this case, becomes a common ground, rather than a domain that divides the secularists and the Islamists (NavaroYashin 2002: 222). According to NavaroYashin, the Islamist market is very much influenced and determined by a kind of nostalgia that is fixed on the Ottoman past. For instance, it is the Ottoman past that inspires Tekbir, the biggest Muslim apparel company in Turkey. Tekbir sells Islamic clothing such as veils, overcoats, and headscarves, some of which are adopted from the fashions popular during Ottoman times. In this respect, Ottomanness is used to form the “authentically Islamic”. Therefore, Tekbir is a good example of the ways in which the Ottoman past is uncovered and embraced as part of the Islamist market (NavaroYashin 2002: 237). Products are presented under the titles such as “Inspirations from the Ottoman past.” As NavaroYashin argues, “the claim to be representative of a ‘past Ottoman and Islamic reality’ was what gave the Tekbir fashion show its legitimacy and force” (NavaroYashin 2002: 244).

Ramadan seems to be an important period for the Islamist market. For instance, the religious publication fair has gained in popularity, with an increase in the books about Ramadan and Islam. An Islamist publisher, Kitabevi, publishes books on the old traditions of Ramadan. There is also an increase in religious books and
interactive educational CDs for children. As well, in Ramadan albums with religious music sell well (Eren 2004a).

However, it is not only the “Islamist” market that embraces the month of Ramadan, nor is it the sole possessor of the Ottoman heritage. The end of 1990s brought about a new era in the heritage industry both in the governmental and the commercial sector. The mainstream media and the popular culture have also joined the celebrations of the establishment of the Ottoman Empire and of the conquest of Istanbul. As opposed to what Çınar has claimed, I believe, the secularist construction of national history is no longer centered on the early Republican ideology, which rejects the empire and embraces Republicanism. Ottoman-ness and the sense of Istanbul as a city with many histories have become a part of the secularist national imagination. This would be a means to deconstruct the dichotomy of “secularists” versus “Islamists” and to move closer to a better understanding of Turkish exceptionalism.

It was not until 1999 that the mainstream media and the popular culture in general embraced the anniversary of the establishment of the Ottoman Empire. For the first time, in 1999, the Ottoman Empire’s 700th anniversary was celebrated in many areas, including the fashion industry (see Sabah 1999). Mainstream newspapers covered the celebrations at length and books and articles about the Ottoman Empire and culture were mushroomed at the time (see Hürriyet 1999). A growing interest in the emerging Ottoman culinary culture manifests itself as well. Divan Hotel organized an event called “the Ottoman Week” for the anniversary of the Ottomans. Tuğrul Şavkay, a food columnist of Hürriyet newspaper, argued that the celebrations were not that impressive, but nevertheless the private organizations did a good job by introducing the Ottoman culture and cuisine (Şavkay 1999a). Ali Esad Göksel, a food writer from Sabah newspaper, complained that the 700th anniversary ceremonies were not as marvellous as they deserved to be. For him, the conquest of Istanbul by the Ottomans on May 29 is significant not only for Turkey as its inheritor, but also for studies of cultural history in general (Göksel 2001). Popular culture in Turkey have created sites where historically constituted “Ottomanness” are manifested. The ways in which nostalgic reconstructions of “Ottomanness” are revealed in Istanbul’s Ramadans remains a crucial question.

Nostalgia as Spectacle and Kitsch: Nostalgia Spaces and the Ramadan Times

It has been widely claimed that contemporary times are marked by a kind of nostalgia that is infused by the commodification of culture. Roland Robertson argues that while previous versions of nostalgia arose more “naturally” from estrangement or alienation, contemporary nostalgia is for the most part capitalistic and intimately bound up with consumerism (Robertson 1990: 54, 55). As Svetlana
Boym also argues, today’s nostalgia is strongly connected to consumer culture. For the nostalgia industry, time is money (Boym 2001: 38). It turns the past into a spectacle or an image that is desired and consumed as a commodity. For Fredric Jameson, there is an “appetite for the images of the past in the form of what might be called simulacra” (Jameson 1988: 104). Nostalgia appropriates “the past through stylistic connotations, conveying ‘pastness’ by the glossy qualities of the image” (Iwabuchi 2002: 549). Arjun Appadurai calls it “ersatz nostalgia” without lived experience. It creates “the simulacra of periods that constitute the flow of time, conceived as lost, absent, and distant”. Commercial nostalgia teaches consumers to miss what they have never lost and fabricates the experience of loss (Appadurai 1996: 77, 78). In other words, it invents “the temporal logic of fantasy” (Boym 2001: 38). Therefore, nostalgia signals not only a return of the repressed, but also an aestheticization of the past. It turns history into a bunch of amusing and readily available activities or objects devoid of politics (Boym 2001: 51). According to Linda Hutcheon, it is the very “pastness” of the past that justifies the power of nostalgia (Hutcheon 1997: 3). Therefore, nostalgia is about the present as much as about the past: “Simultaneously distancing and proximating, nostalgia exiles us from the present as it brings the imagined past near” (Hutcheon 1997: 7). Commercialized nostalgia temporalizes space and turns it into a spectacle by attributing exoticism and difference to the past. This kind of nostalgia can be understood with the notions of “parody” and “kitsch”. Could we then argue that old Ramadans in Istanbul have grown out of commercial nostalgia, where the Ottoman history is aestheticized and is turned into a bunch of amusing activities?

Perhaps the most exotic way of recreating the Ottoman past in Istanbul comes in the month of Ramadan. During this period, Ottoman history is inscribed into public life with commoditized and exoticized Ramadan celebrations, and local Ramadan practices generate new habits of consumption and consumerism. Special Ramadan festivities attempt to bring back the Ottoman past in more than one way. While describing the spaces of Ramadan in Istanbul we have to theorize the complex relationship between temporal and spatial forms. The concept of a temporalized space could be useful here which refers to two simultaneous processes: past makes up a space, and at the same time space creates a particular form of history. The most popular Ramadan celebrations organized by the city municipality, which are held in two historical places of Istanbul, Feshane and Sultanahmet, are decorated in such a way that they attempt to bring back the old Ramadan traditions of the Ottoman past.

Contemporary popular culture and media creates a commercial space using “one” version of the Ottoman past and culture. This temporIALIZED (or historicized) space could be perceived as an amusement park where people can have a little nostalgic fun and be reminded of their traditions:

As oldtimers would know, the shouting of ‘bozza, boooza’ was heard in Ramadan nights as well as kestanevis, şerbetçis, macuncus... Ortaoyuns, kantos, Karagöz-Hacivat shows were fetes for the people. Do not say ‘what happened to
those old Ramadans!!’ Now this traditional festival is revived in Istanbul’s Feshane Cultural Centre. (Öz 2000)

The festivities started in 1999 in the glamorous building of Feshane, which was built in 1826 as a military clothing factory by Sultan Mahmut II. It was renovated to be used as an entertainment centre for Ramadan celebrations. It has become a scene where the old Ramadan days are recreated as theatrical scenery. For example, a historical boat called “the Sultan’s boat”, which was used by Sultan Abdülaziz at the time, is used now to bring back the past. “The Sultan’s boat” tours in Haliç by the rowers in Ottoman costumes with a nostalgic Ottoman music playing in the background (Batur 2004). *Karagöz and Hacivat* (a kind of puppet show), ortaoyunu (a theatrical play based on improvisation) and traditional dancing performances are presented. Magicians, acrobats, meddahs (storytellers of the Ottoman Palace), and fireeaters are all parts of the entertainment (see Doğan 2003; Kurtaran 2007; Düdek 2007).

Sultanahmet has produced another space, a temporalized space, where Ramadan activities have been held since 1995. Sultanahmet is a part of old Istanbul where Topkapi Palace, Hagia Sophia, the Blue Mosque, and other historical sites are located. In the month of Ramadan, Sultanahmet turns into a spectacular space where global and local, traditional and modern meet. Traditional puppet shows of *Karagöz and Hacivat*, as well as *Nasrettin Hoca* performances, and fasıl (a kind of traditional music) are parts of the entertainment. In the descriptions of Sultanahmet the notion of “the traditional” comes up very often. Sultanahmet becomes a space where “traditions are remembered” in most “authentic” ways. For example, to relive the old times, rather than brandname candies, traditional sweets like elma şekeri (apple candy), *Ottoman macun*, and pamuk helva (cotton candy) are sold in Sultanahmet festivities. People listen to fasıl and drink tea (see Yıldız 2004).

Ottoman kitsch is everywhere in the Sultanahmet festivities and a melange of past and future is most evident. A mythical past is mingled with a fairytale like atmosphere. *Alman Çeşmesi* (German Fountain) leaks honey and sherbet in place of water during Ramadan. Sultanahmet was represented with the smell of a blend of Western and local aromas of kokoreç, popcorn, pickle juice, and *macun* (paste) (Zengin 2003). Ironically, there are images of the future and the past of the city, from fastfood and technological entertainments to “traditional” Ottoman *macuns* and old *Karagöz and Hacivat* performances. For example, American “mechanical bulls” are in very high demand, strangely (Yıldız 2004). Salih Zengin, a journalist, writes that rodeo involving mechanical bulls is a humiliating activity for “us”, since it is a “silly” imitation of the American Western films (Zengin 2003).

The mainstream media (including the ones defined as Islamist or secularist) praise but, at the same time, criticize the celebrations. Some writers have developed a cynical approach to Sultanahmet’s activities. In an article in the *Zaman*...
newspaper, Salih Zengin describes the festivities as exaggerated and commercialized events of the past with no genuine Ottoman cuisine: “Kokoreç and sucuk stands make you feel Ramadan with their smells, but the more you eat the more you move away from the Ottoman cuisine, because there is no Ottoman cuisine there” (Zengin 2003).

Instead, it is the Southeastern cuisine that is sold at the palace door. According to Zengin, sultan gözleme, Ottoman sahlep, Ottoman pickles, çiğköfte as well as Ottoman jeweler and sultan trinkets are for the Turkish people who crave for nostalgia. Photographers provide Ottoman costumes for the customers who want their photographs taken in folkloric dress. The sign on its door says, “Photographs with Ottoman costumes are taken.” Salih Zengin shows his condemnation for those “ridiculous” scenes of Ramadan. He says that during Ramadan we are bound to watch how others embarrass and ridicule themselves with such imitations. Zengin also talks about a special Ottoman macun and a machine called Rambo, which is used to test the strength of men who eat the macun. For Zengin, this is typical of the Turkish men who want to show their machismo, and he comments on just how pathetic such displays are (Zengin 2003).Ironically, the Ottoman hindişerbeti (a kind of sherbet) is sold in one stand under the name of “energy drink-Ottoman doping”. This traditional sherbet is presented ironically as an “energy drink”, which makes it “global” as much as “local”. This attracts both the natives and the tourists. In this manner, the local past is recreated and shaped by a global discourse.

These festivities are like a depthless parody where Ottoman nostalgia becomes a fictional past of costume dramas and games. New Ramadan festivals recreate scenes of exaggerated Orientalist kitsch style. They are often thought as commercial activities which are directly connected to the market. They can easily be understood in terms of the commodification of the past with their exoticized imitations of macuncus, şerbetçis, and waiters with folkloric dresses. In this way, nostalgia exaggerates discontinuities with the past by emphasizing “the exotic”. Moreover, Ramadan festivities have created new trends and habits for the entertainment sector (Eren 2004b).

Sultanahmet and Feshane can be considered within the framework of theme parks, which “perpetuates the fetish of commodity culture”. They offer “a fantasy journey into a world of spatial [and temporal] forms” (Harvey 2000: 167). In this respect, contemporary nostalgia for the Ottoman culture can be perceived as fully commercial. All the artifacts of the Ottoman past are made available and the consumer enjoys both modern convenience and old pleasures of Ottoman history within a theatrical scenery.

However, is it sufficient to conceptualize the Ramadan celebrations in relation to the processes of commodification alone? What other discourses, concepts, and perspectives can describe the Ramadan spaces? What kind of a living space is
created other than a commercial one? Does commodification stimulate political indifference? Does it really kill “history” by materializing it?

**Utopias of the Scene: Ramadan as a New Spatial Form**

The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images (Debord 2004: 83).

Shifting our perceptions from commodification to sociability, kitsch styles to new ways of spatial plays where social relations are expressed, Ramadan can be considered as an alternative space. It is a time/space, which creates new ways of experiencing everyday lives in the city. Bringing a new perspective, I explore Ramadan as a heterotopic site and a utopic space.

The notion of commercial nostalgia explains only one side of the Ramadan space. First of all, it quickly eliminates the power of agency. It puts the consumers in a passive position in which they appear to be manipulated by the capitalist system. Secondly, commercial nostalgia, which only focuses on commodity culture, fails to see the fact that in actually existing spatial forms everyday lives are reconstructed and new experiences and discourses emerge. Finally, the question of whether commodification kills history is answered too quickly by commercial nostalgia (Harvey 2000: 168). In other words, the concept of commercial nostalgia cannot provide an alternative ground for understanding the relationship between commodification and history. Andreas Huyssen disagrees with the argument that commodification equals forgetting, that is, that the marketing of memory generates amnesia. For Huyssen, we have to look at the marketing of memory from a different perspective:

> Something else must be at stake, something that produces the desire for the past in the first place and that makes us respond so favorably to the memory markets: that something, I would suggest, is a slow but palpable transformation of temporality in our lives, centrally brought on by the complex intersections of technological change, mass media, and new patterns of consumption, work, and global mobility. (Huyssen 2000: 21)

Consequently, capital and the processes of commodification do not necessarily kill history. On the contrary, in some sense they strengthen remembering and demand more of history, more of historical detail. Perhaps here we should focus on another process, which seems to go “with”, not “against” commodification. In what follows, I will revisit the spaces that are commercialized and aestheticized (and which perpetuate “the fetish of commodity culture”) in relation to notions of “heterotopia” and “utopics”. Such notions effectively combine “the spatial” and “the temporal” to form a progressive politics of time and space.

Louis Marin (1984/1990) coins a term, “utopics”, to define broad social practices where utopian ideals of a society are expressed spatially. It is a “spatial play” which is seen in the examples of prison design, civic building, modernist architecture, town planning and so on. All sites of social engineering such as prisons, hos-
pitals, schools, libraries, and museums reflect utopic expressions of social ordering through new forms of spatial arrangements (cited in Hetherington 2001:51). Those sites are defined as new sites or newly interpreted sites, which offer alternative and different ways of experiencing life, and new ways of doing things (Hetherington 2001: 51; Harvey 2000: 184, 185). To describe the ways in which sites and spaces are produced, Hetherington uses the term, “the utopic engineering of social space” (Hetherington 2001: 51).

Here Michel Foucault’s differentiation of utopias and heterotopias is a useful one. He defines utopias as unreal spaces, and heterotopias as real spaces in a similar way as Marin describes “utopics”. Heterotopic sites produce different experiences of life (Foucault 1986: 25, 26). They include the cemetery, prison, mental hospitals as well as the factory, shopping mall and Disneyland (Harvey 2000: 185). Heterotopias are temporal sites. Some are linked to the accumulation of time, such as the museum and the library. And others are linked to the flows of time, such as the festival (Foucault 1986: 26).

For Foucault, fairgrounds are temporal heterotopias that take place once or twice a year with stands, displays, wrestlers, fortunetellers and so on. Furthermore, heterotopias offer alternative and new orderings of science, politics or art (Hetherington 2001: 52). They disrupt the homogeneity to which society typically remains attached. More importantly, they produce new discourses. In other words, as Hetherington claims, in “heterotopic spaces” discourse is made up:

[I]n order to understand how discourses emerge and become effective we have to pay attention to the spaces in which the utterances, of which discourses are constituted, are made. The model that I have suggested here is that new discourses emerge in places that are Other; heterotopic, sites that suggest a novel or different mode of social ordering that contrasts with the established sense of order within a particular social field. That mode of social ordering is articulated discursively. (Hetherington 2001: 71)

Ramadan festivities, which happen once a year, can be considered as temporal heterotopias. They are linked to the flowing time “in the mode of the festival”. Public life functions differently and a new form of social ordering is constructed in such spaces. Most importantly, daily time is reorganized according to sahur (starting the fast) and iftar (breaking the fast). Ramadan therefore reorder everyday activities through a new discourse of time.

Moreover, Ramadan becomes a cultural celebration where universal qualities of peace, friendship, family, tolerance, and love are presented as if they were expressed by all kinds of people regardless of their age, class, religion, or ethnic backgrounds. Bringing new discourses, Ramadan times and spaces disrupt the constructed polarization of Islamism and secularism and enable us to think otherwise. As Şerif Mardin (2005) argued, we have to think of a dialectical approach for this peculiar modern Turkish Islamic case where opposites come together. In this regard, Ramadan and Ottomanness create a new spatial form where polarization of Islamist and secularist are challenged. The mainstream media embrace the
Ramadan period as a utopic space and an alternative social form, which is experienced by a diversity of people, produces a common ground for the “Islamist” and “secularist”. The spaces of nostalgia in Istanbul are temporalized spaces that gather a diversity of people who would not come together otherwise. I believe such spaces do more than reproduce the capitalist consumer culture. Instead they provide an alternative way of dealing with history, nostalgia, and politics.

Especially in the media, Ramadan and iftar become a common ground for a diversity of people, which do not discriminate according to religion, age, class, and ethnicity in any sense. In other words, the month of Ramadan produces a multicultural and a multireligious space. For example, the Turkish representatives and the members of three main religions come together for Ramadan celebrations. This was organized in 2001 by the Journalism and Writers Foundation. The Fener Greek Orthodox Patriarch, the Turkish Armenian Patriarch, the Catholic Community Representative, the Vatican Representative, and the President of the Rabbis all joined the iftar table, which was called Halil İbrahim Sofrası (“Table of Abraham”). Not surprisingly, Abraham, who is a significant figure recognized by Judaism, Christianity and Islam, is chosen to refer to the commonness of those religions. And, it was felt that such a vision of union should give hope to the world (Yeni Şafak 2001a). The Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri) announced at the time that this show or cooperation and support between people was worthy of praise since it reflected a harmonious multireligious society (Yeni Şafak 2001c).

Therefore, rather than an Islamic event, Ramadan becomes a “cultural”, “historical” and “spiritual” one. For example, in the mainstream media, instead of the idea of a religious faith, “cultural” and “historical” aspects of the month of Ramadan are emphasized. İstanbul Life (a popular magazine for the middle classes) indicates in its special Ramadan pages that its readers “do not have to be ‘too Muslim’ to be interested in this edition, since iftarivelik is a food tasting journey which includes all religions” (Soydemir 2004). On the other hand, the newspapers of Islamist intellectuals and liberal believers of democracy (as they call themselves), Yeni Şafak and Zaman, highlight the spiritual as much as the cultural or the traditional sides of Ramadan. For example, iftar is defined as a holy meal, which “shuns hate and greed, and gives peace” (Zeytin 2004). As well, modern ways of living are seen as a threat to the sacredness of iftar meals. Eating alone is portrayed in the media as an undesired activity that neglects the spirituality of breaking the fast with the loved ones. Therefore, it is the sense of community that gives peace, comfort and serenity to iftar tables. The newspapers describe iftar through friendship and fraternity. İftar tables are portrayed as sacred, and fasting is claimed to strengthen social bonds: “What is filled is not so much the stomach, but the heart and the soul” (Eren 2004b).

As well, the interviews with Turkish celebrities reflect the emergence of a new progressive spatial form. A famous name in Turkish music, Ahmet Özhan, spoke
about the social and individual aspects of friendship, love and brotherhood referring to the old Ramadan days (Yeni Şafak 2004a). Alişan, a young musician, Kenan Işık, an actor, Hülya Koçvit, an actress, and Cem Karaca, a musician, also expressed their excitement and joy for the holy month of Ramadan (Yeni Şafak 2004c; 2002c). But is especially Cem Karaca, whose mother is a Christian and whose father is a Muslim, who occupies an inbetween space where Ramadan is defined through tolerance and holiness. As Cem Karaca claimed, even though his mother was not a Muslim, she had prepared the iftar table and encountered Ramadan with the same sacredness as his father (Yeni Şafak 2002b).

Furthermore, in Ramadan time is reflected on space, in which case Istanbul in general and its neighborhoods in particular become spaces of “progress” and “difference”. Istanbul is portrayed as a highly cultural and historical place to be in the month of Ramadan. Due to its cultural heritage it is supposed to provide a special space and is regarded as one of the most sensational places where Ramadan is experienced (see Göksel 2000). Moreover, Istanbul is treasured for its multireligious character and its mysterious past (see Tüzün 2005). It is a space of diversity and tolerance. By referring to the Christian, Muslim and Jewish histories, Istanbul is cherished with pride:

This year New Year’s Eve is again in the month of Ramadan. We will enter the year 2000 at the end of a Ramadan day. This is a very interesting coincidence! Istanbul is one of the most interesting places to be in the New Year’s Eve… And try to understand the divine coincidence of those people meeting in this world city of thousands of years. Different and meaningful New Year’s celebrations of the year 2000 can only happen in this city. I don’t know about the others but in the New Year’s Eve I will be in Istanbul. (Şavkay 1999b)

A “multireligious heterotopia” is created in Ramadan times by following the “Ottoman tolerance” of the past when nonMuslims were invited to iftar tables (see Yeni Şafak 2003b). In this case, the neighbourhood of Darülaceze is perceived as a spatial model, which has “preserved the notion of friendship for 107 years”. Ramadan is once again characterized by togetherness, tolerance, peace, and friendship among Muslim, Christian, and Jewish citizens. This should be an example to the world reports one particular news story in Yeni Şafak. A Muslim, an Armenian, and a Christian are all quoted as they express their feelings about the cultural month, and all are portrayed as happy in Ramadan (Yeni Şafak 2003c; 2002a). In another news story in Yeni Şafak, Grand Bazaar is portrayed as another space where all kinds of people from Muslims to nonMuslims sit at the same table waiting for the prayer for iftar. The artisans of the bazaar celebrate Ramadan regarding of their religion and ethnic background. The story reports that people preserve the culture of tolerance, understanding, and fellowship in Grand Bazaar. A Jewish and a Syriac artisan who do not complain about any sort of discrimination are extremely pleased during Ramadan because, as they claim, tolerance and friendship have still been a virtue of Istanbul while the world has lost much of those qualities (Kucur 2004).
Sultanahmet is, in a sense, a heterotopic site where religion, culture and history are mingled in complex ways. It can be considered as a progressive temporalized space. As David Harvey argues, spatial form controls temporality, history, and the possibility of social change (Harvey 2000: 160). Sultanahmet is a space that is created and engineered by the state policies of the city municipality. It is a new site, which offers alternative expressions of social ordering, different ways of experiencing life and new ways of doing things. It brings the past in a new form. A new discourse on time and Ottomanness emerges in Sultanahmet. The mingling of global and local, past and future, East and West, new and old constitutes a discourse and a lived experience of history. These are all combined in a theatrical ambiance where past is revealed in the “utopias of the social form”.

Sultanahmet resembles a fairground where “the traditional” is reconstructed and remembered with a diversity of entertainments. Celebrations resemble the old tales. Only in Ramadan do people find a chance to see traditional plays such as Nasrettin Hoca, Karagöz and Hacivat, and meddahlık, which could not usually compete with the modern ones like Pinocchio (Yıldız 2004). Utopia in this sense is not only a “spatial play”, but also a “temporal play”. It invents history and cultivates nostalgia for an intriguing past. From this perspective, Sultanahmet provides an alternative space, which brings “new” experiences from “the past” that are mingled with the “new” global (Western?) entertainments (like the rodeo).

Furthermore, Sultanahmet is a space of utopias, which express a too optimistic concept of “cultural diversity” for today’s Turkey. It reminds us of the old Ramadan times and spaces of the Ottomans which now are characterized by “difference” and “tolerance”. Newspapers embrace the space of Sultanahmet as “progressive” as well as commercial. In this space all kinds of people enjoy themselves freely with maximum tolerance. Through Sultanahmet, the utopian ideals of Turkish society are expressed spatially, where peace, understanding, and companionship are the desired characteristics. A picture of universal tolerance is drawn extensively. Veiled girls, punk tourists, men with şalvar (traditional trousers) and takke (an Islamic hat) are referred to as walking together peacefully. As it is reported in Radikal newspaper, “dedeler [old men] with takke do not even turn their heads to look at the naked bellies of the young girls” (Yıldız 2004). It is as if a “universal” iftar table reports one of the news stories in Yeni Şafak (2004b).

It has been claimed that in Sultanahmet, worldviews, economic classes, and political differences do not count. NonMuslim tourists constitute an important part of this scene of tolerance. They respect the culture of Ramadan by waiting for the iftar time to eat together with the Muslims. More importantly, even though some natives eat before the iftar time, they are not condemned either: “Just like the iftar tables, this space of tolerance in Sultanahmet is Allah’s gift to Istanbul” (Yeni Şafak 2004b). Regardless of its political connotations, “Kurdishness” seems to be included in this picture of diversity and tolerance. It is claimed by one reporter in Yeni Şafak that a Kurdish entertainment was held in “lovers' tent” where Turkish
and Kurdish live music plays not only for the natives but also for the tourists (Yeni Şafak 2003a). In this respect, a discourse of universal spirituality that is free from the state politics and that embraces cosmopolitanism and diversity is created in the “heterotopic space” of Sultanahmet.

Finally, Ramadan in general and Sultanahmet in particular provide an alternative space where “other” politics and views are expressed. The utopian ideals that are pointed spatially are reflected through the means of cultural heritage, which was emphasized by the Eminönü Municipality Lütfi Kibiroğlu as well: “The only way to bring back people’s past would be through culture. Sultanahmet intends to introduce, and to pass our history and culture to the new generations” (Yeni Şafak 2001b). In this sense, culture, history and cultural heritage including for the most part “Ottomanness”, form the common ground where all kinds of people meet.

**Conclusion: Utopia as a Projected Vision**

The city invented potential pasts in order to find a possible new future. (Boym 2001: 162)

Ramadan is one of the ways which mirrors the interaction and conflict between national history, nostalgia and everyday lives. In other words, Ramadan festivities and iftar tables are central to the experience of the past and the future, the new and the old, the global and the local. In the month of Ramadan, restructuring the city according to history, heritage, and tradition is one concern, and turning it into a global metropolis is another. As well as a space of consumption and a site of spectacle, the Ramadan festival becomes a “heterotopic site” where a diversity of people from all ages, religions, classes, and ethnic backgrounds unite to celebrate a common event. As a result, Ramadan attempts to create a space where “Islamist” and “secularist” discourses intertwine and where a utopian future is inscribed through an imagined past. This new spatial and temporal form provides us with an understanding that would challenge simplistic polarization arguments and would take us to a more constructive idea of Turkish exceptionalism.

The Ramadan space provides a possible future created by a version of the Ottoman past. Therefore, utopic ideals of Turkish society are expressed through Ramadan. One must ask, however, how much of this Ramadan space is a projected vision. Do we suppose that this utopian vision portrays Turkey as a harmonious multireligious society, or that Ramadan creates a “community” which is characterized by tolerance, multiplicity and diversity? The Ramadan space in Istanbul could by no means be considered a sign of harmony which characterizes Turkish society in general. Needless to say, religion reveals antagonism between different groups in Turkey, and this inspires radical nationalistic acts. For example, Orthodox Christian ceremony – held each year in Haliç (Golden Horn) for the baptism of Jesus – has been protested again as recently as January 6, 2006 by members of a nationalistic group, Türk Haliç Platformu (Turkish Haliç Platform).
One of the protesters was dressed in Conqueror Mehmet’s costume and others in Ottoman military costumes to reflect the conquest of Christian Istanbul by an Islamic and Turkish Empire (*Hürriyet* 2006). In this case, the Ottoman Empire reveals radical forms of nationalistic sentiments, which do not allow tolerance and harmony between different ethnic and religious groups. Consequently, this article argues that the Ramadan space forms a new social space and discourse which, perhaps being too optimistic, exaggerates religious and cultural tolerance in the city of Istanbul.

**Defne Karaosmanoğlu** is an Assistant Professor in Communication at Bahçeşehir University, Istanbul. Her research interests include narratives of history; spaces of nostalgia in the city; globalization and changing discourses around food and cuisine. Her article “Eating the past: Multiple Spaces, Multiple Times: Performing Ottomanness in Istanbul” appeared in *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2009, Volume 12 (4). She also published an article entitled “Surviving the global market: Turkish cuisine under construction” in *Food, Culture and Society Journal*, Fall 2007, volume 10 (3).

E-mails: [defnekar@gmail.com](mailto:defnekar@gmail.com); [defne.karaosmanoglu@bahcesehir.edu.tr](mailto:defne.karaosmanoglu@bahcesehir.edu.tr)

**Notes**

1. While some serve traditional dishes like hünkar beğendi, tas kebabı, and lamb tandır, the others serve more exotic dishes such as şiş kebap soup, pıruhi, pumpkin borani, mihrap böreği, and lamb palace kebab with quince.
2. It is most certainly the middle and higher classes who visit the five-star iftar places. This elitism has been the subject of criticism from the media (see Zengin 2004).
3. A meat product native to Turkey.
4. Instead of “Osmanlı”, the English word “Ottoman” is used to make the product more appealing to the Turkish customers.
5. Religious performance of Melevis and is performed by whirling dervishes.
6. Those demonstrations were against the controversial Presidential elections, which would result the presidency of Abdullah Gül (former Foreign Minister from AKP). With an email warning from the Turkish Armed Forces, however, AKP suggested early elections. General elections were held in June and were resulted with AKP’s victory.
7. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan from Refah Partisi (RP) stayed in power until 1998. After the closing down of RP, it was succeeded by FP (Fazilet Partisi Virtue Party). The Mayor of Municipality was Ali Müfit Gürtuna until 2004 when Kadir Topbaş from another Islamist party, AKP (Justice and Development Party), became the new Mayor. Therefore, since 1994 the Mayors of Metropolitan Istanbul Municipality have been from the Islamist parties.
8. In this respect, the Islamist celebrations of Istanbul’s conquest not only produce an Islamic identity in the public sphere, but they also serve to nationalize Islamic discourse (Çınar 2001: 387). According to Çınar, while they make full references to Islam, prophecy, and Mehmet II as a Muslim commander, they also constitute a national subject situated in the rhetoric of “us” and “our army” around an Islamic civilization (381). Therefore, an alternative national time is reproduced with Islamic/Ottoman heritage, but the ideal modern nationalist format stays the same as one nation=one time=one state (387).
The five-star Caprice Hotel was built in 1996 for the new Muslim demand for a summer resort. It has gender-segregated beaches and pools. No alcohol is served. As well, the neighbourhood of Eyüp has become popular for its religious shopkeepers, who sell prayer mats, turbans, robes, nonalcoholic perfumes, and rose water on the counters.

Louis Marin (1984) has introduced the notion of “degenerate utopias” to define utopia spaces that perpetuate “the fetish of commodity culture”. He gives the example of Disneyland which is “a supposedly happy, harmonious, and nonconflictual space” situated apart from the “real” world. It entertains, invents history, and cultivates nostalgia for some mythical past (24057; also cited in Harvey 2000: 166167).

Boza is a drink native to Turkey and to the Ottoman times. It is made out of malt.

Ottoman sultans used to live there up until the end of the 19th century. They then moved to Dolmabahçe Palace on the shores of Bosphorus.

Roasted mutton intestines.

A kind of local (Anatolian style) pancake.

A beverage made from sahlep flour, which is very popular especially in the Middle East.

Traditional spicy raw meat.

Another article appeared in Radikal describes the Sultanahmet scene as simply an imitation without any real content. It says that the ambiance of Sultanahmet is “Ottoman” with regards to food and souvenir stands, but that the people who wear fes and Ottoman vests serve fastfood at these stands instead of Ottoman food (Radikal 2004).

David Harvey (2000) has an argument that commodification and spectacles of commodity culture foment political indifference (168). However, he does not totally eliminate history and nostalgia from the scene. He gives the example of “new urbanism” which is basically the nostalgia for a small-town America. It recuperate history, tradition, collective memory, and a sense of belonging and identity, therefore it does not lack “a critical utopian edge”. However, again for Harvey this is the materialization of utopian vision and is problematic since nostalgia for “a community” is not enough if we do not know what it means and how to achieve it (16970).

He calls it the Adornean argument since it originated with Adorno himself.

To explain heterotopias, Foucault provides two categories and five principles. The first category refers to sacred and forbidden places, which are based on purification and ritual, whereas the second category refers to places where people are placed by compulsory means, such as the prison and the mental hospital (1986: 2527).

The President at the time was Mehmet Nuri Yılmaz who made the announcement.

İftarıyelik, which is the first meal to break the fast, is composed of butter, jam, cheese, hurma, sucuk, pastırma, and so on. This is a small meal which would not upset the stomach after a daylong fasting.

A writer of a mainstream newspaper, Ali Esad Göksel (2000) quotes his friend, a Turkish businessman, who lives in London: “Istanbul is the most sensational place in Ramadan” and “it is where you best experience Ramadan”. For him, as well, it is due to ‘our’ cultural heritage that Istanbul provides a special picture for Ramadan. For Göksel, historical breaks and forgetting can never erase the past totally. Gulyabani’siz ramazan olmaz (There cannot be any Ramadan without Gulyabani).

However, it was not until 2005 that the first step was made to advertise Istanbul’s Ramadan internationally. “Ramadan Istanbul Project” was proposed by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism to attract Muslims from other parts of the world, which includes special travel packages and city tours (Tüzün 2005).
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Culture, Work and Emotion

By Can-Seng Ooi & Richard Ek

The pursuit of work-life balance alludes to how work and everyday life have become entangled. The demarcation of one’s private emotional life against one’s professional work no longer holds true as companies want workers to be part of a corporate family and emotional expressions are (selectively) welcomed in the workplace. Yet another demarcation is being challenged; as promoted by proponents of the experience economy, consumption has become an act of co-creation or co-production (Pine & Gilmore 1999). Many products are experiential or have experiential components, such as in thrill rides and leading a branded lifestyle. Today, being emotionally demonstrative can be expected at work and a consumer can expect to generate consumption experiences of her/his own. This special section of Culture Unbound – Culture, Work and Emotion – is dedicated to some of these boundary-crossing debates.

Let’s take a step back. When The Managed Heart by Arlie Russell Hochschild was published in 1983, no one expected its impact 30 years later. The concept “emotional labour” is so entrenched in the social sciences that it hardly needs a reference. It is difficult to overestimate its enduring influence (Brook 2009a). It is also impossible to do an exhaustive overview of the concept because the concept has dispersed into a myriad of research streams and adopted in different academic disciplines. One may say that this special section of Culture Unbound is yet another example of Hochschild’s work being discussed, criticised and advanced.

For some scholars, the emotional labour concept is too close to Marx’s alienation theory and therefore absolutist in character (Korczynski 2002; Bolton 2005 & 2009) while others have argued that the concept needs to be more integrated within Marxian Labour Process Analysis (Brook 2009a & 2009b). The concept has influenced additional concepts, primarily “aesthetic labour”. This is a concept that highlights management’s utilisation of employees’ embodied looks, competencies and skills (Warhurst et al. 2000; Witz et al. 2003; Nickson et al. 2005) and raises questions regarding employment discrimination (Warhurst et al. 2009) and segmentation in the routine interactive service sector (Warhurst & Nickson 2007a & 2007b). Of course, the emotional labour concept has also opened up for a gender conscious scrutinisation of the social reproduction and commodification of gender and sexuality (Warhurst & Nickson 2009) in workplace contexts.

Emotional labour, as a stream of research, integrates two themes: the rise of a service economy and an attention towards the investment, and personal management of emotions in workplace situations (Wharton 2009). Acting in relation to
workplace-bound social and cultural norms requires self-aware intentions among the employees, a process that Hochschild refers to as taking place on the “surface” of personality and subjectivity as well as “deep” within the person in question. Especially in service work, in the service encounter (Hochschild uses the case of flight attendants), the employee is normally obliged to show a predestined register of emotional display. For the employer, it is crucial that the employee does not only show these emotional registers on the surface, but really “means it” (deep within him- or herself) in order to optimise customer satisfaction (see also Gilmore & Pine 2007). To Hochschild (1983: 90), if the service workers who are required to display a certain set of emotions do not feel congruent with their feelings, “emotive dissonance” is developed over time. In order to minimise this dissonance, the service worker adjusts one’s “deep feelings”. In this process, the service workers’ feelings are commoditised, and in the continuation, estranged and alienated (Korczynski 2002: 142).

In a recent overview, Amy Wharton (2009) points to two strands of work based on the emotional labour concept, primarily within sociological research. The first line of work pivots around emotional labour as a cipher to understand organizational contexts and the nature of interpersonal interaction in particular kinds of service occupations. The dynamic character of the service encounter in different servicescape settings is here investigated through keywords like power, control, resistance and empowerment (for a recent compilation, see Korczynski & Macdonald 2009). Subsequently, studies of emotional labour extend to a wider collection of interactive but less reutilised occupations like teachers and doctors (Wharton 2009: 152). The second strand of work of emotional labour research focuses more directly on the management of emotions and especially on emotional display across public-private work-family boundaries (also reflecting later work by Hochschild (2003)). Within this area of research, attempts to operationalize and measure emotive dissonance and emotional management as well as pin down tenable consequences of emotional labour are made.

With the advent of the various so-called service, experience and creative economies, human emotions are in the gambit of wealth creation. This dedicated section of Culture Unbound shows how the debates have moved even further. We aim at addressing service work in general and the emotional labour concept in particular to the assumption that emotion management and emotion display are not limited to the front-desk or service employee. Rather it is a process that permeates and characterises the service encounter and its physical environment, its servicescape, in its entirety. Many of our discussions are painted into the stitches of the dualistic couplet of culturalisation and economisation, that is, a take on the cultural economy. Here, the economy is increasingly inflected with cultural performances and cultural tropes at the same time as culture is being used in instrumental ways, for instance in the promotion of cities. Thematic areas of investigation have been the new economy, creativity and consumption (Pratt 2004 &
The economy in all its spheres is regarded as an act with many different kinds of goals (e.g. material, symbolic, power-related), and theorised as a hybrid organized around a life-world of emotional register (Amin & Thrift 2007). In this force field of intertwined cultural and economic processes a number of empirical changes have been attended to. What is especially interesting in this context is the nature of employment and work, like “the rise of flexible work and self-employment, the concentration of freelancing, and causalization of labour, plus the degree of serial contracting and project working, found in the cultural economy” (Pratt 2009: 410).

The concern with culture, work and emotion transcends national boundaries. In this section of Culture Unbound, we have examples from Denmark, Sweden, Singapore, the Netherlands and cyberspace. One salient theme here is on service workers. The service industry is highly dependent on its service staff to provide satisfying experiences for customers. Attempts are made not only to make customers feel good, attempts are also made to make employees embody the good feelings they demonstrate to sell services. In other words, when demonstrating their positive emotions in their jobs, workers must also be authentic to themselves. Governing the emotions of employees is not easy, but, indeed, there are ways of doing so. Hing looks at how various employers in Singapore motivate their service workers. These workers are socialised to be excellent service employees by reminding them to have the “right attitude”, that is, they must be willing to be flexible in accomplishing their work. The workers must also be professional, that is, they must be friendly, appear unhurried and be positive towards customers and bosses. Parallel observations are seen in Denmark, in Gymóthy and Rygaard Jonas’ study of workers in the “Best Butcher in Town”, a project tagline that the supermarket chain Kvickly has adopted for its meats section. Service workers in Kvickly are encouraged to be the shop’s brand ambassadors. Employees should use their initiative and common sense to boost the customer experience. But the new demands on the butchers to relate directly with customers and to appear positive at all times in their job can be emotionally draining and intrusive. The studies by Hing and Gymóthy and Rygaard Jonas show that workers have to manage their own sense of identity through the demands of their work. With work demanding how they should behave and feel, their own private emotional space is now also being invaded and commodified.

Another salient theme in this collection also deals with services, but in the context of independent business persons providing the extra authentic experience to their customers. Ooi followed an art-loving Dutch couple in Singapore. They visited the workspaces of artists in order to go beyond the staged glitz of commercial art galleries. The encounters between artists and art buyers in the art studios are awkward because the aesthetic and the commercial spheres clash during their encounters. As an established practice, aesthetic value transcends economic value but when artists and art buyers meet to trade, art mixes with commerce. Similarly,
art buyers may be uncomfortable when witnessing the less than glossy, but yet authentic, art practices in artist workspaces. Artists are precarious to reveal too much about themselves, since it might put their glamorous artist image at risk. In sum, artists and art buyers are emotionally ambivalent of such meetings. The awkward moments discourage art buyers and artists to trade directly with each other. The running of a Bed and Breakfast (B & B) requires emotional work too. Hultman and Andersson Cederholm look into the emotional work of a B & B owner. Similar to Ooi’s study of artists and art buyers, guests and B & B host find the need to cultivate their friendship during their brief encounters. They must jointly create the friendly and homely atmosphere. Separating the boundary between economic and private activities is a constant nag for guests and host. The quest for the more intimate and authentic experience by guests can result in both emotional satisfaction and ambivalence.

It is natural that colleagues and business partners become friends. But friendship does not necessarily bring about higher productivity in the workplace. The subject of managing emotions amongst colleagues has become a business. In the context of increasing productivity and effectiveness, mediators are now at hand to provide guidance on how colleagues and business partners should meet and solve problems. Andersson Cederholm looks at the advent of “effective emotions” in the business world, particularly when people hold meetings. Colleagues, customers and business partners are provided with the tools to bring about higher productivity through more effective ways of emotional demonstration when gathering. The engineering of a corporate meeting culture entails the definition of the right moments to allow for selected emotions to be expressed amongst colleagues, partners and clients.

A new emotional culture is evolving on the Internet. Technology is also affecting how we communicate and express our emotions. Munar examines the practices in the ever increasingly popular social media, such as Facebook and Tripadvisor. The popularity of social media indicates that humans are intrinsically social. Today, millions of people use the Internet to befriend and to keep friends updated. Using Munar’s terms, digital voyeurs and exhibitionists complement each other in cyberspace. Strangers become friends, for instance, as they offer advice, suggestions and travel tips through Tripadvisor. Bits and bytes can be a medium for emotional work. Munar’s study show how people open up and express themselves emotionally in order to construct their own digital identities. Nonetheless, how one expresses oneself and one’s emotions are also guided in cyberspace. Advice is given on how people should write and present themselves. The emergence of digital biographies poses ethical issues. Expressions on the Internet tend to be spontaneous but the ephemeral nature of emotion become permanent and digitalised when expressed on the Internet. It remains uncertain if such records can be deleted! Nonetheless, the encouragement of emotive expression in social media like Facebook and Tripadvisor has a commercial motive. While people can keep in
touch with their friends on Facebook and others tell their travel stories on TripAdvisor, these expressions are the commercial contents of the websites. The public is doing the work for these Internet firms.

In the epilogue, Ek brings the collection of six papers together by revisiting the emotional labour concept. The articles point to the diverse research directions Culture, Work and Emotion can take. More importantly, they also point to the direction in which modern society is heading, where the logic of customer satisfaction, co-production and productivity have made emotions part of work, consumption and wealth creation.

Acknowledgement
Friendship and enthusiastic academic exchanges brought this thematic section of *Culture Unbound* to fruition. In the last eight years or so, the Scandinavia-based contributors met several times a year to discuss ideas and each others’ papers. The convergence of minds resulted in this collection. One scholar, Tom O’Dell, was crucial in the initiation and gestation of this assembly of scholarship. Although he has not contributed a paper here, his ideas and encouragement is well appreciated.

**Can-Seng Ooi** ([www.ooi.dk](http://www.ooi.dk)) is an Associate Professor at Copenhagen Business School. His research interests include comparative art worlds, place branding, cultural tourism and cross-cultural management. He leads the research stream on *Place Branding, Art and Culture* in the multi-disciplinary research project ©reative Encounters, a project supported by the Danish Strategic Research Council. E-mail: ooi@cbs.dk.

**Richard Ek** is Associate Professor at the Department of Service Management, Lund University. His research interests include critical geopolitics, biopolitics, postpolitics and place branding. He currently works on a project on the visualization of the postpolitical citizen in urban renewal projects and in city management. E-mail: richard.ek@ism.lu.se.

**Notes**
1 By just having a look at some articles from 2007 to 2009, we see how emotional labour is a referential starting point in management (Townsend 2008; van Dijk & Kirk 2008; Rupp et al. 2009), business (D’Cruz & Noronha 2008), leadership (Gardner et al. 2009; Iszatt-White 2009, Newman et al. 2009), sociology (Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2008), medical care and


References


Service Workers: Governmentality and Emotion Management

By Hing Ai Yun

Abstract

That all may be quiet on the shop floor could be a result of governmentality projects. But what lies beneath an appearance of professionalism? I undertook an empirical field study of workers in the service industry to examine contradictory and competing interests of employees and their employers and observed the dynamic constitution of subjectivity in situations of conflict. Based on a study of 56 service workers, this study first looks at the consensual orientation of workers towards their employment, then discusses a number of common demands required of workers in the service sector and investigates how workers deal with these management demands. My investigation of service workers disclose the internalised struggles experienced in their commitment to a prescribed, official image while attempting to maintain, at the same time, an integrous sense of self. By collecting stories of actual situations, I am able to show how patterns of emotion management, effectiveness of governmentality project, and agency work together to shape social behaviour in working life.

Keywords: Governmentality, emotion management, organismic emotion model
Introduction

During the 1980s, terms like “knowledge worker” were bandied about as part of euphoric predictions heralding the “new economy” (Ritzer 1989) and “post industrial capitalism” (Heydebrand 1989; Castells 1996). It was proclaimed that knowledge and organization, rather than physical capital, are motors of change. On the other hand, those focusing on the emerging service economy see health, education and welfare as main elements of economic action (Fuchs 1968), implying that an expansion of the managerial or supervisory class will lead to better living standards and deliverance from the monotony of industrial work. Three decades have since passed and in this current recession, the optimistic predictions of post-industrial society now sound hollow.

This paper attempts to understand the work behaviour of service workers in Singapore, whose service industry burgeoned following the deindustrialisation that began in the 1970s (Monetary Authority of Singapore 1998). The service industry as defined in this paper is based on the profile made by the Singapore Department of Statistics in their large scale survey of service establishments, and includes Wholesale and Retail Trade, Accommodation and Food and Beverage Services, Transport and Storage, Information and Communications, Financial-and Insurance-related Services, Real Estate and Business Services, Community, Social and Personal Services (Singapore Department of Statistics 2008). Where appropriate, I also considered workers from the manufacturing industry as many jobs in the manufacturing sector are really service type jobs and not production jobs (Monetary Authority of Singapore 1998).

My interviews, conducted between 2007 and 2009, drew from a cross-section of these establishments, with half the interviewees from tourism and hospitality, and approximately a sixth each from healthcare and finance. A combination of purposive and accidental sampling methods was used, with the aim of obtaining information from a wide variety of workplaces.

What is clear is that for the majority, work has become less secure, with dwindling pay, increased competition, and increasingly challenging conditions. Yet, the workforce has continued slogging diligently, even obsessively. One may see this widespread compulsion to toe the line as a consequential effect of governmentality. Governmentality, as argued by Foucault, is “an ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics, that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power” (Miller & Rose 1990: 2).

That employers and the state can hijack the selfhood of citizen-workers is no surprise, what with the effective work of schools, the family, and the commercial system in constituting the identity of workers. Families, the moral educators and emotional props for their children, are often so eager to foster workaholism in
them that aspects of life outside of work come to be perceived as irrelevant. With such conditioning, the young become predisposed to authority.

But my investigation into workers’ lives shows that, despite the mandated assimilation of the service worker into a homogenised workforce, governmentality is not accepted wholesale and without question, but instead, is accommodated within a range of individual social desires and interests, with which it interacts in a complex and dynamic manner. Where personal conflicts arose in a given work situation, service workers responded by negotiating an acceptable level of well-being and satisfaction for themselves while doing, so far as was possible, what was expected. Such a compromise is not always achievable, however, so overwhelming are the demands of social authorities for their interests to be given full reign, even to the detriment of the health, personal integrity and family life of the service worker.

This paper will investigate why and how workers are labouring ever harder, despite such difficulties, to achieve company goals. Deploying the tools of Foucault that focus on the productive potential of power, one argues that by a life-long process of socialisation and shaping by a host of agencies, workers have been constituted with new norms of competitiveness, rationality, job commitment, professionalism, customer service and other values which lead to profit-maximising behaviour, and an orientation towards national growth. Discipline facilitated this drive, and helped transform Singapore into a first world country (Lee 2010).

According to Miller and Rose (1990), political power in market economies can be more effectively exercised indirectly as “action at a distance,” borrowing and adapting the term from Bruno Latour (1987). The trick is to get subjects to actively govern themselves. Nonetheless, as one unravels the process where workers successfully inculcated with discipline and responsibility strive to fulfil company demands, one encounters a complex process of negotiation which encompasses both automatic responses of the responsible, self-monitoring individual, as well as intentional exercise of agency as individuals make up their own way of coping and handling external strictures and “protocols” imposed on pain of dismissal or a place on the blacklist.

But governmentality projects can never be 100 percent effective. When governmentality fails, respondents will go into the emotional management mode. Emotion management, as defined by Hochschild, is the conscious efforts to control, shape and manage unwanted feelings (Hochschild 1979). Although respondents seem to agree that displays of anger or raw emotions are signs of immaturity and unprofessional, workers have been known to flee wailing to toilet cubicles when riled up enough by workplace incidents. An additional element of emotional management that concerns this study is the enhancement of company profits by “mobilisation, development and commodification of employees’ corporeality” (Warhurst & Nickson 2007). Despite managerial jargon of aestheticisation of work, the bottom line underlines all bodywork.
Unlike conventional studies of emotion work/management, this paper will disclose another aspect of emotion management which is not aimed at enhancing company profits, but rather, is carried out for the purpose of helping workers regain their sanity and for the making up of integrous person-hood. The study looks at how individuals negotiate to recalibrate their existing identity when their self-interest is at odds with company demands. Investigation of the use of their bodies to reconstitute and enhance the products they are marketing will be used to illustrate the processes of working on themselves. The dimensions of worklife looked at include the acceptance and negotiation of various employment demands such as tailoring of body work, and incentives that hold them to remain in their jobs despite difficult work conditions.

**Effectiveness of Governmentality Projects**

In their paper “Governing of economic life”, Miller and Rose (1990) drew attention to the personal dimension of the productive process by alluding to how social authorities construed subjects in ways that tie their personal desires to the employers’ quest for profits. By resorting to technologies of the self such as performance appraisal reports and aggregated charts for ranking of personnel, management is able to access the internal life of workers and align them psychologically to the desires of their firms. By addressing workers as entrepreneurs, employers and the state have seduced the self-regulating capacities of individuals to actively take on their role as obsessive producer-consumers.

Even prior to their entry into firms, students have been conditioned into putting a premium on good performance reports, and to take and crave pride in them. Schools have been accepted as effective social authority in the governmentality project, as evidenced by the general acceptance of their products as candidates suitable for employment in most companies. Nonetheless, companies have also established their own stringent recruitment procedures (a major Asian airline required a few rounds of interviews and self presentations, e.g. in swim wear) to filter out the undesirables, although this is no indication that governmentality projects are not trusted 100 percent. Rather, in limiting recruitment to only those with specified years of education, the implication being that these are the successfully disciplined, companies can ensure that workers recruited will have a minimal acceptable level of malleability and the “right” attitude while “undesirables” who have not been normalised to discipline and conformity will be kept out.

In addition to hiring only workers who are generally co-operative and have a malleable attitude, each establishment also requires that workers adapt to the company’s own peculiar way of defining and normalising them. Where one establishment may allow wildly tinted or dyed hair (e.g. night-clubs), another may prohibit these but instead insist that some other aspect of the worker be shaped according to other given specs, e.g. body size and shape. What is sure is that work-
ers are faced with multiple and arbitrary demands that restrain and constrain the way they dress, shape and size their body, and vocalise their discourse. For instance, in the case of a joint that sells food and alcohol using the waitresses as “bait” (the exact words of a server-interviewee), regular checks are made for body size and facial make-up. Waitresses are even given breaks to freshen their make-up. Company expectations are already communicated upfront during recruitment interviews.

As a result of a company’s recruitment process nearly all low-level workers interviewed have expressed their ideal of doing a “professional” job despite menial pay and miserable working conditions. It’s a wonder how these low level workers could have imbibed the prevailing ideology of professionalism (“that work can and should take precedence in one’s life” [Bailyn 2006: 67]) and yet not demand the remuneration consonant with production of work of a professional standard. Low level interviewees repeatedly mentioned wanting to project a professional image and make the company proud of them. “I should provide a minimum quality work which my boss can be proud of.” “I want to be professional to do well.” “I take pride in my work.”

Such phrases have cropped up repeatedly despite facing daily hassles from nasty customers and bosses. The typical worker’s attitude to work reflects well the requirement of employers that they stay disciplined and “professional”. Said a 30-year old female prison worker, “I tended to be proactive and worked hard because I needed to show people the ‘right’ attitude for fear of being misjudged and dismissed as being inefficient and lazy by my superiors as well as my colleagues.” Frost (2009) mentions that in the Robert Half’s survey, which covered 200 Singaporean respondents, 61 percent still go to work when they are sick because they are scared of falling behind in their work, the highest rate when compared against 6,000 others polled from across 20 countries, including the USA and Japan. Half of the respondents did not want to be perceived by superiors and peers as not working, again the highest rate among those surveyed.

Said a 20-year old male bartender who is hourly rated, “People return to the bar and ask for the bartender that made the drinks for them previously. I want my customers to leave happy and stress-free. In a hectic modern world, sometimes all the world needs is a nice bartender like me”, indicating the successful part of governmmentality projects. Servers often do not perceive the conditions as onerous. “The only thing they (bosses) expected me to be was professional when doing my work, and to have a good work attitude.” Ensuring that workers do not have an “attitude” problem means that they can adjust to difficult requirements and accept some degree of suffering and deprivation during working-time. A good example of a co-operative worker is personal banker A (a graduate) who said that after a few months, emotional work expected of her became easier. It was less tiring because it has become “part of me”. She had familiarised herself with the products and would just grit her teeth when irritated by a client.
Besides schools, other social agencies like the media (strongly state-influenced through ownership laws and censorship regulations) have influence over the way people think of themselves. States like the Singapore regime, which is based on one-party rule, have a greater hold over multiple avenues that constitute citizen–personhood, thus resulting in relative uniformity of personhood. Authoritarian states can wreak havoc with the formation of the self, as they are the primary mediators between global capitalism and their people. For instance, the discourse of commerce can be advanced to the extreme to apply to individual personhood. One peculiar recent example refers to the state demand that their people be adaptable in the context of the current, financially induced recession. Where companies are limited in liability, the state demands that Singapore’s workers should accept that they could be stretched to the limits. In response to the current recession, Secretary General of the National Trades Union Congress Lim Swee Say coined the term “Singapore Unlimited” for describing the journey ahead to beat the recession. Singapore must not be contented to just be “cheaper than those who are better or better than those who are cheaper” (Oon 2009). The same penchant for de-humanising citizen-subjects was displayed when Minister for Manpower Lee Boon Yang, in one of many attempts to inculcate workers into the ethos of lifelong learning, alleged that workers have to upgrade to enhance the “shelf-life of our knowledge and skills” (Lee 2000). He was appalled that about half of workers surveyed had not gone for training over the past three years.

On the surface, workers’ pride in their professionalism reflects themselves as self-monitoring, responsible, fulfilled, objective, and autonomous. Primarily, automaticity cannot be assumed, for thoughts of retribution are never far away from the apparent conformity of servers. Frost’s (2009) report reveals that Singapore ranks highest globally when it comes to employees checking company e-mails outside working hours, with 26 percent spending on average 30 – 44 minutes a day doing this.

Banker A was able to keep her cool by constantly reminding herself that this could be a spy sent by the bank to evaluate her. “The worst scenario is that I would be sacked.” The fact that supervisors are sent on board to evaluate them is also intimidating, said an airline steward. Pressure to perform comes from both vertical and horizontal reprimands: “I will get a scolding from my colleagues and supervisor if I did not do as required.”

Despite some success with governmentality, direct coercion such as regular reprimands, scolding, blackening and threats of sacking are still necessary to prod workers back into line. When personal banker X was reprimanded by her supervisor for wearing knee-length pants during the training period, her immediate reaction was one of anger. She could not imagine that she was admonished for not dressing in the required formal attire, which was the usual means of normalising a company’s strict requirements onto their workforce.
First and immediate reaction of workers to such demands from management was that it was ridiculous. In the case of personal banker X, formal dressing takes that much more time. She was feeling grouchy and not in the mood to dress up. However, she did not voice her dissent because she did not want to be painted in black colours. She said that her supervisor later explained the rationale behind dressing up formally: it was a form of respect for the client. Banker X accepted that pleasing the client was important for the bank. Workers are encouraged to be respectful as their fate is linked to pleasing the client, which in turn is tied to profit flows into the bank. Companies now use such therapeutic discourse as a strategy to incorporate and maintain the company’s image into the worker’s personhood instead of allowing workers to just get alienated from management practices that they find difficult to accept.

What happened was that, as a result of her supervisor’s intervention and explanation, she adjusted to this requirement by waking up early and preparing all her clothes the night before. She even stuck with the same dress code when socialising with friends during the evenings. She did not want to lose her job over a pair of short pants, she said. Climbing down from their own rationality to assimilate the rationalities of the company is how most workers work their way through company demands on their subjectivity. Some of the rationale taught included the following: “Try not to let it (rude customers) affect you”, “everyone around you shares the same feelings”, “it’s part and parcel of working life”, “just do it, if you don’t do it, you’ll get fired”. The process of negotiation is not straightforward but highly selective for it involves the real and the unreal. For instance, when comforting themselves, workers said, “sometimes, it’s just what you tell yourself, and not really how things really are”; it also involves balancing the costs and benefits as illustrated by the cases below.

Note here that the service industry is not all misery. In fact, many choose to join this industry to experience the many opportunities available for a great variety of social interaction and exciting experiences. An hourly rated, 21-year-old female barista who quit after daily demands for emotional work reached a tipping point expressed it thus:

I will not take up the job again as it pays too little for too much work. Furthermore, I have found other better jobs that pay more as well. I will miss my friends and even the friendly management staff though.

As illustrated above, intense pressure and other alternative means of support will lead to the morphing of the organismic model of emotions to surface the “I can’t take it anymore” attitude.

Are company prescriptions onerous? They can be, especially when one considers the youthful age of most respondents. Below, I set out the management demands on their workforce.
Emotion Work in Prescriptions and Standardisation

In the preceding section, I discussed how social authorities have impacted the production of subjectivity although there cannot be any prior determination of their effectiveness. In this section, ongoing construction of personhood by companies is seen in interaction with agency’s initiatives in the context of hierarchy and power. I will describe some commonly known behavioural requirements of the service sector like speech restraints, aestheticisation and body work, “customer care”, blurring of time boundaries, performance appraisals and traumatic workplaces.

Following Hochschild’s definition of emotion management as conscious efforts to control, shape and manage unwanted feelings (Hochschild 1979), this article looks at how workers deal with specific employment demands. Definitely, while the management of emotions is a result of learning from social interaction, there is also a point beyond which the worker would throw in the towel despite knowing that he may also be leaving a vital source of income. Through this, I want to address the lack of studies on emotion management that consider organismic explanations of emotion.

This section will show that while governmentality makes it easier to please management and customers, regular exercise of emotion management by workers themselves contribute to the shaping of personhood. My study reveals that besides shaping to responsibility and disciplined autonomy, the management of emotion is vital to the emotional integrity of workers themselves and is done not only for the maintenance of company profits.

Speech

The first requirement most service companies require of their workers is that their speech should be articulated to set specifications. For instance, it is common in many service establishments to demand that workers speak from a packaged discourse. Workers are taught to utter scripted mantras when interacting with customers. An airline stewardess said that the oft-repeated phrases a steward should learn are “Please”, “Sorry”, and “Thank you”. During the training period, workers would be given notes on appropriate answers for commonly asked questions. To give a touch of the “natural” to scripted answers, servers were encouraged to prepare their own versions of these answers. This is what servers mean when they say they can “play” with the phrase “the customer is always right”.

The view of some servers was that, having to repeat the same remarks a few times within a short time could be tedious and torturous. One server went so far as to say that she secretly wished she could play a taped recording of it instead. She said that this was a commonly felt desire of most of her colleagues. However, after many rounds of repetitions, they have come to be “immune” or unresponsive to their repetitive chore and simply reminded themselves that they should do a
good job and maintain the company’s reputation. “Frankly, I took some time to get used to all the rules: the do’s and the don’ts.” Some servers were more malleable whilst others needed more time of about a few weeks or months to adjust. To speed up their adjustment, servers like personal banker A would practice in front of the mirror at home.

Apart from scripted discourse, the tone of responses should be light and at a higher octave so as to come across as enthusiastic and chirpy. Says a call centre worker:

I would keep up my tone of voice to sound enthusiastic whenever I sense myself going down. I know customers would be affected by my voice, so I remind myself that every call has a chance. Even for the last customer of the day, I must still sound like he/she was the first customer for the day. I must motivate myself to sustain and encourage myself. At the end of the day, it’s difficult to remain cheerful. I feel my voice is just a front. As team leader, my lot is worse, I got to cheer everyone up and “Never say die”.

Maintaining a note of cheerfulness throughout the day can be tiring. However, “I can keep my cool if I remind myself that the company has secret shoppers/callers spying to evaluate us,” said personal banker A.

**Aesthetics**

Servers are often considered as part of the display furniture in public view. According to a stewardess from a major Asian airline, stewardesses represent the company “just like packaging on a bottle of champagne”.

Where dressing is concerned for these airline stewardesses, personnel should turn out “well-groomed”. Nothing should be flashy nor should hairstyles be “funky”. In addition, only ear studs are acceptable. As for footwear, only specific colours and types are allowed (e.g. for sales promoters, only black or white shoes are acceptable and only covered shoes are allowed to avoid display of uneven toes). Portrayal of the face should be friendly and smiling; acting friendly is part of the work role. “I make it a point to carry a smile throughout the working day, no matter how gloomy is the day,” said a bartender.

Servers should also maintain a consistent body shape and tone to reflect the company’s corporate image. These were already used at recruitment points (a female manager said that three other male managers had to approve the “looks” of servers before they were accepted and offered the job of server) but later, these aspects were regularly held up as part of appraisal indices. This has resulted in one server going for plastic surgery to firm up and enlarge her breasts. For stewardesses, requirements for aesthetics include good complexion, a minimum height of 1.58cm, slimness to fit into the tight uniform, and no tattoos. The stewardess of the airline is part of the product for sale as she is represented in every company advertisement.
Similarly, a server at a night joint said she had to keep trim so she will not outgrow her tiny uniform of tank top and very short shorts. Her job description, to put it crudely, is to bait, “entice” or lure people into the club, pander to their desires, and get them to drink lots of alcohol.

**Looking cool and crisp**

On top of all the other work, service workers have to appear unhurried and cool. Said a part-time waitress,

> I have too much work. I have to serve customers like bringing the food out to them, and also set the table for them. I have to also make the drinks, wash the dishes sometimes and do cashiering duties as well. All these services have to be provided in a prompt and efficient manner, accompanied by a smile, especially when I am dealing with the customer.

When they are stressed as a result of too much work, they have to appear cool and collected, and not give way to spontaneous outbursts of anxiety or frustration. Experience helps them grow competent and comfortable with the job. “As the days went by, I got used to the customers’ responses. When I became more competent, I made less errors and I felt better about myself too, thus there were less negative emotions for me to cope as well.”

**The Customer is King**

Early and initial encounters with nasty customers have resulted in high levels of frustration and irritation. One employee had to hide in the toilet cubicle to calm herself down. Another, a barista, recalled that she trembled with fear and burst into tears the first time she got shouted at by a customer for bringing out the food late. For all the emphasis placed on the social construction of emotions, many instances of server provocation led to extreme reactions that illustrate the limits of emotional management and the start of the organismic model of emotion. She was comforted by the supervisor and was told to think of the customer as a bastard and to ignore him. Later on, other staff who joked about the rude customer and ridiculed him with names comforted her. Even the boss who asked her to keep a smile joined in. This seems to be the normal and common procedure where camaraderie was mobilised to help servers handle damaged emotions caused by rude customers. With such therapeutic discourse, servers are channelled to see customers as the bully, and the companies as devoid of any blame.

It was common that servers find emotional management physically tiring initially. Personal banker A said she was burnt out everyday due to the expenditure of energy, such that the minute she arrives home, she would crawl into bed; all she would do during her off-day was to rest. But after a few months, it was less tiring, and has even become part of her. To banker A, the most difficult part was to have to spend a long time explaining to clients the details of certain products and get a rejection in the end. Colleagues would gather around to complain about
such “naggy” clients. Though she at times thought of herself as hypocritical, she now sees it only as role-play.

The uniform sometimes helps servers get outside of themselves. An airline steward said to “think it’s you in the uniform”, which was to symbolise the uniform as some kind of protection. Wearing uniform also boosts a person’s confidence, said a sales person. The smile has also come to symbolise “a protective cover”. One can also hide behind the “Colgate smile” even though you may be cursing and swearing underneath said a female personal banker. A server at a major coffee outlet, who admitted that she can still say “come back again” though she was seething underneath, reiterated a similar concept. She just plasters a smile on her face and secretly hopes the difficult customer never returns.

Conversely, working experiences have helped change the personal life of some workers “for the better”. Personal banker A said that friends and relatives have observed that she has moderated her “hot” temper. After a time, she has also got used to the role-playing. “It’s a cloak personal banker A puts on”, she alleges. She sometimes takes a breather from personal issues, otherwise she can get overwhelmed by emotions. But a difficult work situation can have a compensatory element. One is the variety of clients one meets, which adds to the zest of working life. No two days are the same, a familiar refrain for many servers.

The lack of outlets for spontaneous emotional expression during working time has caused workers to develop a hard crust to protect their sensitive heart. However, as a necessary part of the process of maintaining their emotional balance, waiters would be discriminating and still keep the soft and natural responses, but only for “deserving” customers.

It got to a point when I became nonchalant (Mestrovic’s [1998: 97] artificially contrived “authenticity industry”) I couldn’t care about them anymore. But, the better customers, I give a lot of attention to. Smile sincerely, smile a lot and give extra attention to their needs.

To keep their sanity, servers know they have to protect their sensitivity and responsiveness and not just turn hard. “In the service sector, the main thing is to let your customer be satisfied no matter how they may treat you, I finish what I have to do, get the deal and move on.” With successful training and socialisation, servers derive satisfaction and fulfilment when customers are happy and satisfied. Said a server facing difficulties, “It does help when happy customers give me a sense of satisfaction”.

Initially, when they are not used to managing their emotions, reprimands from customers can affect them the whole day: “My feelings were really bad. A mixture of anxiety and sadness can drag on. It affects my mood to work for a few days because of low self-esteem.” One server referred to the Chinese concept of siong or “internal injury”. He was careful to allow emotional hurts to surface, but only at the appropriate time, so as to avoid the risk of such “internal injury”, which he feared may be incurred if his hurt was allowed to be stored inside.
“I want people to see my service as friendly and down to earth. I strive to make both myself and them comfortable to be around each other,” said a male server working in a shoe outlet. “Sometimes, it’s just impossible to satisfy all the customers when they are rowdy and refuse to adhere to regulations.” Elsewhere, a ferry-ride attendant said, “I strive to practice professionalism and yet remain approachable.”

End of Time

In the context of modernity, in general, and capitalism specifically, time has been made a scarce commodity and as a consequence, natural breaks in time (e.g. toilet and meal breaks) have been erased. New and rigid time regimes have been instituted (Segre 2000) as the dominant culture. The worker becomes totally cut off from themselves and live only for their work. “Only targets and ranking matters, nothing else,” said a security guard of an international hotel chain. “Don’t bring your personal matters to work. That’s being professional too.”

During this time of recession, when staff cutbacks are the norm, employees are expected to work overtime during peak periods. It is a common grouse that leave has been arbitrarily cancelled despite its prior approval.

In a Japanese restaurant studied, even though waitresses would be paid twice the normal rate for returning to work during their leave days, it irritated them that their plans for socialising and leisure had to be interrupted or aborted. Where travel had been planned they had to suffer a financial penalty by way of cancellation fees for hotels and airline bookings. When such arbitrary actions occur regularly, workers would take turns to go on MC. The manager was not perturbed as he has a ready pool of temps that he can call upon to help out.

Said a 58-year-old product tester at a computer manufacturer,

Because our project was late and needs manpower to help out, I was asked to cancel my leave even though it was already approved by top management. I am quite disappointed and unhappy as my plan gets disrupted but I have no choice, as it will be hard to turn down the request.

The line between personal and work has thus been totally blurred. It is difficult not to comply because governmentality says that good servers are co-operative, so they have to respond to customer need. However, servers also recognise their own need for rest, which has to be respected too. They also know that the needs of the customer can go on endlessly and should they collapse from overwork no one will bat an eyelid. Moreover, the wage is relatively low, and even if they work non-stop, they would hardly see any recognition in terms of wage increase. For the combination of these reasons, workers are often torn by these many demands on their time and energy and therefore often feel discomfited and pulled in different directions.
Appraisal and Reward

The pervasiveness of appraisal systems has produced a competitive environment that has concentrated workers’ attention to only their job. In a call centre where sales numbers were recorded and updated frequently, workers had to put up a front and focus only on the job at hand. To help her survive, a 26-year-old telemarketer in a bank had this to say, “I play a game with myself and push myself to get absorbed with the calls. This helps me forget my personal troubles so I am in a better mood to do my work.” All the energy of workers must be devoted to their work and nothing outside of work should distract them from their job focus.

I share the stress of targets with my friends. I draw out the targets and crush and destroy them. I find excuses for not reaching the target so I do not blame myself. Our sales record for previous month would be our benchmark. The aim is to double that progressively every month.

The larger portion of variable pay in services has added to the compulsion to work, regardless of health considerations. On top of the hourly pay, there are the commissions and bonuses. According to a personal banker, she sets for herself a target to achieve within a specific period of time as she wanted to show her performance capability. The commission given by the bank acted as a form of motivation to put in that extra effort to clinch deals. Awards were also offered for “top performer of the month”. All these schemes act to drive them to work harder and bear with all the stress and unhappiness occurring during work.

Because bonuses are theoretically unlimited, it drives workers to stretch their personal resources to the extreme, resulting in “burn out” and self-destructive behaviour. Fatalism is commonly used to excuse self-destructive behaviour like working till odd hours continuously. Said a 20-year-old male account executive: “What to do, it’s part of my job.” Fatalism points to their individual weaknesses and shared sufferings and not to systemic moral failure that kills workers by unreasonable and extreme demands on the human body.

A young designer working for a local franchisee of international fashion brands said that she typically works a 13-15 hour day. She was unable to even get out of bed a week ago and had to spend a week to recuperate. She explained that her boss and partner insisted to stay late for work and do not ask the other workers if they are tired. Even though their work was completed, for fear of disappointing their bosses, the workers continued to sit around, hoping their bosses would stop chatting and pack up.

Despite the blurring of the boundary between self and the company, workers can still look forward to the end of the work process. Said an airline stewardess, “I remind myself I have a flight to complete, a meal service to complete, a smile to put on, never mind if it’s fake. It’s only a few more hours and I get to be alone and free.” Because of the end of time, it can no longer be used as a reference.
point. Instead, the work process has become the measuring yardstick as it has an end point.

**Traumatic work places**

In her paper on sex work, Sanders (2004) describes how sex workers to dissipate threats of dangerous workplaces use humour. My study has found similar support for laughter as a strategy for lightening a weighty atmosphere amongst medical workers.

For two 18-year-old student nurses studying at the polytechnics, having to perform the “Last Office” (the cleaning and dressing of a corpse, before presenting it to the family) was intimidating although other accompanying nurses were present. Initially, watching senior nurses doing the job wearing serious or expressionless looks and sometimes even appearing scared, these youthful workers were equally fearful and sad. The body could be covered with blood, vomit or be severely mutilated (as in some suicide cases) but they were taught to respect the bodies and even say “sorry” when they have to do something to them. However, after they had handed the corpse to the juniors, the seniors started bantering around trying to scare the juniors with body parts. This was when the nurse interns realised that bantering and laughing can help add cheer to their workplace and dissipate their fear. For a 32 year-old male doctor stationed at the Emergency department, gory visuals could not be easily dispelled and could affect an objective diagnosis but his part-time magician job helped alleviate the disturbing images of torn up and bloody patients.

Medical workers have to confront images of death in their line of work, and the expectation of it would have provided them a constant opportunity to learn to deploy humour as a defence against the morbid. Other worker-servers with less preparation were unable to utilise such emotional mechanisms when encountering traumatic workplace events, like the hospitality server who had to clean up the remains after a guest who threw himself from the 58th floor of a hotel. Those who witnessed the grisly aftermath got so disgusted and nauseated they had to quit. “The spine was protruding… you automatically want to touch the back of your own neck and go ‘ouch’. It was like staring out at us,” said a guard who had worked 17 years in the hotel.

I was initially fascinated but when I got home, I had to tell myself to stop thinking about it. As for another body that landed in the swimming pool all bloated and blue-black, I couldn’t sleep for days despite the counselling provided.

**Workplace Dynamics**

The multiplicity of workers typically staffing service-oriented workplaces brings with it clashes of personality and emotional sensitivities that have to be managed in accordance with the expectations of propriety and professionalism. Govern-
mentality and agency both play a role in this push-pull dynamic, as I observed in an interview of workers in a Japanese restaurant.

Generally, to the workers, the hardest part of the job is not dealing with customers but with the “boss”. Worker-servers interviewed invariably considered their direct supervisor as the “boss”, regardless of the ultimate authority within the company.

The aforementioned notion of the end of time and the focus on the customer are elements that most bring out tension in the workplace between workers and the “boss”. In the recent downturn, businesses are failing and jobs are being lost at a steady pace, putting increasing pressure on workers and employers alike to do their best for less.

There is a thin line between what further demands workers can stomach, in terms of extended work hours, returning to work upon cancellation of leave, and to what extent they will persevere as a matter of self preservation. Employers have a strong hand, given the current labour laws which makes it relatively easy to hire and fire, and the lack of any minimum wage requirements. What is more, much of the workforce in service-oriented positions are open to easy replacement as the pool of available workers to fill these relatively menial jobs increases with the open immigration policy.

I observed that worker dissatisfactions were seldom vigorously expressed; it seemed the most damaging action a member of the workforce could take to “get at” the “boss” or employer was to report sick. It deprived the employer of necessary manpower, even if only temporarily, and this invited many workers to push their luck to the limit. In this regard, I noted from my interviews instances of a mobilised, strategic response: workers would take turns to report sick, so as not to jeopardise their jobs, which were likely threatened if they had done so en masse. One cannot be sure if such a decision was a result of governmentality – in this case, continuing even in “rebellion” to act with some sense of professionalism, to not harm the image of the employer – or merely a survival move.

**Concluding Thoughts**

This paper set out to investigate issues relating to governmentality and emotion management by studying the work behaviour of 56 workers in the service industry in Singapore. While governmentality has succeeded to a certain extent, by compelling agents to imbibe the desires of social authority into their hearts, the effects can be said to be relatively impermanent. When confronted with issues that demand behaviour contrary to the one they were conditioned to enact, there is pause and a considering of whether their socialised response was to their advantage or appropriate. There is no inevitable automaticity to their response. In effect, agents do try to carry out the demands of social authorities, failing which they will try to craft less socially acceptable behaviour they themselves are more comfortable
with. Despite the compromises made, none of the workers interviewed said their job destroyed their sensibility, though the going was rough.

Due to the unexpected results of the study, the focus expanded to consider what other forces and props were necessary to ensure that behaviour demanded by governmentality was forthcoming. Threats to economic survival were the most effective levers for reinforcing effects of governmentality. But the bounty of social enrichment that the workplace could afford to workers – through new and unexpected encounters with the diverse multiplicity of customers, and the camaraderie of their own – also contributed to their willingness to accept and fulfil the requirements of jobs otherwise considered less-than-ideal, and thereby conform to prescription.

Hing Ai Yun is a free-lance independent researcher in the area of political economy. Her research interest lies in the impact of the transformation of capitalism on workers' well being and cultural practices. E-mail: hingaiyun88@gmail.com.

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Branding on the Shop Floor

By Szilvia Gyimóthy & Louise Rygaard Jonas

Abstract

Service branding is a particular form of emotional management, where employees are regarded as adaptable media, who can be trained to convey corporate values while interacting with customers. This paper examines the identity work of butchers during the brand revitalisation campaign of Kvickly, a Danish supermarket chain. During the implementation of the “Best Butcher in Town”-project, Kvickly’s shop floor becomes an engineered servicescape where the norms of good salesmanship must be performed. By documenting the disloyal behaviour of butchers, we demonstrate that the affective commitment towards corporate brand values is closely related with self-enactment opportunities of occupational communities. Total service-orientation threatens butchers’ perception of autonomy and may therefore result in the emergence of resistant sub-cultures.

Keywords: Occupational communities, brand ambassador, Coop Denmark, affective commitment.
Introduction

Supermarket managers and employees should not be anxious about making mistakes. Everyone makes mistakes once in a while. The most important is to experiment with new things and to learn from our mistakes, so as to improve all the way. […] I firmly believe in people and therefore I’d appreciate a company where managers delegate responsibility to their subordinates and let them solve problems – within, of course, the frameworks of a supermarket chain concept. This is the main managerial philosophy that I will adhere to in my daily work in Kvickly. I believe in performing better as a team, as long as we, the leaders dare to delegate and if you dare to take responsibility. Responsibility for increasing our sales and turnover in every single supermarket.

This does not mean that we will now have 82 individual stores in our chain. On the contrary, we must strive for a more consistent profile and uniform standards across all stores. The first task will be to ensure that the store lives up to the Kvickly ‘08 concept. Thereafter may the creative process begin. […] I hope that you will embark on this journey, where we think of motivation, inspiration, well-being and where we dare to delegate and take responsibility. It’s all about the “good salesmanship.” (Kvickly Kort & Kontant, internal newsletter, 2007, author’s translation)

These were the first words of the newly appointed director of a Danish supermarket chain, Kvickly, inviting all employees to fortify the corporate brand. The senior management of Kvickly opted for starting this strategic process from the inside, that is, they intended to raise employees’ awareness of the brand by creating a collective identity – prior to launching an external market campaign. The term “good salesmanship” in the newsletter above refers to the co-operative roots of ethical trading – intended to serve as an idealistic common platform for everyone across the organisation. The director appeals to employees to take pride in being associated with Coop (the supermarket “with a heart”) as well as to take responsibility on all levels – from procurement to marketing and customer contact. Furthermore, besides the usual mantra of value-based emotional management, he also addresses the significance of the spatial context – “the store” as a stage – within which the creative processes and brand enactment may unfold.

Kvickly is one of five retail chains within the corporate brand Coop Denmark (owned by FDB, the Joint Association of Danish Cooperatives), and it has grown to be a problem child within the past decade. The retail market had became polarised along two essential competitive parameters: (low) price and (high) quality, and Kvickly found itself stuck in the middle without a clear profile and a red bottom line. Moreover, Coop, Dansk Supermarked and other retail chains in Denmark are increasingly identifying themselves as being a part of the service industry, which is perceptible in novel brand strategic approaches. The Kvickly ‘08 concept may thus be regarded as a reaction to contemporary market trends.

Since 2006, the strategic focus was to revitalise Coop as a master brand behind its five retail brands, including Kvickly. Internally, this entailed creating visibility around Coop’s brand essence, “responsibility” as the raison d’être of the whole organisation. Responsibility furthermore embraces four core values, namely: care,
novel/creative thinking, honesty and influence [omtanke, nytænkning, ærlighed og indflydelse], referring to the cultural legacy of the cooperative movement. The cooperative movement is entrenched in Danish collective memory; hence the internal campaign was deliberately connected to the authentic history of the small farmers’ associations, building on Coop’s ideals (supporting environmental consciousness, healthy diet and local products) as a differentiating parameter against other supermarket chains. A central aspect of the Kvickly ‘08 concept was to embed these values among employees so that they would perform accordingly in their daily work.

The Kvickly ‘08 concept also reinvented the frames for the customer-service worker interaction; including the revamping of the physical servicescape as well as the attitudes of contact personnel. Kvickly ‘08 included – among others – the implementation of “The Best Butcher in Town”-project, which intended to reconfigure the entirety of the butcher shopping experience, by grooming both spatial and employee “parameters”, following the prescriptions of experience design (Pine & Gilmore 1999; Diller et al. 2005; Boswijk et al. 2007). Introducing such a performative space in a supermarket is relatively new, as it contradicts the whole notion of the self-service universe, where the traditional focus is on effective transactions of FMCG (fast moving consumer goods). In the past, employees – apart from cashiers – scarcely interacted with customers and the promotion of goods and advertising banners and displays conveyed special deals. Kvickly ‘08 was meant to radically change these practices, requiring all employees on the shop floor to foster long-term customer relationships. The newsletter above witnesses how executive leaders attempt to communicate a service-oriented culture by claiming delegation of authority.

The mastermind behind Kvickly ‘08 was the Marketing Department, and a cross-divisional “taskforce” – also including the Human Resources Department – was assigned with implementing the internal branding campaign. This entailed strengthening employees’ affective commitment to the corporate identity and to initiate a cultural change resulting in a specific behaviour driven by the four corporate values. The challenge was defined as: “to turn staff into effective and proud service workers” by imposing the bread-and-butter of customer-orientation disguised in Coop’s ideals of care, creative thinking and honesty. A series of internal training modules were launched to empower Kvickly’s front line staff to become brand ambassadors. Cashiers and butchers were instructed to use their “common sense” in the service encounter, and even to initiate personal conversation to boost the customer experience.

Service branding is a particular form of emotional management, where employees are regarded as adaptable media, who can be trained to convey corporate values while interacting with customers. Arguably, internal marketing in a service firm is about socialising the individual service worker into an employee culture defined by the senior management (Schwartz 2004), that is, “to
change workers into the kinds of persons who will make decisions that management would approve; and to ensure predictable employee reactions in variable work situations” (Leidner 1993: 18). In other words, employees are domesticated (Parello-Plesner & Parello-Plesner 2005) to stage corporate identity consistently. Kvickly’s shop floor becomes the space of pastoral subjectification (see this theme section’s epilogue), where the norms of good salesmanship must be performed. The goal of this paper is to explore the implementation of a specific component of the Kvickly ‘08 concept (namely, “The Best Butcher in Town”), by documenting the reluctant identity work of butchers as members of a particular occupational community (Van Maanen & Barley 1984) and as disloyal brand ambassadors. In order to problematise this process, the analysis draws on both marketing and social identity theory.

Perspectives on Service Branding

Internal branding in a service firm may be approached from several theoretical perspectives. This section reviews the main tenets and commonalities of service marketing and corporate branding field, and concludes with identifying white spots in the management of emotions within a customer-oriented organisational culture.

Front line employees are recognised as strategic resources in market communication. Service marketing regards them as being part-time marketers (Grönroos 2007), and this field is particularly attentive to the link between employee commitment and delivered service quality as well as customer satisfaction. The corporate branding literature refers to employees as brand ambassadors or brand champions (Ind 2004); and the notion of "the living brand" envisages an ideal employee who internalises organisational values in her way of life. Hence, both fields advocate employee commitment and dialogue-based leadership as a key to achieving organisational goals – inspired by the managerial principles descending from McGregor’s human relations school (McGregor & Cutcher-Gershenfeld 2006). It is argued that if brand visions are communicated to employees in the right way, these will integrate corporate values in their professional identity and will behave accordingly (Karmark 2005).

However, the normative ideals of employee involvement are rarely discussed through empirical examples, let alone, provide guidance in practical challenges. How do employees identify with the brand? How do they become emotionally committed? How to leave the idea of a factory of emotions, where brand meanings are delivered by human media (Hochschild 1983), and instead, foster a meaningful relationship between employee and employer with both parties equally contributing to a dialogue? Even though service marketing adheres to the ideals of dialogue-based leadership, the dialogue itself has so far received scant attention.
Within the past decade, marketing theory has been reinvigorated by the idea of a service-dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch 2004), which claims that value emerges during the service encounter and it is co-created between customers and front-line staff. Following this line of argument, service brand meanings do not exist ab initio, rather, they emerge as social constructions situated in a specific service interaction. Still, the branding process on the shop floor, describing how customers and service workers co-shape and actualise brand meaning, remains unrevealed. Corporate branding is an equally prescriptive field of marketing, yet, it acknowledges the paradox of organisational identity. As Hatch & Schultz (2002) demonstrates, perceptions of the organisational self (i.e., “who we are”) held by senior managers and other stakeholders’ (employees, sponsors or customers) may be divergent and even incompatible. In order to reduce these perceptual gaps and to align the entire organisation behind the corporate brand, executives are offered decontextualised toolkits. For instance, the five cycles of corporate branding describes how to develop and manage various phases of organisational identity (Schultz 2005). As these models are developed to serve strategic leadership objectives, they do not explain what role the corporate brand may play in the employee’s identity construction. Neither corporate branding, nor service marketing, recognise that individuals produce their own understandings of social reality; probably because marketing traditionally deals with inanimate goods as brand media. Hence, internal conflicts and cultural change (which is not senior management-induced) do not exist in the world-view of services marketers. While it is well documented how a market-proof “corporate story” is conceived in the marketing department, still little is known about how the brand is connected to the daily activities of employees. Although there is a growing body of brand management literature which studies the symbolism and emotional relationship between individuals and brand meanings, the focus is exclusively on the identity construction of customers (see Fournier 1998). There have been so far no attempts to describe how service employees affectively relate to the brand and how does this relationship influence their professional work identity and job loyalty.

In order to explore the (missing) link between meaning in work-life and service brand management, we are informed by postmodern theories on organisational culture (Hatch & Cunliffe 2006). This allows us to view the organisation as a complex entity, consisting of diverse sub-cultures (Martin 2002). Viewed from this particular perspective, organisational culture and organisational identity are ongoing sense-making processes formed by employees as much as by middle managers and top executives (Ogbonna 1992: 75). Job position is an important part in the personal identity construct; hence the choice of workplace is often based on how well the corporate community matches one’s self-image. As Salamon (2003: 24) notes: “Employees are no longer working for a living, but working to find identity” (our translation).
The commitment of individual employees can be pursued by interpreting specific behavioural patterns contrasted to what is deemed acceptable within an organisation (Schwartz 2004). But who sets the standards for acceptable behaviour? Within corporate branding, employees are deemed “disloyal” if their service performance does not live up to customer expectations or brand book specifications (van Rekom 1997). Nevertheless, as long as the employee-brand relationship remains unrevealed, so will the reasons for employee resistance and reluctance to become brand ambassadors.

**Culture and Identity Work in Kvickly: A Methodological Statement**

Our ontological point of departure for discussing employees’ affective commitment is that of social constructivism, seeing individuals as active contributors to the social construction of reality. Hence, commitment can be approached from a relational perspective, as a sense-making co-shaper of organisational culture and sub-cultures (Wenger 1998; Weick 2001).

Our analysis will examine the occupational communities of butchers as a sub-cultural unit instead of individual employees. Occupational communities entail one’s nearest colleagues, and the role performance of individuals are steered by what is socially acceptable within this group – instead of a formal and detailed job description provided by the Human Resources Department. Identification with brand values becomes affected by the extent to which sub-cultures may enact themselves within the brand framework. Disloyal behaviour makes sense; as a manifestation of resistance against the organisational identity claimed by top executives (conceptualised in the so-called culture/vision gap by Hatch & Schultz 2003). This notion is crucial for the methodological choice; the source of employee commitment or disloyalty must be found in the context of sub-cultures’ self-presentation.

The analysis is based on a Goffmanian framework, and it seeks to understand how strategic alterations to a retail service brand change the work-life of a sub-culture in a retail organisation. The empirical analysis focuses on the identity work of Kvickly’s butchers, a strong occupational community within Coop. Based on employee interpretations of Kvickly’s operative codex, as well as enactments of the new Kvickly ‘08 service concept for butchers, this case will highlight and explain gaps between the corporate brand vision and the behaviour of butchers.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

The data presented in this paper is built on conversations with Coop’s director of Human Resources as well as ethnographic interviews (Spradley 1979) with Product Area Managers and participant observation sessions with head butchers in Kvickly. One of the authors has listened to various internal presentations of the “Best Butcher in Town” project held for supermarket managers. Furthermore, the target group of this internal branding process, butchers, was followed for several
months in two different Kvickly stores. The empirical work was inspired by ethnographic methods to reveal what (de)motivates butchers to emotionally commit themselves to the brand and to the claimed identity (“Best Butcher in Town”). Our story of the butchers has been stitched together from observation sessions as well as informal chats by the cooling boxes or over the worktables. Before presenting the empirical material, we would like to set the stage by briefly describing the particular organisational context of Kvickly as a workplace.

Kvickly’s Organisational Culture

On the outset, Kvickly’s organisational structure follows a professional bureaucracy, where store managers control service quality delivered by their subordinates through the operations handbook “Rhythms and routines” [Rytmer og Rutiner]. At the same time, due to Kvickly’s organisational roots (the cooperative movement), commercial operations are decentralised, and the ideal of “good salesmanship” is translated into the freedom to match local demand in procurement and offers. This leads to a more organic organisational reality, which is better geared at being customer focused. Kvickly is a typical example of a customer-oriented bureaucracy (Korczynski 2002) characterised by a management paradox: the organisation is steered along bureaucratic rules and procedures, but store managers adhere to a value-based leadership philosophy. This philosophy also entails that employee groups in various divisions are involved in the implementation of new brand strategies. According to theorists, such an approach may ensure affective commitment and identification with the company’s corporate values (Schultz et al. 2000).

Cheney (1999) discuss the link between the interaction of organisational culture, structure and market conditions in the context of contemporary cooperative enterprises. Owing to its sheer size as a national retail chain, Coop Denmark faces problems in achieving cultural homogeneity, while market demands necessitate internal rationalisation and uniformity, bureaucracy and centralisation of certain decisions. The problem with increasing power centralisation is that the internal social dynamics based on historic ideals and culturally rooted democratic traditions will be lost in favour of operational objectives. In the struggle for a strong market position, Coop Denmark must balance between productivity and subjectivity as a competitive parameter, and the Human Resources Department should achieve this balance (Røldsgaard 2008: 7). Thus the HR department simultaneously draws on tools that make operations more efficient and productive as well as tools aiming at increasing employees’ empowerment and well-being (ibid.). In addition to this double-edged sword, the HR department is now also involved as a strategic partner of training brand ambassadors, being in charge of entwining the claimed organisational identity with the self-presentation of individual workers.
The Status and Organisational Self of Butchers

For many years, the butcher department was functioning as a secluded workroom in the back-end of the warehouse, and as such, butchers have been physically isolated from customers and other employees. As they were not expected to service customers directly, they were allowed to adorn the “production hall” with personal items, for instance, by hanging “pin-up calendars with naked women” on the white-tiled wall. Butchers would work together closely around the cutting table (placed in the middle of the room) during the entire day, and they had come to know each other well by working as a team. They would use humour as a particular socialising tool, for instance, when an apprentice once cut steaks in different sizes, the whole group was “making internal jokes of him for some days”. At the same time, butchers are segregated from the rest of Kvickly’s staff, not only physically, but also temporarily – meeting at work earlier than others. One of them even claimed that “it is not natural” for other colleagues to enter the production hall. This isolation is further manifested in daily practices, where butchers leave early and do not feel responsible to participate in other operational activities in the supermarket. One of the butchers confesses that there is an asymmetry of contributions: “We butchers are a bit pig-headed, at least, I am. The greengrocer lady often comes by to help to refill the coolers, but the butchers are not very good at helping others in the house.”

Creativity and craftsmanship skills are central to the performance of butchers. They often described a delight of producing “home-made” specialities, such as grill-sausages or goulash, which also underscores the importance of professional development in an apprentice-master relationship: “We have started to produce home-made salami here, because we are allowed to do that locally. And the apprentices really enjoy being a part of it.”

Besides leading the butcher’s department, the head butcher is also a member of the executive team and formally reports to the supermarket manager. However, this formal hierarchy has been neglected for years, owing to the professional skills and irreplaceability of butchers: “A butcher can always put cans on the shelves, but an employee on the floor cannot slice steaks”. The formal authority of the supermarket manager was not respected; “It is less problematic to do without the supermarket manager than the head butcher for one day”, and supermarket managers themselves would rather avoid daily dialogue with them unless it was necessary (i.e. unless turnover goals were achieved). In other words, the butchers’ autonomy was in fact greater than they were entitled to in formal job descriptions. As Van Maanen and Barley (1984: 335) notes: “To the extent occupational communities succeed in convincing themselves and others that they solely command the expertise necessary to execute and evaluate their work, they gain autonomy and discretion.”

The exclusive position of butchers had been radically changed between 2004-2006, marked by a rationalisation process implemented through the entire Kvickly
chain. In order to cut costs, many head butchers (being on the top of the payroll) were made redundant, and at the same time, “centrally packaged meat” delivered by Danish Crown was introduced. Instead of local production of ham chops, butchers were now in charge of ordering meat via the computer software, “Automatisk Disponeringsprogram”, an activity that did not demand greater skills than basic IT-knowledge. As one butcher commented resentfully: “The new apprentices are quite good at computers, but they are bad at their craft.” The traditions of craftsmanship were repressed in favour of efficiency (Ashforth & Mael 2004: 301); and work processes become standardised. A former head butcher commented this economising period:

… Those smart calculations did not consider that being “a butcher” is a 4-year-long education. To buy centrally packaged meat meant that we were deprived of our craftsmanship. And it’s not very motivating to go to work, when the only thing you do is to open cardboard boxes and put goods in the cooler.

The emphasis on the length of the education is a metaphor for the professional identity of this occupational community, which is a key to understand the impression management of “being a butcher” in Kvickly. Butchers clearly differentiated themselves from the ‘employees on the floor’, who follow a much shorter internal training programme. Along with the scale economic advantages of centralisation, butchers could no longer differentiate themselves from others by means of executing skilled work or significantly different daily routines. Professionalism was no longer a needed or acknowledged competence, which entailed that butchers have lost status compared to the rest of the employees whose abilities were compared “to those of a conveyor belt worker” (i.e. opening boxes and filling up the shelves).

Furthermore, the length of the education was also a source of internal differentiation among butchers themselves. During the fieldwork, it became clear that there is a social stratification between “craftsmen” and “production people” – the latter referring to butchers taking their education after the introduction of centrally packaged meat. One head butcher saw this as a professional degeneration (complaining, at one instance, about apprentices who were no longer able to arrange pork chops in the right order). These and other incidents are signs that may jeopardise the impression the head butcher desired to offer to customers about himself and his team (Goffman 1959). The emerging schism between “right and false butchers” shows a heterogeneous occupational community, characterised by conflict and adversary intra-group images (Wenger 1998). Miller and Van Maanen (1988) report a similar heterogeneous sub-culture among commercial fishermen, differentiating themselves from non-traditional colleagues on the basis of their education and job contract. Hence, seemingly homogeneous occupational communities may also foster an internal social idealisation, ascribing uneven roles to different members within the sub-culture. Furthermore, it can be concluded that being an “authority” is a social construction rather than a formal and static organisational title (cf. Marshall 2000). For the head butcher, authority does not
stem from formal leadership qualifications (Ulrich & Smallwood 2007), but from the craftsman’s skills, which used to be taken over by apprentices. The head butcher is (by Goffman’s terms) a team leader, who must define and maintain a stable impression of his entire team, including staging the brand vision and coaching new members to perform accordingly. However, he feels set aside and claims that butchers will all be trained as “production people” in the future.

Our analysis reveals that the butchers’ dis/identification with the Kvickly brand is partly attributable to their social self (identification with other butchers in their department) and partly to their role identity imposed by Kvickly. This role identity is not related to the self-image of butchers, rather, it is a generalised role (a butcher dummy) that the individual employee is expected to perform as brand ambassador. In the example above the head butcher distances himself from the new practice of ordering centrally produced meat, as it forces a new role identity onto him which is clearly in conflict with his self-image as a craftsman. He is dissatisfied with centrally produced meat obstructing the impression of a local butcher in front of customers, but more importantly, these artefacts may dismantle his status as an expert in Kvickly’s organisational hierarchy.

Staging “The Best Butcher in Town”

Butchers were given a central role in the Kvickly ‘08 repositioning strategy. The vision was to rethink the store concept, daily operations and routines for the entire meat department. The claimed identity, “Best Butcher in Town” emanated from senior management and has radically changed the communicative staging (Arnould et al. 1998) of butchers’ daily work. They were provided a new, common set of symbols, such as uniforms (consisting of a blue shirt, white apron, name tags and a bowler hat), a themed stage (a butcher’s corner in each store, open towards customers), as well as new product brands accentuating provenance and quality (Bornholm Poultry, Premium Beef, Five Manors). These symbols were intended to generate an illusion (Hochschild 2003); as if the customer-butcher interaction was taking place in a small butcher’s shop. It was believed that employees would find it meaningful to enact the local butcher as a professional self, and thus, they would be highly committed to representing corporate values when talking to customers. In practice, butchers were expected to deal with customers as if they were close acquaintances. As the corporate director expressed: “You are not buying meat in Kvickly, but from Brian”. Knowing the butcher by his first name also suggests an illusion of intimacy with customers, and deep acting skills (Hochschild 1983) were emphasised throughout the project:

During the “Best Butcher in Town” training we wanted to change the image of a butcher being a big, fat, surly guy hiding back-stage to that of a jovial person who dares to come out and meet customers. If a customer goes around and looks for a rump, then the butcher should approach him by saying (clears his throat): “I can see that you are interested in buying this rump. If you wish, just call me, and then I’ll
clean and prepare it for you so that it is ready to go in the oven, when you get home.” (...). The butcher should be able to find out what is going on in the customers’ head when they walk into a Kvickly. What does the customer expect from this encounter, what do I expect? If they can be one step ahead and give them more than they expect, customers will be happy.

This excerpt is not only an illustration of the dramatic role shift (from back-stage productions to front-stage service), where butchers are supposed to impersonate the brand in the service encounter. The rhetoric question, (What does the customer expect from this encounter, what do I expect?) forces the butcher to reflect upon the task of initialising Kvickly’s corporate identity starring the role of brand ambassador. Previously, customers had to ring a bell in order to invoke a butcher from his back-stage “cave”, but now he is onstage as the servicescape is designated for customer interaction. Goffman (1959) discusses the link between the personal front (looks and behaviour) and stage, which, in combination may strengthen the impression a team or an individual wishes to make. Both the head butcher and an apprentice told us that the “live butcher concept” would enable them to better advise customers about preparation. They argued that they would be able to shape the sensory experience at the customers’ dining table, instead of “just” striving for making an enticing visual impression (neatly arranged packages) in the cooling boxes. This line of thought rhymes with the concept of brand touch points (Davis & Dunn 2002), which maintains that customers’ impression of Kvickly’s service brand may not only be influenced in the supermarket, but also before shopping and during consumption at home.

Obstructing the Best Butcher in Town

In the supermarket where this research was conducted, butchers had just finished the fourth and final training module of the “Best Butcher in Town” and were admittedly positive about the concept itself. During their training period, they had become familiar with the new assortment of Kvickly products. The apprentices as well as the head butcher were proud of these products as “the best on the Danish market”. They were also trained in customer orientation and reflected upon their new role on the stage: “we must think about how customers would feel about this” and, “we have learnt that customers would need 10 good impressions to put one bad experience out of mind.” However, it soon became clear that focusing on satisfying the customer requires a dramatic effort: they must compromise their own views in favour of letting the customer be right. The confrontation between customer integrity and butcher authority may result in conflict. As one butcher recounted:

There was this man who complained about the Bornholm Poultry and compared it to an average chicken. I explained him that there were miles between a chicken from Bornholm and other poultry, because they are fed and bred differently. Then he claims that both were just as dry and he could not taste any difference. So I told him: “well, it’s because you are not competent enough to savour difference”.

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According to Goffman (1959), a face-to-face-interaction between customer and employee is framed by two elements: 1) the information held by the two parties of each other and 2) a mutual understanding of (or agreement upon) “what is going on”. In a face-to-face-interaction, both parties invest themselves in the relationship, weakening the conception of the self to arrive upon an agreement (ibid.). The new personal front of the butchers (e.g. uniforms differing from the other employees) was designed to underscore their craftsmanship, positioning them as more knowledgeable in the staged interaction with the customer. However, superiority is sat aside in an absolute customer-oriented logic: “Here, the customer is always right; you cannot tell him that he’s an incompetent cook”. The interaction to be played along the scripts of “Best Butcher in Town” is overruled by the ultimate customer authority paradox. However, the butcher in this case chose not to hold back his professional pride (wounded by the customer’s critique of the Bornholm Poultry). Instead, he attempts to make an impression by sharing his knowledge about the product, expecting to reach upon an agreement (an acceptance of taste differences). Reading along a symbolic interaction framework (Goffman 1959: 3), the butcher’s reactions are driven by the goal to make a favourable impression about himself and his profession, as well as to demonstrate that he has high thoughts about the customer – so none of the parties loose face (Goffman 1959: 18): “When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them.”

The butcher invests a “part of himself” in the interaction in order to maintain a mutual respect (his own respect for the customer, compelled by Kvickly, must be reciprocated by the customer respecting his professional judgement). However, the customer’s negative response bears no sign of respect, as he only focuses on his own sensory experiences (“both [products] were just as dry”):

(He) acts in such a way as to destroy or seriously threaten the polite appearance of the situation, and while he may not act simply in order to create such dissonance, he acts with the knowledge that this kind of dissonance is likely to result. (Goffman 2004:36).

The situation collapses, and the butcher’s retort (in Goffman’s terms, “involuntary expressive behaviour”) signalises his emotional dissonance (Hochschild, 1983). He creates a new act (a framework for the interaction) and changes tactics. The butcher redefines the power relationship (breaking the corporate spell about “the customer is always right”), to claim cynically his own superiority as a connoisseur of poultry tastes. He is no longer a cordial conversation partner, but someone who is recklessly resolute to save his own image, thereby loosing control over the impression he wanted to create in the first place.

This is not just one isolated illustration of how butchers think about customers’ gastronomic expertise in general. One head butcher declared that given the excellent quality of Kvickly’s meat products, the real reason behind complaints is
the insufficient cooking skills of customers. “However, we cannot tell that to the customer; they must get two bottles of wine and two extra steaks instead”. This quote clearly refers to the gap between the façade butchers bear front-stage (the customer should feel that he is right), and their own true viewpoints. Butchers must now perform a double emotional labour in accordance with Kvickly’s *display rules* (Hochschild 1983) – as a branded butcher dummy and a frontline service worker, they are engaging in both *surface acting* and *deep acting* (ibid.).

However, the Bornholm Poultry incident also reveals a different type of emotional labour. The butcher has, in fact, initiated the role he plays, in order to stage his professional self. As Ashforth and Humphrey (1993: 94) notes, “the service agent may naturally feel what he or she is expected to express without having to work up the emotion in the sense discussed by Hochschild”. His sarcastic reply may be a sign of his “central salient and valued identity” (ibid.: 97); customer-focused on the surface, but a craftsman at heart. However, it may also be interpreted as the gap (disagreement) between the butcher’s and the customer’s expectation towards the service encounter. The “customer doesn’t even know that there is a butcher in Kvickly, so it can be all the same” said one butcher. Apart from the material (substantive) staging of the concept as a butcher’s corner, “The Best Butcher in Town” is not widely marketed externally. This leads to customers not reciprocating the interaction, because they simply do not realise the prospect of personal encounter on the shop floor. Hence, the proposition of temporarily delaying brand implementation (with internal communication preceding external campaigns, cf. Pitt et al. 1999) may have severe practical consequences for value co-creation in services.

**Discussion: The Affective Labour of Butchers**

Kvickly’s approach towards involving butchers in the implementation of Kvickly ‘08 and in building a collective organisational identity is designed to appeal the butchers’ preferred self-image (“Best Butcher in Town”). The professional pride of butchers is acknowledged as a strategic resource to get individual employees perform conforming Kvickly’s brand goals. However, as exemplified by the snapshots above, butchers do not automatically become brand ambassadors, neither is there a unanimous script in the brand book, describing “how” to be a butcher. Our case reveals that butchers do indeed adhere to customer-orientation as a proper state of mind (cf. Hochschild 2003: 7), but there is a barrier when the butcher is implicitly expected to overrule his professional identity and to “draw on a source of self that [he] honour[s] as deep and integral to [his] individuality” (Hochschild 2003: 7). Hence, the daily impression management of the brand is a journey paved with hurdles of personal, social and professional development.

Ironically, some of the hurdles are created by the new training programme, which, besides communicating a common corporate vision, also intends to set
new standards for an already existing sub-culture. These directives dismantle the self-image of butchers as they do not take into account the historical and current social identity of this occupational community. Today, Kvickly is moving towards a service-oriented culture, from “skills with things to skills with people” (Mills 2002: 182). The mantra of “customer is first”, including customer safety is seemingly a common goal for head butchers and top executives alike. Responsibility is signified by specific markers (such as “best before” – dates or centrally packaged meat), which simultaneously frustrate butchers, as they are at odds with their sense of autonomy. It is because butchers wish to protect their status that they deliberately “forget” to discard overdue products or re-order centrally packaged meat. The most significant barrier for the internal branding process is thus the fear of losing grounds in the social hierarchy of Kvickly (and being downgraded to the level of unskilled conveyor belt workers). Consequently, the external demands of service-orientation threaten occupational communities’ perception of self-control and may therefore contribute to the foundation of resistant sub-cultures (Van Maanen & Barley 1984).

Yet, customer orientation may only succeed if butchers’ self-image is aligned with the designed impression created by the marketing department. In the service encounter, employees’ self-reflexivity is an important condition of consistent communication of brand identity. Our case suggests that commitment is not so much related to the content of the job or job processes as such, but whether or not work processes make sense related to the self-image of butchers. The option to produce local specialities make sense, while centrally packaged meat does not, as these latter do not acknowledge the community’s professional skills. The gap between Kvickly’s vision of customer orientation and subcultural behaviour is also accountable to a terminological confusion. While Kvickly executives speak of service culture and service branding, butchers still perceive their workplace as a production universe. To facilitate butchers’ performance along “the Kvickly way” requires, that the meaning of words like “expertise” and “creativity” must be explicitly associated with customer advising and culinary knowledge instead of production-based craftsmanship.

Conclusion
The most important mission of internal branding and affective commitment is not to impose corporate values onto individual employees but, rather, the managing of professional identities in groups (Sennett 2007). The study of Kvickly’s internal service branding process revealed that it severely affects the identity of butchers. Occupational communities – their role and the status of their professional competencies in the supermarket – are central bricks in the puzzle of an organisational ”us”. The significance of individuals’ actions on a workplace develops through the relationships they foster with others – and occupational
communities strive for power and status within the social hierarchy of the firm. As individual employees’ behaviour are more related to their nearest work team values than that of the corporate identity, brand managers must deal with a differentiated culture consisting socially constructed organisational identities. This requires that internal branding must be approached more democratically; by acknowledging occupational communities before putting a top-steered strategic process into action. Affective commitment can be understood as a sense-making negotiation process between advocated brand values and the team’s self image. Hence, the main conclusion is that the employee becomes a committed brand ambassador to the extent s/he – as a member of an occupational community – may strengthen his/her own ideal self-image and whether the occupational community perceives a high degree of self-control in doing their job. In addition, this conclusion confirms Sennett’s notion (2007) of employees becoming less committed to workplace realities, which are beyond their control.

**Szilvia Gyimóthy** is Associate Professor at the Department of Culture and Global Studies, Aalborg University (Denmark). Her research focuses on deconstructing strategic communication in the experience economy. In particular, she has studied advertising and branding campaigns within tourism and services marketing. Szilvia holds a PhD from Anglia Rushkin University. E-Mail: gyimothy@ihis.aau.dk

**Louise Rygaard Jonas** is Human Resources project manager at Coop Denmark. She is affiliated with Copenhagen Business School, Department of Marketing, where her main field is corporate brand management and service marketing. She has recently completed her doctorate on internal branding in the Kvickly supermarket chain. E-mail: lrj.marktg@cbs.dk

**Notes**

1 Using the word “responsibility” signalises the general trend towards ethical trading and environmentally friendly products. Influence refers to having a say about consumption preferences and ultimately, affecting social trends in an “ideal” or ethically desirable direction.
References


Cacophony of Voices and Emotions: Dialogic of Buying and Selling art

By Can-Seng Ooi

Abstract

The importance of galleries as go-betweens for artists and art buyers is acknowledged in art world research. Using a Bakhtinian dialogic approach, this article examines social encounters of three artists, two art buyers and one gallery sales executive in Singapore. Specifically, it looks into the social interactional dynamics of artists and art buyers when they trade directly. Situational ambiguities and emotional ambivalence arise during such meetings from the different expectations and demands that are imposed, which have the effect of placing the parties involved in conflicting social contexts. For instance, when art connoisseurs and artists discuss aesthetics, monetary value is not of primary concern, nonetheless when they want to trade, commercial concerns become central; this can lead to discomfort between the parties. Similarly, art buyers may want to go behind the scenes to know more about the artist and the art practice; getting away from the glitter of the commercial gallery and into the modest art studio for an authentic experience may reveal too much for visitors; such experiences may break their illusion of the glamorous artist. This article looks at the microscopic interaction between artists and art buyers and shows how the ambiguities and ambivalence that can be generated by their encounters become constraining factors in encouraging artists and art buyers to trade directly, by-passing commercial art galleries and dealers.

Keywords: Art world, art markets, art mediators, dialogic of art, Singapore
Cacophony of Voices and Emotions: Dialogic of Buying and Selling art

Buying and selling art can be emotional. This article examines the social processes involved when artists, buyers and gallery managers engage in discussing, selling and buying art. Their negotiations and discussions are emotionally-laden. Social ambiguity – where a social situation is unclear to individuals and they wonder how to behave and relate to each other – is common, as art buyers and art sellers shift between the aesthetic sphere and the commercial sphere during their transactions. Emotional ambivalence or mixed feelings are part of socially ambiguous situations.

This article documents the experiences of a Dutch couple in Singapore – Laura and Nico (unless stated the actual names of respondents are not used). I interviewed and followed them on their journey to acquire works of art in the city-state. I also interviewed the artists, Victor Tan and Chng Seok Tin (who granted permission to use their actual names). Interviews were also conducted with Karen, the sales executive of a commercial art gallery, Tree, which Laura and Nico visited during their quest to expand their art collection. Wong, an artist represented by Tree, was also interviewed.

This study is steeped in the art world research tradition. This stream of research addresses art quality and value within social settings. The relational dynamics amongst various art world stakeholders, functioning within social structures and institutions, generate the commercial value, popularity and recognition of artists and art works. There is a system of gatekeepers, mediators, intermediaries and institutions that structure the art world and construct consensus on art quality and taste. The starting point is that a work of art has no value in itself; various values – aesthetics, prestige, social, historical, political and economic – are generated and maintained through the art world (Adorno & Horkheimer 1972; Becker 1984; Zolberg 1990; Throsby 1994; Schulze 1999; Currid 2007: 388–389; Thompson 2008; Madoff 2009). Museums, galleries, collectors and artists collaborate, even manipulate, to maintain prices of works of art, perpetuate the status of art in society and define what constitutes good art (Albrecht 1968; Wolff 1981; Becker 1984; Bourdieu 1996; Bonus & Ronde 1997). Works are also popularised and commodified through the system (Adorno & Horkheimer 1972; Thompson 2008). Art has become a means to socially differentiate and stratify society (Bourdieu 1996; Bonus & Ronde 1997; Grenfell & Hardy 2007). Art quality and value may seem to lie in the eye of the beholder but the eye is socialised, as persons acquire aesthetic tastes. So, groups of individuals learn to appreciate art in their own social milieu. The status of art and artists are acquired through the social system and processes of internalisation.
Studies have shown that commercial art galleries and art dealers serve important functions between artists and art buyers. For instance, Becker (1984: 108-119) and Thompson (2008) showed how dealers form symbiotic relations with collectors. Dealers train appreciators to be collectors and inculcate pride and confidence in displaying one’s taste and social status through art. At the same time, having bought works, collectors can trust their dealers to continue to champion the represented artists. Also, working with “independent” critics and auction houses, dealers and collectors develop a consensus on the aesthetic and commercial value of art works. In another study, Abbing (2002) explained why most professional artists remain poor. Many people, including artists, are trained to think that art and commerce do not mix. Artists should be purely creative; commercial interests should not dictate them. As a consequence, public funded support is expected, demanded and often given. Many artists have come to accept their relatively poor economic state of affairs and have devised their career in this frame of mind. Since artists are not supposed to be overtly interested in commerce, galleries and dealers step in to facilitate the commercial tasks of the art market.

While acknowledging the mediating functions of art dealers and art galleries, it may be asked why artists do not attempt to educate their own potential customers, change their own mind sets and learn to market their own works. Similarly, why do art buyers approach commission-seeking art dealers when they could save money by buying works directly from artists themselves? In fact, many artists and art buyers do so. But fulfilling the roles of the commercial art galleries and dealers is easier said than done. As will be shown in this article, the so-called obstacles also come from the microscopic interaction mechanisms. This article aims to present some of the mechanisms in the art world that give relevance and importance to galleries and dealers. This case study will highlight the social and emotional challenges facing artists and art buyers when they interact face-to-face and trade. As will be elaborated later, their interaction is highly influenced by views that art should not be appreciated through monetary value and that good artists are only marginally concerned with selling art. Such views are not easily reconciled with the wheeling and dealing that an art transaction often involves, and the result is an awkwardness and tension that hinders the parties when negotiating a direct sale. At the social interaction level, commercial art galleries and dealers offer a way to art trading that is less socially ambiguous and emotionally ambivalent, making the experience of buying and selling art more pleasant for artists and art buyers.

In using the dialogic perspective, this article maps out the intricacies of selling and buying art works. The various parties have to navigate from the emotional appreciation of art to exchanging money for art. These processes display a cacophony of voices and emotions. In the next section, I will discuss the dialogic perspective. Subsequently, the case of Laura and Nico is presented. By accentuating emotional ambivalence and social ambiguities, this paper points out various constraining microscopic mechanisms in the art world.
Dialogism

The dialogic perspective originates from literary theorist Bakhtin (1981, 1965/1984, 1986). His works on literary texts have been appropriated into the social sciences (van Loon 1997; Gardiner and Bell 1998; Ooi 2002). The dialogic perspective accentuates social multiplicity and dynamic processes. It offers a set of concepts and vocabulary to present social phenomena in a dynamic and yet systematic manner, with the emphasis on social multiplicity and interplay. Just as importantly, the dialogic perspective accentuates the tensions of order and disorder in the social environment.

For this paper, to accentuate emotional ambivalence and multiplicity, a number of dialogic concepts, namely heteroglossia, polyphony and carnivalesque, are used. Heteroglossia points to the multiple contexts existing in social situations (Bakhtin 1981: 325–326; Holquist 1981: 428; Vice 1997: 18–44). Heteroglossia or multiple contexts are embedded in the art business. A social context entails a common understanding of what constitutes appropriate behaviour and how social actions should be interpreted. So, for instance, at the broad level, art business assumes at least two different social contexts. In the circumstance of art appreciation, pricing is usually not the main dimension when discussing aesthetics. The aesthetic experience may be subjective and emotional, or rational and technical, but the value of the work is usually not judged by the price it commands in the art market. In fact, in what Abbing (2002: 34) terms the “denial of the economy”, an obsession with price may destroy the aesthetic experience. As a popular set of discourse, overarching commercial intent by an artist would suggest a corruption of the creative art-making process and as a result, the works created would be rendered less-than-art. Commercial intent is seen as detrimental to the art making process. On the other hand, the art market is a commercial institution; artists sell their works and collectors buy. The art sale arena is essentially a commercial one. A commercial gallery, for instance, is intentionally staged to entice buyers. Many artists and collectors know the rules and behave accordingly in the aesthetic mode but awkwardness and tensions arise when the meeting switches to business exchange. For instance, when an artist sells his own art, in wanting to show a disinterest in the worldly commercial sphere, the artist may refrain from being enthused with the potential sale although the artist may be inwardly excited. In each situation, there is a social order in which people know how to behave appropriately. There is disorder when contrasting social contexts meet. Heteroglossia highlights the clash of contexts when people interact in social arenas.

Closely related to heteroglossia is the concept of polyphony. Polyphony highlights multiple voices (Bakhtin 1981: 331–336, 1986: 112–113; Vice 1997: 112–148). When a point of view is being articulated, there is also an overarching voice or the voice of the narrator. Just like in this article, my voice is omnipresent even though I do not use the personal pronoun in most instances. In text, dialogism draws our attention to the voice of the author. In social interactions, individuals
may marginalise their own voices and instead invoke other voices in their arguments and opinions. For example, when an art dealer says that “the price is determined by the market”, it is an attempt to marginalise the dealer’s own interest and giving a voice to the so-called “market”. The actual voice is still the dealer’s because the dealer constructs the argument and narrative. The concept of polyphony reminds us of who constructs arguments and whose voices are used and whose are hidden during social exchanges. Voices that are marginalized are also important. Together, the voices articulated by one party shows the politics of the conversation. The dialogue amongst different parties, the cacophony of voices, illuminates the social complexity, ambiguity and ambivalence in the situation.

Carnivalesque alludes to the seeming disorder and yet orderly proceedings of the carnival (Bakhtin 1965/1984; Stallybrass & White 1986). The concept accentuates multiple cultures and spheres of activities in the art world, which cannot be totally managed, suppressed or controlled. The concept of carnivalesque brings together heteroglossia and polyphony. Multiple contexts and voices characterise social reality. A person holds different, even contrasting views and carries a repertoire of social behaviour. Because a person can behave differently within the range of appropriate behaviour, the outcome of the interaction remains uncertain. For example, an art buyer may want to know an artist and visit the studio to have a more “authentic” appreciation of art practice. Art making practice can be messy and disorderly, in contrast to the sleek and staged presentation of finished works in commercial art galleries. The reaction of a visitor to the revealed grubbiness of the art studio, the lack of glamour in the creative process, is coloured by any preconceived idea he may hold about what the working space of an artist should be. Subsequently, as expectations meet or fail to meet, and impressions conflict, the visitor may be in awe or be disappointed with the visit. Artists, on their part, seek a “balance” between being open and honest in presenting their workspaces while, at the same time, maintaining the image and mystique of themselves as artists; this “balance” is not defined. Individual artists and art buyers are not sure of the outcomes of their encounters as they all have their personal preferences and interpretations of the situation. The experience of visiting an artist studio to go behind the scenes and to buy art is fraught with social ambiguities and emotional ambivalence. The social situation, like in the on-goings of a carnival, can take off in different directions as persons interact. Individuals involved may feel happy and frustrated as the dynamic carnivalesque social situation emerges.

As a framework, dialogism opens up discussion on social complexity. But unlike a functionalist integrative ontology – although the dialogic approach does attempt to simplify – the aim is to organise the complexity rather than to reduce the complexity. As a result, the case in this paper will accentuate the multiplicity of social contexts and voices in the interaction between artists and art buyers. The tensions between order and disorder will also be highlighted. Emotional ambiguities and ambivalence are predominant. Using Bakhtin’s dialogical framework, this
paper addresses some complex ways in which art, emotions and money come together through the case of Laura and Nico buying art in Singapore.

**Laura and Nico Buy Art in Singapore**

Laura and Nico, a married couple, are Dutch university professors working in the Netherlands. Nico was in Singapore for the first six months of 2008, visiting a local university. Laura also visited the same university but only for two months. Both of them are my friends. Because of my research on the art world in Singapore, we started talking about local art and artists when we met in Singapore.

According to Laura and Nico, they collect paintings and sculptures that they like, not so much for investment but for enjoyment and decoration. The works must also be affordable and reasonably priced. Their appreciation of art is multifaceted; they refer to their emotional responses, the techniques and ideas behind works and also their evaluation of the price. Their perspective on particular art works is also shaped by their knowledge of the artist, and whether they have met the artist before and their chemistry with the artist. Before making a purchase, Nico often searches for information on the Internet about the artist and earlier prices of works sold.

In my conversations with them, they recalled how they acquired various pieces of art over the years. Nico has meticulously documented their various pieces into a booklet. They recalled affectionately the specific pieces they acquired at flea markets, artist studios, galleries and small shops. Going behind the scenes into artist studios is special to them because they can get closer to the artist and understand the artist’s works better; these experiences are, in their own words, “more authentic”. They were glad when I wanted to introduce them to a couple of artists and visit their studios in Singapore.

**Visit 1: Laura and Nico Visit Victor Tan at the Telok Kurau Studios**

The first artist studio Laura and Nico visited with me was Victor Tan’s. Laura and Nico met Tan a couple of evenings earlier at an exhibition, during which I introduced them. Over drinks, the first meeting was friendly and animated, as we discussed the art scene in Singapore, the Netherlands and Denmark. We also exchanged views on art and the art business.

Tan’s studio is on the fourth floor of the Telok Kurau Studios, a government-supported art housing complex. The studio is about 50 square meters. The black walls contrast well against Tan’s stainless steel wire sculptures; from a distance and at first glance, one might mistake the sculptures as being made from wire mesh. There are hundreds of sculptures of different sizes in the studio. Most of the sculptures are human figures in different poses – standing, sitting, walking, jumping. There are also figures of birds, trees and abstract shapes. The figures come in different sizes, ranging from a few centimetres tall to over four meters high. For
the first-time visitor, one fears knocking down sculptures while navigating through the labyrinth. In the middle of the room, there is a raised platform on which Tan makes his sculptures.

The guests looked around the studio curiously, peering into the workspace of the artist. They were amazed by how Tan could create sculptures with bales of stainless steel wires. Laura and Nico asked Tan about his works and stories behind various pieces. Tan was forthcoming with his tales. For example, Tan explained that a series of baby sculptures was inspired by the birth of his niece. Tan is also visually impaired and he explained how he accidentally started making sculptures with wires: he could not draw because of his handicap in art school, so the then school principal encouraged him to try other media to “sketch”. He tried using wires and that eventually turned out to be his medium of artistic expression, even though he majored in ceramics.

After about 30 minutes, we decided to visit another artist, Chng Seok Tin. Her studio is on the ground floor of the art studio complex.

Visit 2: Laura and Nico Visit Chng Seok Tin

Chng is also visually impaired. In her 60s, she has received the highest national accolade for an artist in Singapore, the national cultural medallion. When we visited, she was working on a series of prints and preparing for an exhibition in Taiwan. A friend and helper, Kate (not her real name), was with her. Chng welcomed us warmly. Chng’s studio was once the servant’s quarter in the complex. Chng was putting two paintings in the sun when we came calling. She explained that termites infested the two paintings and she was “drying” the pictures. After I introduced Laura and Nico to her, we went into her studio. Most of her works were stacked and kept in two rooms.

Chng gave Laura and Nico catalogues of her works. She also explained that she required help in making her prints because she is visually impaired. Chng also writes, composes music and paints. Chng is more proficient in Mandarin but speaks and understands English. Kate and I helped in the interpretation at times.

Laura saw a painting in the catalogue that interested her. She asked Chng if it was still available. Chng laughed uncomfortably before saying that the painting, together with other art pieces, was destroyed by termites. After looking around the cluttered art studio, Laura and Nico were shown her new series of prints. Nico took particular interest in a series called “Development of wind”. This series shows a picture of long grass blowing in the wind, with a bird flying in the sky. The composition and the style makes the print look like a Chinese brush painting and yet western in character; the blend of the East and West appeals to Nico. The series consists of nine pieces: three prints, one Artist’s Proof (A/P) and five test prints. The series was meant for the exhibition in Taiwan. While appreciating the series, Nico wanted to acquire a copy. Nico cautiously navigated the art-business heteroglossic situation; he first praised the works, indicated that he is touched by
their aesthetics and then with enthusiasm, asked if the prints are for sale. Chng smiled, paused to indicate that she is not overly excited on selling but said, “artists need to make a living too”.

Nico looked at the “Development of the wind” series for some minutes, compared the various prints and was most interested in the A/P. An A/P is usually not for sale, Chng explained, because it is the artist’s favourite. But would Chng part with this A/P? She smiled hesitantly and said “yes”. Chng then detached herself from the price by stating that the sum she has quoted is the “market price”. Never comfortable to bargain with the artist, Nico looked at the print again and decided to acquire it. And after a moment of reflection, in a carnivalesque turn of events, Nico spontaneously proclaimed that he wants to buy the whole series of nine pieces. Nico thought that he could display all pieces, showing how the creative process emerges in the series! He asked Chng to think about his proposal. Nico said that he will not bargain with her, and asked her to give him an offer for the whole package, instead of for individual pieces. If he could not afford the lot, then he would just buy the A/P. Chng was agreeable and seemed pleased. They agreed to communicate via email. All parties, including myself, were excited. After taking pictures and having some discussions, we left.

Nico and Laura were glad for the honesty and authenticity experienced in Chng’s studio. Behind Chng’s powerful works, they saw a very competent artist who overcame her physical disability. They were however also uncomfortable with the fact that some of Chng’s works were destroyed by termites and that her space seemed disorganised. Nico nonetheless loved “Development of wind” and wanted to acquire it.

**Back to Tan’s Studio**

We returned to Tan’s studio. On our way, Nico talked enthusiastically about acquiring Chng’s series. We were supportive of his taste and choice. Laura and Nico were again looking around Tan’s studio. They showed interest in acquiring Tan’s works. Nico cautiously broached the subject of a commercial transaction and asked Tan whether the works are for sale. With an uncomfortable smile, having to step into business dealings, Tan replied positively. Tan also added that he normally would ask visitors to go to the galleries to buy his works. He would then not have to deal with the commercial transaction. The buyer would also know the prices of his works in the market.

While Tan stated his “normal” practice and reluctance in doing a direct sale, he also alluded to the exceptions he would make. He would only sell to friends who are aesthetically excited about his works; unspoken in the clarification is a hint that Laura and Nico prospectively qualify. In putting primacy on the aesthetics and friendship spheres in the heteroglossic situation, Tan has used his criteria for direct sales as a social marker of how he views the buyers; he would prefer to relate to them as friends and art connoisseurs, not as customers.
Nico was interested in a figure climbing out of a wooden frame. Tan said that was not for sale because that was his last piece in the series. Tan mentioned that he could however make another piece for them. That was not acceptable to Nico; he felt that the buyer should not usurp the artist’s right in creating and editioning his work. Laura asked about another figure and that was also not for sale. Nico pointed to another and met with the same response. “Are there any for sale?” asked Laura in a jovial but exasperated voice. “Yes”, replied a laughing Tan, “but you want those that I want to keep!”

In a later interview, I asked Tan why he did not sell any pieces to the couple. Tan said:

It was a coincidence that they picked some of the sculptures that I have strong feelings for, or there is significance for me in keeping them. This has happened before. If I said “yes” to selling them a long time ago, they would not have seen them.

I also feel that buying and selling art is about synergy, […] there is a need to have some chemistry between the two parties. It is not just me pushing a sale but also depending on the buyer. To have someone appreciate my work is more important than one buying my work because friendship is more important to me. It is not like if they don’t buy my work, then they are not my friends. I like to spend time with them. Actually when people email me to buy my work, I ask them to go to the gallery first. Look at those there. If they want to come to have a look and want to have a chat, they don’t have to buy my work from me. Galleries [offer the] mood for selling and buying. Willing parties come together.

I rather be friends than talk about money. […] I say the price and wonder if they will be offended. It’s a dual effect. I feel uncomfortable to sell and they feel uncomfortable buying […] That’s why I like to let galleries sell my works.

Essentially, Tan was uncomfortable and ambivalent about selling his works directly to buyers. He wanted to see and portray himself as an artist first and art seller second. By voicing himself as a friend (versus that of an art seller) in cases where he does sell, Tan personalises the process because the commercial transaction is then actually a favour for a friend. Tan was also afraid that the price he named might make him sound money-minded. It would be easier if the buyer obtains his works through the galleries that represent him.

Coffee After Our Visit

After the visit to Telok Kurau Studios, Laura, Nico and I went for coffee. In the absence of the artists, we talked candidly about the experiences earlier in the afternoon. Both were happy with their experiences of going behind the scenes in the studios; the artist work spaces were very different from the glitz of a commercial art gallery. Nico was clearly excited about acquiring Chng’s series of prints. He liked the character of the prints, in the sense that they look like Chinese paintings, but are prints. Laura and Nico however felt somewhat sorry for Chng because her works were not stored properly. Laura was upset that termites had destroyed the piece she was interested in. Laura and Nico felt that every work by an artist
should be precious, like one’s baby. Knowing of her handicap, they knew that she needs help in getting organized. They respect her works and admire her for having received the national cultural medallion in Singapore. I also asked Nico how much he would pay for the series of prints. Nico thought that Chng should not charge him for the test prints, while he would pay full price for the rest. That is a fair discount, he thought.

Laura and Nico have a good impression of Tan too. They felt that Tan, in his late 30s, is confident and he knows the future is his. They also felt that Tan’s studio was overwhelmingly crowded. Nico was drawn to those figures that depict motion. He said that Tan’s aesthetics rests in the portrayal of “movement”. Switching to the commercial aspect of their encounter, Laura and Nico were a bit confused and wondered if Tan was truly interested in selling his works to them. They asked to buy three pieces and were told they are all not for sale.

Our after-visit discussion contrasts against how Laura and Nico behaved during the visits. As they immersed themselves into the private workspaces of the artists, Laura and Nico were always mindful to demonstrate their appreciation of the works and of being allowed into the studios. They did not discuss the quality of the art works based on monetary terms with the artists. In other words, Laura and Nico behaved cautiously, showing respect and appreciation and not insulting or offending the artists when they navigated through the heteroglossic situation of art versus business.

Email Correspondence and Acquiring a Work From Wong

A few days later, I met Laura and Nico. Nico received an email from Kate on behalf of Chng, listing the price of each individual print in the series, with full and “discounted” prices. The whole series was too expensive for them. During their face-to-face meeting, the discussion was informal. Chng was happy to sell. They felt it strange that the email was formal, and each print was priced individually. Nico had asked for a packaged deal. Nico said:

It is interesting that the prices listed are higher than were mentioned in the studio but with a discount. [Giving discounted prices] is very unprofessional, I would say, because we don’t buy by seeing whether there is a discount or not.

Nico felt uncomfortable that he was perceived to be a bargain hunter. After Nico received the email, he went to visit Chng in her studio. He wanted to acquire the A/P. He thought they had an agreement: if he does not buy the whole series, he would just buy the A/P. But Chng refused to part with the A/P. Nico found the whole incident puzzling and hoped that he had not offended Chng. Chng eventually explained to me that she wanted to use the print for the exhibition in Taiwan. She had not taken a picture to document the work. It was also Kate who liaised on her behalf with Nico; Chng did not know the exact details. Kate later explained to me that she thought she followed Chng’s instructions. There was confusion and misunderstanding, resulting in the rather messy and unpleasant situation.
Regardless, Laura and Nico told me that they acquired a painting from an artist, Wong, through an art gallery, Tree. Laura saw a tulip painting that she liked but it was reserved. The gallery’s sales executive – Karen – said that she could ask the artist to produce a similar one, with some changes. Laura, with her view on artistic integrity, was aghast. Laura was shown a catalogue of Wong’s works and was drawn to one particular piece. Karen then suggested that she could bring the couple to Wong’s home and studio. Karen called up the artist and they took a taxi there.

During the visit to Wong’s home, Laura and Nico became fond of Wong. Laura felt that she, in her own words, “clicked” with the artist. Karen was asking Wong to take out works to be shown to Laura and Nico. Wong was, on the other hand, asking Karen to allow Laura and Nico to look around and take their time. He unwrapped paintings and turned them at different angles, so that Laura and Nico could enjoy. In contrast to Tan’s and Chng’s, Wong’s works are meticulously packed and documented.

Laura noticed that there was a massive commissioned work being done. She mentioned that the work looked complete. Wong said that the client would probably think so too but he felt that there was still something more but did not know what that was. Laura and Nico also saw a painting hanging over the door. Wong noticed their interest and said immediately that the painting is not for sale. Laura and Nico felt that Wong is not comfortable telling them the prices. Laura found that Wong encapsulates a sense of aesthetic expected of an artist. Karen was the one doing the selling. Inadvertently or otherwise, in the heteroglossic situation embedded in the visit to appreciate art and to sell art, Karen was handling the commercial aspect of the visit, while Wong focused on the aesthetic discussion.

Wong’s studio is separated between the workspace and the display space. That is a professional set-up, according to Laura and Nico. To the Dutch couple, unlike Chng and Tan, who seem only to create works, Wong takes his works to the packing and selling stages.

Eventually, Laura saw the piece from the catalogue. After seeing the actual painting and meeting Wong, she likes the picture even more. To Laura, there is a Zen-like character in both the painting and the painter. She asked to go home and contemplate before deciding on a purchase. That was not a problem. A few days later, Karen told her that the first piece that she liked was on the market again. Laura asked Karen to bring the one from Wong’s house to the gallery, so that the two pieces can be compared. Laura and Nico eventually decided on the piece from the house. Without rational reasons, the Zen-like painting grew on the Dutch couple more and more, and the tulip painting less and less. The one they bought cost S$6000 (€3000), while the other S$10 000 (€5000); the couple admitted that the price was also a factor. Price did affect their decision; they could afford the dearer one.
Laura and Nico also told me about their encounters with Karen, when they visited Tree. Nico felt that Karen had a kind of naivety and simplicity that helped in selling art. She is chatty. To them, Karen seems to think that Laura and Nico would buy more pieces. She kept asking, “You don’t want to buy the other?” As a result, Laura thought that Karen has many rich customers. Karen seems to have limited knowledge about art, according to Nico. For example, Nico noticed the artistic signature of Wong in his paintings – a few dark brush strokes found in almost all his paintings – and pointed that out to Wong. Karen interjected and pointed out instead the artist’s name-signature at the bottom of the painting. Wong then said that Nico was referring to his artistic signature. To Laura and Nico, Karen may have an unpracticed eye, but she is good at selling. Karen revealed her sale tactics to me in an interview:

We always say the things that the customers like to hear [she laughs]. So always say nice things about the paintings. For example, one lady came the other day and walked past the shop three, four times and finally came in to take a look at a painting. This square painting really caught her eye and she liked it very much. Since the lady doesn’t have enough space for the painting, she was wondering if she should buy or not. Then I told her that lots of customers like the details in the painting and I also told her that every time she looks at the painting, it makes her feel happy. The customer agrees and said, “Yes, I feel happy when I look at it”. That’s how we try to convince customers.

With little ambiguity in what she has to do as an art seller, Karen embodies the commercial agent in the art world.

Wong’s View on Laura and Nico

I interviewed Wong a couple of weeks after Laura and Nico bought his painting. Wong described himself as a “very local” artist because he lived in Singapore all his life and has no overseas training. He graduated from the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts while in his early twenties. He does both traditional Chinese ink paintings and also western paintings using oil and acrylic. Of late, he has been working with mixed media, including sand and gold paper. Based in Singapore, he finds himself mixing Chinese and western traditions in his works. The blending of the East and West comes naturally to him because of his Chinese background and his major in western art. My conversation with him was conducted in Mandarin. Laura and Nico felt that his art is special because, in their eyes, it blends eastern and western traditions. The mixed media (oil and sand) painting they bought was of a hill protruding out in the open space, but on closer examination, reveals a side profile of a face speaking to the heavens. Wong explained to me that the picture refers to a Chinese legend in which a warrior asked the heavens 100 questions. That is why the painting is titled “Talking to the sky”.

It is very rare that customers visit his home. Laura and Nico’s visit was agreed upon because of their interest. Wong said that Laura and Nico are the best type of customers because they know what they like. While he does commissioned works
for hotels, banks and private homes, he likes to work without the dictates of art consultants and interior designers. He wants to express his own feelings in his creations; he has also moved away from his training in photo-realistic paintings. His current works are mainly abstract and semi-abstract. With an idea in his head, the painting emerges as he works on it without knowing the exact outcome. Laura and Nico seem to resonate with him, Wong said, because they pick out the paintings that he himself likes. Also, unlike many local art buyers, Wong did not have to explain much about his paintings to Laura and Nico. Wong is aware of the heteroglossia or conflict of contexts if he has to sell his works himself; he maintains his aesthetic aura by letting Tree represent him in the commercial field.

By marginalising the customer in Laura and Nico, the voice of friendship is articulated by Wong. In our conversation, the encounter with Laura and Nico was framed as establishing friendship. Wong said that he enjoyed talking to them, discussing art and ideas in his works. It was not important that they bought a painting. Wong said that Karen is keen to push for a sale during the visit and that created some awkwardness for him. On the other hand, Wong admittedly knew that Laura and Nico were ready to buy.

Tree and Wong have a good relationship. Wong appreciates Tree’s support although the gallery is making money through him. The gallery is professional and is able to do the marketing and documentation of his works. Marketing and administrative skills, as Wong admitted, are lacking in him.

Discussion

The case presented above highlights a number of emotionally-laden social processes in art buying and selling. The artist and the art buyer straddle different social arenas as they engage in art appreciation and transact commercially. I will highlight two dialogical arenas in the discussion.

The Authentic-Staged Line

In contrast to commercial art galleries, visiting artist studios offers behind the scene insights into artists. Talking to the artists, seeing how they work and knowing artists’ views will add different dimensions to understanding particular art works. Laura and Nico admitted that they do feel more compelled to buy when they visit artists in their studios. Artists know that persons visiting their studios are potential customers. But as the case shows, the social interaction between artists and art buyers can be uneasy and the outcomes uncertain. Nico recalled his visits:

We have a very nice time at Tan’s studio. You also feel that you actually have to buy something. […] But it was unclear in Tan’s studio what was for sale and what was not for sale. Interesting that the pieces we are interested in, Tan wants to keep them. So there is something special in those pieces.
Then we went to Tree and subsequently Wong’s home. It was a completely different experience, in the sense that Wong’s [home] gallery is completely separated from his studio. It was nicely maintained with the décor. He was more professional [even in his own private working space]. He made a clear distinction between what is for sale and what is not. We got a present from him, something made of clay, even though we didn’t buy anything [then]. And we have an open and nice discussion.

Karen is an amazing person. She has a [sincere] naivety in selling because you would not get the idea that you are pushed by her or she is telling things which are not true. [...] She lets the buyers take their time to look at the art and she tries to figure out what the buyer wants.

Laura and Nico, I observed, felt uncomfortable and ambivalent when they see the artists’ workspaces as disorganised or works stored improperly. They were dismayed by the destruction of some of Chng’s works by termites, one of which they had wanted to acquire. In Wong’s case, Tree have helped him document and pack his works; that gave a good impression to Laura and Nico. These reactions revealed an expectation by Laura and Nico that art be revered from its inception, and not only upon its launch. The professional standards of a commercial gallery in its careful handling and showcasing of art, for which Laura and Nico have high regard, arguably conditions such a line of thinking. The staged gallery standards seeped into the disorderly reality of an artist studio, giving rise to mixed feelings. They nevertheless avoid being rude during the visits; they did not criticise the artists during their visits. They behave appropriately in the studios, by showing respect and appreciation of the art works, exchanging views on art, asking questions about the artists and not evaluating the art works through monetary terms.

Catering to the desires of visitors to know them better and yet to present themselves in a good light is a challenge for artists. Negative judgements may be made if artists reveal all aspects of their practice. But if they were to tidy up their spaces and selectively reveal positive aspects of themselves, visitors to their studios would have a false impression. Essentially, Laura and Nico’s experiences are layered. They crave and enjoy having the veil over the creative process lifted, but they cannot help but evaluate what they are allowed to see in accordance with their own value systems.

The quest for the authentic experience by visiting artist studios, but with a desire to see artists practicing art in an organized and staged manner allude to the heteroglossic clash of the unkept artist studio and the primed up art gallery; the art studio is a private work space and should not be staged and the commercial art gallery is a publicly staged space to entice art collectors. These conflicting demands inadvertently come together when art buyers want to visit art studios while inherently expecting art gallery practices.

**The Art-Business Crossing**

Many artists and art collectors believe artists should be concerned primarily with their creative production. Their art works should not be dictated by commercial
potential as profit-driven art is often looked upon dimly by many, though there are also those who would challenge this view. Regardless, Tan, Chng and Wong all try to separate the process of creating art from selling art. Mingling these activities closely would be seen as a commercialisation of art and unacceptable to many artists. Laura and Nico think so too. From my observations of Laura and Nico, they were always first to cross into the business arena with the artists. They initiated the process by asking if works are for sale before inquiring for the prices.

As this occurs, the parties inhabit the dual contexts of art and business simultaneously. This heteroglossic situation results in a quandary. Tan, as described above, was visibly uneasy about selling his works directly to Laura and Nico, feeling that it risked compromising his integrity as an artist. Laura and Nico, in turn, did not want to press him into making a sale. When faced with this awkward situation, Tan attempted to recalibrate the social dynamic: he emphasised those qualities he saw in Laura and Nico – taste and cordiality – that appeal to his value system. In so doing, he indicated that they were people he could bond with. Friending them would assuage his unease and make him more amenable to selling to them; any such transaction would then honour his policy of only selling directly to buyers who he considered friends. Subsequently, Nico had several friendly meetings with Tan over the weeks and trust and understanding was built. Nico eventually managed to buy a work from Tan, a piece that Nico did not notice on the first visit. And out of goodwill and friendship, Tan gave Nico an additional, “incomplete” piece. Acquiring these works from Tan was protracted.

Chng, in contrast, took the unambiguous step of making a formal offer to Laura and Nico through an email, stating the “market prices” and the “discounted prices” of her works. It was considered too expensive by Nico and a deal did not take place. They did not bargain or negotiate the prices face-to-face. Further, Chng rescinded the original agreement for the A/P. The episode was uncomfortable for the artist and the art buyers. They did not know how to continue their communication with each other; Laura and Nico wondered how Chng viewed them, and vice versa. The awkward dynamic of the art-business crossing remained unchanged. But in March 2010, Laura visited Chng again, partly on my initiative. Laura wanted to acquire a print for Nico’s birthday. The visit ended with Chng giving Nico a print of Laura’s choice. Goodwill was fostered, but no commercial transaction took place.

From Laura and Nico’s perspective, their acquisition from Wong was the least complicated. The commercial exchange was unambiguous and they did not worry about how to proceed in acquiring the work. The deal was settled through Karen and Tree. The meeting with Wong was polite and friendly, without the artist having to mention any prices. Wong discussed art, his works and his background, essentially establishing a friendly relationship with Laura and Nico. The commercial transaction, made through Karen, was clean and clear cut. Karen’s relationship with Laura and Nico was basically a commercial one and Wong’s relation-
ship with Laura and Nico stayed within the art and aesthetic arena. Wong did not have to cross into the commercial sphere directly and personally.

These three contrasting art-buying experiences highlight the carnivalesque outcomes of heteroglossia or multiple social arenas. In straddling between the aesthetic and commercial spheres, Tan and Chng invoked the voices of the market and the gallery to justify their prices. They were also uncomfortable when talking prices with Laura and Nico. As for Wong, Karen was Wong’s commercial arm. The result for Laura and Nico was that the transaction with Wong and Karen was smooth and uncomplicated. That was not the case with Tan and Chng.

**Conclusions**

Art world research has shown that the value of a work of art is not inherent in the work itself. There are stakeholders that maintain prices and define tastes. At the start of this article, I briefly discussed a few mediating roles of commercial art galleries and dealers in the art world. They also add costs to artists and art buyers. Some artists and art buyers do appropriate the functions of the art mediators but as the case presented in this article shows, social ambiguities and emotional ambivalence mar the microscopic interaction between them. When cast alongside the established norms of how artists and art buyers should behave, and what to expect, these ambiguities and ambivalence become constraining factors in encouraging artists and art buyers to trade with each other, bypassing art galleries and dealers. Heteroglossia highlights the clashes of multiple contrasting social contexts when artists and art buyers trade. This article concludes with two points.

One, many art buyers appreciate art works by learning more about the background of and even having personal experiences with the artist. They desire the authentic encounters with artists by going behind the scenes but as the experiences of Laura and Nico demonstrate the visits to artist studios may shatter the professional image of artists. Artists may be perceived as unprofessional if they work in a less organized manner, so it is risky for them to allow visitors into messy work studios. Despite their desires, visitors may not hold consistent views and may not appreciate the work circumstances of individual artists. Art buyers like Laura and Nico also carry with them preconceptions of a professional artist and inevitably impose these expectations when they go behind the scenes. As a result, their experiences are bittersweet. They are ambivalent; they adore certain artists and their works, but at the same time they are dismayed by their chaotic art practice. In contrast, commercial art galleries shield the grubbiness of art practice from the public.

Two, artists and art buyers may have similar understanding of what art is and share common interest in art trading but crossing from the aesthetics to the commercial in the heteroglossic situation can be clumsy and often generates discomfort for all parties. To many, artists who are overtly and primarily concerned with
the commercial value of their creations often draw criticism because they have compromised the ideal of pure artistic expression. So, while artists do sell their works directly, they should not appear too eager. A compromise, as shown in Laura and Nico’s experience, is for the artist and the art buyer to fraternise and build trust; when there is goodwill and friendship parties need not bargain, and gifts and discounts may even be offered. To Laura and Nico, Chng may have crossed too aggressively into the art business sphere with the email but meeting after nearly two years later, the gesture by Chng to give Nico a birthday gift generated a level of goodwill. Karen, as a sales executive in a gallery, explicitly sells art; there is no ambiguity. At the end of the day, it was easier for the Dutch couple to relate to Wong. The protracted and uncomfortable encounters of buying art directly from artists make such forms of acquisition cumbersome. It is easier to buy art from the commercial art galleries.

Can-Seng Ooi (www.ooi.dk) is an Associate Professor at Copenhagen Business School. His research interests include comparative art worlds, place branding, cultural tourism and cross-cultural management. He leads the research stream on Place Branding, Art and Culture in the multi-disciplinary research project Creative Encounters, a project supported by the Danish Strategic Research Council. This study is part of the project. E-mail: ooi@cbs.dk

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Bed, Breakfast and Friendship: Intimacy and Distance in Small-Scale Hospitality Businesses

By Johan Hultman & Erika Andersson Cederholm

Abstract
Through an analysis of the narrative of a Bed and Breakfast (B & B) and art gallery owner, the emergence of intimacy as a commercial value in the hospitality industry is illustrated. This is a formation of economic value where economic rationality as a motive for commercial activity is rejected. Simultaneously though, a different set of market attitudes are performed by hospitality practitioners in the course of everyday interactions with customers, and a tension between emotional, spatial and temporal intimacy and distance is uncovered and discussed. It is concluded that commercial friendship is a more complex issue than what has been acknowledged so far in the hospitality literature. A continued discussion of intimacy in hospitality will therefore affect the cultural understanding of emotions, identity and lifestyle values on the one hand, and business strategy, value creation and markets on the other.

Keywords: Hospitality, intimacy, distance, performativity, boundary work, lifestyle entrepreneurs
Introduction: A Hospitality Paradox

In service economies, the relationship between economic and social exchange is often close. Sometimes there is no distinct boundary between them. Service interactions are transformed into experience products and a form of commercial friendship might emerge (cf. Price & Arnould 1999; Lashley & Morrison 2003). Although this kind of friendship has been regarded in the literature as a specific type of instrumental marketing relationship it has several characteristics in common with other forms of friendship, notably affection, intimacy, social support, loyalty and reciprocal gift giving (Price & Arnould 1999: 50). The term commercial friendship implies that spatial and temporal boundaries between private/public and non-commercial/commercial have become subjects for negotiation in certain commercial service contexts (see Sennett 1993; Seligman 1998; Hochschild 2003). Bed and Breakfast (B & B) businesses in rural tourism – a business sector identified in the literature as a significant part of the hospitality industry (Lee et al. 2003) – highlight how a growing service economy reorders these boundaries. The B & B industry typically features small firms that sometimes combine the basic service of accommodation with added-value experience offerings such as horse-riding, nature experiences, stone-oven baking, painting courses and similar activities. Many of the operators of these businesses can be called lifestyle entrepreneurs, striving for a correspondence between their own lifestyle values and those of their guests (Ateljevic & Doorne 2000; Andersson Cederholm & Hultman 2010). When the correspondence between host and guest lifestyle values is the basis for the commercial enterprise, economic activity becomes situated in the intersection between intimate and commercial life spheres.

Earlier research on lifestyle entrepreneurship in rural hospitality has shown how qualities such as more family time and the attraction of specific localities are crucial motivating factors (Shaw & Williams 1987; Ateljevic & Doorne 2000; Getz & Carlsen 2000; Andersson et al. 2002; Getz et al. 2004). Lynch (1998:332–333) reports that emotional motives such as “meet interesting people”, “like to cook for people” and “makes me [the host] feel good” are generally rated as more important by B & B hosts than economic motives. This indicates a need to contextualise small-scale hospitality businesses in relation to the development of a critical understanding of the hospitality industry (cf. Lugosi et al. 2009). This is a dynamic empirical field and the boundaries and characteristics of a critical hospitality research agenda are simultaneously contested and articulated (Ottenbacher et al. 2009). From a cultural analysis perspective, small-scale rural hospitality businesses are interesting in two ways. First, these businesses are framed by a wider social and cultural context articulated through rhetoric markers such as “the good rural life” and “a living countryside”, indicating values of social embeddedness and sustainability.¹ Quality of life and locality are thus important aspects of lifestyle entrepreneurship (Marcketti et al. 2006) and business success is typically defined
in ways that differ from growth-oriented economic measurements (Reijonen 2008). Practices associated with economic rationality – such as strategic work to gain competitive advantages – are often explicitly rejected (cf. Ateljevic & Doorne 2000; Di Domenico 2005; Helgadóttir & Sigurdardóttir 2008).

Secondly, however, the rejection of economic rationality carries within itself a new set of attitudes towards the market. In the formation of a hospitality discourse this has consequences for how hospitality can be conceptualised both as a phenomenon and as an empirical field of critical research. At the same time as the business rationale expressed by lifestyle entrepreneurs is frequently explained in explicit contrast to that of large-scale firms, small-scale hospitality businesses are driven by values that are increasingly becoming promoted as business ideals for large hospitality firms. As an example of this, a recent issue of the globally distributed lifestyle magazine Monocle was dedicated to the “Heroes of hospitality”. Here the heroes – “the players reshaping the travel sector” (Monocle 2010, cited from front cover) – were asked to pinpoint what was missing from modern hotels and what were going to be strategically important factors in the future. A majority of these informants answered that qualities such as “earthiness”, “authenticity”, “human feel”, “the human touch” and “personality” were missing. Important issues for the future of hospitality businesses, consequently, were expressed as becoming “smaller, simpler, always cosy”, that hotels should be more inviting towards locals to use its lobbies, bars and restaurants, that they should become “more focused on emotional values”, that hotels must become explicitly integrated and central to their local environments and communities, and that they should move towards “old-fashioned inn-keeping” (Monocle 2010). In the same issue, the author Alain de Botton annihilated any distinction between the economic and the social by stating that “A good hotel is an embodiment of the act of love: love understood as a commitment to the wholehearted care of another human being”, and that few hotels “are able to promote proper sociability” (Monocle 2010: 105). Consequently, the formation of a hospitality discourse contains a paradox. Small-scale businesses traditionally understood as being driven by emotional rather than economic motives are becoming the ideological and perhaps even strategic role model for a rapidly expanding and hyper-commercial industry.

**Commercial Homes and Commercial Friendship**

In rural lifestyle entrepreneurship where traditional conceptualisations of economic growth and the market are dismissed, lifestyle values are marketed as commercial propositions aimed at predominantly urban consumers. Personal values are translated into economic values. The physical site of business for these entrepreneurs is often the home (see Di Domenico & Lynch 2007). The home of the host is transformed into a commercial home (Lynch & MacWhannell 2000; Lynch et al. 2009), and this commercial home becomes the site where boundaries between personal and commercial values are launched into a process of negotiation. Hosts
are not merely providing accommodation, activities and service in the traditional sense, but also the set-up for guests to socialise with each other and with their hosts. In some cases, socialising is developed into specific business concepts offering guests recreational and self-developing social interactions as part of the commercial product. This is the setting where we will apply the concept of commercial friendship.

Commercial friendship is a term used by Lashley & Morrison (2003) to describe sociable relations between hospitality producers and guests. Such relations are seen as a result of explicit strategic considerations on part of the producer in an instrumental manner. In this way, normative service marketing literature argues that commercial friendship is of great strategic importance (e.g. Grönroos 2008). But in light of the motivations and negotiating attitudes towards economic growth expressed by lifestyle entrepreneurs, such an understanding is not enough to make sense of the formation of a hospitality discourse. So in addition to its strategic implications, we propose to look at the concept of commercial friendship from another perspective. We will argue that it emerges from the negotiations of boundaries between personal and commercial values in real-time social encounters between hosts and guests, rather than preceding the host/guest relation. It follows that strategy in lifestyle contexts will not imply the same thing as strategy in instrumental business contexts. To date, there is a lack of empirical research discussing how emotion is understood and transformed – in situated social interactions – into values possible to calculate on a market (but see Callon & Muniesa 2005), and the whole issue of emotions and the political and economic importance of emotions is an underdeveloped research focus. Anderson and Smith (2001: 7) notes that: “emotional relations tend to be regarded as something apart from the economic and/or as something that is essentially private, and does not substantially infuse the public/policy sphere”. The formation of a hospitality discourse and the emergence of discursive practices of hospitality in commercial settings makes it necessary to re-think boundaries between the “economic”, the “political” and the “emotional”. To accomplish this, we first turn to the economic sociology of Georg Simmel. Then we draw upon recent discussions about the temporality and spatiality of emotion, specifically as manifested in the dynamics between hosts and guests.

**Intimacy and Distance**

This analysis of hospitality practices deals with the social and normative construction of what are commonly presumed to be subjective experience values, and how these are constructed in an interactive process between hosts, guests and society (Granovetter 1985; Zafirovski 2000; Steiner 2009). Tools for the analysis of value and value creation as social processes, and the contextualisation of value creation, are offered in Georg Simmel’s *The Philosophy of Money* (1900/2004). This classic in economic sociology showed how the construction of economic and non-
economic values is a relational process. From this follows that values can be understood as being performed in host/guest interactions. This is contrary to dominant service marketing theory where values are seen as preceding and thus scripting host/guest interaction. Instead we understand performativity as the continuous becoming-in-action of values and norms (see Edensor 2001; Perkins & Thorns 2001; Bærenholt et al. 2004). The issue of value and values is a tricky one. We are not concerned with the construction of taxonomies of values as such, but it is necessary to categorise values in some conceptual manner since translations between different kinds of values are central to the analysis. To Simmel, economic value is one value category among others, for example aesthetic, moral and cultural values (Simmel 1900/2004; Cantó Milà 2005). Economic value is the category most objectified, manifested in practices of monetary exchange. It follows that the notion of distance is central in Simmel’s analysis and a crucial aspect of value realisation. When distance is introduced between a subject and an object, desire emerges and later develops into the concept of value. Distance places the object in relation to other objects (Simmel 1900/2004: 59).

By making distance a central part of the analysis two issues need to be addressed: time-space and emotion. A sociological understanding of distance usually means social or even abstract aspects rather than tempo-spatial ones. But by conceiving of hospitality in a way that makes boundaries between commercial and non-commercial spheres a matter of negotiation, the distinction between the social and the tempo-spatial begins to break down. It then becomes appropriate to find a way to bring social and time-space dimensions together, and here we find support in the field of emotional geography. Distance and intimacy, as well as in-betweenness, are central aspects of geographies of emotion. In the hospitality industry, social relations are arguably a central product dimension and not merely vehicles for product deliverance. Service encounters, in common with the concerns of emotional geography, are all about “the emotions that people feel for each other and, more extensively, for places, for landscapes, for objects in landscapes and in specific situations.” (Pile 2010: 15). Commercial friendship in the context of a commercial home can then be explained as an encounter between a person and another person or people; or in the encounter between a person and their environment, whether through travelling, dwelling, reading, ageing, consuming, cowering or whatever…this space between…is easiest to ally with a politics of caring, and the production of caring…environments. (Pile 2010: 15).

Thus, in combination with intimacy and distance in economic sociology, the in-between time-space relating hosts to guests as defined in emotional geography serves to further frame the formation of a hospitality discourse and markets of sociability.
**Boundary Work**

To see how distance and intimacy are performed in a situated, commercial context we use the concept of boundary work (see Gieryn 1983; Nippert-Eng 1996; Allen 2001; Åkerström 2002; Goode & Greatbatch 2005; Zelizer 2005). This refers to ordering practices, which create, maintain, and recreate cultural and/or cognitive categories, in our case categories related to time-space, social relations, emotions and values. We focus on the borders between what are considered economic and non-economic spheres – more specifically borders between personal values on the one hand and collective values possible to transform into commercial values on the other, but also borders between host and guest time-spaces – and illustrate how these are performed in lifestyle entrepreneurship. In this regard, our analysis ties into the concept of emotional labour as discussed by Ek and Ooi in the introduction of this special theme issue of *Culture Unbound*. Emotional labour was introduced by Hochschild (1983, 2003), who studied emotional work in service labour where the service provider – often a woman – is expected to evoke positive emotional responses in the customer. The concept is used in studies of service interactions with a clear asymmetrical power relationship with no or little mutual emotional response, where the service provider gives (or sells), and the customer takes (or consumes).

Emotional labour could under certain assumptions be used to describe the everyday business activities of a B & B host, but at the same time it should be acknowledged that lifestyle hospitality is embedded in a different context compared to earlier analyses of emotional labour. The relationship between hosts and guests in the small-scale tourism and hospitality industry features emotions such as joy, disappointment and irritation. For management-driven emotional labour, surplus value is created but it does not necessarily, or even at all, benefit the emotional labourer (Constanti & Gibbs 2005). The case of small-scale tourism and hospitality firms, where the business is built upon lifestyle motifs, is different. Lifestyle businesses do not display the same asymmetrical relationship between provider and guest, as for instance the relationship between air-stewardess and the passengers (Hochschild 1983), and the expectations on professional roles are not scripted from the same kind of management perspective (see also Bærenholdt & Jensen 2009). For the lifestyle entrepreneur, emotions evoked by interactions with customers coincide with the commodification of personal lifestyle values, since togetherness and in-betweenness are not only social values but also commercial ones. The surplus value created then becomes difficult to separate from other kinds of values, economic or otherwise. Emotional performativity among lifestyle entrepreneurs is in other words embedded in different tempo-spatial and social contexts compared to managerial hospitality. Furthermore, the emotional work performed by lifestyle entrepreneurs is commonly discussed in relation to a cultural and economic context where rurality connotes “the good life” through the potential for social embeddedness and environmental stewardship, which are values with great
power of attraction on a tourism market. One important condition underpinning
lifestyle-based economic activities is a social discourse encouraging entrepreneur-
ship and the development of small enterprises (Berglund 2007), particularly in
rural areas (the Association of Swedish Farmers 2009). The societal support for
starting a business may encourage new modes and ideals of self-development and
identity construction by making a living through emotional work that differs in
important respects from asymmetrical emotional labour. This development con-
btributes to the norms and ideals of lifestyle entrepreneurship, and legitimises the
emergence of specific values that are attractive in the hospitality industry.

The Performativity of Distance and Intimacy

We will proceed to examine everyday practices and the business narratives of
lifestyle entrepreneurship by an analysis of how personal and commercial values
are socially constructed through emotional performativity. We will visit the com-
mercial home of a lifestyle entrepreneur – Lisa – and focus upon how practices
characterised by specific emotional qualities are performed (the empirical material
has also been used in Andersson Cederholm & Hultman 2010).

The Empirical Study

Lisa runs a B & B combined with an art gallery by the shore of a lake, at the out-
skirts of a middle-sized town in Southern Sweden. Lisa is in her fifties with
grown-up children and grandchildren. She is divorced since some years back and
lives by herself in a small and picturesque cottage. We have chosen Lisa as a case
study because her narrative and her business are ideal-typical – in the Weberian
meaning of the term – of a lifestyle entrepreneur in relation to approximately 20
other informants in rural tourism and hospitality businesses that we have con-
ducted open-ended interviews with during 2006-2008. These interviews were part
of a research project with the aim to unpack and analyse practices and processes
where formerly non-economic natural and cultural values were transformed into
commercial attractions. In this way, lifestyle entrepreneurship can be seen as one
form of enactment of how tourism has gained strength as a force of rural econom-
ic, social and spatial restructuring. For our analysis, this is important in the sense
that it illustrates how hospitality practices order space and social relations – not
only in the micro-scale but also in wider societal contexts. Lifestyle entrepreneurs,
as an integral part of tourism, are “world-makers” (Hollinshead 2008, 2009) and
this in turn is important for an understanding of the meaning of emotional perfor-
mativity in the hospitality industry.

The interviews have been conducted in an “active” manner in the sense that we
have paid attention to how respondents give answers and present their narratives,
not only to what they say (Holstein & Gubrium 1997). In Lisa’s case, she gives
primacy to values and qualities such as the small scale, close contact and commu-
communication with guests, the emotional importance of the specific locality, intimate knowledge of surrounding areas, and a focus on issues of care-taking. During the interview with Lisa, she led us around her home, garden and atelier, discussed artefacts – such as objects, environments or vistas – of particular importance for her business and several times she related particular situations and instances to specific places.

**Drawing Boundaries and Generating Intimacy**

Even though the hospitality performed in Lisa’s business is characterised by homeliness, it is still different from the practices of a private home. According to Lisa, warmth and spontaneity should appear to customers as surprises. This is illustrated through anecdotes on how Lisa finds a sofa for the unexpected guest, or lets the guest sleep in her own bed while she herself has to find a bed in the basement. She speaks of warmth and instant familiarity as specific experience values, values that are socially constructed as experiences worth having. This value construction is made possible by a positioning of Lisa’s performativity in explicit contrast to a rational and standardised service context common in managerial hospitality firms. Hereby, the complex nature of the commercial home providing intimacy as an experience value becomes evident in how host/guest interactions not only invoke trust, but insecurity and ambivalence as well. One important means of managing this dynamic is through stories of the norm breakers. In Lisa’s narrative, two types of deviants appear, representing opposed expectations of the commercial home: those that expect more efficient and standardised services, and those who treat the place too much like their own home. As a way of avoiding the former, Lisa prefers to have personal contact with potential guests before they book rooms. She can then get a feeling for if they are the “wrong” kind of customers and discourage them to come. She avoids the booking system Citybreak™ administered by the local tourist office. Here, guests can book themselves into registered accommodations on a web page. One important reason for not signing up with this system is the lack of first-hand personal contact and thus the lost opportunity to vet visitors. At the other end of the deviant spectrum are guests treating her place too much as their own home. She tells us about the Austrian young men who undressed in the kitchen, the guests who ate grandmother’s cake when they failed to realise that Lisa had set the table for her own private family party, or the boys who without announcing brought girls to their rooms, causing embarrassment at breakfast. These examples become amusing anecdotes and show how situations are transformed from potentially threatening to a crucial aspect of the in-betweenness of host and guest through Lisa’s performance of sociability: “I sometimes become a mother to my guests”. Stories of deviance become a mediator in the boundary work to negotiate and perform private and public time-space.

Distance is also introduced by the temporal and spatial limitations of the commercial home. The relations that unfold between host and guest are framed in a
specific time-space, similar to what Price & Arnould (1999: 12) in their analysis of commercial friendships between hairstylists and their clients, describe as compartmentalised. Their study showed how friendship relations among service provider and client may emerge, but are often limited to the service context. Even though the client and the service provider may develop an intimate relationship of mutual trust and self-disclosure within the servicescape framework, meetings outside this time-space context may be out of the question. Lisa sometimes gets invitations from guests to come and visit them in their homes. She tells us that she might consider visits to her guests, but while saying this she comments with a smile of self-reflexion “…but then they may not recognise me”. The existence of this dynamic between intimacy and distance is thus temporally and spatially asymmetrical – it would not appear in the home of the guests. This points towards the overlap between the social and temporal dimensions necessary to evoke distance, intimacy and in-betweenness in commercial hospitality, but in particular the spatial aspect is highlighted.

**Producer Experiences**

When we ask Lisa what her guests appreciate most, she immediately mentions the locality, the beautiful surroundings, the local attractions found in tourist brochures and the excellent conditions for walks and bicycle tours. It is the kind of attraction categories found in marketing material, standardised and clearly framed as values for the tourist. However, except from this direct question and quick, seemingly ready-made, answer, Lisa’s story is full of descriptions of more intangible values, such as the atmosphere, the spontaneous, the personal and the intimate. These values are simultaneously described as values for herself and values for guests. While talking about these values, Lisa juxtaposes the intimate B & B with the scripted and efficient service of a Hilton hotel where the guest knows what to expect, but which lacks the personal touch. Lisa emphasises the personal and the intimate as a value her commercial friends search for. Thus, she recognises its collective and social importance, although she does not frame intimacy as a typical tourist value.

A similar example is the importance of storytelling, where Lisa enjoys telling her guests the stories of her family heritage, how the family industry was founded 300 years ago, how her grandfather built the cottage, and about the furniture and other characteristics of her home. In this way – and in this time-space – personal values become tourist values. She recognises the potential of the commercial value of storytelling, since she describes it as belonging to her standard repertoire for entertaining her guests:

…then when the weather is bad we use to sit in the atelier, I serve coffee and… I have always a lot of suggestions on what to do in the surroundings… and they enjoy hearing about the house and I always have some funny anecdotes about the house, because that is what I think people appreciate with B&B, because when you stay at a hotel, Best Western or Hilton or whatever, you have a nice cleaned room and every-
thing, but you will not have that contact with the local milieu… many people like it because it is so old fashioned and charming, and I tell them about my family’s history.

- So you are a real local…?
- Yes [laughter] and I take advantage of that a little bit, with the tourists…

While this practice of storytelling has a clear value for guests, it is also related to Lisa’s own collection of experiences. This negotiation of values between boundaries of the subjective and the commercial illustrates value formation as an explicitly social process. It also points to the importance of specific media, or consolidating catalysts, such as generic marketing material and tourist brochures in the social construction of intimacy as a crucial hospitality value.

Lisa’s narrative is structured by a clear dissociation from typical strategic, economic thinking when she explains her motives for running a business. Associated with her B & B is an atelier where she paints, sells art and gives painting courses to guests. She describes how she first realised that she might make a living out of her hobby:

I have always painted because I enjoy it, and then, by coincidence, a relative of mine came for a visit and said “Oh, I want to buy that painting! How much does it cost?” “Cost? How should I know?” “I give you 400.” “400!? It is much too expensive, it is not possible. It must be a lot cheaper! 200…” “No, I give you 400…” and so it continued, and finally it ended at 300. And then I went out to buy a notebook and I started to make a note whenever I sold a painting. So that was fun!

Lisa describes all her activities, not only her painting and the painting courses, as the result of coincidences. In her narrative, they evolve organically with one incident leading to another. This attitude is accompanied with her reluctance to even start a business in the first place. With certain pride she says that someone else was actually responsible for taking the initiative. One of her daughters brought her to the tourist office to discuss the potential of her business. Presently, her other daughter helps her with marketing. Lisa does not acknowledge a self-identity as a business woman: “I am just the same old bohemian artist as before, I just try to make this work as well /…/ I have no claims on running a ‘good business’, I just do it by intuition”. When she tells about her recent engagement in local tourism business networks and meetings, she is delighted: “I have never been to meetings in my entire life, it was so fun”. She also expresses distance towards the institutionalised social obligations that come with professional economic relations: “I just do it [engage herself in networks] as long as it suits my life and schedule”. In this way, she makes the social, emotional and economic coincide in time and space. Lisa rejects the ideals of an instrumental attitude towards the market, but at the same time she embodies a new set of market attitudes through her emotional performativity.
Performing Hospitality

These attitudes and ideals are manifested in everyday activities and encounters with guests. Lisa recounts several anecdotes of how she has to improvise to handle unforeseen situations: “…and then there was this girl, she had been bicycling for three days and she said ‘do you really not have any room for me?’ … ‘OK, then, I say, I will sleep down in the basement’”. She repeatedly stresses the importance of being flexible and creative and having the ability to improvise, but the way she talks about this quality does not make it appear as a necessary dimension of a professional role. Rather, flexibility and the ability to improvise are expressed as her own personal characteristics and part of her general take on life. To improvise and to handle things spontaneously emerge in her narrative as the ideal way of doing and being. But her anecdotes about being flexible are primarily about being hospitable, of providing intimacy. One way in which Lisa illustrates the overlap between the social and the economic is thus how she performs the time-space boundary between order and sudden chaos:

There was this wedding party … a Swedish girl was about to marry a boy from Boston and his whole lovely large American Jewish family would come … and I had made a buffet and served it in the atelier … and they were so pleased … and it rained and it rained, like a tropical rain, and everything went alright until I suddenly saw … I didn’t believe my eyes … how the water started to pour into the room, like a waterfall, there was a blockage in the drainpipe and all the water just poured in … In that same moment I saw in the corner of my other eye how someone had opened the door towards the sea … it was so crowded … and the rain poured in and “sh-t, I have to do something!” So I grabbed some carpets because it was flowing on the floor and I threw towels on the windows and the guests thought that was really funny … and I asked the guests afterwards how everything had been and they said that “Oh, it was such a wonderful party” “but didn’t you notice all the rain coming in…?” “Oh, no, it was so little, it was just fun” [laughter].

The customers were pleased despite the pouring rain and a wet floor, and Lisa’s spontaneous actions would in a scripted management context be interpreted as commercial friendship; as a relationship marketing strategy to have satisfied customers although the product was not what the customers originally expected. But in Lisa’s case, the personal relationship becomes the primary product, despite – or because – the lack of dimensions deemed critical in managerial hospitality: for Lisa entertaining guests is to a great extent about her own emotional satisfaction. So Lisa rejects economic instrumentality by dissociating herself and her performance from the images and discourses of a commercial and strategic service business, and by emphasising the intrinsic values of the relationship with the guests. However, she still recognises the economic value of the by-coincidence attitude, by emphasising how pleased the guests are: parts of the narrative that features chaotic or unforeseen situations and the subsequent need to improvise are followed by testimonials of satisfaction among guests. In her narrative, economic value is equalled with guest satisfaction that in turn is told interwoven with her own emotional satisfaction. This rejection of economic instrumentality – at the
same time as value is created in social interaction – makes sense as a strategic practice if viewed as emerging from the dynamics between distance and intimacy – the in-between space – structuring the emotional performativity of commercial hospitality.

Conclusion: The Complexity of Intimacy and Distance in Hospitality Businesses

Through an empirical example of lifestyle entrepreneurship we have used the narrative of B & B and gallery owner Lisa as our ideal-typical case to illustrate ways in which attitudes towards the market are simultaneously rejected and shaped. Earlier studies of lifestyle entrepreneurs have concluded that market instrumentality is rejected in favour of personal values as motivating factors for doing business. By viewing lifestyle entrepreneurship from a perspective focusing on emotional performativity and the micro-spatiality of hospitality practices, we conclude that attitudes towards the market are not so straightforward. Through a “by coincidence” attitude and dissociation from the role of a typical rational business manager, as well as through the emphasis on intrinsic values concerning relationships with guests, an instrumental market ethos can be rejected within a commercial context. However, the case shows the emotionally rich space in-between host and guest as an experience value emerging and being consolidated in the everyday practices of a commercialised home. This in-between space is constantly performed around key notions such as flexibility, deviance, intimacy and non-standardisation. Hereby, the lifestyle entrepreneur acts as the embodiment of an ideal on a complex market where personal, social, experiential and economic values fuse together. The emergence of new meanings, practices and ideals of a market and how market relations should be performed becomes indexical to the formation of a hospitality discourse that includes, even demands, intimacy as a critical value even in hyper-commercial settings. This paradox goes beyond rhetoric, and the surplus value created by emotional labour must be contextualized in order to be critically assessed. Managerial emotional labour is conditional upon the separation between the social and economic. From a mechanical perspective, the surplus value created here must be kept pure in the sense that it must not escape the economic sphere and overflow into other areas. The emotional labour performed in lifestyle entrepreneurship, on the other hand, is embedded in a context with different time-space conditions.

The commercial home brings forth the potential for a kind of commercial friendship that is difficult to categorise as a relationship marketing strategy. When the social and economic become tempo-spatially concomitant, emotional labour can become emotionally rewarding in a deep sense since this labour in turn rests on lifestyle values and self-identity. There is also a wider societal discourse of small-scale entrepreneurship, rural restructuring and stewardship issues that in
effect encourages the tempo-spatial conditions for commercial homes and commercial friendship development. The celebration of the kind of values apparent in lifestyle businesses in large-scale hyper-commercial businesses is one, probably important, feature of the emerging hospitality discourse. But to put this in a larger picture, just as a neoliberal place market discourse celebrates values such as creativity and tolerance while neglecting issues of equality and ethics, so does the hospitality discourse celebrate values of intimacy and homeliness while reproducing and strengthening inequalities associated with for example gender and migration. In a more analytical sense, intimacy in hyper-commercial settings can hardly be conceived as anything but an instrumental relationship marketing strategy since the crucial aspect of distance – resulting from boundary work in situations where the social and the economic overlap in time and space – is hardly possible to perform outside the commercial home. At the same time, it is difficult to imagine how management-driven hospitality businesses could reach strategic goals associated with small-scale lifestyle entrepreneurship without scripting distance, intimacy and in-betweenness. This analysis has taken one step in unpacking this paradox by illustrating that commercial friendship is a more complex issue than what has been acknowledged so far in the hospitality literature. It seems probable that a continued discussion of the social, temporal and spatial complexity of commercial friendship will have bearings on the cultural understanding of emotions, identity and lifestyle values on the one hand, and business strategy, value creation and markets on the other.

**Johan Hultman** and **Erika Andersson Cederholm** are involved in tourism studies at the Department of Service Management, Lund University, Sweden. They are interested in issues of value creation in relation to sociability, mobility, nature and sustainable development. Hultman and Andersson Cederholm have published several texts on sociability in tourism, tourist and nature interactions and the agency of tourism in rural development. E-mails: johan.hultman@msm.lu.se & erika.andersson_cederholm@msm.lu.se.

**Notes**

1 See for example the Swedish Rural Network (2010) for an institutional framing of this discourse. The network is a government-led public-private partnership whose aim is to facilitate the implementation of the national Rural Development Programme, where the diversification of rural farming businesses towards offering experiences on tourism and hospitality markets is encouraged (see the Government Offices of Sweden 2010).
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Effective Emotions: The Enactment of a Work Ethic in the Swedish Meeting Industry

By Erika Andersson Cederholm

Abstract
The meeting industry – an encompassing term for services related to various kinds of professional meetings, from mega-conventions to the ordinary work meetings – is increasingly consolidated and legitimised as a specific sector in the service industry. New professions such as meeting designers, meeting facilitators and meeting consultants are emerging, promoting new knowledge in this field. By focusing on processes and social interaction, and highlighting emotional dimensions of meetings, these professions pave the way for new modes of conceptualising and practising professional relationships. The intangible, emotional and playful dimensions of social interactions are promoted as effective means to achieve economic goals, thus highlighting a professional ideal that is here called “effective emotions”. The aim of this article is to show how the work ethic promoted by the meeting industry encourages new intersections, and tensions, between the idealisation of the tangible/measurable/rational on the one hand and the intangible/emotional/magical on the other hand, and between working life and intimate spheres. Through a discourse analysis of a Swedish corporate meeting magazine, it is shown how the distinction between work and leisure is dissolved in this specific work culture, and by this, it is discussed how the meeting profession acts as a normative regulator by reinforcing ideal ways of being and interacting with others. Creativity, personal growth, reflexivity and flexibility are enacted as idealised personal assets as well as moral imperatives in the discourse of the meeting profession and through the practices of various meeting techniques, thus reinforcing not merely a professional ethic but cultural ideals of being as a person as well. It is also suggested that this reinforcement may, under certain circumstances, turn into its opposite and undermine the promoted ideals, thus pointing at the importance to pinpoint the dynamic and situated tension between economic rationality and emotional intensity.

Keywords: Work ethic, emotions, meeting industry, discourse
Introduction

The meeting industry in Sweden - an encompassing term for services related to various kinds of professional meetings, from mega-conventions to the ordinary work meetings - is increasingly institutionalised, consolidated and legitimated as a specific and important sector in the service industry. One example is the emergence and growth of international associations such as Meeting Professionals International (MPI), initiated in the US in 1972 and established in Sweden 1994. Furthermore, there are new media covering the specific interests of this industry, such as the Swedish corporate magazine Meetings International, established 2003 and some years later launched on an international market. Simultaneously, as the industry is increasingly consolidated and legitimated as a specific sector of the service industry, and particularly the tourism industry, there is a growing complexity within the sector. One example is the large amount of meeting professions emerging on a new service market, with a growing emphasis on the value of social interactions. Meeting designers, meeting planners, meeting facilitators and meeting consultants are just some examples of new professional roles, promoting new knowledge on how to stage a good and efficient meeting.

In the professionalisation efforts of this “new” meeting industry, professional ideals, norms and practices are highlighted and reinforced. Despite a range of professional roles and types of meetings in the industry, I will use the singular term “the meeting profession” to elucidate the discursive formation of a professional culture embodying a specific work ethic. This professional culture conveys values and recommendations on the instrumental aspects of practices, that is, specific techniques to evoke the ideal meeting, as well as on ways of being and relating in social interaction. There is an emphasis on creativity and reflexivity as personal assets, and authenticity and intimacy feature the idealised social interaction. On the one hand there is a strong concern for economic efficiency through the development of new meeting techniques, on the other hand ideals of playfulness and emotional intensity are highlighted, and the intrinsic value of social interaction is idealised. Hence, a distinction between the rational/cognitive and the emotional is reinforced, simultaneously as these rationales are being intertwined in the culture of the meeting profession.

The aim of this article is to show how the work ethic promoted by the meeting industry encourages new intersections, and tensions, between professional and personal roles, working life and intimate spheres. By introducing the concept “effective emotions” I will highlight how ideals of economic rationality and emotionality are intertwined in a knowledge-intensive service industry and how discursive practices in these types of professions may reinforce certain ways of being in professional as well as personal relationships. Whilst the meeting industry is paving the ground for new service markets, there are not merely new professions arising, but conceptualisations and ways of thinking about and practising services and
professional encounters emerge that reinforce ways of being and relating to others. The meeting profession is thus an agent of change, a catalyst in an increasingly significant service economy. The meeting profession embodies both change and stability and highlights cultural values, social norms and work ethics not merely in a growing meeting industry, but in a cultural economy where the intersection between commercial and professionalised services on the one hand, and the non-commercial and non-professionalised on the other, is vividly negotiated and complex (du Gay & Pryke 2002). In the following section, I will set the frame for my analysis by discussing an emerging work ethic and new capitalist “spirit” (Boltanski & Chiapello 2005) in Western societies that emphasises creativity, flexibility and self-development. I have outlined two dimensions that I suggest play a crucial role in this development: the commodification of social relationships and the articulated increased significance of emotions at work. These two dimensions have a general significance in Western societies today, but are highlighted in certain industries and management ideologies, such as the meeting profession.

The Emergence of a Work Ethic of Self-Development

Commodification of Social Relationships

In the emerging Swedish meeting profession, there is a growing focus on social interactions, not merely as by-products or means to an end in the service encounter, but as a product of its own. In the discursive formation of the meeting profession, the importance of social interaction is emphasised and juxtaposed to the “old” authoritarian one-way communication between meeting participants, as in the following statement by the chief editor in Meetings International, an influential Swedish corporate meeting magazine:

Now the time has finally come for dialogue and interaction and we have once and for all put an end to meetings as a medium for one-way communication. Now we have to get used to lots of new specialists and competencies to be able to engage people with our message – most welcome interaction-designers, stylists, anthropologists and scenographers! (Meetings International 2008, no. 28: 63, my translation)

The focus on social interactions, framed as an objective with a value of its own, in contrast with a previous, presumed ignorance concerning the interactive dimension of meetings, highlights the intrinsic value of social interaction. In this sense, social interaction as it is articulated in the meeting profession has similarities with the notion of sociability, a concept coined by the sociologist Georg Simmel (1949). Sociability refers to the intrinsic value of social interaction or, more specifically, the play-form of sociality. Although the world of the meeting business, emphasising values such as efficiency and cost-effectiveness, seems quite remote from the intrinsic values of Simmel’s sociability, it highlights a tension between the autotelic dimension of playfulness and the instrumental efficiency of the in-
The meeting profession enacts ideals of reflection and egalitarian and non-authoritarian communication, which, in line with Boltanski and Chiapello’s (2005) study of the changes of the capitalist culture at the end of the 20th century, is typical of the anti-hierarchical ethos highlighted in management discourses of the 1990s. In order to reach this ideal, the meeting industry emphasises the importance to stimulate all senses in order to create a sense of here and now. Particularly in the event-oriented type of meetings, the context is explicitly framed as experience-oriented and playful, illustrated in the following quote from *Meetings International*:

This time the sales manager Hans-Åke Antoniussion chose a different type of context for the meeting. During three days, 32 colleagues were all gathering on a camping ground in Vaxholm outside Stockholm. Dressed in jogging-suits. Staying in caravans. On Svensson Svensson’s camping ground (Emdén, *Meetings International* 2006, no. 15: 40, my translation).

The sales manager continues: “- It makes a great difference when everybody has the same clothes. We become equals. You mix the group but everybody still look the same. It is like being in a sauna.” (ibid., my translation). Although most corporate meetings are not framed in this obviously playful context, the focus on interactivity and process in the meeting context is assumed to encourage an egalitarian social structure and evoke reflexivity. The choreographed meeting thus embodies a ritualised playful aspect, like a liminoid out-of-the-ordinary situation (Turner 1969, 1978). The play-form of sociality is thus visible in this type of meeting. However, although the meeting itself may have the autotelic aspects significant of the play, the overall objective of the meeting industry is to satisfy the customer’s seemingly rational motives, implying more cost-effective and efficient meetings.

This commodified sociability, highlighted by the professional culture of the Swedish meeting industry, is one example of a more widespread phenomenon in Western societies where relationships and interactions are increasingly commodified and ascribed a value in themselves (Wittel 2001; Rojek 2010). In a society where the service industry is becoming increasingly important, social competencies and “people skills” are not only seen as a personal bonus, but also necessary in order to function as a professional. This is in line with what Andreas Wittel (2001) calls a “network sociality”, where the art of socialising, particularly in the in-between spaces of work and leisure such as networking at conferences, dinner parties and at the pub, is perceived as crucial for success in both work and non-work contexts. Since these skills are presumed to be tacit and highly personal, it is the sphere of play and leisure that primarily provide the basis for this type of learning. Consequently, leisure-oriented activities are seen as an investment in personal development where we can develop social and emotional competence in order to enhance work performances (Heelas 2002; McRobbie 2002; Rojek 2010).

Although far from all meetings advocated by the Swedish meeting profession are framed in such a leisure-oriented and playful manner as the teambuilding ac-
tivities referred to above, it is a professional culture that emphasises both emotional and cognitive/rational skills. Through the concept “effective emotions” I will highlight the aforementioned tendencies and discuss how professional ideals in the cultural economy of services are intertwined with the ideals of personal development. More specifically, I will analyse how a professional discourse blurs the boundaries between work and leisure, between the market and the personal life sphere, and thus reinforces professional and cultural ideals.

**Emotions at Work**

Previous studies on the intersection between the personal sphere and the market have developed into different lines of thought. One is the work on emotional labour, a concept discussed by Airlie Hochschild (1983), indicating the emotional work involved in service work to create satisfied customers (Hochschild 1983; Anderson 1993; Ashforth & Humphrey 1993). Additionally, Hochschild (2003) discusses a general tendency in late modern societies of blurred distinctions between commercial spheres and intimate personal life through the commodification of services surrounding households and intimate life. A similar line of thought is Vivianna Zelizer’s studies on the role of money in intimate relationships (1994, 2005), where social negotiations that are creating distinctions between the commercial and non-commercial life sphere are in focus. By focussing on the monetary value that emerges in the non-commercial life sphere, such as the cost of non-paid service work, the norms related to the boundary between intimate life and the market are brought into light (Zelizer 2005). Another similar, albeit slightly different, distinction that has been discussed and critically analysed is the one between work and leisure. The pertinence of such a distinction in the capitalist culture of today, has been called into question since we all seem to engage in a “labour of leisure” (Rojek 2010) where the notion of “being creative” encompasses both work and leisure and is dominated by a logic of economic rationality (Banks 2009). This implies, for instance, that the instrumental focus on self-development and emotional competence in our so-called “free time”, corresponds with a similar preoccupation during our working hours (see also Wittel 2001).

The discussion of the distinction between work and leisure calls forth the notion of work ethic, that is, the values and cultural meanings of work. Organisational studies on emotional labour in creative work have pointed at a dominating work ethic where the notion of flexibility connotes values of freedom and lack of rigidity, and the line between work and leisure is thus transgressed. However, the flip side of the coin is the precariousness of such “free” working conditions, which may reinforce hegemonic social structures (Ross 2003 & 2008; Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2008). For example, the notion of “free choice” when it comes to working long hours in knowledge-intensive work that is often perceived as personally rewarding, is not only an issue of individual choice, but normatively embedded and gendered in the organizational culture (Grugulis et al. 2000; Lewis 2003). The
historical conditions and social consequences of a work ethic promoting flexibility has been thoroughly analysed by Richard Sennett (1999), who argues that a neoliberal political and economic culture that expresses contempt for routinized work and praises creativity, individual self-determination and short-term job-commitments, will undermine long-term commitments regarding personal relationships. The result, according to Sennett, is a “corrosion of character” since our possibilities for building long-term personal trust is undermined.

Although the development foreseen by Sennett may not be equally pertinent to the entire work-force in a society, the ideals of flexibility, creativity and self-determination are, however, relatively wide-spread and accepted in Western culture. That is, if we see these ideals as dimensions of a “labour of leisure” in Rojek’s sense (2010), implying that we engage in self-management and self-development in order to lead a creative, self-determinant life, beyond routinisation and boredom (see also Goldschmidt Salamon 2005). One example of this is how the tradition of preparing oneself to get a job has been displaced by the notion of a “building a career”, and how it has become increasingly important for people to incorporate private and leisure oriented experiences into their notion of a career (McRobbie 2002; Salomonsson 2005). In this sense, the formation of a professional life is also the formation of a subject (Salomonsson 2005: 125). It is thus not merely important what we may accomplish as professionals, but how we are as persons (Heelas 2002). By showing that we take responsibility for our personal development by being creative and flexible, we are presumed to be more attractive on a labour market.

Although I have depicted some more generic tendencies in the cultural economy of Western societies, a work ethic that idealises creativity, flexibility and self-determination may be more significant in some professional cultures than others. The corporate cultures and management discourses and practices of the so called new economy has been analysed as particularly prone to embrace novelty and innovation, often with the unconventional pairing of the hard facts of economic calculation and psychological and emotional values, sometimes wrapped in an attractive package of playfulness (Löfgren & Willim 2005; Thrift 2001, 2002). Nigel Thrift (2002), for example, has shown that many companies today are under constant pressure of measuring performance and innovation, which evokes specific forms of management ideologies and practices. Thrift argues that although innovation has always been an important dimension of business growth, what we see in many businesses today is a greater emphasis on the prerequisites for fostering creativity. Consequently, creativity emerges to a larger extent than previously as a value in itself. Creativity in this sense implies that companies do not only seek employees who accomplish tasks that may lead to innovation, but they want creative individuals. Furthermore, the working subject wants to be creative as well, not primarily in order to fulfil work tasks, but to fulfil him/herself. Informed by Foucault’s notion of governmentality (Foucault 1991), that is, how modes of
governing becomes self-governing by the subject’s themselves (see also Miller & Rose 1990), Thrift points at specific techniques or “performative spaces” (2002) that hasten the fusion between management ideology and the ideology of self-improvement. One is visual communication and visual rhetoric through new communication technology, the other is through managing the body through emotionally triggering events and performances that heighten social interaction, and a third are the techniques and prerequisites for mobility and travel that may enhance circulation. These techniques are particularly pertinent and visible in certain industries, especially those that, according to Thrift, characterise themselves as “fast”, that is, those who wish to present themselves as being in a permanent stage of change. It is also particularly significant in companies with a highly educated management, especially human resource management preoccupied with “fashioning the self” (2002:207).

The meeting professionals presented in this study, through various portraits in the Swedish magazine Meetings International, are usually self-employed consultants, and many of them may be called entrepreneurs, emphasising innovation and growth (Johannesson 2005). Several of them actively annihilate the distinction between personal lifestyle and work, and are in many ways part of the creative workforce where flexibility and individual freedom are highly valued (Ross 2003 & 2008; Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2008). The meeting profession may thus be studied as a kind of creative work typical of the new service economy. However, since this type of profession focuses on social interaction per se, it highlights a phenomenon in late modern societies where the notion of social interactions becomes a product on its own terms, and shows how the modes in which we relate to others are deeply intertwined in market relations. As I will try to show in my analysis, the enhancement of psychological and emotional dimensions of meetings, and the promotion of humanistic and artistic knowledge in the new meeting profession, do not replace rational/cognitive modes of calculating business, but these rationales are intertwined in both management ideologies and ideals of being as a person and a professional. To illustrate the tension between these rationales, the outline of the analytical section of the article, “the enactment of a meeting profession”, is divided in three main parts: “Techniques and materialities” highlights the measurable and “rational” aspects of the industry, “Interaction and being” discusses the emotional and elusive dimensions, and the third part, “the practices of being” is a synthesis of the two that focuses on how ideals and practices in “how to do” manuals enact a form of “how to be”.

Methodology: The Meeting Magazine as a Discursive Medium

The magazine Meetings International (the name of the owner organisation is Meetings International Publishing Ltd.) was launched in 2003 as the first Swedish magazine focusing primarily on the meeting industry and its growing professions.
It publishes approximately six issues per year and is the main forum for the Swedish association Meeting Professionals International (MPI) (www.meetingsinternational.se). As a corporate magazine, its readers are presumed to consist of professionals in the industry that, except from the “new” professions described above, includes all service producers in the meeting industry and their customers and potential customers. According to my analysis, the advertisers seem to be primarily conference organisers such as hotels. The magazine aspires to cover the latest trends in the industry, with many portraits of leading personalities in the profession. As the sole magazine of its kind in Sweden, it is an influential mediating factor in an institutionalisation and professionalisation process. Meetings International Publishing Ltd. has a newsletter and a web site as well, including a bookstore. The bookstore’s offerings are relevant for the analysis since it exhibits those books that, by the magazine, is considered to be interesting to the market in focus. The magazine has, from the start until issue 23/2007 been titled Meetings International – your first lifestyle meetings magazine (however, since issue 24/2008 changed to Meetings International – your first meetings management magazine). The first title associates it with other life style oriented magazines such as travel-, leisure-, health-, design- and garden-magazines. This life-encompassing aspiration corresponds well with the content, and the shift in titles does not seem to have changed the style and discursive content of the magazine. When it comes to issues of work ethic and cultural ideals expressed in the magazine, I do not see any significant changes during the period of five years that encompasses my document analysis, which includes 20 issues of the magazine between January 2005 and April 2009.

I have focused predominantly on this specific magazine in my study of the meeting profession, albeit aware of the lack of nuances that for instance interviews with meeting professionals may provide. However, the aspiration of being in the front highlights certain values in a distinct and discursive manner, which makes the magazine appropriate for a discourse analysis of an emerging professional culture. In line with Foucault’s (1993) discussion of the exclusive power of discourses, I will focus on the discursive formation of ideals and values, highlighted in a normative and thus exclusive manner, making the nuances of a complex and multifaceted professional culture less visible. The professional culture of the meeting industry displays similarities with a “doctrine” or educational culture (Foucault 1993:31) which ties subjects to certain manners of speaking and writing and exclude other discursive forms. The doctrine, according to Foucault, executes a double submission: the speaking subjects are submitted to the discourse and the discourse is submitted to the group of speaking subjects (ibid.).

One example of an ideal highlighted and promoted in the discourse of the meeting profession is novelty. Novelty, trendiness and being in the front are three notions that capture the spirit of the Meetings International magazine. The spirit of novelty is in line with the nervousness and “newness” that Löfgren and Willim
Novelty in the meeting industry is not merely about covering the latest news and trends in the business, but also about conveying the profession as a whole as new, which is important in order to distinguish it from previous and other professional cultures. This does not imply, however, that the business of meetings is new. Hotels, travel agencies and transportation companies have for a long time provided services related to meetings, such as conferences and congresses. What is new is rather the discursive use of the notion of novelty and the narrative juxtaposition between the old and the new. One expression recurrently used in the magazine is “from logistics to content”, implying that the “old”, or rather “obsolete”, meeting industry was solely preoccupied with practicalities such as transport, accommodation, food, meeting rooms and technical facilities, juxtaposed to the “new” meeting industry that provides services more related to the meeting itself, everything from staging the setting or room in specific ways in order to trigger the senses needed to be triggered to achieve the goals, towards entering the meeting process itself, such as preparations for the agenda and coaching the customers to reflect upon and sharpen the focus of the meeting. Furthermore, the “old” type of communication in meetings is portrayed as authoritarian, hierarchic and non-creative, whilst the new type of communication emphasises mutuality and transgression of fixed traditional roles. Overall, there is an emphasis on processes and social interaction, and also an emphasis on the emergence of a new market, hitherto regarded as a black box in the meeting industry, but now discovered and promoted.

A discourse of a market does not only represent ideals, but enactment the market as well. However, when it comes to the notion of being in the front, it also implies the possibility, or risk, that the meeting profession is far ahead of the market. The focus on experiences and new dramaturgical devices in staging meetings may provide more than the market is ready to buy (see Acar et al. 2007), and the variety of new professions may still be unknown to the customers. Even though the gap between supply and demand is not specifically articulated or debated in the magazine, the ambition to narrow the gap is expressed through the persuasive tone in the magazine, where the new professions are promoted in an educating manner. The discursive power of the meeting profession thus includes not only what is being said, but also how it is said. Furthermore, as mentioned above, the discourse of novelty may reinforce certain work ethics and ideals and practices of a market, but simultaneously, if the emphasis on novelty makes the industry seems too avant-garde or even obsolete (if newness becomes a cliché), it may undermine or change the market. In the subsequent analysis, I will point at the discursive practices of the meeting profession by highlighting ideals and norms discernible through statements by the editors, personal portraits of professionals in the field and their work and publications, advertisements, and reportage of new techniques. The images and the text are included in the discursive practices of the meeting profession, but I will also discuss the specific meeting practices and techniques.
that are referred to in the magazine. Although I have not analysed how these practices are performed in practice, they are referred to in a discursive manner in the magazine and may point at the ritual techniques or formalised practices that are important in order to sustain a discourse (Foucault 1993: 28).

The Enactment of a Meeting Profession

Techniques and Materialities

Although the meeting profession dissociates from the “old” practicalities surrounding meetings and emphasises the “black box”, that is, the elusive social interactions and processes within the meeting itself, these elusive matters are being concretised and materialised. One way of materialising is an emphasis on communication technology. This is not merely about making the computers work smoothly at the meeting, but through technical means trigger the meeting participants’ presumed capability of simultaneous sensory stimuli that may facilitate interaction. Thus, the ideal seems to be that the technique should be used not merely as a simple tool but as a catalyst for creativity and reflexivity. In promoting new technique, there is an obvious dissociation from a “previous” preoccupation with the technique as such, while ”now” focussing on its potential in social interaction, illustrated in the following quote:

For many years there has been some kind of imagined threat that we will stop having personal meetings. Instead, we will look at each other through our computers and, if we are lucky, have so called video-meetings in a studio. Simultaneously as the technique has improved, the technical development has shown that we have even more reasons to meet in real life. Because one simple rule still prevails: you cannot share a beer on the Internet. The new system Tandberg Telepresence T3 is designed to give the meeting participants the experience of sharing the same table. To create the best possible meeting-experience, the company has contracted a social anthropologist which has co-operated with the company’s development team and customer representatives. Together, they have investigated the importance of design, colours and the furniture for the meeting. (Meetings International 2008, no. 28: 84, my translation)

Quite typical is the emphasis on holistic knowledge, where unconventional knowledge in this industry, here represented by the anthropologist, signifies novelty as well as legitimates the focus on technology by recognising the importance of the “human touch” in professional meeting situations. Another mode of materialising the meeting profession is by emphasising the physics and biology of the meeting experience. Personal portraits of professionals with specific knowledge in this field – such as specialists in lighting design – represent this. One example is the interview with a professional in architectural lighting design, working as a researcher and teacher at one of the technical universities in Sweden. In the interview he talks about the two processes related to light that affects a meeting: the psychological and the physiological. He elaborates on the physiological aspects, informing about hormones which affect both sleep and stress and are related to the
type of light we are surrounded by. The reader is thus informed by his knowledge of expertise in predominantly the biological and technical aspects of lighting, but we are also informed about the multidisciplinary character of his knowledge and career and, as he tells us in the interview, the novelty of the disciplinary field he is working in. (*Meetings International* 2008, no. 25: 71-77).

The portrait of the lighting architect is merely one example of several professional portraits of technical and biological expertise. Another example is a series of articles called “Brain-check”, on how our brains work in everyday working life (see for example *Meetings International* 2008 no. 25, 27, 28). One of the articles is a portrait of a woman who has developed an expertise on the role of food in wellness and how the brain is affected by what we eat. Typical of the professionals interviewed, her career seems rather diverse but successful with a clear tone of entrepreneurial spirit:

Ten years ago Helene (…) finished working as the director of one of the largest multimedia companies in Sweden. Since then she has established two (names in original) publishing companies, written books, purchased a printing company, been educated in acupuncture in China and is just about to finish medical school at the Karolinska Institute in Sweden (*Meetings International* 2008, no. 28: 77, my translation).

The journalist continues:

It is easy to see a clear line in Helene’s (…) life and work. She has left a more stressful life to a life with more harmony. Today she focuses health and well-being in working life, which she is currently writing a book about (ibid., my translation).

The article continues with Helene’s specific knowledge on food and how it affects the brain and our working capacity, and Helene has several concrete advises on what to do and not to do. Although Helene’s field of expertise seems very multifaceted and holistic considering her background, the article focuses on specific material and biological matters:

Scientific research shows that everyone who is hungry makes more mistakes in memory- and attention-tests. – Hungry people are also more irritated and some become aggressive – this concerns especially men since their amount of testosterone rises, the nerves affecting smell are activated and we are affected by colours; red stimulates hunger and blue reduces it. (ibid., my translation).

The article continues with similar information and corresponding advice, related to working capacity in general, but also on how to make a good meeting environment using food as a specific meeting device.

Another example of an article in the same “brain-series” is an interview with a man who is both psychologist and architect (*Meetings International* 2008, no. 27). Typical of the professional intersection of these professionals, the emergence of a niche-product that seems tailor-made for the meeting industry is discernible. This professional has specialised in how colours affect us: “Those who choose a room with right colours may enhance creativity, fighting spirit, speed, security and many other things – but also the contrary with the wrong colours.” (ibid.: 85, my translation). The economic potential of this kind of knowledge is persuasive:
Colours are a natural part of our lives and they affect us whether we like or not. A modern company cannot afford to ignore it. It is not enough to reach mediocrity in the meeting industry; the company has to find the niches and reach for excellence. (ibid.: 92, my translation).

The personal portraits above express the emergence of professional niches related to specific knowledge of expertise. The kind of knowledge illustrated in these examples is oriented towards the natural sciences, and when human behaviour and interactions are mentioned, it is framed in a behaviouristic and biological oriented tradition of knowledge. This is not merely related to the fact that two of the portraits mentioned belong to a particular series about the human brain, but the positivistic aspects of human behaviour is highlighted in the magazine, that is, the observable and presumed measurable aspects of human life. One possible explanation is that the measurable is less elusive and may also have a legitimate effect on the emerging professional fields in this industry. Furthermore, there is an overarching and pressing demand within the industry, which now and then is articulated as one of the greatest challenges in the sector, which is to find the adequate means to measure the economic effects of meetings. Return on investment, shortened ROI in the magazine, is the overarching rationale for the industry. Thus, the measurable, in all aspects, is portrayed as a positive loaded value, which is closely connected to the observable materialities of meetings.

Interaction and Being

I have argued that the “black box” of interactions and processes – the meeting itself – is increasingly being illuminated through the emerging meeting profession. The meeting itself has turned into a professional field and a new knowledge area, wherein the materialities and measurable practices of the meeting professionals are highlighted. However, there is a seemingly opposite direction in the enactment of the meeting as valuable in itself, which is rather concerned with norms and morals of being, in private life as well as professionally.

The cultural norms and ideals conveyed in the magazine, seems to encourage a transgression between the personal and professional self, between the private sphere and working life. Indeed, as mentioned previously, the logo of the magazine was until no. 23 in 2007 titled Meetings International – your first lifestyle meetings magazine. Several of the personal portraits of professionals in this field convey an image of people whose professional careers are directed by their personal interests and lifestyles. The portraits often show how these people have reached a junction in life, and how existential quests of choosing direction has paved the way for a new professional career. They often seem self-determined and creative as well, with a clear entrepreneurial spirit, crossing traditional professional fields.

The notion of creativity is thus a highly regarded value in the emerging meeting culture. The professionals are portrayed as innovative, introducing a new spirit to the meeting industry, and their multifaceted careers and their flexible approach to
life are regarded as an important means to creativity. One professional who runs a consultant company called The Idea Laboratory describes himself:

I am a person who thinks you become creative by mixing. I started (my career) as a student in literature, then I entered the Drama Institute to become a film director, now I study for a Master at the School of economics, and I also work as a sport journalist on the side while running my own company. I think it keeps my head clear. This may not be a recipe for everybody, but it works for me, so I won’t be bored… (Meetings International 2007, no. 23: 28, my translation).

Not merely the meeting professionals, but the products, the meetings themselves, have to be staged and choreographed in order to enhance creativity. The word “creativity” is used repeatedly, both as a naturalised, taken for granted personal asset among the professionals or as a self evident buzz-word in commercials, or as a scientific quest, represented by portraits of professionals who are researching the topic, for example the connection between place and creativity. Successful leadership is presumed to enhance the meeting participants’ creativity. The following statement is from a guest article written by Jan Rollof, an academic who is the author of several books on the topic of creativity. Facilitating creativity is not only desirable, but even framed as a moral imperative, according to Jan Rollof:

Is it possible to plan creative meetings? Yes – you can and you should do it. You can be even more explicit and say that you have a responsibility and obligation to do it (emphasis in original). Meetings take time and effort and cost money. In the long run you cannot afford not to use the energy that good meetings may evoke. (Meetings International, 2007, no. 21: 45, my translation)

Being creative is often mentioned in line with notions of personal development and individual responsibility, implying that the ideal of being creative may act as a moral imperative as well. The three notions of creativity, personal development and individual responsibility are a complex whole that is presumed to benefit the organisation as well as personal relationships. In the personal portraits as well as in other type of articles, this complex whole is emerging not merely as instrumental assets for making meetings more efficient and thus more profitable, but as ideal ways of being and relating to others as a human being. The ideal of personal development is intimately connected to individual responsibility through the ideal of reflexivity. An ideal meeting should encourage reflexivity as well as your whole way of being. The blurred distinction between professional and personal relationships is discernible throughout the magazine by the use of a discourse recognisable in the therapeutic professions but generalised in a common and popular discourse on self-development, in line with what Chris Rojek calls “the labour of leisure” (2010). For instance, one columnist, the professional psychologist Hans Gordon, compares meetings in professional life with personal encounters in almost every issue of the magazine. Another example is the following statement under the heading “The personal meeting – what a possibility” by the editor in chief:
In the personal meeting you communicate with all your senses. It is the meeting that provides you with an image of a person, it is the meeting that provide you with new contacts and make relationships grow. We share common experiences. It is when people meet that new ideas are arise, and isn’t that right that when ideas come true we grow as human beings? (Meetings International 2005, no. 6: 9, my translation).

The quote above implies that the previous type of meeting, in the “old” meeting industry, was not personal, and therefore, less efficient. Thus, being there as a person, involved with all your senses and not merely a distant professional in the conventional sense, may lead to professional as well as personal growth. Being there with all your senses is a formulation known from the experience discourse in leisure travel as well, common in marketing of tourist destinations and attractions, illustrated in the following advertisement by a conference organiser:

Important meeting! With yourself.

In the forest, you are closer to everything. To yourself and to life. Here you and your colleagues will have the time to reflect and absorb the majestic sighing in a hundred years old tree-top. Discover that you are able to manage several days without mobile phone, red light or café latte. Instead you will absorb the smells of lingonberry and chanterelle… (Meetings International 2005, no. 6: 35, my translation).

The notion of “being there with all your senses” is closely related to the notion of authenticity, which in tourism is often represented by more or less essentialistic aspects of the physical surroundings, such as originality, history, localness, sometimes transferred to primitivistic aspects of the local population (see Andersson Cederholm 1999). However, being there with all your senses rather indicate an existential dimension of authenticity, a sense of wholeness and presence (Andersson Cederholm 1999; Wang 1999; Taylor 2000; Hom Cary 2004; Steiner & Reisinger 2005).

Furthermore, the dimension of authenticity that is articulated and promoted by the meeting profession corresponds quite well with Ning Wang’s (1999) notion of inter-relational existential authenticity. Inter-relational authenticity implies an intellectual and/or emotional intimacy with others, whom in leisure tourism may be either your travel companion such as your partner, family member or friend, or people you meet on your journey, for example locals or other travellers. Although the corporate meeting context is professional, intimacy is an implicit dimension in the notion of a “personal” meeting, where we meet with open senses, with no pre-determined hierarchical order or hidden agenda: “it is only a self-conscious and present person that is capable of leading a meeting without hidden agendas. The authenticity of the leader evokes the authenticity of the participants” (Hörberg, Meetings International 2008, no. 25: 82, my translation). This author, Per Hörberg, has presented a series of articles in the magazine on the topic of authenticity in meetings, and he has also written a book on the same topic called “To Really Meet”(Hörberg 2007, my translation). Being present in the meeting, with your intellectual as well as emotional self, is crucial for a successful meeting, according to Hörberg: “The meeting that we find interesting, in our personal life or
at work, is about the same thing. That those who meet really meet. It is not until we are totally present and able to show our emotions simultaneously as we talk about something, that we can achieve this.” (Hörberg, Meetings International 2008, no. 25: 82, my translation) and “The secret of a meeting is that you and I always departure from ourselves when we meet others… To dissolve you own obstacles are like coming home to yourself. It is not until I am close to myself, that I can be present in a meeting. To be present means to be close”. (Kellerman, quoting Hörberg’s book, Meetings International 2007, no. 22: 40, my translation).

Again, the blurred distinction between life and work is highlighted. Roger Kellerman, who is the publisher of Meetings International, continues his review of the book:

Per Hörberg is the leader of meetings that develop people as well as companies. He is coaching organizations, management and individuals to focus on essentials. To the company and the management group this may lead to more involvement with the common goals. To the individual, it may lead to a more meaningful life with a better balance between efficient work and a relaxing leisure time. (ibid., my translation)

The ideals of existential authenticity, and the ideals of being and interacting as a professional in general and in the meeting industry in particular, thus highlights specific ideals of being as a person - a creative and reflecting individual striving for personal growth, preferably with an entrepreneurial spirit of transgressing conventional boundaries while pursuing your personal interests. This is in line with Foucault’s (1991) notion of governmentality, which Nigel Thrift discusses in relations to management ideologies and practices in the corporate cultures of the new economy (2001, 2002) and Karen Lisa Goldschmidt Salamon’s discussion of the “logic of the inside-out management” (2005: 53). According to Salamon, this logic implies the development of a new positive self that operates by forms of subjectification, where the individual is encouraged to “take ownership” of his/her own “path to success” (2005: 54). This type of management ideology attacks routine processes of work that are assumed to be outdated and mechanical, instead emphasising on notions of authenticity and emotional intensity.

Through Hörberg’s book and the articles by him or about his book, the existential dimension of authenticity is articulated and shaped in an intellectual discussion. Nevertheless, this type of authenticity has an elusive character and in contrast with more essentialistic images of authenticity, often related to nature, this type of authenticity is more often articulated, and particularly in commercials, in words and phrases such as “magic” and “something just happens when people meet”. This elusive and magical aspect of meetings seems quite far from the technical and measurable dimensions I presented earlier. However, although the elusive character of existential authenticity may be articulated in intellectual reflections or as emotional triggers in commercials, when it comes to more practical matters, that is, how to design a good meeting, the elusiveness is quickly transformed into specific techniques, or “performative spaces” (Thrift 2002). In the following section, I have called these “the practices of being”. They are seemingly
very simple, practical methods of meeting in the “right” way - or implicitly - being in the “right” way.

The Practices of Being

One type of technique used in order to interact in an idealised way is to change the conventional staging of the meeting room. In a portrait of the former therapist and now meeting coach Tom MacD onald who is currently working on a book entitled “Big heart, big profits – unlocking the power of love at work”, he says in the interview that he is surprised that so many meeting organisers still use the setting of a classroom, where the participants sit by desks which they put their papers on:

If you are going to talk to each other, you can’t sit in a row, next to one or another. If you want to be creative you must have a round-table discussion. Personally, I think it gives the participants opportunity to hide behind the desks, so I usually suggest they take them away.” (Meetings International 2008, no. 27: 70, my translation).

These simple means are not only used in staging the meeting, but also in the meeting process itself. The methods used in the process are often structured according to different stages of the interactive and analytical process. Two consultants, introduced in the magazine, who have developed two methods now widely used among companies all over Europe, say that they think that their methods are actually very basic. It is about “to release common energy in an organisation or a meeting” (Meetings International 2005, no. 10: 43, my translation). They describe one of their methods as divided into five stages; in the first stage the participants are encouraged to individually think about a specific question, a stage called “spontaneous thinking”. The next step is to discuss the issue in pairs. In the third step the thoughts from all participants are openly exposed, in the fourth step these are ranked according to what is closest to the aim of the meeting, and in the last stage all the discussions are categorised according to various themes (ibid.: 44). This method is an example of many techniques that in similar ways are compartmentalised in stages, and the entire meeting process is framed in a specific temporal and spatial frame, often according to a very strict time schedule and led by a consultant/instructor.

Other types of techniques, less formalised, are oriented towards the individual’s presumed tacit skills and competence in social interaction. Such is the art of networking. In the personal portrait of Patrick Delaney, the owner and manager of a large Irish event company, he states three concrete advises on how to network: be different, give more than you try to receive, and think ROI in your networking. He continues with many concrete details on the art of networking, thus articulating a presumed tacit knowledge:

… move around the room, talk to many people, repeat the names on those you meet, try hard to remember them. Leave your business cards, write notes on the ones you receive so that you don’t mix them up when you are back in the office … make sure that you have open questions which make the answers longer … Then it is all about
giving instead of taking. Listen to his needs. Follow up and do what you have promised. Otherwise you have created an enemy, not a friend. (Meetings International 2007, no. 19: 77-79, my translation).

What is significant with all these techniques of interaction is their astonishing simplicity. The detailed compartmentalisation and specification in time and space is an effort to transfer the elusiveness of social interaction into a comprehensible and technical “know-how”. Simultaneously and more implicitly, there is an effort in framing the ideals of being with others in professional meetings – such as authenticity and reciprocity – into formalised codes of conduct. Thus, the practices of being enacted by the meeting profession illustrate the tension between different and seemingly contradictory ideals in the meeting profession: the measurable positivistic aspects of social interaction on the one hand, and the egalitarian playfulness of sociability evoking a sense of existential authenticity and emotional intensity on the other. This tension is even more accentuated by the fact that the overall and explicit aims of all the techniques presented above are quite simply economic: to create efficient meetings that may give a return on investment. Through these techniques, energy and creativity are expected to be released, as they are important aspects of efficiency. Furthermore, the egalitarian non-hierarchical and reciprocal meeting situation is supposed to evoke reflexivity, encouraging growth in the company as well as for the individual employee. Hence, the practices of being manifest the notion of effective emotions. Economic rationality and emotional intensity are two ideals and rationales that are being distinguished, as well as intertwined, in the performative practice of “know-how”. Effective emotions illuminate, enact and legitimise values related to specific ways of being as a person as well: you should be creative and innovative, constantly reflect upon yourself, your life and work – and thus be prepared to be flexible – and exhibit personal growth, preferably accomplished through social and emotional skills.

Concluding Remarks

I have presented the meeting profession as an agent of change, a catalyst, paving the way for new professional arenas in the service economy. New niches are created, traditional professional roles transgressed and intersections between social, psychological, technical, artistic and economic fields of knowledge emerge. New methods of social interaction are established and promoted. Furthermore, the meeting profession is a catalyst in a deeper, structural manner as well. It is one example of a new type of service profession that encourages the involvement of emotions and intimacy in professional relationships, and idealises ways of being that blur the distinction between the professional and personal self, life and work, and between the private and the public sphere. Interpersonal existential authenticity, that is, a sense of presence, mutuality and intimacy with others, is thus ascribed a social as well as an economic value, and it is promoted as an important medium in market relations. The meeting profession highlights the tension between the
measurable, tangible and instrumental on the one hand, and the elusive, intangible and playful on the other. The notion of “effective emotions” seems like an anomaly, but represents a mode of conceptualising and practising social relationships that may be increasingly common in the fuzzy intersection between the life world and the market in the service economy.

However, the meeting profession is not merely evoking change but functions as a normative regulator as well, normalising and legitimising specific ideals of being. Through the increasing tendency of focusing on the interactive process itself, and thus how you relate to others, ideals of being is performed, enacted and reinforced in the discourse of the meeting profession and through the practices of various meeting techniques. Thus, creativity, personal growth, reflexivity and flexibility are enacted as idealised personal assets as well as moral imperatives. The critical implication of this is that what we may see as “merely” ideals of a professional role, should rather be seen as ideals concerning our way of being and relating to others in all aspects of life. The discursive practices of the meeting profession, and the specific interactive form of meetings, may thus be interpreted as a means of governmentality (Foucault 1991; Miller & Rose 1990; Thrift 2002) or as a seductive “magic” typical of the corporate cultures of the so called new economy (Löfgren & Willim 2005). The combination of a ritualised, temporal and spatial framed situation, the simplicity of its techniques and emotional and interactive intensiveness, may produce the magical “effectiveness” typical of ritual enactment (Turner 1969, 1978). Hence, the notion of “effective emotions” does not merely refer to the discursive ideals of combining instrumental rationality with emotional intensity, but it also refers to the performative power of discursive practices, manifested in everyday practices such as the “practices of being” referred to above. However, a ritual enactment that is framed in a commercial setting, with an overall instrumental goal, may have both a legitimising and undermining effect. The persuasive discourses and practices of the meeting profession carry the potential of both reinforcing and undermining ideals and norms of a specific culture. On the one hand, it is legitimising in the sense that the moral imperative of specific ways of being and acting reinforces a market and work ethic that encourages creativity, personal growth, reflexivity and flexibility. In line with Boltanski and Chiapello’s (2005) study on the new spirit of capitalism, this kind of work ethic might be an expression of an ambition to overcome the perceived disenchantment of the social world and former hierarchical, overly formalised and emotionally distant working cultures. On the other hand, if the overarching instrumental goal becomes too explicit in the interactive situation itself, and if the implicit normativity in “how to do” becomes explicit enough, the intrinsic value of social interaction is undermined and the magic will disappear. The efforts of re-enchantment will turn to its opposite. Effective emotions are thus only “effective” as long as a tension between instrumental rationality and emotionality is preserved. By focusing on the manifested practices of effective emotions, their discursive contents as well as
interactive forms, the tension and dynamics of a work ethic may be brought into light.

**Erika Andersson Cederholm** is Senior Lecturer in sociology at the Department of Service Management, Lund University. Her research interests embraces the intersection between culture, economy and social life, including the commodification and organisation of intimacy and emotions in tourism and hospitality, value creation in service interactions, and lifestyle entrepreneurship in rural tourism. Email: erika.andersson_cederholm@msm.lu.se.

**References**


Digital Exhibitionism: The Age of Exposure

By Ana María Munar

Abstract

Web 2.0 has expanded the possibilities of digital creative production by individuals and enabled the digitalisation of private life experiences. This study analyses how social media contributes to the making of personal biographies and discusses the shift towards a culture of digital exposure. This study uses netnography and a constructive approach to examine online communities and social networks. The findings illustrate that these new technological platforms are mediating in the construction of late modern biographies, which are expanding the complexity of today’s socio-technical systems. The paper discusses the power of these technologies as agents of socio-cultural change and suggests that, besides providing individual realisation and mediated pleasure, these technologies encourage exhibitionistic and voyeuristic behaviour, elude reflexivity, and display authoritative tendencies and new possibilities for social control.

Keywords: Social media, cultural change, online communities, social control
Introduction

From the outset of modernity individuals have traditionally kept records of their lives. From diaries, to paintings, to photographs or music, men and women of all ages have created cultural texts portraying their experiences, emotions and opinions. In most cases, this private creative content was circulated among a limited social sphere consisting of family, friends or colleagues. The cost of producing these texts meant that people needed to be selective about the kinds of special occasions, such as weddings or travels, they wanted to record. This feature of modernity has been radically transformed thanks to the expansion of information technologies (IT) and the World Wide Web. Social media now provide digital platforms that support and enhance self-expression. The new phenomenon popularly known as Web 2.0, for example, has further expanded the possibilities for individuals to produce creative texts digitally. Web 2.0 allows for the digital creation, storage, publication and sharing of people’s private lives. This technology does not only enable individuals to portray their lives in new ways, it also provides the necessary tools for them to create instantaneous and real-time self-biographies on the Web. This in turn has transformed the Web into an exhibition of do-it-yourself biographies (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002). The conversion from an analogue to a digital culture of private experiences has profound consequences for the ways in which we portray ourselves and shape our identities. It also offers new insights on how technology supplements and re-mediates our social activities.

The main transformation from analogue to digital texts has been possible due to developments in IT, such as enhanced capacities for collaboration and sharing of information (Cooke & Buckley 2008), and by factors such as more powerful and affordable hardware and software, a faster network edge, the enhancement of easy-to-use tools, a higher e-literacy among the population of the world, and the increase in portable and wireless platforms (Parameswaran & Whinston 2007). All of these elements have led to a change in the locus of control in the creation process of the online content: from a Web content controlled by organizations and corporations to a Web which, to a large extent, is the expression of the interaction and participation of end-users.

The main attributes of popular social network sites are the content generated by the users and the tools that allow the user interactivity. Although the phenomenon is quite new, there is already a myriad of personalised social information available to cyber-users around the world. Social media allow for the digitalisation of creative texts (visual, narrative or audio) that were previously produced and consumed using other technological tools with a lower diffusion capacity. This provides a new scene for the self-making of personal biographies. The new interactive Web is a vehicle for the digital exposure of personal lives, which float in cyberspace on different types of social network sites.
A popular viewpoint among analysts of the Web 2.0 is that the increased possibility of interaction between the users and the Internet opens a new era of participation and democratisation (Qualman 2009). This development is explained as the beginning of a new digital revolution that is shifting from a technology based on “command and control” to a technology based on engaging and empowering individuals through their online identities (Shih 2009). However, other more critical perspectives question the value of the user-created content or pose ethical questions to the use of social media. There are emerging studies problematizing the optimistic view that Web 2.0 empowers users through their collaboration and shared information. Authors have pointed to the poor security of content and identity theft by the media (Poster 2006), the possible misuse of increased transparency to achieve greater centralised control (Hand 2008; Miller 2010), or issues relating to the ownership of displayed content (Aspan 2008; Tierney 2010). Keen (2007) in his provocative essay challenges those who praise the wisdom of the crowds and the quality and value of the millions of amateur contributions. According to Keen, instead of creating masterpieces, social media users produce an “endless digital forest of mediocrity” (2007: 3). Positive as well as critical accounts of this phenomenon agree that the digitalisation of user generated content offer new understandings of social and cultural participation. This study examines how social media contribute to the construction of personal biographies, discusses the turn towards a culture of digital exposure, and critically examines the challenges of the digitalisation of personal life.

Method of Study

This paper explores the Web as a social construct and a context that facilitates the examination of the creation and evolution of social structures, such as relationships and communities. Markham (2004) defines this methodological perspective as the constructive approach. The specific methodology used in this study is netnography. Social scientists typically use netnography to conduct Web research (O’Reilly et al. 2007). Kozinets (2002, 2008) describes this methodology as an online evolution of ethnography and defines it as an application of methods of cultural anthropology to on-line cyber culture. Netnography consists of the participative observation and examination of one or several online communities, as compared to ethnography, which is the study of cultural and social forms through observation of events as they unfold. Ethnography is a method that requires co-presence with the people observed during the study (Haldrup & Larsen 2010). Netnography applies this presence to the virtual world. The researcher acts as an active member of the community and studies the processes of interactivity, the specific settings, the architecture of the sites and the main characteristics of the content available. However, the digitalisation of the object of the study means that this method can only trace a very specific type of cultural and social communica-
tion, which is recorded and uploaded digital content. This type of communication differs greatly from other types of social behaviour. In this case, there are no “natural settings” in which the social acts takes place; the setting is a virtual platform of communication, which is another type of social construct based on specific technological cultures.

Another important difference between netnography and ethnographic methods is that the researcher conducting a netnographic study can return to the original form of communication studied, because it is recorded, stored and displayed on the virtual platforms. Nevertheless, the nature of the Web poses several challenges to the netnographic method. Websites and other forms of digitised documentation, which lay the foundation for netnographic analyses, develop and change at a high speed. Additionally, the rapid change in the patterns of use, and the fragmentation and massive amount of data associated to the object of analysis, represents an additional challenge to the study of the Web, but it does not make Web studies any less relevant. Netnography is a multi-method approach whereby the researcher can apply historical analysis, semiotic analysis, and other observation methods, to their netnographic study. This study uses content analysis and observation methods.

In order to analyse the role that virtual communities play in the development of virtual identities, two main data sets were established. Firstly, a purposive sample of online communities was developed and a sample of personal profiles of a web community examined. A total of three different social network sites and one wiki site (an interactive website that focuses on the content and not the users) were selected: Facebook, TripAdvisor, Twitter and Wikipedia. These websites represent different types of online communities, which have different aims and purposes, and at the same time a large scalability and a very large number of users (see table 1). Secondly, the development of ten different personal profiles in Facebook was studied. The social network of Facebook is characterised by a password-protected and membership only use. Its content has a limited circulation and it is not accessible to the broader public. This raises specific ethical issues for the researcher who wants to study the content of this site. It was therefore essential to obtain informed consent from Facebook members and to present de-identified text and multimedia representations of these people in this article. Half of the profiles correspond to men and half to women, whose ages range from 15 to 45 years old. The group consists of four different European nationalities. The examination of sites and profiles took place during the months of November 2009 to February 2010, with frequent visits to the different communities.
Table 1: Features of Different Online Communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Online community</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>Social network with a focus on personal interaction among members; non themed; membership required.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>Community based on microblogging; non themed; membership required.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TripAdvisor</td>
<td>Community with a focus on reviews; themed community dedicated to tourism and travel; open to all users; registration required for uploading content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wikipedia</td>
<td>Community with a focus on the creation of an online encyclopedia; based on wiki technology; open to all users; personal account required for uploading or modifying content.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

User Generated Content and Online Communities

There are many different perspectives on the Internet and the Web as factors of social change. These perspectives relate to globalisation processes and cultural change (Hand 2008); focus on the digital divide, diversity and power relations (Kirkpatrick 2008; Kleinman 2005); assess the construction of personal identities (Poster 2006); examine changes in space-time constraints and cultural perceptions of body (Basu et al. 2007; Schwanen & Kwan 2008; Shaw 2008) and view the Internet from a historical and sociological standpoint (Castells 1996, 1997, 2001). Recent books have examined the impact of social media and web communities, such as Facebook, Youtube or Twitter, on both society and on the market place (Li & Bernoff 2008; Qualman 2009; Weinberg 2009; Brogan & Smith 2009; Weber 2009).

The more interactive Web has been popularised with the term Web 2.0. Web 2.0 describes a Web which is “increasingly influenced by intelligent Web services that enable users to contribute to developing, rating, collaborating and distributing Internet content and customizing Internet applications” (Vickery & Wunsch-Vincent 2007: 9). It reflects a mix of different types of ICT tools, including wikis, podcasts, messaging applications or blogs (Stillman & McGrath 2008). The main characteristic of the new Web is that it enhances the collaboration and sharing of information online, and is built around social software which makes it possible for
individuals to communicate and form communities using their computers (Cooke & Buckley 2008).

Discourses on information technologies and the Web have long focused upon the technological contribution to economic and social development. However, the Web 2.0 turn has expanded the “techspressive” (Kozinets 2008: 870) perspective of our socio-technical environment. This ideological perspective considers technology a provider of individual realisation, mediated pleasure and escape. This perspective is historically the most recent element of technology’s ideological field (Kozinets 2008). The techspressive discourse has developed following an increase in the importance of video games and it is now being expanded thanks to the popularity of social media and Web 2.0. Much of the literature on online communities is embedded in the techspressive discourse of technology use combined with a linear progressive understanding of the technological influence on economic development (Brogan and Smith 2009; Qualman 2009). The techspressive focus on pleasure and individuality is further enhanced thanks to the possibilities of user generated content (UGC).

UGC is the aggregation and publication of users’ contributions on the web. User created digital content is very diverse and includes narrative text, such as reviews or diaries; contact details; photos; video and audio files; and goods and services for sale. Some of these contributions have a strong creative element, for example, photo reportages of personal experiences, while others are more passive contributions, for example, the sharing of the processing capacity of computers to achieve free Internet telephony (e.g. Skype). Several definitions and classifications of this content exist (Deshpande & Jadad 2006; Lenhart & Fox 2006; Vickery & Wunsch-Vincent 2007; Wellman 2007; Cook 2008; Cooke & Buckley 2008; Stillmn & McGrath 2008). Cook (2008) defines UGC as part of the broader user contribution systems. User contribution systems “aggregate and leverage various types of user input in ways that are valuable to others” (Cook 2008: 62). Additionally, Vickery and Wunsch-Vincent’s (2007) analysis of the participative Web highlights a difference between UGC and user created content and focuses on the creative element of the content generation. Their analysis demands a more extensive use of creative skills by the user, for example when reviewing a restaurant or making a photographic reportage of a destination.

Online communities, or virtual communities, are one of the main elements of Web 2.0 and its broader contribution systems. Communities can be defined as networks of interpersonal ties. Online communities are websites where user relationships develop, and their main assets are a combination of user generated content and easy-to-use tools and applications. They are technological platforms with relationship tools that allow users to communicate with their network in new ways, changing the cost of interaction and maintenance of a relationship, and increasing people’s network capacity (Shih 2009). The Web displays a very large
diversity of online communities which represents different social characteristics of the users.

The large number of different communities that exist on the Web vary according to their size, their conditions of use, the variety of their activities, and whether they are open or require membership. Virtual communities can be strongly influenced by the amount of users they have; too many people may create too much confusion, while too few will not provide any dynamism and the value of participation may be too low (Preece 2000). Online communities can provide sociability, support, information, a sense of belonging and social identity (Wellman et al. 2002). Some of the main types of communities are media-sharing sites, such as Youtube; virtual worlds, such as Second Life; blogging sites, such as Travelblog; social bookmarking and voting sites, such as Digg; review sites, such as TripAdvisor; or social network sites, such as Facebook or LinkedIn. These communities are extensive environments with many different types of tools and components allowing for different forms of interactions and activities. They differ from other interactive platforms in the Web, such as wikis, blogs and message boards, in that they enhance relationship building among their users (Buss & Strauss 2009).

The distinctive norms used in these communities have also resulted in differing degrees of public access, participant norms and expectations (McKee & Porter 2009). However, according to Castells (2001), these communities share two important characteristics. The first is their support of free and non-hierarchical communication. Although there are varying degrees of protection of content uploaded online, the assumption that these platforms should be based on the free exchange of ideas remains paramount (Lash 2002). The second is the self-directed connectivity, which allows any person to connect to the web and publish his or her own information. Self-directed connectivity is a tool for social organization, collective action and meaning (Castells 2001). Furthermore, it allows individuals to express their identities and to create and maintain social relations online.

The social networking sites selected for this study have distinctive rules and forms of interaction among their users. These sites invite self-biographical expression in diverse ways. Facebook was established in 2004 by undergraduate students from Harvard University and was first aimed at university students. This linked to a long tradition in universities of establishing networks among students while they are studying and later on through associations. However, as opposed to more traditional associations, Facebook initially functioned as an informal dating site where students could obtain photos and contact details from their classmates. The members of the site would thereby attain links to other users’ details, with their permission, as “friends”, a term used as a marker of trusted identities for this site. The network’s building blocks are the users’ profile pages and its design relies on a clear protocol, which allows users to accept or reject friends’ requests (Zarrella 2010). In 2006, Facebook was opened to anyone with an email address and it became extremely popular. The site announced that it had reached 400 million
members in February 2010 (Helft & Stone 2010). It has also proven to be a very profitable business; the company reported $210 million in U.S. ad spending in 2008 (Buss & Strauss 2009). Nevertheless, the network has also received hard criticism for claiming ownership over the content uploaded by the users, a debate that resulted in a revision of the terms of use by the management of the site (Stone & Stelter 2009).

TripAdvisor is the largest networking site focusing on tourism and travel. It has over 11 million members and it had amassed more than 30 million reviews of tourism products by February 2010 (TripAdvisor 2010). Contrary to Facebook or Twitter, TripAdvisor is an open network and it is not necessary to register or become a member in order to access the published content. However, it is necessary to create a virtual identity to upload content onto the site.

Twitter uses microblogging, a form for blogging which limits the amount of text posted (a maximum of 140 characters). This technical limitation has created a very specific form of communication that has had a burst in popularity since the first half of 2009. Twitter is used by individuals and companies alike, and it is a kind of “news” site where users can upload and share all types of updates. It can be seen as a major news channel with a diverse mixture of traditional news and information about individual members’ real-time daily life activities.

Wikipedia is an iconic representation of user generated content. It is selected in this study as the counterpart of the other social media platforms of the sample. Wikipedia encourages the creation of content but, unlike the other platforms mentioned above, its focus is not on sociability but on the co-creation of knowledge. In some of the literature wikis are not considered to be online communities, because their focus is on the content rather than the contributors and because the content’s authorship is anonymous (Buss & Strauss 2009). However, participation in wikis can provide a feeling of belonging and social recognition, as seen in the open source movement (Castells 2001). Wikipedia appeared in 2001 thanks to the wiki technology. This technology allowed any user to upload content to a communal web site without any approval by a central administrator. This collective experiment made it possible to handle a massive amount of amateur contributions using a very clear regulatory system of online behaviour. In this type of community anyone can become a contributor (or editor) but the result is a collective effort where the individual creative effort is diluted into the community. It is a system of libertarian roots in which individuals are given equal voice so “neither our reputations nor our qualifications have any intrinsic value” (Keen 2007: 43). It is an example of an interactive Web in which the individual identity is excluded on purpose to give room to the wisdom of the crowds.
Digital Exhibitionism

Social media platforms are technological tools mediating in the construction of late modern “lego” biographies:

The second modernity’s totally normal chaos is regulated by non-linear systems. It is also regulated by an extraordinarily powerful interlacing of social and technical systems: by, precisely, socio-technical systems. It is at the interface of the social and the technical that we find the second-modernity’s individual. It is at this interface that we take on the precarious freedom of a “life of our own”; that we “invent the political”, that we take on ecological responsibility. The individual in the second modernity is profoundly a socio-technical subject (Lash 2002: xiii)

Social media sites are new tools that contribute to a larger complexity of these socio-technical systems. These platforms can be placed on a continuum. There are those that promote self-biographical expressions (such as Facebook or LinkedIn) and on the opposite pole those enhancing a communitarian effort and a dilution of individuality in the “commons” focusing on a product or the content of the site (such as Wikipedia).

A common feature for Twitter and for Facebook is that they encourage users to share brief textual narrations in the form of microblogging. The most prominent tool in Facebook’s profile is a microblogging tool, which invites individuals to write something personal in answer to the question: “What’s on your mind?”. Twitter has a similar question: “What’s happening?”, oriented towards the outside world. Individuals are invited to join the network activities by publishing updates about their lives and thoughts. In the first case other members of the network can become “friends”; in the second, “followers”.

The microblogging tool is a technological application that enhances the exhibitionist tendencies of social media. Common to the culture of these sites is the acceptance of the recording and publishing of daily life activities or banalities. Both platforms invite the broadcasting of the “immediate thought” or the “immediate observation”. In much of the discussion around the evolution of modernity (Bauman 1998; Held et al. 1998; Giddens 1999, 2002) there is focus on the increased reflexivity of individuals. However, these platforms invite instant communication and lightness of being, like an online playground characterised by the immediateness of feelings and emotions, and members are encouraged to engage in a less reflexive practice of interactivity and self-portrayal.

This technology supports the change from reflexive behaviour to “reflex” behaviour. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) describe this change as a movement towards an increased non-linearity of individual life. The non-linear modern person may wish to be reflexive but does not have the space or the time to devote to reflectivity. In social networks the recording of the memorable has been changed by speed and by immediateness. Facebook and Twitter represent the dilution of the frontier between what is considered as being essential for one’s biographical
Artistic expression has proven to be able to reflect upon socio-cultural change while it occurs (Giddens 1999). In the film Julie and Julia (2009), directed by Norah Ephron, Julia Child's story as a cook and writer is intertwined with blogger Julie Powell's challenge to cook all the recipes in Child's famous cooking book. The film portrays the power of exhibitionism and exposure of intimate emotions that lies in blogging. Julie shares with her online followers her more intimate feelings, her self-esteem problems and lack of career prospects. This exposure challenges her personal relationships; her husband makes her promise not to write about their quarrels and her boss prohibits her to mention him in her blog. One of Julie’s friends blogs about her extravagant sexual experiences, and therefore achieves huge online audiences and is portrayed as successful.

The inherent exposure of blogging is highly present in the microblogging of online communities. This is not to say that everyone who uses platforms such as Facebook or Twitter will share all intimate details of their private life with the community, but the culture of social media is that it is all right to do so, and those that do are seen as active and well-functioning members of the community. In the ethics of these communities it is accepted to expose one’s “self”.

In the profiles studied in Facebook, different levels of emotional exhibitionism are present. It is possible to distinguish between those who use Facebook with a larger level of intimacy, expressing emotions and personal opinions about different issues, and those who use it as a news board to announce interesting events for the community or to list their different daily life activities. Nevertheless, the latter type of user also includes expressions of intimacy and emotion in recounting their thoughts on the events they are informing about.

Besides microblogging, other typical activities members of the social networks in this study engaged in are: interactive diaries or blogs; publishing original photos or videos which other members can tag and comment upon; and participation in interactive games, quizzes or discussion groups about specific topics. Facebook and Twitter’s updating systems allow members to receive regular information about other members’ activities. Some of these activities have exhibitionistic tendencies similar to those seen in microblogging. For example, it is possible to see the results of other users’ tests. One of them is called “The truth” and aims at disclosing private opinions of emotional character. After a member (X) has taken that test, the rest of the community can get updates such as “See if X fancies Y” or “Are you in love with X?”. Other similar applications inform that “X just took [a]: Who is your love story? Test” and invite other users to check the results. There are also updates on game behaviour, such as “X played The Family Farm today” or “X just got a new high score in Kamikace Race”. In general, social sites trace members’ activities on the network and feed information back to the network. Accordingly, the design of these networks not only encourages interactivity, it
also discloses information which may be felt as an invasion of other members’ privacy. Some users may take an IQ test on Facebook just to discover that all of their “friends” are being updated about their results with the offensive note: “One of your friends got the score idiot, click here and see which friend”.

While users may be in control of which private photos or videos they want to upload to the network, little can be done about the visual content published by others. The culture of exposure of these media creates a collage of visual virtual identities co-created among community members and defies personal control of the content. Social networking promotes group interactivity as opposed to individual control, and although these platforms have increased their privacy settings, the question remains of how these platforms try to educate their users in this matter (Tapscott 2009). Personal control upon visual content can only be achieved by a constant monitoring of the network activities, a task that may prove to be extremely time consuming.

Communities allow for more extreme forms of Web exhibitionism, for example, the uploading of webcam videos broadcasting a member’s activities in real-time. These technological platforms have the potential to turn into life the “big brother” tendencies portrayed in the movie *The Truman Show*, a film directed by Peter Weir portraying a man who is living in a TV-produced reality soap opera, which is televised without interruptions to global audiences. Anybody is free to broadcast a personal version of the reality-TV success *Big Brother*.

The review genre, which is the main content of TripAdvisor, encourages another type of exhibitionism. This form of social media promotes itself as the place to find “the truth” about tourism products and places. The discourse of the administrator of this digital platform is rooted in the idea of authenticity, which is a contested and problematic concept in tourism studies (Ooi & Stöber 2010). The review genre provides insights into the feelings and emotions of tourists from a micro-perspective. This genre is activity related and self-centred. The online review genre is very different from the traditional reviews we read in newspapers. As in the case of Wikipedia, there is no demand of expertise to legitimise the “truth” of the content. Users frequently write in the first person and include names of family members and friends: “Mom and I went for their Sunday Roast special, £15 for two courses. They were very tasty.” or “I absolutely loved afternoon tea at the Dorchester Hotel. First, we started with tea, I chose Earl Grey, scones, clotted cream, and jam”.

The legitimacy of the review lies in the expression of the personal emotional experience. A community review includes the exposure of a person’s feelings and opinions, akin to a personal biography. It is the lack of commercial or authoritative language and the exposure of feelings attached to the consumption experience that gives users’ reviews extra value. Furthermore, TripAdvisor also invites self-biographical mapping with a tool entitled “Cities I’ve Visited”. This tool allows users to place pins on a digital map (using Google maps) so that they can create a
map showing their travel record. Individuals can use this tool to expose their travel conquests, as hunters used to display the heads of their hunted animals at home. Users can now expose their travel patterns by alerting everybody in their network every time they travel to a new city.

**Digital Voyeurism and Social Control**

Digital exhibitionism fosters its counterpart: digital voyeurism. Voyeurism has been considered a type of deviant behaviour because it relates to the pleasure provided by observing other peoples’ private activities without participating in them or making one’s presence known. Voyeuristic activity becomes extremely easy in social networks. Facebook provides an application that allows members to seek information about users who visit their profiles. However, it is seldom that members monitor who looks, and for how long, at the personal information they have uploaded, or follow all the conversations that take place among different members. Social networks therefore provide a double pleasure, that of social interactivity and that of social observation. As a researcher, there is nothing easier than to monitor and observe other members private behaviour without making oneself present and it is important to face this ethical problem, as mentioned previously in the methodological section of this paper.

The voyeuristic tendency of social media is in IT literature referred to as “lurking”. A lurker is someone who does not participate, only observes the community and remains silent. A “voyeur” (from the French) is “one that looks”. The exhibitionist tendencies of these media make voyeurism a normal form of online behaviour. It is easy to feel like a voyeur when looking at intimate photographs portraying a couple in love or a private party, reading the results of a test about sexual preferences, or being updated about a member’s gaming behaviour. However, observing private content is part of the meaning and value of these social communities. Depending of the cultural background of the user, what may be understood as voyeurism may differ a lot. In some cultures observing (or uploading) photos of physical intimacy among lovers or family members may seem deviant, in others publishing political or religious views may be perceived as incorrect behaviour. Therefore, these social networks are redefining what is to be considered as deviant in voyeuristic terms.

The division between public and private becomes diluted by the empowerment of these technological platforms. How much privacy one wants to expose or get exposed to therefore becomes an individual matter. The individualistic tendency seems to support the thesis of self-directed connectivity (Castells 2001), by which individuals design their virtual conduct. However, much of the online behaviour seen in this study is pushed, transformed and moulded, not by free-individuals interacting in neutral spaces, but by the socio-technical platforms embedded in specific technical cultures.
Social network sites and communities provide another form of social behaviour closely related to voyeurism, that of social control and monitoring. Several researchers have focused on the danger that lies in the possible abuse of personal digitalized information by political authorities or corporations (Hand 2008; Tapscott 2009; Miller 2010). However, the Web as a social control tool can also be seen in other more intimate spheres, such as that of the family. For example, a virtual group was created in Facebook with the goal of excluding parents from the network. This group was created by teenagers who used Facebook as the main communication platform within their community, and who were of the opinion that accepting parents as “friends” in the community was expanding parental control. They believed the parents used the network to monitor their activities. This is not a strange assumption. In the United States it is possible for parents to buy applications that inform about their children’s updates and activities on social networks. For many western cultures, to avoid interference by adults or authorities has traditionally been a part of being young. Parents are confronted with the dilemma of choosing between interacting with their children’s virtual communities and becoming voyeurs, or keeping out of their children’s online activities, which today are an important part of their social life.

A similar dilemma relating to the fear of social control is found in the process of accepting or rejecting “friends” or “followers” in both Facebook and Twitter. Depending on the individual’s use of the network it is not always easy to accept the virtual “friendship” of a superior or a colleague at the workplace. How would it then be possible to post negative feelings or frustrations related to work? However, the decision of rejection is not an easy one either. For example, in Facebook it is difficult to know if the rejected member is updated about their rejection. Similar considerations can be given to the online interactivity of students and university professors or patients and doctors/other health specialists. To what extent, for example, do professors want to share their private life with their students? Traditionally, individuals have been able to keep their identities depending on their role in a specific community. A professor would keep a specific role with the student, a different one with a colleague, an old friend or a relative. However, the fluidity of social media also has consequences for the building of individual networks on these platforms. Social rules and procedures of how to keep these different identities separate online are still in the making. The popular social networks studied here allow for the creation of several online identities by one person. Nevertheless, this entails a large degree of reflexivity and purposiveness in the making of virtual identities, which is still rare to encounter.

Virtual Identities

Social networking sites allow people to create new forms of relationships, which are different from traditional face-to-face relationships (for example, the “friends”
in Facebook) and provide new tools to maintain and enhance personal social networks, but they also pose new demands and challenges to the users. These platforms demand a new type of reflexivity about the creation of virtual identities and the management of personal information. Several authors have discussed the implications of digitalising personal data and information (Greenfield 2006; Hand 2008). Others have celebrated it as an era of transparency (Shih 2009; Brogan & Smith 2009) or as a new social transformation (Bus & Strauss 2009: 31):

Today’s teenagers and twenty-something, far from valuing privacy and boundaries, like earlier generations, embody a new kind of self-obsessed, Youtube broadcast culture. The typical high school student today posts her photos on Facebook or Flickr, and tells the world where she is, what she is doing, and how she is feeling on her Facebook status message or Twitter.

The increased transparency is not only viewed as a positive phenomenon, it has also been criticised as a medium to a larger centralised control on personal life. Nevertheless, this study challenges the very assumption that these platforms are transparent. Although users upload a considerable amount of content on these platforms, nothing points to this content being more transparent or more “true” than other traditional forms of non-digital social communication. Individuals can use the relationship-building tools provided by this technology to build and shape their virtual identities and, although it is impossible to monitor all the content that may be uploaded about oneself, users choose specific ways to portray and present themselves in those digital platforms. Users of social networks are becoming increasingly conscious about the image they want to project and the use they want to make of that image. The profile pages of Facebook and the updates on Twitter are virtual blocks of a personal brand. There are plenty of recommendations of how to optimise these tools for personal promotion in the social media literature:

It’s a good idea to do whatever you can to make your profile reflect your personality and personal brand, but don’t go crazy – everyone hates the seizure-inducing profile with alarmingly loud pop music (Zarrella 2010: 57).

Some of this literature invites an increased reflexivity in the use of these platforms (Tapscott 2009; Bay 2009). Users adapt to different types of roles in virtual communities. The participation in these communities helps to provide a multidimensional virtual identity, which can take many different shapes depending on the platform of communication. The multidimensionality of social identities is also reflected in the virtual world. The four different social network sites selected for this study are different mediascapes that encourage different types of social interactivity.

Authoritarian Virtual Coaching

Users are helped to create and maintain online identities that match the aims of the virtual platform. In the case of virtual communities the employee is not present in a traditional way; there is no “human face” representing the organisation. The
firm is represented by those in charge of the administration and the system architecture of the site. The role of the “employee” resembles the voice of a virtual agent that takes the mask of a facilitator or coach and not that of a traditional manager. The informal style of language and the collegial approach to users is found again and again in the presentation of the different tools available on the sites. This language differs greatly from other, more formal bureaucratic instances, which have normally addressed large populations of users.

The communication style of the facilitator of the sites is very specific. There is no she or he, instead the facilitator becomes a de-personalised voice. The voice addresses the user with a colloquial style, which tries to imitate that of friends or colleagues and is far from other types of more formal communication. However, it combines this “friendly” style with authoritative tendencies (such as the language of the coach of a sport team). Within the sites it is common to find plenty of commands: “Send a message to …”, “Write on her wall …”, “Suggest friends for …” “Write a review …”, “See what people are saying about …”. The authoritarian language that appears in the main pages of the sites is always encouraging participation and speed of action; it does not encourage protection of privacy or reflexivity. There are no commands such as “protect your privacy …”, “be aware of the type of content you upload …”, “reduce the number of people that can see this…” or “think before sending …”. The style of communication is informal and resembles that of teenagers. Use of honorifics such as Mr. or Mrs. or other such as Dr. is avoided. Typically the member is addressed in the second person: “You can do this and that here”. There is a cult of “youth” and of personalization in the language style used on these platforms. The “coach” seems to say: “Well, let’s pretend that we already know each other and let’s get started”.

Technological systems are not produced in vacuums but in specific cultural settings, and the communication style of the network expresses the importance of the cultures of the internet in the shaping of social media. The specific language of the platforms can be connected to the informality of some of the most prominent web cultures such as the hacker culture or the virtual community culture. Those cultures have their roots in “contra cultural movements” and other alternative lifestyles which appeared during the 1970s (Castells 2001) and are characterised by a lack of formality. Although these “rebellion” tendencies have dissipated in a Web that is a reflection of mainstream cultures, there are still some traces in the communication style of the sites.

The platforms’ different goals are stated in the sites’ presentations and are further explicit in the different tools used. Facebook presents its aim already in the homepage: “Facebook helps you connect and share with the people in your life”. There is no difference between working life or private life; it is a holistic statement, which invites to self-biographical representation. This appears as a contrast to other popular social network sites such as LinkedIn, which presents itself as the place to “Stay informed about your contacts and industry, find the people &
knowledge you need to achieve your goals and control your professional identity online”. Interestingly, this site mentions the aim of identity creation and control and also acknowledges the existence of multiple identities. The edition of the personal profile in Facebook includes questions about political and religious views as well as a section called “Interested in:”, with possibilities of selecting men and/or women, apparently referring to sexual preferences although it is not explicit. This may be seen as a fear of sexual references by the administrator (they are not afraid to call politics or religion by their names). The user can also specify if he is looking for friendship, a relationship, dating or networking. Furthermore, the user can indicate all types of preferences from favorite movies to activities, personal data like addresses and educational background. It is a virtual tool to create a mobile, ever-changing self-biographical profile. Twitter has a similar unpretentious and colloquial style, it announces that the aim of the site is to allow users to “Share and discover what’s happening right now, anywhere in the world”.

TripAdvisor does not display the aim of the site on the homepage. The “coach” in this case indicates the main asset of the site stating that it has “Over 30 million trusted traveler reviews & opinions”. It is first in the section dedicated to reviews that the user is addressed in a similar informal and authoritative way: “Write a review. Get Started... Review a hotel, restaurant, attraction, or even the place you visited”. Wikipedia is also open to all Web users and addresses the reader in the following way: “Welcome to Wikipedia. The free encyclopedia that anyone can edit”. However, from the different sites studied the “coach” of Wikipedia, although informal, is less authoritative, the language used is more explanatory and there are fewer commands. In general this type of network invites more reflexivity and provides reasonable arguments to the virtual audience. For example, it says, “Semi-protection is sometimes necessary to prevent vandalism to popular pages. You can discuss this page with others. You may request unprotection of the page”. There is a generalized use of “can” or “may”, which seems to favour reflexivity as opposed to the abundant use of imperative language in the social networks dedicated to online communities.

A fundamental value of the hacker culture is freedom, which is fostered by the lack of formality in relation to ownership of production, whereby many contributors use anonymous signatures. In social media there is a vast use of nicknames and anonymity. This is clearly the case on TripAdvisor or Wikipedia. Wikipedia is the most extreme case of those studied. The final product or article appears as one collective work without any indication of the individual contributions and without references to the authorship, whereas in TripAdvisor there is a specified authorship of content. However, signatures are unreliable as they include anonymous names, nicknames, signs and what may look like the real name of the author. In Facebook and Twitter contributors’ names are important and they seem to correspond to real names that can be traceable, although identity theft can occur in both platforms. From the examination of these platforms it is possible to con-
clude that those platforms which focus on self-biographical exposure are also those that have a larger tendency to reveal the real authorship of the content. While those that focus on knowledge, such as product reviews or encyclopaedic articles, have a tendency towards anonymity and nickname use. Personal exposure on the web reflects the tension between the real and unreal (use of nicknames, chat language and the brief commitment of web groupings; vs. the expansion of open-sources, wiki and other forms of more “objective” forms of contributions). It allows the production of hypertext about personal realities; not only including the personal details but also linking them to other personal contacts, other contributions, and other sites with information.

The ten profiles studied in Facebook show the real identity of the contributors. However, tendencies towards anonymity and informality of authorship often appear in the photos that these contributors use on their profile. Three of them use pictures of objects or of other famous persons (Hollywood actors or sport stars) as their profile photo and they tend to change their photo often. The majority, however, use traditional portrait photos on their profile. The examination of the identification of personal identities points towards a very different use of social media for shaping virtual identities. While platforms like Facebook and Twitter may be used to enhance and promote a personal career or individual social networks, TripAdvisor and Wikipedia provide other types of rewards which relate to peers’ recognition as it is known from the open source movement.

**Disembedding Biographical Experiences**

Web 2.0 disembeds the recording of biographical experiences. This takes place in two different ways: in relation to space and in relation to ownership. Firstly, there was once a clear spatial limitation between the production and sharing of traditional biographical records in the forms of familiar photo albums or analogue-written diaries. There was also a specific natural setting for the sharing of those creations. Digitalisation processes have profoundly altered these spatial boundaries. There is no physical space limitation for digital content. Everything can be documented and stored and therefore every banality or daily activity can become important in the self-portrayal of one’s life. Mobile devices have increased this tendency, providing access to these virtual platforms from anywhere, not only from a computer desk. The democratisation tendencies of Wikipedia, in which amateurs and experts are considered as equals, displays a parallel development in these social network through the “flattening” of our own life experiences, where everything is to be considered good enough to command attention from our network. The constant interaction and updating of the platform is a silent expectation of these communities; several of the “friends” studied in this article apologised for not being active enough, concluding that because of their lack of activity their profile would not be of interest. For Facebook members, quality of performance is related to constant interactivity; it is like the virtual “Reuters” of one’s social life.
In the future we may see a whole virtual world of graveyards of biographical banalities to be carried along as we get older.

Secondly, social media entail a profound change in the control and ownership of the created content. Traditionally published narrative, visual or audio texts had a clear authorship and functioned as closed works after their publication, e.g. a published review of a restaurant in a newspaper or a diary notebook. Texts published on the web are open. The work is not completed, and it invites the contribution of other users. Social network sites encourage people to write about people, so that individuals in a network can upload narrative texts, photos or videos of others, creating a biographical hypertext. The influence of the “open-source movement” in social media is evident in the openness of the virtual texts. An example of this is that the personal home pages of Facebook do not only show the photos or videos of the user, which have been uploaded by herself, but also those that have been provided by other “friends” of the network. Furthermore, it also includes a tool to comment on personal updates. This encourages virtual social interaction and also provides new layers of meaning to the personal contribution. This interactivity is an embedded characteristic of these systems, and individuals are invited to alter the original work by rating it, providing extra comments on the content, including tags in photos and videos, linking it to other contents, or sending the content to be published at other network sites. The character of most of the user-generated content is dynamic and fluid, always open to alteration. There is little self-direction in this socio-technical behaviour. The lack of full control over one’s own production is part of the essence of this virtual sharing of information, and the assumption of this lack of control of the final product is part of the system architecture of the social network sites.

The examination of the data also entails that there is no single virtual identity or specific way in which social media contributes to identity building, but many diverse shapes and a multiplicity of platforms that help users to create a collage of multiple, fluid and complex virtual identities. These essential elements of social networks will soon demand necessary tools to manage this increasing complexity and solutions to monitor a portfolio of different identities created in different forums, which aim at different goals.

Individuals begin at an early age to develop virtual self-biographic texts in different social media platforms. This poses new and different types of challenges to the management of the exposure of private life on-line. Today’s children and teenagers will accumulate a large record of biographical content. Real ageing will be mirrored by the virtual ageing of identities and profiles created through time, providing different self-portraits and do-it-yourself biographies. This traceable web behaviour may in turn become a heavy burden to carry, as information about one’s life becomes more and more fragmented and difficult to comprehend and control. There has long been a debate about the impact that the massive amount of information provided by the Web will have has had on younger generations (Bay
However, the information found in social media is not just any kind of information, it is information about one’s private life and intimate world.

**Conclusions**

The aim of this study was to examine how social media has contributed to the making of personal biographies, while discussing the shift towards a culture of digital exposure and digitalisation of personal life. The findings illustrated that online communities and social network platforms are new technological tools mediating in the construction of late modern biographies and that they expand the complexity of today’s socio-technical systems.

The analysis of the different platforms indicates that the use of social media promotes non-linearity in the making of personal biographies due to the encouragement of instant communication and the broadcasting of immediate thoughts and observations. It also shows that the architecture of the sites and the culture of online communities promote digital emotional exhibitionism, although it is possible to distinguish between the different levels of emotional involvement of the users. These socio-technical systems support the change from reflexive behaviour to reflex behaviour and help to erase the frontier between the documenting of a person’s biographical record and daily life banalities. The exploration of the sites illustrates that social networking promotes interactivity instead of individual control and personal privacy. This, together with the encouragement of speed and lack of reflexivity, poses important ethical questions in relation to the management and ownership of virtual identities.

Digital exhibitionism provides the necessary grounds for the development of digital voyeurism. Besides eroding the division between the memorable and the ordinary, these technologies also challenge the division between the public and the private. The traditional frontier becomes dilated by the empowerment of the socio-technical cultures that enhance disclosure and exposure of information as well as voyeuristic tendencies. The exposure of personal content also enhances the possibilities of using these technological tools for social control. This has posed new challenges to the users of these networks while ethical rules and procedures for the management of online identities are still on the making.

The analysis of the cultural, technological background has provided insights on the processes that allow the user to create virtual identities. These processes reveal the significance of the system architecture of social network sites, tendencies towards anonymity and informality of authorship, and show that the communication style of the administrators is informal but with authoritarian tendencies, aiming not at the encouragement of reflexivity but at group interactivity and speed of action.

The study points towards the multidimensionality of online social identities, an addition to the complexity of today’s late modern biographies. The lack of control
over one’s production is an essential part of these technical platforms. The large interactivity of social media in the form of comments, tags, signs, etc., provides new layers of meaning and content to the uploaded personal contributions. This feature, combined with the participation in many different online communities and networks, contributes to the digitalisation of a personal life as a collage of multiple, fluid and complex virtual identities and challenges the idea of a self-directed Web.

Hundreds of millions of users are digitalising personal and biographical information. Online communities and social network sites are seen by many as providers of individual realisation and mediated pleasure. However, these platforms are not culturally neutral playgrounds. They are technological platforms embedded in the cultures of the Internet, which enhance the making of reflex-biographies. This analysis points towards some complementary characteristics of this popular phenomenon: the exhibitionistic and voyeuristic features of the communities, the lack of reflexivity, the authoritative tendencies and possibilities of social control, and the power of these technologies to act as agents of socio-cultural change.

Further study may reflect upon the management of virtual identities over time, how the dilution between the memorable and the banal and the private and the public impacts on the ageing of biographies, online and off-line, and how the different socio-cultural backgrounds of the users reflect upon the use of these media. As our world’s use of IT and social media increases and expands, an enhanced understanding of the impact of these technologies in the making of personal identities and relationships becomes more valuable.

Ana María Munar, Associate Professor at the Department of International Economics and Management, Copenhagen Business School, is a political scientist and holds a PhD in Business and Economics. Her research interests are in tourism and information and communication technologies, social media, globalisation processes, destination branding, policy and trends in tourism education. E-mail: amm.int@cbs.dk.

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Epilogue – Towards an Experience Ecology of Relational Emotions

By Richard Ek

In the introduction we addressed service work in general and the emotional labour concept in particular, with the assumption that emotion management and emotion display is not limited to the front-desk or service employee. Rather, as indicated, “it is a process that permeates and characterises the service encounter and its physical environment, its servicescape, in its entirety”.

From this suggestion I would like to address three implications that are in need of more scholarly attention. The first is that also the consumer, as a customer, tourist, client, guest or whatever, conducts emotion management and emotion display. The second implication is that these two processes of emotional management and emotional display (the service personnel’s and the customers’) are preferably apprehended and discussed as relational in character. This means that they mutually shape and enhance each other in an interaction with a particular set of politics and poetics that craves more analytic concern. The third implication is that the poetics and politics of relational emotion management and emotion display need to be situated in their spatial context.

The third implication in turn addresses a call for a more sensitive attendance towards this relational spatiality through its ontological register. This is of course a very ambitious task, and here I can only offer a distilled picture of the work pertaining to the cultural circuit of capitalism conducted by Nigel Thrift as analytical spine. While the different implications addressed above are attended to in different ways in the individual papers, I would like to use this postscript to paint a distilled picture of what could perhaps be referred to as experience ecology for relational emotion management and emotion display.

Experience Ecology for Relational Emotion Management and Display

Taking a political approach, Nigel Thrift (2005a: 6–8) argues that the cultural economy of contemporary capitalism can be divided into three areas of approach: the cultural circuit of capitalism, new spatial forms of corporate related practices and new forms of commodity and commodity relations. For me, all these three areas of approach enlighten the experience ecology that relational emotion management and emotional display should be situated in.

The first approach, the cultural circuit of capitalism, was introduced in the 1960s. This cultural circuit is a self-organising assemblage of knowledge production and diffusion, primarily among the business elite (Thrift 2001). The chief
components in this assemblage include business schools, management consultants and management gurus (Thrift 1998a). Particularly characteristic of this institution, and the management discourses that are articulated and spread in this amalgam, is the ambition to deal and cope with complexity through reflexivity (Thrift 1998b & 1999). Through this ambition, “soft” aspects like knowledge, creativity and innovation become key concepts (as was stated at the end of the introduction). In this situation people become the primary resource, which means that this human resource consequently needs to meet new requirements and managerial expectations. This leads us to the second area of approach, namely new spatial forms of corporate-related practices.

A soft capitalism that rests on creativity, knowledge, tacit skills etc., needs willing subjects. More explicitly, the business organisation is in need of willing and willed subjects (Thrift 1998a). The managed body has to do more (work harder) but at the same time be passionate about it and not only invest cognitive skills in the work. In addition, the managed body has to become more adaptable (through constant learning) and participative in order to be sensitive to the social dynamics of the organisation (Thrift 2001). The managed body, and particularly the bodies of the personnel, becomes performing bodies as attempts to engineer “fast” subjects are unfolded in tandem with attempts to produce new spaces of intensity and plasticity. These fast subject positions become engineered through spaces of visualisation, circulation and embodiment (Thrift 2000a).

These spaces of pastoral subjectification and performative recitation of norms (Butler 1993) do not create agent-less drones. Nevertheless, they are products of intentional circumstances, reflected in practices such as therapeutic models, a management ethos that predicts openness and fluidity and organisational work forms like teams and projects. In order to underpin this openness and capacity for renewability, inspirational practices like events, performances and playfulness are used as management technologies (Thrift 2000b), together with more representational technologies such as corporate storytelling and iconographic uses of signs and spaces (Thrift 2001; Boje 2008).

These new spatial forms of corporate-related practices do not only limit themselves to the spatialities of the organisation bodies, but apply to the organisational spatiality as a whole. Among all the dimensions that can be considered here, Thrift stresses in different writings that the background is usually more or less taken for granted. Clearly, computing is now much more common in the organisational environment, with the consequence that surfaces and all kinds of software-driven devices (Thrift & French 2002; Thrift 2003) give a new texture to everyday life. New information ecology increasingly forms a background of cause and effect, thus creating all kind of densities and intensities and blurring ontological as well as ontic orderings and distinctions (Thrift 2004a & 2004b). Societal interaction becomes embedded in a more active object environment and an informed materiality that is continuously mediated and articulated, sensed and represented.
As kinetic, ubiquitous surfaces, these environments influence our understanding of movement and time (Thrift 2004c).

It is now time to attend to the third area of approach – the new forms of commodity and commodity relations. To Thrift (2005a: 7–8), this is a development that pivots on the consumption of the new commodity forms that are unfolded, such as the ubiquity of brands and the animation and vitalisation of commodities (material, non-material, material-and-immaterial, more-than-material and so on) intended to produce affect (see also Molotch 2003; Lury 2004; Miller 2009). The tendency here is intensification, or extensification, in order to produce commodification in registers so far downgraded in capitalistic mechanisms (Thrift 2006). These tendencies are perhaps best captured in management discourse through the work of Pine and Gilmore (1999) on the experience economy and the need for business to arrange, design and create experiences for and with an increasingly active consumer.2

When consumer practices become imagined as experience creation and as something more than an instrumental exchange or interaction, a new, but still commercial, poetics of the service encounter is unfolded. This tendency has paved the way for immanent management recipes on value and an all-encompassing service dominant logic within service marketing literature (Vargo & Lusch 2004; Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004; Prahalad & Krishnan 2008). Value is increasingly expected to arise not from what is but from a realm of potentiality (Thrift 2006) and consumers’ investment in the act of consumption.

Here, the full consumer register must be played upon. In particular, the spectrum of non-cognitive processes, of forethought, has to be mobilised through new business models and management engineering. Forethought is no longer understood as a substrate but as a vivacious performative situational element. As a consequence, what counts as production and consumption, as well as products and services, is restructured.3 Attention is paid to affect, since consumption is increasingly understood as not only an emotional but also an affective field that is possible to reach through an activation of space (Thrift 2006).

This is not the place to make a long re-capitulation of affect or the increased interest in these questions that makes some voices claim a contemporary affective turn (Clough 2008). Basic definitions and a suggestion as to how affect can be related to feelings and emotion will have to suffice. Affect can be described as a culturally unfiltered self-referential state of being (Thrift 2008: 221). It can be seen as “the stuff of our being and not the semiotic material that enables us to understand our being” (Dewsbury 2009: 21). It can also be imagined as an “experiential force and a material thing that exists as a relational experience and a phenomenal realm in a noninterpretative and impersonal manner” (Dewsbury 2009: 20).

These definitions refer to the perhaps more dominant approach towards affect outlined by Thrift (2004d: 63–64), and are based on the works of Spinoza and the
interpretation of Spinoza's work by Deleuze (1988, 1990) and Massumi (2002). Affect is a form of usually indirect and non-reflective thinking, its own kind of intelligence and consequently a capacity of interaction, a force of emergence. Affect is therefore a transpersonal capacity, a force in and between bodies. The body (not necessarily a human body) can both affect and be affected. Affect is inherently relational (Anderson 2006). In Steve Pile’s review, affect is non-cognitive, pre-reflexive, pre-conscious and pre-human, and, following this, representations of affect can never represent affect itself (Pile 2010).

What becomes problematic for Pile (and I agree with this objection) is Thrift’s insistent remarks that affect can be manipulated. To Thrift (2006), capitalism to a greater extent uses the whole bio-political field, a microbiopolitics of the subliminal, including affect (non-cognitive dimensions of embodiment and instinct, the 0.8–1.5 seconds of little space of time, the blink between action and performance) (Thrift 2000c, 2004d). Business corporations become increasingly affective, with more and more advanced affective techniques that appeal to the heart, passion, imagination and emotions (Thrift 2008: 244-246), while cities are concentrations of manipulations of affect for political gain through new political registers (Thrift 2004d, see also Connolly 2002 and Protevi 2009). To return to Pile (2010: 17), he is critical of the assumption that affect, as a non-representational object, can be grasped, made intelligible, represented, i.e. known, and the same time consciously and deliberately engineered. It is clear that we need to be concerned about and examine the ontology of affect and how it relates to feelings and emotions.

To Clive Barnett (2008: 188), affect is doubly located in the relational in-between of interaction fields, metaphorically below the level of consciousness and before the realm of intentional action. Affect comes before “doing” and “knowing”. These layers of ontology are perhaps most evident in the separation between affect, feelings and emotions. Emotions are everyday understandings of affect (Thrift 2008: 221), affect is unqualified intensity, while emotion is qualified intensity (Massumi 2002: 28). Pile (2010: 9) summarises this ontological map of prior, below, and beyond (affect is prior to emotions, below cognition and beyond reflectivity and humanness [situated in the realm of bare life]) as a three tiered cake of mind-body, in which the first tier is the non-cognitive – affect – below, behind and beyond cognition, the second tier is the pre-cognitive – feelings – not yet expressed or conceptualised but made into conscious and personal responses to transpersonal affect and the third tier is the cognitive – emotions – expressed feelings that are socially constructed through language and other kinds of sign systems. The problem is, of course, that since affect is unknowable the basic ontological tier cannot be represented (that is, ontologically fixated in any sense). Even if it could be situated as the foundation or requirement of feelings and emotions, it is not possible to articulate the nature of this foundation, requirement or influence. Pile definitely has a point here, so we need to articulate a new view of affect, feelings and emotions in order to address their presence in experience.
ecology and the relational emotion management and display phenomena situated within.

Instead, I suggest that the cartography of affect, feelings and emotions can be regarded as a palimpsest, following Crang’s geographical vision of the urban landscape (Crang 1996). It is still tiered cake ontology, but the tiers no longer have a causal function through a one-sided direction of forces (from affect and then “forward” in time and topography). Affect is here no longer isolated and impossible to make knowable or represent, because affect is here topologically related to feelings and emotions, and in that sense, graspable and tangible, possible to represent and understand.

This is perhaps an unorthodox view of affect, but it fits with our purpose of directing analytical focus to emotional labour in an experience-filled economy that is increasingly unfolded through ever more inventive and creative (mainly commercial) approaches and actions along the entire emotional register of societal interaction (see for example George 2008). Thrift’s and other scholars’ takes on affect help us to pay attention to a spatial context that includes the ephemeral, artefacts, technology and the mundane in the context of emotional labour, at the same time as the content of what is social and social interaction is not taken for granted. This is what I have called the experience ecology of relational emotion management and display.

Richard Ek is Associate Professor at the Department of Service Management, Lund University. His research interests include critical geopolitics, biopolitics, postpolitics and place branding. He is currently involved in a project on the visualisation of the post-political citizen in urban renewal projects and in city management. E-mail: Richard.Ek@msm.lu.se.

Notes

1 I am well aware of the literature based on Foucault’s work on governmentality and bio-power and the fact that it fits well into this analysis, but I choose not to include this strand of work in the reasoning in a systematic way.
3 This has also developed into an “identity crisis” in service marketing, as the former distinction between goods and services no longer holds, not even in a superficial way (Grönroos 2001; Lovelock & Gummesson 2004; Gummesson 2007).
4 The second approach conceives affect as a set of embodied practices that produce visible conduct as an outer lining from phenomenological, hermeneutic and social interactionism approaches. The third approach is based on the notion of libidinal and sexual drive in Freudian
and psychoanalytic meaning. The fourth and last approach to affect is what Thrift called Darwinian affect, which discusses the universality and specificity of expressions of emotions involving the face, the voice and body postures and movement (Thrift 2004d: 63-64). Later, Thrift (2006: 223-225) identified five schools of thought relating to affect: the Darwinian approach, the James-Lange theory, Tomkin’s distinction between drives and affect, Deleuze’s work and the psychosocial school of thought. Affect is consequently of special concern in Non-representational theory, an investigative approach that questions the scholarly emphasis on the representational realm in the social sciences and humanities. Besides stressing affect and sensation, Non-representational theory or geographies further stress the vitality of the everyday flow and the philosophies of becoming, the anti-biographical and pre-individual, practices, things, experimentation (also in the research process and research outcome, see McCormack 2002) and a view of space as the concreteness and materiality of the situation rather than a transcendental or metaphoric take on space (Thrift 2008: 5-16, see also Cadman 2009). The most important articles on affect from the Non-representational geographies literature not taken into consideration here include Dewsbury (2003), McCormack (2002, 2003, 2007), Anderson (2004, 2005) and Harrison (2007).

5 Thrift uses Agamben’s (1998) notion of ‘bare life’ to conceptualise this bio-political domain of half a second and manages to elucidate the connection between the bio-politics of modern totalitarianism and the society of consumerism and hedonism, to some degree apparent in Agamben’s work through his reading of Debord and Heidegger.

References

Introduction: Literary Public Spheres

By Torbjörn Forslid & Anders Ohlsson

Why a thematic section on “Literary Public Spheres”?

Literature has always constituted an important part of the public sphere. For instance, drama in ancient Greece was performed within the popular festivals of Dionysus. However, drama was also an important part of life in the city state. Writing drama was part of a competition, and those selected for performance were sponsored by wealthy citizens. Using well known myths of the time, these dramas typically dealt with central issues in the daily life of the city states and its citizens. Each performance was attended by close to 15,000 spectators, which makes ancient Greek theatre a dominating medium before the invention of print technology.

Examples abound that literature influences public debate and public life: Taslima Nasreen challenging Islamic fundamentalism in her documentary novel *Lajja* (1994), and Elisabeth Alexander performing her own poem “Praise Song for the Day” at Barack Obama’s presidential inauguration in January 2009. Literature has always affected its readers and listeners, it has exerted influence on politicians and legislators, and it has called upon action or defense.

The complex relation between literature and the surrounding society has of course been a much debated issue. At the turn of the 20th century, Swedish literary historian Henrik Schück considered the study of literature as part of the history of culture in a broad sense. In literary biographies, which for long held the position as dominant genre within literary studies, and which in recent years has experienced a noticeable revival, the life of the author was put in relation not only to his or her literary works, but also to the surrounding society. Within the sociology of literature, the social production of literature and its social implications are considered.

Since the mid-20th century, however, literary studies have been dominated by theories focusing on formal aspects of the literary text. Suffice it to mention theories such as Russian formalism, new criticism, structuralism, and post-structuralism. Literary studies have given precedence to the interpretation of single works, groups of texts, or whole authorships. Also in cultural studies, interpretation has been a key analytical tool, although the focus here has not been on canonical texts.

The developments in society in the latter half of the 20th century have made this traditional text analytical approach difficult to defend. In today’s literary public sphere, different artistic and commercial interests converge. Dissolution of genres and transgression of borders has become the rule, rather than the exception.
depth readings of, for instance, Nasreen’s *Lajja Shame* will give us a more thorough understanding of this documentary novel. These types of literary studies, however, will not explain the function and effect of this novel in today’s mediated public sphere.

The objective of this thematic section on Literary Public Spheres is to broaden the scope of literary studies by exploring how writers and different categories of readers employ literature for a variety of purposes – some explicit, some only vaguely defined – in a wide range of public settings. Thus, we seek to explore how literary texts become the subject of debate, negation or dialogue centered on contemporary values and opinions of popular concern. Furthermore, we consider the public conversation – the debate – about literature, as a crucial part of literature itself.

The literary public sphere may be approached from a number of theoretical perspectives. One natural, yet partly problematic starting point is Jürgen Habermas’ classical *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962; eng. transl. 1989). Habermas develops a slightly idealized concept of “public sphere”, which emerged in 18th century Europe. It is a space outside of state control, where individuals can get together for debates, conversations, and discussions, thus forming a “public opinion”. The best argument, not the prestige or status of the debater, should be conclusive/decisive. According to Habermas, the bourgeois public sphere had its heydays in Britain during the 18th and 19th centuries. Already in the 1870s, the economic decline and the growth of commercial mass media caused what Habermas refers to as the “decay” of the public sphere.

Several objections can be raised to Habermas’ idealized and normative view of the public sphere; some of these are displayed in the very first article below. Still, the concept of the public sphere offers a point of departure for the study of today’s modern (literary) public spheres. Habermas’ concept should not be considered a static and normative theory, but a productive hypothesis. Furthermore, it highlights the function of (the debates of) literature in a wider context. The concept of the public sphere might also be used for bridging the gap between internal interpretation of texts and a wider cultural analysis, focusing on the effects of different texts in society. Consequently, Habermas forms a background to the predominant “deliberative” view of democracy (compare lat. “deliberare” meaning “discuss”, “deliberate”) where literature and culture hold a prominent position.

*In “Participation, Representation and Media System: Habermasian Paths to the Past”, Patrik Lundell argues that Jürgen Habermas’ theory of the public sphere may serve as heuristic tool for the study of today’s media situation and media development. In order to achieve this, Lundell argues for further historical investigation into three aspects of Habermas’ theory: Actual media participation, the representative features of media institutions, and media systems. These can and should...*
be combined, and historical specificity is of utmost importance. Focusing on concrete situations and places makes the neat grand-scale chronologies (Habermas’ and others’) fall short.

In her article “An Amateur’s Raid in a World of Specialists? The Swedish Essay in Contemporary Public Debate”, Emma Eldelin focuses on the role of essayists in late modernity. Referencing on Edward Said’s plea for an attitude of amate ureism in the public sphere in response to the contemporary specialization, Eldelin argues that the essay, as a genre, should be considered a vital part of public culture today, because of its devotion and interest for the larger picture. Some examples of essayists and essayistic writing of later decades, mainly from Sweden – among others Kerstin Ekman and Peter Nilson – serve as illustrations. These writers, however, have also gained at least part of their authority from being acknowledged in other fields or genres: Ekman as a distinguished novelist and member of the Swedish Academy and Nilson as a trained astronomer.

In her article “Personal Readings and Public Texts – Book Blogs and Online Writing about Literature”, Ann Steiner states that the blogging culture has become an important and integrated part of the book trade and has influenced the publishing, marketing and distribution of literature in North America and in many European countries. The question is how this potential agency among bloggers operates. Focusing on Swedish book blogs during the autumn of 2009, Steiner addresses two issues in her article: the position of the amateur book blogger with regard to concepts like professionalism, strategies and hierarchies, and secondly, the connections between the book bloggers and the book trade, especially the publishers and their marketing departments.

After the “cultural turn”, the question of how to legitimate the study of literature has become an urgent matter within Western educational systems. In her article “The Literature Curriculum in Russia: Cultural Nationalism vs. the Cultural Turn”, Karin Sarsenov examines the development of educational discourse in Russia. Despite radical educational reforms since 1991, literature still holds a prominent place in Russian schools. Sarsenov identifies the specific objectives of the authorities in devoting so much time to literature in school, as well as to elucidate in what way literature is to achieve these aims.

According to German media theorist Friedrich Kittler, the turn of the 19th century meant an intimization of language and literature. Coinciding with this development, Jon Helgason states in his article “Why ABC Matters. Lexicography and Literary History” that radical institutional attempts were made to regulate and discipline language and to codify spelling, inflection and, not the least, meaning – all on scientific grounds. Influenced by “The Encyclopaedic Idea” – the will and ambition to collect and order all human knowledge – institutions and researchers began working on and publish impressive lexicographical projects such as The Swedish Academy Dictionary (1893 – ). Helgason describes its origin, and considers its importance for the literary culture.
Media development has profoundly affected the literary public sphere. Authors as well as politicians may feel obliged to follow “the law of compulsory visibility” (John B. Thompson). All contemporary writers, be it bestselling authors or exclusive, high brow poets, must in one way or another reflect on their marketing and media strategies. Meeting and communicating with the audience, the potential readers, is of critical importance. In our article “The Author on Stage”, we consider how different literary performances by Swedish novelist Björn Ranelid (b. 1949) help establish his “brand name” on the literary market place.

**Anders Ohlsson** is professor of Literary studies at the Centre for Languages and Literature at Lund University. He has published a number of books, e.g. on intermediality and on the literary public sphere, most recently - along with Torbjörn Forslid - "Fenomenet Björn Ranelid" (2009). E-mail: Anders.Ohlsson@litt.lu.se.

**Torbjörn Forslid** is associate professor of literary studies at the School of Arts and Communication, Malmö University. He has published a number of books, for example on masculinity in Swedish literature and on the literary public sphere. His most recent book – together with Anders Ohlsson – is "The Björn Ranelid Phenomenon” (2009). E-mail: Torbjorn.Forslid@mah.se.
Participation, Representation and Media System: Habermasian Paths to the Past

By Patrik Lundell

Abstract
Drawing from Swedish press history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the present article argues for further historical investigation into three aspects of Jürgen Habermas’ theory of the public sphere. The first concerns actual media participation, the second the representative features of media institutions, and the third media systems. These routes of analysis can and should be combined, and historical specificity is key. When we focus on concrete situations and places, the neat grand-scale chronologies (Habermas’ and others’) fall short. There is no simple development from a “representative publicness” to a participatory public sphere, and back again. And the media have always been interconnected in a system-like way. However, historical specificity does not exclude contemporary developments. The present conclusion is that if we are to gain any true understanding of contemporary phenomena, a historical perspective is crucial, and aspects of Habermas’ theory can serve as heuristic tools.

Keywords: Participatory media, representation, media system, public sphere, Jürgen Habermas, press history, eighteenth century, nineteenth century.
Introduction

Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit, published in German in 1962 and translated into Swedish in 1984 (Borgerlig offentlighet) and into English in 1989 (The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere), has been strongly criticized. Three problems associated with Jürgen Habermas’ theory of the public sphere are 1) that, by focusing on the (male) bourgeois public sphere, it downplayed other forms of public activity, and hence depicted the public sphere as a far too homogenous object; 2) that, by focusing on a small range of high-culture periodicals, it neglected other forms of printed material, and hence described public life in an idealized manner, as being free from commercialism and sensationalism; 3) that its depiction of the decline of the bourgeois public sphere is simplistic, because recipients of media products have never been passive consumers who are as easily manipulated by new media techniques as Habermas, clearly influenced by Horkheimer and Adorno, imagined (e.g., Calhoun 1992; Robbins 1993; Thompson 1995; Bergström, Ekström & Lundgren 2000; Roberts & Crossley 2004).

These are valid objections. Habermas’ work has nevertheless remained central, and the present article suggests three empirical paths, originating from his theory, worth exploring in an attempt to deepen and extend our understanding of the past. The first concerns participatory features of historical media forms. The second considers the representative character of media institutions. And the third deals with media systems. While Swedish press history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the period from which most of my examples derive, has its own unique features and chronology, the paths suggested can most likely be followed far beyond the borders of Sweden, in other media forms, and in others times.

Participatory Media

According to Habermas, the public sphere was constituted by private persons who came together to discuss among themselves how civil society and the state should best be regulated. The periodical press did not constitute the public sphere. Individuals did. The public sphere was neither a medium nor an arena, neither newspapers and magazines nor salons and coffee houses. It consisted of communicating people.

This notion has been blurred in much of the historical research, and it has been common to view the newspaper press as perhaps not equivalent to the public sphere, but at least as its most important expression. In Swedish historiography, authoritative individuals, in the form of, e.g., self-confident liberal newspaper editors in the first half of the nineteenth century, have even been described as (more or less successful) interpreters or registers of the public sphere and their papers as (more or less accurate) mirrors or megaphones of public opinion (e.g., Nordmark 1989; Rosengren 1999). But how, more specifically, did the editors
manage to register public opinion? And where, more precisely, was this public opinion created (Habermas’ whole point being that public opinion was crystal-
ized within a critical discussion among individuals)? That is, if the editors did actually manage to register some predominant opinions (by opening their windows, by eavesdropping at coffee houses, or in some other way), how do we know that these opinions had been formed in a critical debate that was in principle open and unconstrained? Or, to put it differently: What is the actual relation between the texts in these newspapers and the individuals supposedly constituting the public sphere? Naturally, as long as that question remains unanswered, interesting things can be said about these newspapers and their editors; we should be careful, however, with any statements about their relation to a rational and critical Habermasian public sphere.

The periodical press was certainly, as Habermas argued, important to the public sphere: to start with, as an important source of information on which arguments and critiques could be based, and later on, as a medium through which individuals could express their views and opinions. But empirical anchorage is not the strength of Structural Transformation. Habermas was not particularly empirically generous with regard to how individuals actually expressed themselves via the periodicals.

I will only be slightly more generous in that respect and merely point out some remarkable features of Swedish press history (see Lundell 2002 for a comprehensive study). In the latter half of the eighteenth century, the ideal of a participatory press was established. Newspaper publishers started to consider it their duty to print letters to the paper, and readers began to identify a corresponding right to be published. Incorrectly, some individuals even believed that this was a legal right (Sylwan 1896: 108). It was commonly agreed that, in order to promote a better society, newspapers should contain a public discourse, not merely reflect one.

Three examples: In the 1760s, when one paper was beginning to show signs of decline, a subscriber appealed to his fellow citizens. “Whom shall I blame? Not the printer, for his task is to print, not to write. It must therefore be the learned and literary citizens of this city” (Quoted in Lundell 2002: 23). In a prospectus from 1793 for another paper, the ideal of the participatory press was articulated as follows:

One would see such a daily or weekly open the door, so to speak, to a constant conversation among the residents of the town, where everyone has the opportunity to enlighten, benefit from and amuse each other, and where the most prominent as well as the most common resident enjoys an equal right to raise his voice, for both the public and the private good. (Quoted in Mral 1998: 111.)

In the first issue of a third newspaper, launched in 1795, the paper’s editor addressed his readers: “The beginning of a newspaper which reflects the values of our city and our community is hereby realized; it must depend, however, on the practitioners of Science, Literature and the Fine Arts to further my purpose!” (Quoted in Lundell 2002: 23). Naturally, this ideal was shaped by several factors.
– cultural, economical and social – that cannot be elaborated on here. My point is
that it was very frequently expressed. It is furthermore easy to show that it was put
into practice; material submitted by subscribers comprised a substantial amount of
newspaper content, ranging from hard facts about travel and comers to poetry and
polemics. And it is even possible – based on signatures and subscription lists – to
get a fairly good picture of the social status of the contributors (Lundell 2002).

In principle, the newspapers were explicitly open to everyone; in practice, however,
high cultural and social barriers were erected around them, including of
course gender qualifications. In the case of Sweden, this periodical press was
borne primarily by the clergy and the nobility, i.e. the traditional elite of the old
regime, demanding in the name of Enlightenment and anticipating (and later echo-
ing) Immanuel Kant’s famous appeal (Kant 1784) that the true good citizen be
actively involved in society. The view of the Enlightenment as a not too radical
but politically moderate and elite phenomenon is fairly established today (e.g.
Porter 2000; Knudsen 1986; Christensson 1996). Furthermore, an important pa-
rameter was the limitation of the medium itself, conditioned by its historically
specific means of production and distribution. As few as three or four hundred
copies could be considered successful circulation, often in towns with less than
10,000 inhabitants. The papers usually lacked competition on the local market and
hence operated in relative solitude. And although newspapers had existed since
the beginning of the seventeenth century, the papers referred to here were often
understood as a new way of communicating, as a new medium. Their relatively
conservative content and their socially and geographically limited scope, how-
ever, do not make the participatory features of this press less true, neither as an
ideal nor as a practice.

So, was this the Habermasian public sphere? In the case of Sweden, the social
structure of the actual public supporting this kind of press had little to do with a
pushing bourgeoisie; its “decline” in the nineteenth century, on the other hand,
can certainly be related to the rising middle class. And in any event, an analysis
limited to newspapers is certainly not sufficient for making statements about a
single, uniform public sphere. Habermas’ ideas still work as a heuristic frame-
work for generating questions, and this kind of periodical press corresponds as
well as anything to what I find to be most central in his theory, namely the par-
ticipatory aspects. In a sense, it actually seems even more Habermasian than any-
thing in Structural Transformation.

In the British context, the “humble” editor of the eighteenth century has been
compared with the “authoritative public oracle” emerging in the next century,
based on, e.g., the very first issue of the London Daily Universal Register (soon to
be renamed the Times) in 1785, where one could read that a newspaper “ought to
resemble an Inn, where the proprietor is obliged to give the use of his house to all
travellers, who are ready to pay for it” (Liddle 1999: 5–6). In other words, this
kind of media participation could be seen in London as well as in small provincial
towns in Sweden. Though hardly studied to date, the theme can most likely be found elsewhere as well.

And the observations per se are not new, at least not as far as Sweden is concerned. However, the participatory elements of the Enlightenment press have previously often been understood as something else. While everyone has agreed that its history stretches much farther back in time, proper newspapers, the story has usually gone, only came into existence in the nineteenth century. The preceding period has often literally been seen as pre-history and quite anachronistically defined in terms of its lack of features to come. Historians around 1900 sneered at the amateurish elements and poor quality of the eighteenth-century press. In 1927, a highly regarded history of Swedish literature informed the reader that the pages of Dagligt Allehanda, one of the most widely-circulated and long-lived Stockholm papers (founded in 1769), were filled by its own readers. “Thus,” the authors concluded, “Dagligt Allehanda was a very inferior newspaper” (Schück & Warburg 1927: 76). In a four-volume history of the Swedish press published at the dawn of the twenty-first century, the participatory qualities of the early nineteenth-century press are referred to in terms of editorial “cunning and tricks” (Torbacke 2000: 282).

Instead of being blinded by the rhetoric of novelty, changes in the media of our own digital age – blogs, podcasting, video sharing websites – should make us capable of seeing something quite different in history as well. We just have to start looking. Instead of speaking vaguely of a Habermasian public sphere that connotes openness, dialogue and civic engagement, we should try to study actual participation historically (cf. Ekström et al. 2010). And who knows where this could be found – in what times and places, in what media forms? This would truly deepen our understanding of past media relations, and it would challenge the widespread notion of the revolutionary nature of our time (e.g. Surowiecki 2004; Tapscott & Williams 2006; Keen 2007).

Representative Institutions and Individuals

One answer to the question of why we became so blind, of how we managed to forget media participation in days gone by, is that modern media institutions have had no interest in letting us see or remember. The history of the newspaper press and its audiences has largely been constructed as part of the professional efforts of an emerging corps of journalists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This resulted in a narrative that ignores their older participatory precursors and emphasizes the non-participatory qualities of their own enterprise (Lundell 2010).

In the first half of the nineteenth century, a new type of editor began arguing for both a representative and leading role. This was motivated by the fact – as one very influential paper, Argus, put it in 1825 – that everyone, including the individuals who wrote letters to the papers, was driven by self-interest, even if it was
often “concealed even to the writers themselves.” The same paper wanted to abolish “the extensive and uncontrolled practice of printing letters to the paper” (Quoted in Lundell 2002: 125). The only individual actually capable of rising above self-interest was the independent editor, by virtue of his being a professional. The editor, and the editor only, could lead and educate public thinking and give the same public a voice. Thus, what happened was that an existing, participatory public was degraded to a passive audience that received the teachings of professional editors. The dramatic increases in the number of newspapers that found their way into the hands of the lower classes would not occur until half a century later, when the new roles were firmly established.

When it became apparent that this type of editor was fighting a winning battle, conservative representatives of the old Enlightenment ideal began insisting on the legal obligation of newspapers to make room for rebuttal. In 1849, the parliamentary ombudsman recommended that such a law be enacted, because it would not only curb abuse and defamation, he argued, but also strike at the core of the problem, viz. the lack of impartiality in the press and hence in the public debate (Theorell 1849). Liberals sometimes agreed that these ideas were seemly and just—while at the same time dismissing them as unrealizable. The modern infrastructure of communication was simply far too complex (Rydin 1859).

For the new editors, there were a number of discursive means (from silence to exaggeration) of attaining status and establishing the new ideals and practices in the public mind. For example, the word correspondent was recharged. In Swedish, it had primarily denoted a letter-writer (a layman), but in the 1830s, it quite rapidly came to mean news reporter (a professional), and soon it behoved every editor with self-respect to employ at least one or two of them. Quite a few new newspapers even added the word to their names. The more or less professional correspondent certainly existed. But in many cases, this was merely a case of giving an established practice a new name. In the public mind, however, the label stressed the difference between professional and layman, and hence strengthened the professional image of the paper (Lundell 2002: 235–236). As for the participatory element per se, there is no question that non-professionals were responsible for a considerable amount of newspaper content long into the nineteenth century, and much later (Johannesson 2001; cf. Griffen-Foley 2004).

On a general level, there was a rhetorical exaggeration of professionalism. For instance, in descriptive reports of newspaper offices, the huge buildings (baptized newspaper palaces) are bustling with people, the pace is frantic, and the rotary press adds to the industrial atmosphere. In reality, most of these late-nineteenth century papers had only a handful of employees, the offices were furnished with one or two desks, and the most important tools were a bottle of glue and a pair of scissors (Jarlbrink 2009).

It is not possible to draw a line between the conscious strategies and inherent logics of a profession gaining momentum. But around the year 1900 – when the
press, as far as Sweden is concerned, could be described as an institution and an industry, whose power and influence no one could seriously deny – organized and very conscious attempts were also made to promote the self-image (Lundell 2006). And this self-image was that of the professional, not of layman participation. The newspaper press now became occupied with far more than the mere production of papers. Several other media forms – from pins to statues, from stamps to movies, from posters to lavish history books – were enrolled (Hampton 2004; Jones 1996; Lundell 2008). These expressions should not be regarded as exceptions, or phenomena outside proper journalism. They should be considered obvious features of practising the profession, of attaining and maintaining the status of the institution. Besides these kinds of external, self-celebrating activities, more internal strategies developed, for example narrative techniques aimed at creating the impression of objectivity (Tuchman 1980), i.e. the impression of professionalism.

The success of a medium is always conditioned by blindness or inattention to its supporting protocols, i.e. the social and cultural norms and practices associated with the specific media technology (Gitelman 2006: 5–7). Today, the narrative of the professional press is part of a confirming tradition, “invented” in the nineteenth century. And this tradition is also maintained outside the press itself. Politicians, novelist, scholars and other intellectuals and artists have – for various economical, ideological and social reasons – joined in the chorus (Lundell 2008). On the other hand, the mass-media critical approach developed during the twentieth century, from (say) Karl Bücher and Walter Lippmann onwards, has generally been highly consistent with and confirmed the internal stories of professional media institutions. Bücher (1917: 257–258) described the press as developing from a news-based medium via an opinion-based one to being advertisement-based (a scheme that Habermas later adopted). In his own time, Bücher (1926: 31) saw newspapers as an industry that produced advertising space, which required at least some editorial material to sell. Lippmann (1922) viewed the press as a means for transmitting information from professionals to the mass public, and his main concern was with the standard and skills of those professionals, arguing for the importance of scholarly influence on the journalistic corps. These two narratives – the internal journalistic and the external (sometimes) critical – have been so predominant that the professional and basically non-participatory aspect of the press is seen as media specific, creating a blindness for any actual participatory elements.

According to Habermas, the public sphere was eventually “refeudalized”. In modern society, critical debate left room for theatrical practices. It has been argued, however, that direct comparisons between the kind of “representative publicness” that was typical in the Middle Ages and the mediated politics of today risk being superficial; the development of media has supplied new forms of political interaction (Thompson 1995: 75). On the other hand, this does not alter the
fact that there actually are representative elements in modern media institutions as well. Every institution, every power, is anxious about how it is viewed. This is true of the *New York Times* and BBC as well as of Routledge and Google. Any exercise of power actually requires a production of meaning that confirms and conveys the legitimacy of that power (e.g. Walzer 1967; Hunt 1986; Douglas 1987). This also applies to individuals. Every individual needs to present himself/herself, in the public particularly through a professional identity (e.g. Goffman 1956). Every individual – be he or she a small-town journalist, a famous novelist, an upcoming poet, an ageing actor, a wealthy publisher, a young blogger or a career-planning academic – needs to produce meaning in relation to his/her public function. We need not moralize on these conditions. Identifying self-images as such, and seeking to offer critical correctives, is therefore no less important.

### Media System

*Structural Transformation* can be described as a periodization of different media systems: the representative, the bourgeois and the refederalized media system (Harvard & Lundell 2010). In Habermas’ narrative, the bourgeois phase was dominated by one specific medium, *viz.* the periodical press; the preceding representative era was characterized by ceremonial practices; and the following refederalized media system saw a wide range of new manipulative media techniques. In some important respects, this is consistent with later works on media systems. They have very often been occupied with establishing large-scale chronologies, and they have described the historical development as being characterized by ever-growing medial complexity and diversity. Furthermore, like Habermas’ historiography, they are also often normative, pointing out the “best” media system, and they are as a rule limited to a rather narrow spectrum of media forms (e.g. Bastiansen 2008; Bastiansen & Dahl 2003; Turow 1992; Hallin & Mancini 2004; McChesney 1999).

Habermas’ theory and description of the history of the public sphere could be enriched by other new perspectives used in recent historical media research. An approach that is more sensitive to history can draw from an expanding multidisciplinary field of research into the cultural history of media. Once again, changes in the media of our own time can open our eyes to neglected aspects of the past. To begin with, in recent decades, the very concept of media has been challenged in a new way, calling for a much more open definition than one that only includes the traditional mass media of the twentieth century (which has dominated if not theory construction in, at least the practice of media research) (Jüllich, Lundell & Snickars 2008: 12–17). If a medium is defined as a technology for producing and transmitting messages, there is no reason why a wide range of historical artefacts, apparatuses and activities should not be included, from mechanical automats and zograscopes to exhibitions, museums and public festivals.
In line with the ideas of Raymond Williams, it could furthermore be argued that any given epoch has residual, dominant and emergent media (Williams 1977: 121–127). The relation between the past and present is always dynamic. And the relation between media forms at any given time, also in the past, can be analysed using concepts like convergence, intermediality and remediation (e.g. Bolter & Grusin 1999). All these relations can be said to constitute the media system of a given time and place. The hitherto predominant form of media historiography, which focuses on one medium at a time – book history, press history, film history etc., is becoming obsolete. And once again, these historiographies are partly the result of media institutions writing their own history. The dependence on and interplay with other media forms have hardly been in focus, because one aim has been to market a product, commercially and ideologically. One measure of the success of these internal historiographies is the institutionalization of some academic disciplines, for example media studies (centred on the press, radio and television – one at a time), film studies and comparative literature.

In *A Social History of the Media*, Asa Briggs and Peter Burke, in their critique of Elizabeth Eisenstein’s work on *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (1979), stress the necessity of considering “the media as a whole, to view all the different media as interdependent, treating them as a package, a repertoire, a system, or what the French call a ‘regime’, whether authoritarian, democratic, bureaucratic or capitalist” (Briggs & Burke 2002: 22). And they continue:

To think in terms of a media system means emphasizing the division of labour between the different means of communication available in a given place and at a given time, without forgetting that old and new media can and do coexist and that different media may compete with or echo one another as well as complement one another. (Briggs & Burke 2002: 22–23.)

It is obvious that, in the past as well, content migrated from one medium to another, that changes in the form within one medium had effects on the content of other media, that new media changed the conditions for old media, that the economic base within one sector of the media system influenced the production within other sectors, that the terms of distribution of one medium acted on the consumption of other media.

This approach can partly be illustrated by two twin articles on the parliamentary reform in Sweden in 1865, written by Jonas Harvard and Madeleine Hurd, respectively (Harvard 2010; Hurd 2010). Harvard shows how a group of influential individuals carefully orchestrated a media campaign in order to create an opinion in favour of parliamentary reform. By activating newspaper editors and other influential citizens in more than one hundred places in the provinces, and by having these agents organize so-called reform meetings, a grass roots movement was established. Through the whole chain of media – from the letters of instruction, and the local meetings and the petitions, to the delegations calling on the King, the pamphlets, the parliamentary protocols and the increasingly frequent telegrams on these issues published in the papers – the impression of a uniform and nationwide
opinion was created. In Hurd’s article, the very organizing function of the newspaper press is in focus. The relations between various medial expressions outside the press – like political meetings – and their equivalent genres within the press are analysed. There was a firmly established structure for how the ritual of a typical and successful political meeting should be carried out. The corresponding reports on the meeting in the papers incorporated the ritualized activities in a suitable text form, which at the same time arranged the activities into a uniform narrative on the meeting in question. Through this uniformity, the single report became only one part of a larger narrative, in which the press – by referring to all the activities outside itself – could claim to speak on behalf of the nation and its people.

To be sure, by focusing on a small range of high-culture periodicals, Habermas neglected other forms of printed material, but he did include – and this, I find, is another very important result of his study – the coffee houses, the literary salons, the political clubs and the parliament in a view of the media as a system (cf. Briggs & Burke 2002: 73). With a more generous media concept and with new analytical tools, we can deepen that understanding. Instead of adopting his scheme (which is based on not too solid empirical ground in England and France) and instead of looking at it from above, from the perspective of grand-scale chronologies, we should start from below, in specific places and situations. We should try to uncover concrete medial interchanges, connections and overlapping practices on the local level. Only then – and after a great deal of hard work – can overall patterns and casual relations be seriously discussed (cf. Harvard & Lundell 2010).

Conclusion

The present article has argued for further historical investigation into three aspects of Habermas’ theory of the public sphere. The first concerns actual media participation, the second the representative features of media institutions, and the third media systems. Naturally, these paths of investigation can, and should, be combined. The last example above – on the media system of the reform movement in Sweden in the 1860s – is also a clear case of both participation and representative strategies. Historical specificity is key. When we focus on concrete situations and places, the neat grand-scale chronologies fall short. There is no simple development from a “representative publicness” to a participatory public sphere and back again. The media have always been interconnected in a system-like way. Historical specificity does not exclude an interest in contemporary developments. On the contrary. Today, one discursive strategy for newspapers, printed or net-based, is obviously to create the impression of public participation, which on the other hand does not exclude the possibility that there actually is some real participation going on. If we are to gain any true and deep understanding of these contemporary phenomena, a historical perspective is necessary.
Patrik Lundell is Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Communication and Media, Lund University. His latest books are the co-edited anthologies Mediernas kulturhistoria (2008), Media and Monarchy in Sweden (2009) and 1800-talets mediesystem (2010). Lundell has published several articles on the media history of the press. E-mail: patrik.lundell@kom.lu.se.

References


An Amateur’s Raid in a World of Specialists?
The Swedish Essay in Contemporary Public Debate

By Emma Eldelin

Abstract
The point of departure of this paper is a lecture by Edward Said, in which he claimed it necessary for today’s intellectuals to respond to modern specialization by assuming an attitude of amateurism in public life. It can be argued that there is a historical connection between the public role of the learned amateur and the essay as a form of expression and communication. Among recent advocates of the essay, the decline of this genre in modernity has sometimes been explained by the increasing public confidence in experts and specialists. According to this view, the development of modern society has made it less legitimate for essayists to serve as generalist commentators on society and culture. However, the growing tension between amateurism and professionalism goes back at least to the nineteenth century, and it has marked the ambiguous relation of the essay and the essayist to academia and institutional discourse ever since.

This paper discusses what has become of this public role of essayists in late modernity. Some examples of essayists and essayistic writing of later decades, chiefly from Sweden, serve as illustrations of a general line of argument, even though there are also comparisons between the essay in Sweden and in other countries. Among the examples of Swedish essayists put forward here are Kerstin Ekman and Peter Nilson. The reception of these writers suggests that the essayist, adopting the role as amateur, driven by devotion and interest for the larger picture, might still be a vital part of public culture today. However, it is also clear that writers like Ekman and Nilson have gained at least part of their authority from being acknowledged in other fields or genres – Ekman as a distinguished novelist and Nilson as a trained astronomer.

Keywords: Swedish essay, late modernity, amateur, authority in literature, persona, Kerstin Ekman, Peter Nilson
Introduction

In 1993, the literary theorist Edward Said gave the Reith Lectures on the subject *The Representations of the Intellectual* (Said 1994). In these lectures, broadcast on BBC Radio 4, he discarded several of the explanatory factors given by recent debaters, among them John Carey (1992) and Russell Jacoby (1987), for the decline of intellectuals in contemporary public debate. Instead of blaming the postwar explosion of higher education, the universities monopolizing intellectual work, or the increasing commercialization of journalism and publishing, Said asserted that the largest threat to intellectual life in contemporary society was an attitude of professionalism. By professionalism, he meant

\[...\] thinking of your work as an intellectual as something you do for a living, between the hours of nine and five with one eye on the clock, and another cocked at what is considered to be proper, professional behavior – not rocking the boat, not straying outside the accepted paradigms or limits, making yourself marketable and above all presentable, hence uncontroversial and unpolitical and ‘objective’ (Said 1994: 55).

In contemporary society, Said argued, the true intellectual was often expected to be a specialist or professional in a certain discipline or field. There was not only an increasing expectancy of specialization in higher levels of the educational system, but also a widespread cult of expertise and expert authority in society at large. In a system that rewarded conformity, the most pressing task for the intellectual should therefore be to respond to modern professionalization by representing a different set of values and ideals. He or she should assume an attitude of amateurism, which Said described as

\[...\] the desire to be moved not by profit or reward but by love for and unquenchable interest in the larger picture, in making connections across lines and barriers, in refusing to be tied down to a specialty, in caring for ideas and values despite the restrictions of a profession (ibid.: 57).

Even though Said does not elaborate on his definition of amateurism in the lectures, he seems to refer to the etymological roots of Latin *amatorem*, which means “lover of” (Stebbins 1992: 43). Amateurism might then aim at something you do primarily out of devotion and commitment. Even though there might be other, more sociological definitions of the amateur (cf. ibid.), for Said, it rather seems to be a question of attitude, of spirit, of a way of acting and behaving in public life.

The role of the amateur or generalist in contemporary public debate, stressed by Said and in focus of attention in this paper, is evidently not a new one. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was quite common for writers and thinkers to adopt this role, not least while using the essay as a means of expression and communication. Essayists of the past often spoke and wrote as nonspecialists, but still, “they knew how to speak with a generalist’s easy authority”, claims Phillip
Lopate (2007: 390), an American author and essayist, in discussing why this typical persona or public role of essayist writers is no longer very frequent. The essayist, considered as a man of letters (the major part of essayists until the early twentieth century were male, cf. Boetcher Joeres & Mittman 1993), used to speak comfortably of just about everything, serving as a commentator on society and culture, on manners and customs in the periodicals of the day. In public life, these men of letters were often looked upon as providers of moral and intellectual guidance (Gross 1969).

The role as generalist or amateur was often made legitimate through the essayist’s habit of quotation. Just as Montaigne abundantly quoted his ancestors from classical antiquity (expecting his reader to recognize the sources), essayists, at least until the twentieth century, often addressed themselves to an educated reader, assuming that they shared with their public an idea of a universal literary culture. “Though the early essayists’ habit of quotation may seem excessive to a modern taste, it was this display of learning that linked them to their educated reading public and ultimately gave them the authority to speak so personally about themselves”, writes Lopate (2007: 387). Even though such a literary culture possibly existed only as an ideal for a very limited group of readers and authors – perhaps consistent with what Jürgen Habermas (1962/1989) has spoken of as the “public sphere” – it had an imaginative power, and as such it was often used by essayists as a pretext for speaking about anything and everything.

Both Said and Lopate seem to point to the generalist or amateur as a legitimate and even indispensable public role in contemporary society as well. While Said does not explicitly discuss the verbal forms suitable for expressing such a generalistic attitude, for Lopate, it seems that the essay has for a long time been the congenial genre for the discourse of the amateur. However, compared to the confident guides of the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, the essayists of later decades have had problems with their authority. In a multicultural world, where the idea of a universal literary culture might seem dated, conservative as well as attached to a particular social group, essayists have often replaced references to literary learning with more personal experience. According to Lopate (2007: 388), this tendency might often be hazardous, as it is risky to suppose that “individual experience alone can constitute the universal text that all may dip into with enlightenment”.

Evidently, Lopate’s main concern is the state of the essay in American culture during the last few decades. Just like Said, he is troubled by the increasing public confidence in experts and specialists, as it might have made the essayists’ fondness for making general comments on societal and cultural matters even less legitimate. He claims that scientists like Stephen Jay Gould and Oliver Sacks have attracted attention as essayists at least partly because they have been perceived as experts; their readers “are reassured they are ‘learning’ something, not just wasting their time on belles lettres” (ibid.: 390). If Lopate’s observation is correct,
what reason should people then have to listen to the essayist who might not be addressing the public as a surgeon, a biologist, a physicist or a literary theorist? On what grounds is the essayist – as an amateur – authorized to speak, and what are the certain attractions of the essay, as method and form of expression, in a world of specialization? How is the essayist, enacting the role as learned amateur, perceived in public debate today? Below, I will touch on these issues by means of some examples, chiefly from another national and cultural context – Sweden – thereby also making some brief comments on the state of the essay and essayistic writing in contemporary Swedish culture, as viewed in a wider context. However, I will start by again referring to Lopate, as one of his essayistic books bears many similarities to the Swedish examples presented here.

**A Form to Encompass All?**

Despite being doubtful about the impact of today’s essayists speaking as learned amateurs, Lopate himself deliberately adopted this very persona in *Waterfront* (2004), a book that might be described as an essayistic walk around the Manhattan shoreline, scattered with references to technical facts, autobiographical fragments, and fiction. In an interview about writing the book, Lopate admitted he was sometimes bothered that readers perceived him as a specialist who knew all about waterfront history, asking him obscure questions he could not answer, since he had studied the subject just enough to “tell the story”. In comparing himself as an essayist and writer with the historian, he claims that the latter would have said “‘I still need another few years to read all the documents’”, while this was never Lopate’s intention (Taylor 2006: 133f). He wanted to enact the role of generalist or man of letters, because it allowed him to be personal, and to combine a wide range of material and methods without being exhaustive or systematic. This role is further emphasized by the fact that *Waterfront* was originally supposed to be published in a series of “belletristic guidebooks”; it was a book that an editor asked Lopate to write, but which he hesitated about, partly because he did not at first find the accurate form for it (ibid.: 126). Eventually, *Waterfront* did not turn out the type of guidebook it was originally meant to be, but something much more wide ranging: an “‘everything but the kitchen sink’ book”, as Lopate calls it (ibid.: 134). He searched for a form where he could purposely work with discordant materials. Making use of his experience of essay writing obviously made this possible, as he describes the book as “an anthology of essay types” and overall stresses the affinities with the essay tradition (ibid.: 131).

True enough, the book-length, all-encompassing *Waterfront* might perhaps not be apprehended as an essay in the traditional sense (a commonplace definition of the essay being “a short, non-fictional prose form”, Obaldia 1995: 11). Among the typically external and formal aspects of essay definitions is the question of length. As Peter France (2005: 25) has pointed out, there are major differences between
English and French usage in this regard. It is in the English-speaking world, predominantly, that the essay has been viewed as a relatively short prose form, while the French *essai* has for a long time referred to all kinds of non-fictional prose, often to books. In part, this difference might be explained by the heavy influence of the periodical press on the Anglo-American essay from the eighteenth century onwards, with its favouring of texts that could be read at one sitting (ibid.: 33). As an example of the Anglo-American view, for some perhaps verging on the comic due to its exactitude, Graham Good (1997: xix) has argued that essays are “texts of between one and about 50 pages”. Even though Good has admitted that the term could sometimes be used for book-length works, he is sceptical about whole books being consistent with the ideal of spontaneity so common in the essay tradition (1988: xi). Nevertheless, changes in publishing during later decades might have made it more attractive for essayists to write essayistic books rather than compiling collections of previously published essays, as there are fewer periodicals and magazines today that seem willing to provide the necessary space for essayistic writing (cf. Lopate 2007: 388f).

Apart from length, it is also possible to describe the essay by pointing to some of its inner features – many of them clearly present in *Waterfront* – among them the typically essayistic approach to a topic which has been described as “provisional and exploratory, rather than systematic and definitive” (Good 1997: xix). Further, the essay has often been viewed as random, fragmentary or sauntering. “Rather than progressing in a linear and planned fashion, the essay develops around a number of topics which offer themselves along the way”, writes Claire de Obaldia (1995: 2). The essayist acts as if all subjects are naturally linked to one another, by using association and digression as textual and compositional tools (Lopate 1995: xxvii). There are multiple points of contact among thoughts rather than hierarchy, coordination rather than subordination. Montaigne’s essays, for example, were often additive and in lack of clear linear direction (Good 1988: 19f). The effect of this is, in the words of the British writer Aldous Huxley (1960: ix), that the essayist tries “to say everything at once”, which is “as near an approach to contrapuntal simultaneity as the nature of literary art will allow of”. The essay seems, at least ideally, to be the form to encompass all. One might perhaps even, as Lopate does with *Waterfront*, describe this kind of writing as striving for an “aesthetic of impurity” (Taylor 2006: 135).

**Winding Paths, Dead Ends and Exhaustion – Kerstin Ekman’s “Masters of the Forest”**

Turning now to my first Swedish example, there are some apparent similarities between the form and approach of *Waterfront* and Kerstin Ekman’s *Herrarna i skogen* (“Masters of the Forest”, 2007). The latter might be described as a wide-ranging, essayistic account of the relationship of nature and civilization through
the lens of the forest, particularly the Nordic and Swedish variety. The book is overflowing with references to reading and thought about the forest, from Virgil to Simon Schama. Already, it has been represented as the first cultural history of the Nordic forest (e.g. Jonsson 2007; Olsson et al. 2009: 527). To describe the scope of Herrarna i skogen as extravagant or excessive seems not to be entirely inadequate – as several critics have noticed, Ekman seems to have scoured Western literature, art, and science for every possible depiction of the forest, fusing them together in an immense volume of about 550 pages (cf. Jonsson 2007; Lingebrandt 2007).

For non-Swedish readers, Kerstin Ekman might be most well known for her crime story Händelser vid vatten (“Blackwater”, 1993), for which she was awarded the August (Strindberg) prize. In Sweden, she has for a long time been a widely recognized and highly respected writer, praised for novels like the “Katrineholm” series (1974–83), Rövarna i skuleskogen (“The Forest of Hours”, 1988) or the trilogy with the overall title Vargskinnet (“The Wolfskin”, 1999–2003). In many of these novels, the forest and the shifting northern landscapes are ubiquitous. As Anna Paterson (2008a: 41) has noted, Ekman is a writer who has stayed true to her native culture and the national heritage. As an acknowledgement of her literary oeuvre, she was elected member of The Swedish Academy in 1978. Since 1989, however, Ekman has chosen not to take an active part in the Academy, after having accused it of being too indulgent in the debate on the death threats posed to writer Salman Rushdie.

Ekman got the idea for Herrarna i skogen as early as the 1970s, when she started reading and thinking about the forest, collecting notes in a binder (Lenas 2007). However, she always seemed to get distracted by ideas for other books, even if she did not altogether abandon the thought of a nonfiction book about the forest. Thirty years after its conception, she finally wrote it. Most critics have viewed Herrarna i skogen as a voluminous book of essays, which seems to confirm the author’s own opinion of it. In an interview, Ekman has explained that she has been intrigued by the essay format for a long time. She especially stresses the freedom of the essayist to use language so variously, sometimes causing tension between the personal and the literary, the technical and the imaginative. “You can break up the structure, change the mood and the pace at will”, she says (Paterson 2008b: 44). Again, as in the case of Lopate’s book, Ekman seems to have sought for a form that could contain almost everything – regarding tone as well as material. As one critic has put it, Herrarna i skogen “combines passages of lucid prose-poetry with erudite, witty essays on history, literature, folklore, ecological biology, aspects of sociology and geo-economy, as well as punchy personal anecdotes, observations, and political polemics” (Paterson 2007: 76). The author herself has described the structure of the book as symbiotic with the forest itself: “The paths are winding. They sometimes end blindly. You come across the unexpected, and the foul and dangerous, things you’re tempted to
avoid, but have to find your way through in the end.”” (Translated by Paterson 2008a: 41) As this quotation is part of the preface of Herrarna i skogen, it might probably be viewed as the author’s instruction for how to read her book.

When the reader is confronted with such demanding and shifting texts as Waterfront or Herrarna i skogen, the sense of trust in the author might be crucial. In cases like these, the self-representation of the writer is among the major textual tools for gaining the reader’s trust. Regarding the self-representation in the essay, it has been quite common to describe it by using the term persona, which refers to a mask or social role that is used by the author “to set him- or herself in the right posture towards particular subjects for a particular audience” (Cherry 1994: 91f). One of the chief functions of the persona in texts like Waterfront or Herrarna i skogen seems to be to serve as a trustful reader’s guide on an unpredictable journey – be it mental or geographical. This is an authorial role often put forward in studies of the essay, and it has been argued that honesty and reliability in the essayist are among the core values of the genre (Lopate 1995: xxv; Atkins 2008: 12, 59). Furthermore, the personae in Lopate’s and Ekman’s books may well be viewed as representatives of the bellettristic amateurs typical of the essay tradition. While Lopate seems to be the witty, quite intimate flaneur of the big city (New York is his home town), Ekman, an outdoor woman equally learned but more detached, with her wellies on and her dog at her side, is at home walking, reading and thinking in the woods rather than in the city.

While Lopate advisedly has referred to himself as a generalist as opposed to the specialist, Ekman has rather emphasized the literary status of the essay and Herrarna i skogen belonging to literature (e.g. Lenas 2007). It seems that in Ekman’s view, as long as your writing is acknowledged as literature, you can take liberties with materials and methods. She considers the essay an unbeatable form of literature, as it offers new knowledge to the reader, and combines it with a personal point of view and an eloquent style (Unge 2007: 98). Ekman’s description might remind us of Horace’s “utile dulci”, as her aim seems to be to delight as well as inform the reader.

In Ekman’s view, the essay form obviously offers knowledge of something, which makes it adequate to ask what sort of knowledge this might be. Is it somehow related to the amateur stance in the essay tradition? Graham Good (1988; 1997) has addressed these issues, as he has stressed the essay’s position outside of and in opposition to a system of specialization. He claims that the essay opposes the organising structures of academic knowledge and does not aim at a system. Rather, the essayist’s observations are free – they do not “seek authority from tradition and doctrine” and they are often rooted in individual experience (Good 1988:4). Like many other essay theorists (e.g. Adorno 1958/1997), Good has tried to capture the character of the essay mainly by contrasting it with disciplinary expertise and its major genre – the academic article. While the discipline carefully distinguishes its area of investigation and defines its proper
method, the essay “cultivates diversity”; it is provisional and personal, “thus non-disciplinary” (Good 1988: 6). While each individual contribution to the discipline has to take account of previous contributions on the topic (which is often carried out by quotes and footnotes), the essayist is free to look for subject matter anywhere, which might include making use of personal experience. As the essay’s knowledge is “situated”, its claim to truth is limited, it “is for here, for now, and for me” (ibid.: 23). The insights of the essay are thus non-transferable, they do not offer a theory or a method which can be applied to other objects, which makes the essay less useful from a disciplinary point of view (ibid.: 24).

As for the question of the learning of the essayist, the essay “is not in itself a ‘learned’ work in the sense of contributing to a common system of knowledge”, even though essayists frequently express their personal learning, often through quoting (ibid.: 6). However, the essayist’s learning, his or her formal credentials or academic degrees (if any), might not be among the major sources of authority. As the essay “possesses neither the institutional legitimacy of a scientific treatise nor the cover of traditional generic conventions (lyric, epic, dramatic), authority is intimately tied to the author”, writes Elizabeth Mittman (1993: 95). Likewise, Good (1988: 7; 1997: xx) has stressed that the essayist’s authority is expressed chiefly through his or her personal experience and the personality as it is reflected in the style of writing.

How are we then to understand the authority of Herrarna i skogen in the light of the above statements? Might there be answers in the critical response to Ekman’s work, and have critics made a point of the author’s massive learning? First of all, it is likely that as Ekman is already acknowledged as a distinguished writer, this has given her authority in this case as well. Further, she is predominantly a writer of fiction, which is one of the most prestigious of literary forms today, while the essay is often described as ancillary or secondary (e.g. Obaldia 1995: 4; Good 1997: xxi; Atkins 2005: 11–25). It is probable that the public acknowledgement of Ekman as a writer has made it irrelevant that she is in this case expressing herself in a less prestigious genre. Besides, who could avoid being impressed when an author has been working on a book for thirty years? Herrarna i skogen is a life’s work. Consequently, Swedish reviewers often seem to have felt overwhelmed but clearly and positively impressed while reading the book, but there are also some descriptions of exhaustion and feelings of intellectual inferiority (e.g. Lingebraadt 2007; Luther 2007). One reviewer (Kronqvist 2007) even asked herself who the supposed reader of Herrarna i skogen might be – who was expected to be able to navigate through all these facts, references, historical figures and quotations piled up one after another? She pointed out that in small parts of the text, Ekman makes use of her own experiences and expresses her love for and concern about the forest, but that she does not seem to trust this personal commitment enough to be the centre and motivation for the book. Instead, Ekman covers herself with references to her
learned gentlemen – she seems to feel obliged to account for everything, as if she was afraid that the personal perspective could not make room for her wide-ranging learning. This reviewer however discerned a slimmer, more pressing volume within Ekman’s 550 pages – a pamphlet, an expression of love for the forest and an apology for the endangered species.

The observations made by this last reader could serve as background for a conclusion about where to place *Herrarna i skogen* in relation to the essay and more academic genres. Ekman’s book shares the typical scope of the essay as she has not decided on any limits or restrictions for her subject matter. However, though *Herrarna i skogen* is not a contribution to a specialized discipline, Ekman seems to have taken into account almost every possible previous depiction of the forest that she has come across. What distinguishes *Herrarna i skogen* is that she has added on to her material for years and years. In this case, it has resulted in an aesthetics of exhaustion (rather than an aesthetics of impurity, as in Lopate’s case). While Ekman is clearly not addressing a specialist audience in the disciplinary sense, *Herrarna i skogen* serves among other things as a display of the author’s immense learning, and thus, it certainly demands an educated, attentive and above all persistent reader. It is likely that the public function of *Herrarna i skogen* has much in common with the communicative relation of the essay to the educated, though non-specialized, audience of the past (cf. Rohner 1966: 351, 372, 557; Haas 1969: 24, 80f.; France 2005: 35f.). Nevertheless, there are also major differences between Ekman’s book and the personal essay, most favoured in the Anglo-American tradition, that strives for the ideal of “light learning” (Lopate 1995: xlii). The most salient one is that Ekman does not primarily seek authority by referring to her own experience – the voice in *Herrarna i skogen* is not so intimate and confidential as in the personal essay.

**The Essay Murder in the Library – a Debate on the State of the Essay in Sweden**

As can be seen above, Kerstin Ekman has maintained that the essay is a literary genre. Likewise, her shield against intrusion from the media and expectations of her to pronounce on matters of politics and morality has been to claim the autonomy of literature: “I don’t enter policy debates. I’m a writer”, is a recurrent comment (e.g. Paterson 2008a: 42). When interviewers ask her if *Herrarna i skogen* might not be perceived as a contribution to the debate on deforestation or environmental policy, Ekman persists in that her book is literature, not a pamphlet or an apology (Lenas 2007).

The status of the essay as a literary genre was also a starting point for a debate in one of the major Swedish newspapers, *Dagens Nyheter*, in 2003. The initiator was Nina Burton, essayist and poet, who started by expressing her concern for the essay being dispersed in Swedish libraries (Burton 2003a). As essays were not
being located on a certain shelf, but were catalogued by subject matter and placed among works of nonfiction in general, one could get the impression that the essay was not viewed as belonging to literature. Just like the novel, Burton argued, the essay was a literary genre in its own right and it should therefore be placed by form and not by content. With a striking comparison, she stated that no one would ever think of sorting *War and Peace* under Military Science or *Madame Bovary* under Biography, while this constantly happened to essay books (2003c). In three witty, rhetorically effective articles, Burton further underlined her message by satirical metaphors and allusions to literature and mythology. She claimed that the dissemination of essays in the library was a matter of “murder” (which likely inspired the editorial headline “The cruel essay murder in the library”, perhaps alluding to whodunits like Agatha Christie’s *The Body in the Library*) (2003a). She also stressed the conformity of the classification system by comparing it to the iron bed of Procrustes where the mythological bandit amputated every limb that did not fit his bed (2003b). She even created an inverted Ten Commandments by stating that if the essay was not to be seen as belonging to literature, there would be an alarming change of the definition of the latter. Literature would then be, according to the standard Swedish classification system (SAB), *not* to be too serious, not to know too much on the matter in question, not to make use of facts, not to strive for the bigger picture, and not to express thoughts on a certain matter (2003a).

What was at stake in this debate, at least for its initiator, was not so much the principles of classification in general as the changing definition of literature. The physical location of essays in the library was given a symbolic function, but what Burton really wanted to discuss was something more abstract. Perhaps as a result of this, debaters representing different interests evidently talked at cross-purposes in the debate following Burton’s first article. Librarians and representatives of the Swedish classification system (Berntson 2003, Fredén 2003, Myrstener 2003) explained the principles of classification and the advantages of sorting by subject matter, they gave advice on how to find your way through the library data-bases, or they seized the opportunity to lament on the recent decline of Swedish folk-libraries (i.e. public libraries). On the opposite side, besides Burton, there were other writers and critics (Eriksson 2003, Thente 2003) who elaborated on her analysis of the relation of the essay to literature. According to writer and critic Ulf Eriksson, the apparently low status of the essay in Sweden was culture-specific. He claimed that in other European countries like France, Spain, Italy, or Germany, the essay was without question a vital part of public life. In these countries, there were prestigious awards for essayistic writing and the essay could serve as an intermediary zone in society. Literary critic Jonas Thente did not hesitate to suggest that the weakening of the Swedish essay might be due to Swedish essayists themselves, as they were content to write belletristic articles. These articles in the guise of essays could easily be summarized or reduced to a single
subject, and could therefore not be viewed as real essays, while an essay should be impossible to truly describe.

The above debaters are not the only ones who have pointed to the low status of the Swedish essay in the last few years. In a recent essay collection, the former permanent secretary of the Swedish Academy, essayist and critic Horace Engdahl (2009: 7f), has regretted the shrinking public space for essayistic writing in the last two decades. Engdahl himself was during the 1980s one of the major contributors to *Kris*, a Swedish learned journal introducing many of the central continental philosophers and thinkers of the time (e.g. Derrida, Barthes, Blanchot, Adorno, Benjamin, Lacan). In retrospect, *Kris* was often accused of adding fuel to the post-modern cultural climate of the 1980s, but it clearly also contributed to a renewed interest in theory in the university departments of literature in Sweden (Arping 2009: 545). *Kris* also favoured the critical essay as its chief form of expression and, as is apparent from Engdahl (2009: 7), the members sometimes expressed a wish that this type of criticism be viewed as a pursuit distinct from literature, but equally valuable. Engdahl however concludes that it is more difficult than ever to maintain such an ideal today, since the blogosphere has triumphed and the media no longer have room for reflective writing.

The tendency among Engdahl, Burton and other Swedish writers and critics to talk about a decline of the essay in public life in recent years, or to observe that the relation of the essay to literature is ambivalent, is neither unique for Sweden, nor is it new. Rather, these observations seem to have been omnipresent for a long time. For example, Ludwig Rohner (1966: 120) has noted that the low status of the essay in German culture was already apparent in the 1930s. A somewhat different but recurring example of later decades might be the debate, probably most clearly expressed in the United States, about the weak position of “creative nonfiction” in English studies (e.g. Hesse 2003). Even though creative nonfiction and similar concepts are much more wide ranging than the essay (e.g. Root 2003), many of the American advocates of the essay genre of later years have expressed themselves by referring to such labels, or speaking about creative nonfiction as the “fourth genre” (e.g. Klaus 1991; Root & Steinberg 2007). There are however those who have remained sceptical of attempts to make the essay purely literary. In his introduction to genre theory, Alastair Fowler (1982: 5) concludes that the essay, along with genres like biography, dialogue and history, is “literature in potentia”. This quite effective description of the essay’s borderline position has been further commented on by Claire de Oballa (1995: 16), who has stated that “the essay is, and [...] is not literature; or rather, the essay is not yet literature”. The relation of the essay as a genre to literature is contingent, but this has not prevented particular essays and essayists making their way into a literary canon.

Despite the fact that essays are often viewed and treated ambivalently – as “literature in potentia” – whether in the United States, in Germany or in Sweden, one might still distinguish between essay traditions of different countries. While it
is not possible to make a detailed comment on this matter here, some short points should however be made. As Kuisma Korhonen (1998:14) has noted, the Scandinavian essay has for a long time been associated with literary criticism, “sometimes in a pejorative sense: in academic circles the word ‘essayistic’ often refers to a loosely written tractate lacking proper documentation”. In addition, Göran Hägg (1978) has stressed that the tendency in Sweden to use the essay as a tool for literary criticism, or at least that literature has been the chief subject matter of essays, has been predominant since the turn of the last century. This is further emphasized in the article on the “Scandinavian Essay” in the Encyclopedia of the Essay, where the authors argue that the essay in individual Scandinavian countries has certain affinities: “The Danish essay might be called the subjective, personal essay; the Norwegian essay, the essay of national character; the Swedish essay, the literary essay.” (Mitchell & Greene-Gantzberg 1997: 746.) The tendency to equate essayistic writing with criticism that seems to be predominant according to these examples should not be overstressed, however. Among the Swedish essayists discussed in this paper, Horace Engdahl is alone in expressing this view, while for example Nina Burton (2007) has argued against the essay being equal to criticism. Conversely, Burton as well as Ekman have maintained that the essay is a literary genre, whereas Engdahl (2009: 116f, 148) has rather made a distinction between the essay and literature.

In the above mentioned article from the Encyclopedia, the ancillary status of the essay in the Scandinavian countries is stressed as well:

In some literary histories the term “essay” is not even indexed. In others, the essay is generally treated as an author’s secondary preoccupation; little effort is made to clarify the relationship between the essay and other genres. Although the essay is much discussed, it is relegated to the less important corners of secondary and university instruction. (Mitchell & Greene-Gantzberg 1997: 746)

It seems that from these descriptions, the Swedish essay is far away from the continental tradition (France, Spain, Germany), where the essay has served as one of the major genres of intellectual writing during the post war-period (cf. Korhonen 1998: 13f). However, it is evident that Swedish writers like Horace Engdahl have expressed a conception of the essay that has much in common with the continental tradition, likewise that this tradition has probably had an influence on the Swedish discussion on the essay over the last few decades, not least in literary journals. It should be noted, however, that the essayistic writing of continental philosophers like Benjamin, Adorno, Weil, Cioran, Camus, Barthes – often following the aphoristic style of Nietzsche – is a type of writing that is quite different from the informal, conversational style of the personal or familiar essay often favoured in the English speaking culture. The continental “essayism” has been described as a “subversive tool of skeptical probing” and as a “critique of ideology in a time when large, synthesizing theories and systems of philosophy are no longer trusted” (Lopate 2007: 390). According to Phillip Lopate, the view of essayistic writing as something serious and philosophical is only beginning to
influence American essayists today, while the more intimate, chattering and friendly voice has long been preferred. In Sweden, however, essayists at least of later decades have often been reluctant to be too intimate with the reader. The eloquent, slightly detached, and very learned voice that we can distinguish among essayists like Horace Engdahl or Kerstin Ekman seems to be a recurring persona in the Swedish essay tradition. Whether this tells us something about the cultural climate of Sweden or not can of course not be established from these few examples, though it might be a suggestive hypothesis for a more wide ranging study of essayist personae in Sweden as compared to other countries.

A Form for Expressing Ambivalence – Peter Nilson’s “Solar Winds”

Despite the above description of the Swedish essayist as being somewhat reserved, my last example, Peter Nilson, would seem at least a bit different, as his voice is more personal and venturesome than most Swedish essayists I have come across. However, he is, just like Kerstin Ekman in *Herrarna i skogen*, acting as a generalist with regard to his refusal to stay within disciplinary boundaries and in his desire for the larger picture. This makes him an adequate example of the amateurism that Said claimed to be a necessity in a professionalized world, in my view not least because Nilson favoured the essay as a form of communication.

Even though Nilson dreamed of being a writer at an early age, he was also inspired by Einstein and Darwin and eventually became an astronomer at Uppsala University. There, he compiled a widely acclaimed catalogue of galaxies and was made a senior lecturer in the mid 1970s. At this time though, he felt that his wide ranging interests could not be satisfied by doing scientific research (Nilson 1996). Accordingly, he abandoned his academic career for the more insecure path of the writer. Until his death in 1998, he wrote a number of novels and essay books which were often greatly inspired by scientific theories and ideas, but equally by philosophical, religious and mythical thought of the Western culture in general. Despite the evident eclecticism of Nilson’s inspirational forces, his essays were often perceived as contributions to popular science. Perhaps the tendency to view Nilson as a popularizer was reinforced by his appearance in a famous Swedish radio show (*Svar idag*), where listeners would phone in to pose questions on different subjects to a panel of experts. Nilson was also elected member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences in 1993.

In the early 1990s, Peter Nilson published three essay books of a similar character where he aimed at describing the scientific world view of our time and ourselves as inhabitants of the universe (Nilson 1993a: 225). The last of these books, *Solvindar* (“Solar Winds”, 1993), is the one that will be in focus here. Just as in the case of Kerstin Ekman’s *Herrarna i skogen*, *Solvindar* was nominated in the category of nonfiction for the August Prize in 1993, but neither of them
 received the prize.

To give an adequate and brief description of Solvindar is not easy. The essayistic writing of Peter Nilson seems to be a neverending search for the missing pieces in the big puzzle that is the world. In nine winding essays, Nilson hovers around recurring questions, often concerning fundamental conditions of human existence: How is human life possible? Are we alone in space? What are the boundaries for our knowledge of the universe? What exactly is the human soul? What would it be like to travel back in time and will we ever be able to do so? Of what concern is science to everyday life?

As there are hardly any simple answers to these questions, they rather serve as expressions of the disposition of the essayist. Nilson’s persona is clearly ambivalent – he embodies the rational ethos of the scientist as well as the whimsies of the dreamer (Eldelin 2008: 249–252). Nilson’s essays seem to be expressions of the self, thinking. In fact, they might even profess a Montaignian view of the essay. As has been pointed out by many, Montaigne did not use the word essai as a generic concept but as a methodological principle (referring to the verb essayer). As one of his many interpreters, R. Lane Kauffmann (1989: 224), has put it: “To essay is to experiment, to try out, to test – even one’s own cognitive powers and limits.” Essaying, for Montaigne, was an ongoing process of trying out ideas and weighing his own experiences through writing (Rohner 1966: 66f.; Obaldia 1995: 29). Even if Nilson does not claim, like Montaigne, that his essays are foremost explorations of the self, he frequently confronts his own experiences with the peculiarities of human existence. What distinguishes Peter Nilson as an essayist is the intimate voice and the sometimes direct addresses to the reader, the recurring autobiographical references and a penchant for playfulness and fictive elements. Foremost, however, Nilson poses questions, to himself as well as to the reader. And rather than providing the reader with answers, as the questions that fascinate him often challenge the boundaries of thinking, it is the trying out and the probing that marks the core of Nilson’s essays.

In Nilson’s case, just as in Kerstin Ekman’s or Phillip Lopate’s, the value of freedom connected to the essay as form (cf. Klaus 1989: 160) allowed him to cross boundaries and confront ideas and topics from different areas in society. It was Peter Nilson’s pronounced ambition to do so – he has expressed that the intention of his writing was to let the arts and the sciences reflect each other (Nilson 1993b: 248). In public life, he was often perceived as a reconciler of the two cultures that C.P. Snow (1959/1961) once pointed to and which were widely discussed in Sweden (Eldelin 2006). That Nilson often touched on matters that he had no first-hand knowledge of, as a generalist, was rarely considered a problem in public life. Rather, some critics viewed his learning as boundless, not only in his own field but in philosophy, religion and cultural history as well (e.g. Jacobson 1993; Anshelm 1994; Wallroth 1994). That Nilson appeared to be the
very opposite of the specialist was met by reviewers with admiration and praise. However, these reviewers rarely claimed to be able to determine whether there might be errors among the massive heaps of facts that Nilson provided the reader with. As one reviewer noted, as Solvindar was a work of art and not solely of science, some minor errors would not affect the quality of the book (Kälvemark 1993). Nevertheless, Nilson himself does not seem to have been as anxious as Ekman or Burton to describe the essay as a purely literary form. Rather, he asserted that the ambition of his essay trilogy was to cross the boundaries of the science essay and literature (Nilson 1993b: 248). By literature in this case, it is likely that Nilson mainly referred to fiction, as there are recurring fictive elements in his essays, among them apparently fictional anecdotes but also a play with fictive or mythological identites (Eldelin 2008: 249–252).

Despite the playfulness and irony that mark the essayistic writing of Peter Nilson, it might be tempting to compare him with Phillip Lopate’s expert essayists, writers like Stephen Jay Gould or Oliver Sacks, since Nilson shares their scientific background and was considered a popularizer of science in public life. Is it, in this case, the scientific training of the author that has given him the authority to speak, rather than the personal experience that is often put forward as ground for authority in the essay? From the reception of Peter Nilson’s work, not least Solvindar, it is clear that critics have often perceived Nilson as keeping himself informed of what was going on at the research frontier in his own as well as in neighbouring fields. This is a recurring picture of the writer even twenty years after he quit his career as a scientist (Eldelin 2009: 83). It seems that the high social status of science as expert knowledge is passed on to the reception of Nilson’s essays, even though he has also received praise for his literary style and for making readers feel as fellow travellers on a challenging intellectual journey (e.g. Gellerfelt 1993; Törnlund 1993; Wallroth 1994). As stated above, however, the persona in Nilson’s writing is not acting as the convincing expert that one might perhaps expect, following Lopate’s description. For Nilson, the essay rather becomes a form to hold his ambivalence; it allows him to constantly shift between different modes and to express his uncertainty (cf. Eldelin 2006: 287). Therefore, it might be more adequate to compare the essays of Nilson with the natural science writing of the American anthropologist and philosopher Loren Eiseley, as they both shared a sense of wonder at the marvels of the natural world which is expressed through their texts (cf. Nilson 1993b: 248, who has stated that Eiseley was an inspirational source for his essayistic writing). In Eiseley’s perhaps most well-known book, The Immense Journey (1957), the evolutionary perspective of science shares the space with philosophical and religious contemplation, poetic nature descriptions and autobiographical anecdotes. Apart from the apparent compositional similarities between the writings of Nilson and Eiseley, they both used the essay form to express a personal and imaginative response to scientific facts and to a scientific view of the world. As Andrew J. Angyal (1993: 61) has
noted, Eiseley “found it increasingly difficult to reconcile his ‘personal universe’ with the rational universe of science”, where everything was reduced to measurable facts. A similar disillusion with regards to the rationalism of science, though perhaps not as pointed as Eiseley’s, could be found in Peter Nilson and in his choice to be a writer rather than moving on as a scientist. Nilson seems to have shared with Eiseley a certain intellectual temperament that sought connections between facts and imagination. In Eiseley’s case, it has been compared to that of the Victorian scientist, who was not “intimidated by the ‘two cultures’ division or the fear of bridging disciplines” (ibid. 1993: 64).

The Essayist and the Growing Tension Between Amateurism and Professionalism

In intellectual history, the growing tension between amateurism and professionalism in Western countries has often been traced back to the nineteenth century, the very time of Victorian scientists like Darwin. Before that, scientists and humanists did not form exclusive university circles separate from those of other educated people, and the learned amateur or dilettante was welcome to participate in scholarly and scientific work. Gradually during the nineteenth century, however, rules were formulated and methods and fundamental principles were established that made it increasingly difficult for non-academics to be recognized by scientists and scholars. Along with a new social and institutional organisation of science, new social identities for research practitioners emerged as well: the ideal of the specialist scholar eventually replaced the broad-ranging generalist (Torstendahl 1993; Wittrock 1993). As a result of this development, the amateur culture seemed more and more outdated at the turn of the century. This was even more the case after World War I, when new socialist intellectual groups referred to themselves and their work as objective, scientific and specialized (cf. Mauriello 2001). Nevertheless, it seems to have been possible, even after that time, to combine scholarship with being a generalist with a public position. Not surprisingly however, the scholar who wanted to communicate with a wider audience through the medium of the essay or through public lectures was met with increasing challenges in a society of growing specialization. One example from the Swedish-speaking culture could serve as an illustration. As Thomas Ek (2003: 18) has pointed out, the chief expression of the Finno-Swedish aesthetician, philosopher and writer Hans Ruin was the essay in its many forms; he wrote autobiographical, philosophical, political as well as literary essays. Ruin rejected a professorship in Åbo and emigrated to Sweden in the late 1940s. Besides being appointed senior lecturer in aesthetics at Lund University, he was known as a popular speaker and lecturer, not least on the radio, where he could express his wide sphere of interests, ranging from philosophy and psychology to aesthetics and literary history. Ek notices that Ruin, at least periodically, considered himself
an outsider in the academic world. In his diary notes from the 1960s, he expresses a growing disillusion over not getting the academic acknowledgement he expected, and blames it on himself being too versatile. In his own eyes, his penchant for bridging genres and disciplines became a weakness. He was met with the “tyranny of genres”, which neither promoted his academic career, nor gave him a place in literary history (ibid.: 123–126). The borderline position so typical for essayists and for the essay genre could certainly be traced in the authorship of Hans Ruin.

Despite the proceeding specialization and professionalization that seems to have bothered Ruin in the 1960s, and which might seem even more pressing half a century later, Edward Said was persistent in his talk of the necessity of intellectuals adopting an amateur stance in public life to be able to look for the larger picture, to challenge conformity and to raise moral issues. As amateurism, for Said (1994: 54f, 61), was not an occupation but an attitude, he considered it to be possible to combine with being an academic. Said did not primarily, like other debaters of the time, blame universities for the decline in intellectual life. Here, he argued chiefly against Russell Jacoby (1987: 141), who had claimed that professionalism at universities had led to a “privatization” among intellectuals and to a “withdrawal of intellectual energy from a larger domain to a narrower discipline”. However, it might be adequate to remain, along with Jacoby, a bit sceptical about the possibility of an attitude of amateurism residing within academia, not least today, when university managements as well as single scholars and scientists increasingly seem forced to rely on bibliometrics, citation analysis, rankings and high impact factors as the chief measurements of academic quality. One might ask if devotion is even compatible with the bibliometric system?

The examples that have been discussed in this paper confirm that the relation of the essay and the essayist to academia and institutional discourse remains ambivalent, just as it has been for a long time, despite the common ground of the essay and the emerging modern science in late sixteenth century Europe (Hall 1989; cf. Good 1997: xx). This ambivalence will probably be even more accentuated the more we rely on bibliometrics in academia. Among the Swedish essayists that have been put forward here, apart from Ruin, none has remained a scholar or scientist at the university even though several of them have received high academic degrees and might therefore be considered professionals of some kind (Nina Burton and Horace Engdahl both hold PhD’s in literature, Peter Nilson a PhD in astronomy). Irrespective of these writers having deliberately chosen to reside outside of academia or not, it is doubtful that they would have been able to fully express and develop their penchant for essayistic inquiry and experimental writing within modern academia. Nevertheless, all of them have or have had affiliations with institutions or academies that at least historically could serve as competitors with the universities with regards to learning (cf. Wittrock 1993).
Engdahl and Ekman are members of The Swedish Academy, Nilson was a member of The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences and Burton is an elected member of Samfundet de nio, another Swedish prize-awarding and learned literary society. These affiliations, along with the reception of their essayistic work, confirm that these writers have adopted or been ascribed to public roles that clearly resemble the learned amateur essayist or man of letters of the past, even though they have not explicitly or deliberately referred to themselves as amateurs (perhaps this is due to the contemporary connotations of *amateur* being somewhat more disparaging than positive).

However, in the essayistic writing of these authors and in their view of the public function of the essay, one might also find prevailing traces of originally romantic ideas of the autonomy of literature and the independence of the artist. The tendency to describe the essay as belonging to literature or to defend oneself from public debate that can be seen in some of these examples suggests that there is a certain reluctance among modern essayists to act as the “amateurish conscience” that Said (1994: 62) was asking for. The scepticism of today’s essayists to claim moral authority also distinguishes them from many of the learned amateurs of the past, not least in the British tradition, where morality and manners were among the chief subjects of periodical essayists like Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, or Samuel Johnson (cf. France 2005: 35f). However, it could also be that as essayists have excused themselves “from the job of pontificating to the public” (Lopate 2007:391), they have remained true to the ethos of the essay tradition, which since Montaigne has been marked by scepticism and by the rejection of all kinds of totalizing modes of thinking (cf. Adorno 1958/1997). Still, it cannot be denied that essay books like Kerstin Ekman’s *Herrarna i skogen*, Peter Nilson’s *Solvindar*, or other similar essayistic works, have often been acclaimed in public for being syntheses of some kind, however fragmentary, maps of meaning or graspings at the larger picture driven by a devotion for the subject. In a time when we are overwhelmed by disruptive information and increasingly tend to rely on experts of all kinds, the discourse of the essayist, which might still be adequately described as “an amateur’s raid in a world of specialists” (Sanders 2007: 417), seems more essential than ever.

**Emma Eldelin** holds a PhD in Communication Studies and wrote her dissertation on how the concept of the two cultures was interpreted and made use of in public debate in Sweden. At present, she is a teacher of literature at the Department of Culture and Communication at Linköping University. Among her major research interests are the state of the essay in late modernity and the shifting public roles of essayists. E-mail: emma.eldelin@liu.se
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Personal Readings and Public Texts: 
Book Blogs and Online Writing about Literature

By Ann Steiner

Abstract

The blogging culture has become an important and integrated part of the book trade and has influenced the publishing, marketing and distribution of literature in North America and in many European countries. However, it is unclear how this potential agency among bloggers operates, and thus far most research has concerned politics, media systems and larger social structures. The present article is a study of the Swedish book blogs during the autumn of 2009 and an attempt to address a small, but significant, part of the Internet influence. The relationship between books and digital technology is complicated and manifold, but it is clear that the Internet has changed how people access books, how they read and how they communicate with others about their reading. Here, the position of the amateur is one that will be discussed in detail in terms of professionalism, strategies and hierarchies. Another issue that will be addressed is the connections between the book bloggers and the book trade, especially the publishers and their marketing departments. The book bloggers operate in a social realm, despite the fact that their writing is personal, and have to be understood in their social, economic and literary context. The Swedish book blogs will be analysed with the help of reader-response theory, sociology of literature and a book historical perspective on the dissemination of literature.

Keywords: Blogs, Internet, book history, book trade, reader-response theory, reading
Introduction

In October 2007, Andrew Stevens, an editor of *3:AM Magazine* in the UK, wrote about the existential and emotional troubles of being a book blogger. How can I be a book blogger, he said, when such people are so often described as being “over-opinionated and under-qualified dilettante[s]” (Stevens 2007)? Stevens had been “outed” in a book on the subject, a guide to English language book blogs (Gillieron & Kilgarriff 2007), which gave him reason to question his own position. The article was, of course, largely ironic, and it started a friendly and humorous discussion on being in denial, acceptance and coming to terms with being a book blogger.

This discussion on who and what a book blogger is and the publication of the *Bookaholics Guide to Book Blogs* (2007) were signs that the phenomenon had become an established part of the literary scene. Two years later, when I conducted the research for the present article, the book bloggers were no longer called into question, but mainstreamed. Monthly magazines suggest book blogs, and in the daily papers bloggers are interviewed about their reading habits and literary interests. The blogging culture has become an important and integrated part of the book trade, and has influenced the publishing, marketing and distribution of literature in North America and in many European countries. The present article is a study of Swedish book blogs during the autumn of 2009. Blogging, like much of the Internet, is constantly changing, and any study of online activities has to deal with the fact that the material is elusive. It is only possible to map out and analyse the character of the blogging phenomena at a certain point in time and with geographical and linguistic limitations. Sweden is a valid example. It is a country with a small population, a single language, an extensive general knowledge of English, and widespread use of the Internet. The observations made, however, can be compared to similar findings in other countries.

Describing and analysing how books are produced, distributed, and consumed in contemporary society has many similarities with writing an historical account of the book trade in antiquity or in the early modern period. There are, of course, differences in addressing historical or contemporary material, but there are also parallels between different periods. The methods and theories underlying a perspective within sociology of the text (McKenzie 1999) or book history (Eliot & Rose 2007) supply useful methods of approaching the material. The difficulty in historical research is that a great deal of material is lost, and in a study of the present, the material is overwhelming in size and cannot be processed as a whole. Each attempt to investigate reading habits, the book trade or the production of literature in digital media has to be accompanied by a number of limitations. Thus, it is still important to make sense of contemporary development in order to address the conditions for literature.
In studying the book blogs, a number of questions immediately arose concerning reading, attributing value, the public character of the Internet, as well as marketing, the book trade, and the position of the book bloggers. For example, is it possible to study book bloggers in order to understand how general readers discuss and approach literature? Are different kinds of values employed in reviewing books than in professional critique? Is it possible to find common strategies that many readers use in their writing about literature? Two aspects immediately stood out as important; one was how amateur reviewers and professional critics relate to one another. The other significant facet was the fact that there are connections between the book bloggers and the book trade, especially the publishers and their marketing departments. The present article will cover these aspects as well as others essential to an analysis of how the book meets the digital world.

**Books vs. Internet – Theories and Positions**

There is a surprising edginess between representatives of different media in the literary world. Many booklovers do not trust the new media to spread the word, and many IT devotees find the book old-fashioned and obsolete. Considering that they in effect owe a lot to each other, the conflict is a little startling, but still it is a recurrent feature of most discussions, articles, and even research in the field. This general observation applies to a great deal of writing about books and the Internet in recent years, but is not relevant to book bloggers. The book blog is rather the opposite; it is a place where different media intermingle and meet. Most book bloggers love not only literature, but also the book itself, and many often express that the printed book is the best format for reading literature. These readers happily use digital technology to cherish the experience of reading an old-fashioned book.

That modern media and digital technology pose a threat to the printed codex is an often-repeated mantra that has yet to be proven. In fact there are no signs that e-books, audio books, or online writing are taking over the printed codex’ position. As Angus Phillips, British researcher in publishing studies, noted: “Paradoxically, the world going digital is helping to keep the book alive, with the possibility that books may remain in print indefinitely while being available to buy anywhere in the world” (2007: 547). Not only has digital technology improved the possibilities to store and print books, but book bloggers, online reviewers and BookCrossers have showed that the Internet is in fact promoting and aiding literature published in the book format.

Others would not agree with Phillips, and one of the most influential critics is Sven Birkerts who, in *The Gutenberg Elegies* (1994), argued that digital technology is a threat to literacy as well as to higher level reading skills. Our willingness to embrace new technologies endangers reading and literature, according to Birkerts, and all new media – CD-ROMs, DVDs, the Internet, etc. – have detrimental
effects on our ability to read printed text. In the 2nd edition of his renowned book, Birkerts did admit that parts of modern technology have proven to be more useful and less harmful than he had predicted, however, he still maintains that his initial analysis was correct (Birkerts 2006: XI–XV).

On the other side of the so-called “reading wars” are those who argue that the book is a dead medium and that it is only a matter of time before this non-environmentally friendly, old-fashioned product will be gone for good. For example, in his thought-provoking text (published as a printed book!) Print is Dead (2008), American publisher Jeff Gomez pronounced that not only the book in codex format, but also all other kinds of printed matter are passé. According to Gomez, the reluctance displayed by publishers and distributors in the trade is the main obstacle to the development of e-books, mp3 files and other forms of digital distribution. Not only does Gomez believe in a digital future, but also he claimed that the change has already taken place in the younger generation and predicted that the process might be slow, but that we will eventually forget print and the book (Gomez 2008: 39).

Perhaps it is no coincidence that those who are for and those who are against new media have a different focus. Among those who embrace the development, there is a strong interest in the technology itself or in the social interactions between those who use it. While the critics, on the other hand, instead talk about content and how this is created and spread. Those who disapprove of the literary uses of digital technology will most often discuss quality, informed knowledge, and culture. Some are also interested in the interplay between people, but not with an enthusiastic belief in the development.

Gomez still maintained that the medium – whether it is an e-reader, printed book or broadsheet – has no bearing on the content, at least not for the readers (2008: 45–47). His argument, however, is neither elaborated nor convincing, and other theorists, such as Friedrich Kittler or Don McKenzie, would object that the medium influences and shapes content (Kittler 1999; McKenzie 1999). Most booklovers would also argue that there are profound differences between a printed book and an e-reader, and that the latter will change reading and writing in the long run.

This polarized debate has left traces in most parts of the Internet research, and neutrality is not a possible position. So yes, I still think the printed book in codex format has a future. However, supported by reading researchers such as David Reinking (2009), I also believe that digital technology will have profound effects on literature and printed matter in general. The competition between different media may take a different turn than expected, as has been suggested by American media theorists Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999). They argued that new media technologies integrate older, already established media forms and content, it is in this sense “remediated”. A similar line of reasoning can be found as early as in Marshall McLuhan’s Understanding Media (1964), where he claimed
that all media exist in constant interaction with each other. These ideas can be applied to the book, as well as the other media used for texts and literature that have become increasingly important. Henry Jenkins has also suggested that the meeting of different media in the present “convergence culture” is not a technological shift, but should be seen as a process: “Convergence alters the relationship between existing technologies, industries, markets, genres, and audiences” (Jenkins 2006: 15). His argument is useful for addressing the book blogs and their relationship to literature, as the encounter is not merely a physical and technological meeting; instead it is process in which the audience, the texts and the market re-negotiate their positions and responses.

Media studies have tended to dominate the research on the Internet, but many other fields have contributed to our knowledge, for example law, economics, and linguistics. The present approach is from a literary studies perspective. This means, among other things, that some of the theories and concepts, e.g. the ideas mentioned by McLuhan, Jenkins, Bolter and Grusin, are standard to a media theorist, but new when applied to literary material. There is a rift between literary studies and media theory, but in combination with a book historical perspective, which in reality is the study of a single medium’s history, it is possible to address contemporary literary material in new ways. The book historical view is that the conditions for media production constitute an important historical link to understanding literature and the construction of knowledge. Within book history, an often-used theoretical basis is that of Robert Darnton and his view of the book as a process: “the communications circuit” (Darnton 2002). Others have questioned the usefulness of Darnton’s model for the contemporary book trade (Svedjedal 2000: 125–126). One particular critique is that the literary circuit, as described by Darnton, reduces the reader to a passive recipient of texts (Pawley 2009). However, in this context, Darnton can be employed to analyse and clarify the structure of the book trade and the position of the book blogs within the literary system.

As argued before, book bloggers are part of the market at the same time as they are readers and consumers, and in this respect, it is possible to make use of theories inspired by Michel de Certeau and his concept of “poaching”, i.e., the reading strategies employed. According to de Certeau, an active reader will fight back against an oppressing system based on the assumption that production and distribution exist above consumers and beyond their control (de Certeau 1984: 165-176). Christine Pawley thus argued that the criticism of Darnton could similarly be directed at de Certeau (2009). They both regard the producer and the consumer, the author and the reader, as separated from each other, but this is an opposition that is no longer valid. Furthermore, according to Pawley, de Certeau places the reader in a hierarchy below the author and the publisher, which is a simplifying model.

Pawley’s arguments provide tools for understanding the position of the reading process in contemporary society. The drawback is that in criticizing both Darnton
and de Certeau, she leaves a theoretical vacuum. If the objective is to make sense of reading strategies, it is hardly possible to dismiss both the socio-economic layer as well as the individual psychological one. In order to understand book bloggers, I suggest that a very open use of Darnton’s set of functions could provide a solution. Instead of applying the functions to individuals, they can be used as a method for mapping out different activities in the trade, such as marketing, writing, or evaluating. This will help us make sense of the actions of companies, individuals and different agents in the book world. As suggested by others (Svedjedal 2000: 130–132), the contemporary book trade does not differentiate between various tasks in the manner of early trade booksellers, printers, and binders. For example, the Internet bookstore Amazon sells books, distributes, markets, evaluates, publishes, etc., all at the same time (Svedjedal 1999, Steiner 2006). Therefore, it appears to be necessary to question the separation of audience and trade.

A general difficulty in applying theories from book history or sociology of literature to a single phenomenon is that it has proven to be complicated to show how societal change affects individual actions. The connection between a wider sphere and an individual person or phenomenon tends to be vaguely described, and however important and interesting the questions are, the answers often leave methodological issues unresolved. Christine Pawley suggested that, in order to understand how literature links individuals with society, organizations and social institutions such as libraries, government agencies, and literary societies should be studied. Another possibility, only hinted at by Pawley, would be to study readers as groups. Others have proposed similar concepts, i.e. Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities” (1983), Stanley Fish’ “interpretative communities” (1980) and Elizabeth Long’s “social infrastructure of reading” (2003). Long is particularly useful in this article as she has examined readers’ uses of literature.

One of the most significant arguments in debates over the consequences of the Internet has been about the changes – positive as well as negative – in social structures. Media theorist Manuel Castells mapped out a new world, The Internet Galaxy (2001), where information technology dissolves existing social patterns and creates new ones, unknown and difficult to grasp. This is a drastic and thought-provoking idea if applied to literature. People are already becoming more publicly social in relation to literature – book clubs, blogging and Internet bookstores are examples of how people interact in the public realm with both friends and people unknown to them. On websites like these, readers are no longer passive consumers, but instead actively promoting and discussing reading and literature.

When different forms of digital media became widespread in the 1990s, many expected a rapid development that would revolutionize the book trade. However, a number of previous setbacks have caused the book industry to be cautious with regard to other media. One not-yet-forgotten failure was the miscalculated ventures into CD-ROM publishing in the mid-1990s, when many small and large pub-
lishers alike made investments that did not pay off at all. The so-called “dot.com-crisis” around the year 2000 added to the unwillingness among traditional publishers to venture into new technologies. Besides, the printed book sells very well. A survey among American publishers showed that they are keen on creating websites, online marketing and new distribution channels, but have no interest in new media for publishing (Healy 2008). Established websites such as Amazon and Facebook or sites specifically dedicated to certain kinds of genre fiction, such as Fantasy Fan, are useful for marketing purposes, and these are being used more frequently. The relation between the freedom of the Internet, the commercial interests and the uses of the public sphere is intricate, and will be discussed further in the article.

The Book Blog in Sweden 2009

In Sweden, use of the Internet is widespread, among the highest rates in the world along with the other Nordic countries, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. A survey from 2009 revealed that 77% of the Swedish adult population uses the Internet on a regular basis (Findahl 2009: 15). Blogs may be a much-talked-about phenomenon, but only 37% of Internet users read blogs and only around 5% of the adult population spends time creating or developing a blog. The statistics also show that it is women who blog, while men spend more time file sharing and playing online games (Findahl 2009: 22, 31–33).

Blogging arose as a phenomenon already in the mid-1990s, generally attributed to the web diary of Justin Hall in 1994 (Rosen 2004), with the first Swedish counterpart in 1997. In Sweden, the web diary, later referred to as weblog or blog, became widespread in 2004. With well over 100 million blogs worldwide, the numbers and the variety of the blogs are still, in 2009, rapidly growing with new blogs being created every day. The blogs dedicated mainly to literature were common already in 2005, and in autumn 2009, the number of active blogs about literature in Sweden, depending on the definition, ranged from 150 to 250.

The survey conducted for the present purposes was based on the book blogs that could be found through three major portals, one general (Bloggportalen.se) and two specialized in book blogs (Bokbloggar.nu and litt.se). The collecting site Bloggportalen.se claims to have 3,000 registered blogs about writing and literature, but this figure also includes bloggers writing occasionally about literature who link themselves to this category. The lists from the two more specialized portals gave 300 blogs, but after going through each link, the number was significantly lowered. Several blogs were inactive and others wrote more about other things than about literature. Attempts to find unattached book blogs gave some newly started ones. In the end, the list comprised 220 blogs about books, literature, and reading. The requirement for being included on the list was regular postings (minimum two per month) and more than half of the postings had to be about litera-
ture, the book trade, authors, or writing. There are a large number of general cultural blogs that also write about literature, but those are not included in this study. Many other bloggers writing web diaries about their daily life also comment on books they have read, but these bloggers are also not included in the material. So it should be noted that blogging about literature is much more extensive than this survey indicate.

Defining the book blog was difficult in several ways; one hard line to draw was determining the differences between an online literary magazine and a book blog. There are several group blogs that resemble online magazines. A common, but not always valid, definition is that the online magazine publishes a number of articles at the same time, making it an issue with a number (often with some kind of theme). The articles in the magazines also tend to be longer and edited. In contrast, the book blog article is rarely edited, the articles are generally shorter and they give a sense of “immediacy”, both in publishing and content. However, for the present purposes, the blogs and the magazines have been allowed to define themselves, i.e. the sites that call themselves magazines have not been included.

A general observation is that it is hard to maintain a blog dedicated solely to literature. Most people do not read at a steady pace. A holiday may result in more postings, and work in dry periods. Some bloggers solve this by writing reviews that are published at a later date. Also, many bloggers express that they find it difficult to have something to write about apart from reviews. The result is that most single bloggers have a short life span, rarely more than one or two years, while group blogs (made up of more than one blogger) usually last longer. As the person behind the blog Rubus Libri expressed it: “I can now look back on more than a year of blogging, and observe, as expected, that it was harder than expected” (Rubus Libri 2009). This blogger complains about the difficulties of being a creative writer, the lack of visitors, and worse, the even lower number of comments. It is clear that book blogging, like most things, requires time, hard work and dedication. As a result, less than 20% of the single bloggers started before 2007 and had maintained their blog for more than two years. At least 20% of the single bloggers (probably more as these tend to be more difficult to trace) started in 2009, the same year the survey was conducted. I made a similar study of book blogs during the autumn of 2007, and at that time the majority of the blogs had been started in 2005. Two years later, most of them were deactivated. However, it can be argued that the intention of the blogs is not to be permanent or fixed. The nature of the format promotes a short life span.

Other general observations that can be made concern age and gender. The book bloggers are usually, in cases where age is presented, between 30 and 40 years. This is a higher average age than bloggers in general, as most blog creators are between 16 and 24 years (Findahl 2009: 31). Accordingly, book bloggers more often have families, and they also generally have university degrees and jobs. Furthermore, most of them live in smaller towns around the country, although quite a
few live in one of the three larger urban areas: Stockholm, Göteborg, or Malmö. The book bloggers are also almost all female. Among the single bloggers, 75% of those who state their sex are women and only 8% men. These figures concur with blogging in general, as women spend more time on creating and updating blogs than men do, but women are even more common among book bloggers than they are in the rest of the blogosphere.

In Sweden, the most popular (visited) blogs are written by young women (between the age of 15 and 20) writing about gossip, fashion, and their daily lives. Bloggers like Blondinbella, Kenza and Kissie have between 600 000 and 700 000 visitors a week, and have duly become minor celebrities. These bloggers get invited to parties, are written about in evening papers, and mentioned on TV – blogging has become a route to fame. Yet these bloggers are in most respects far different from the average book blogger, who is older, writes more or less on one subject, is less personal, and does not have as many readers. The only book blog with plenty of readers is Bokhora, a group blog that will be analysed in more detail, with approximately 15 000 visitors a week (Björkäng 2009). Most book bloggers, on the other hand, only have a few visitors, ranging from less than ten to 2 000 a week.

Book blogs could be mapped out in different ways depending on the criteria, e.g. content, themes, and style. To give a general overview, I have divided them into four groups based on the blogger, or bloggers, i.e. their actual number (one or more), purpose (commercial or non-commercial), and profession (professional or not). The groups intersect and overlap, but give a sense of the nature of different kinds of blogs. The following groups are described: “professional commercial book blogs”, “professional non-profit book blogs”, “non-professional individual book blogs”, and “non-professional group book blogs”. The “non-professional individual book blogs” form by far the largest category and are also important, as they represent a group that did not previously have the same kind of access to the public sphere.

Professional Commercial Book Blogs
These are blogs written by authors, bookstores, newspapers, magazines, journalists, etc. Most of them are created in order to market a brand, a name, or a company. Some are simply commercial marketing, while others have a versatile and sophisticated content. The professional blogs tend to be nicely designed and do not have so many banners. The blogs produced by publishing houses and bookstores generally post comments on an irregular basis. Newspapers and journals, on the other hand, often make a daily posting written as a way to comment on current debates or events. None of the four large daily papers in Sweden have cultural blogs any longer (they used to have them), but the large evening papers have several (e.g. Aftonbladet’s Kulturbloggen). These professional bloggers generally have a surprisingly slight influence on the debates in other blogs, with a few ex-
ceptions, such as prominent authors (e.g., Bodil Malmsten). In the survey, there were twenty publisher blogs (e.g., *Svante Weylers blog*) and six belonging to bookstores (e.g., *SF-bokhandeln i Malmö*). The authors’ blogs are more difficult to define, as these tend to be about more than literature. Many of these are literature in their own right, while others are simple marketing for the author’s persona.

**Professional Non-profit Book Blogs**

These are blogs written by a single librarian, or more commonly a group of librarians, connected to a local city library. The aim of these blogs is to inform the public about books and literature in general. A few of them are directed at other professionals, and will also give general information about the book trade, authors, events, etc. These are popular, while the blogs written by single committed librarians have fewer postings. The most influential in this group is a book recommendation blog, *Boktips.net*. Library blogs have become increasingly popular as a way to reach readers outside the house, especially the blogs written for children and teenagers (e.g., *Skolbibblian*). There were forty library blogs on the list.

**Non-professional Individual Bloggers**

The single-writer, non-professional blogs are the most common (e.g., *BookyDarling*, *En annan sida*, and *Lyrans noblesser*). The search for active blogs of this kind gave 140, but there are likely more. New blogs are started daily, while old blogs become inactive. The variety among these is large. Some write short postings about a book they have read, followed by a very similar review of another book, and then another. Others write ambitious long texts about literature in general, compare books they have read, or discuss literary trends they have discovered. Most of the bloggers are personal in their views of literature, and some also relate their reading to personal experiences. Most postings are on popular literature published in paperback by the large publishing houses. There are only a few book bloggers who discuss less known literature or poetry. However, most of them read a great deal, and overall many different kinds of literature are brought up.

**Non-professional Group Blogs**

Blogs run by more than one person are less common, but on the other hand more active, long lasting and well established. At the time of the survey, there were thirteen active non-professional group blogs. Some of them are devoted to a specific field: crime fiction, children’s books, or paperbacks. The most talked about book blog, *Bokhora* [Book Whore], is a group blog, and the oldest book blog *Dagens bok* [Book of the Day] started in 2000. The level of writing in the group blogs tends to be higher than among the single bloggers, probably due to discussions within the group, and in some cases an editor goes through texts pre-publication.
Bloggers as Critics and their Role in the Book Trade

The grouping of the book bloggers served the purpose of making structures apparent, and it illuminates differences between the blogs. The professional bloggers, whether commercial or not, used the blogging technique mainly for marketing. Much of this work is a development of pre-existing strategies among publishers, authors, and librarians alike. An important part of the professional’s work is to get attention and to reach an audience, and the blog is simply another means to achieve this end. The non-professional bloggers, on the other hand, developed new strategies and structures, and the main interest here is in examining how this is done and the effects it has had. The following section deals with the non-professional bloggers in general, in what sense they are literary critics, and their role in the trade. The subsequent two parts will discuss examples among the non-professionals: the group blog and the single blogger. The purpose is to analyse more closely how a few of the book bloggers operate.

The non-professional book bloggers might be idealists, and unconnected (as a whole) to the trade, but they are still part of the book market. Marketing, distribution, publishing formats, media attention, and literary trends are factors influencing which books the bloggers write about. Only a small proportion of the books published will be discussed in the blogs. In Sweden, approximately 2 000 new works of fiction are published each year.2 A single, fast reading blogger might manage to write about less than 100 works. The group blogs generally cover 200–300 titles of mainly new fiction, but still the majority of new titles will not be reviewed or discussed to any great extent. The number of new titles published each day, in Sweden as well as globally, makes the proportion of reviewed titles tiny in relation to all the texts never mentioned.

The book bloggers are part of the book trade in the sense that they contribute to the attention a particular work receives. The need to orientate in the book world, or the book flood, has become central in all dealings with literature, as so-called over-publishing has been called the greatest threat to the book. In 2008 there were over 100 000 titles published in the UK, over 80 000 in Germany, more than 275 000 in the US (some of the UK and US titles are the same) and 75 000 in Spanish (from different countries). Swedish book production in 2008 amounted to a modest 4 500 titles printed for the public (all printed books is a much higher number, but this includes governmental reports, etc.), but since most Swedes also read in other languages – especially English, but also maternal languages, Scandinavian neighbouring languages as well as French, German and Spanish – in reality the number of books on offer is much greater than a few thousand. The import of foreign language books make up at least 10% of the trade and the two large Swedish Internet bookstores offer between two and three million titles, where books in Swedish only comprise less than ten percent (Steiner 2005). The number of published titles the book blogger can choose from is enormous.
The increasing book publishing is a problem for the trade as a whole as well as for the individual reader. As the Mexican author Gabriel Zaid remarked, “Books are published at such a rapid rate that they make us exponentially more ignorant” (2003: 22). Even an imagined extensive fast reader going through a work of fiction a day would miss thousands published any particular day. In a year, the unread books make up a massive amount. Books given as a gift, books I got as an intellectual challenge, and books bought for fun – all the unread books on my bedside table giving me a bad conscience. “Humankind writes more than it can read”, says Zaid, which is a fact that readers have to find strategies to deal with (2003: 30). Perhaps the previous economic and practical restraints on publishing had advantages over the present system. Today, however, these are gone, and print-on-demand publishers such as Lightning Source and the Swedish Vulkan.se have eliminated the last impediments. Everyone can publish anything at a very small cost. But who shall receive these texts? The professional critics will not, and cannot, write about everything as the produced texts are too many and the large daily papers decided long ago to limit their reviews.

When too many titles are published, visibility becomes the key to success in the trade. In reality, this applies to most media, as the expansion of the information flow has required new ways to become known. In “the attention economy”, being seen is the most difficult and important task for authors, publishers, and other agents in the book trade (Davenport & Beck 2001: 2–3). It has become easy to be published, but difficult to receive attention. Visibility has become the most desired, and the least accessible commodity in the new economy, and in book marketing it has become essential to “whip up a hype” or “create a buzz”, PR phrases in publishing. It is not only the avant-garde trendy or hip products that are buzz-worthy. Generating hype can be done regardless of content and setting, with the right target group anything can be achieved. Market strategist Renee Dye argued that not all costumers are equal, some are vanguard, highly influential, first adopters and others are followers (Dye 2000). If you aim at the middle-class reader, the critics at large daily papers are influential, but the young, globally oriented, and ideologically aware groups of readers that blog and comment on different online communities may be equally important. These readers can create a buzz, as they are the real things – the authentic readers. While Dye suggested that PR groups and branding people create most buzzes, there is evidence that on the whole publishers of general fiction do not have the means, technical know-how, or funds to fully employ such strategies. When it comes to the previously mentioned Stephanie Meyer’s Twilight series (2005–2008), Dan Brown’s The Lost Symbol (2009), or other titles with a substantial market, these schemes are used, but in Sweden very few works of fiction have enough pull to allow for advanced marketing.

There are exceptions, and a few of the large publishers have experimented with new marketing schemes (Thoresson 2010). On example was in the summer and early autumn of 2007, when the largest publishing house in Sweden, Bonniers,
aimed at the bloggers in a marketing campaign. They promoted a debutant, the pseudonym Tim Davy, and the novel *Amberville* (2007). The strategy included sending out 100 copies of the unedited manuscript, although nicely bounded as a book, to bloggers well before publication, in order to create a buzz. The manuscript was followed in the mail by a lighter, then a kitchen sponge, and finally a large leek – all with quotes from the book tied onto them (Cato 2007). The campaign was not particularly successful in creating a sense of authenticity, and most of the bloggers wrote about the marketing scheme and the leek. However, the book was much talked about, and by mid-October it was the most discussed novel on all Swedish blogs. The fact is that a large proportion of the 100 bloggers did read and write about the text, prior to its official publication.

Despite the economic limitations of the Swedish publishing houses, and perhaps also the lack of know-how, it is clear that the Internet is a part of modern marketing strategies. There are courses given for publishers’ employees to ensure up-to-date knowledge, and in 2008 the trade magazine published an issue dedicated to online marketing (Westlund 2008). It has also become more or less the norm for publishers to send out review copies to the more influential bloggers, and occasionally more sophisticated schemes are employed. In the early days of the Internet, publishers merely presented books on their websites, but during 2008–2009 marketing moved into areas where the readers were already active – Myspace, Facebook, Twitter, Bebo, and blogs – preferably through discrete infiltration, in what is termed “social media marketing” (Westlund 2008: 15–16).

An often-repeated critique of how literature is discussed and spread through the Internet is that there are no gatekeepers offering judgements. Considering that book bloggers might be one group of gatekeepers, there is a risk that they will be used for marketing purposes. What position does the book bloggers take in balancing personal interests, publishers’ influence, and other kinds of inspiration/authority? Are bloggers general readers, or are they part of the contemporary book trade? In analysing the Swedish book blogs, I would argue that it depends on the blog, as these are so diverse. The bloggers as a phenomenon operate with a variety of functions: marketing, displaying, recommending, reviewing, gossiping, and consuming. Some act as gatekeepers, but this is not a prominent feature. Instead, the book bloggers tend to promote reading in general, rather than single titles. Most book bloggers also affirm the opinions and views spread in other media as well on other sites on the Internet.

**The Non-professional Group Blog – the Example Bokhora**

The book bloggers are readers and studies of readers, historical as well as present, are marked by methodological difficulties. The previously mentioned reception studies researcher Christine Pawley argues for two different methods. One can study readers as individuals, with one or more examples, but the problem is the
difficulty in determining the general accuracy. Using the second method, it is feasible to group the readers based on characteristics, but as a consequence, some individuals might not fit into the groups constructed by the researcher (Pawley 2002). Despite these valid objections, I have divided the book bloggers into groups to reveal general patterns. This is supplemented by a more in-depth analysis of some examples, the first being the non-professional group book blog Bokhora. It is the most established and talked about book blog in Sweden.

Bokhora is a group blog created in 2006 by five women around the age of 30. In many ways, these women represent the typical book blogger – not only in age and gender – but also in that they all have university degrees, and three of them have studied literature in college. Despite their education, they present themselves as “general readers”, i.e. non-professionals. Their double nature as amateurs with an education raises questions about professionalism. What are the differences between writing by professionals and by amateurs? This is a significant question that has to be examined and discussed from different angles. A traditional way of differing the professional from the amateur is if someone is paid for the job or not. The five women in the Bokhora group are not paid to blog, on the other hand have they are often invited to do other, but connected, work that is waged.

One notion is that book bloggers and others alike (such as the critics on the Internet bookstore Amazon), unlike most professionals, write about all kinds of literature. They include genres generally not reviewed in daily papers or literary journals – crime fiction, chick lit, fantasy, etc. – and they also write about a mixture of newly published titles and back list (even out-of-print books). The mix of texts seems to be a goal in itself. In some ways, it reflects how people generally read – an inexpensive paperback, an old book, a borrowed recommendation, or a brand new expensive hardcover. “We go to bed with any kind of literature” is the Bokhora mantra (Rydin 2009). But a further exploration of the titles reviewed at Bokhora shows that this is not quite the case. Most of the reviews published August-October 2009 on their blog were of new novels published by one of the larger established publishing houses in Sweden. The reviews of older books were only of English-language titles and were written by the same person, Helena Dahlgren, who is the only one presenting herself on their site as semi-professional. There are also other kinds of books mentioned on Bokhora, but these are rarely reviewed in their own right, instead these are titles referred to in general discussions on a theme or a presentation of an author. The reviews make up only part of the blog, and it is in the other postings that a wider range of books can be found.

The reviewed titles on Bokhora indicate that they operate in much the same manner as professional critics. One can question whether the five contributors to Bokhora are amateurs, and on their blog there is a constant balance between their semi-professional character and their image as general readers. While they often promote themselves as amateurs, it has become increasingly difficult to ascertain this position. They have in many ways moved from the amateur to the profession-
al sphere. For example, they are presented in styled press photos as smart, good-looking, intelligent middle-class women, they appear at the annual Book Fair in Gothenburg, they have published an issue of the literary magazine *Album* at a large publishing house, and they travel around the country talking about reading and books. They sell advertising space on their website, and occasionally they link to an external book sales site. In daily papers and monthly magazines, they are presented as the new generation of readers (Rydin 2009; Eklöf 2009), they are quoted on book covers, and *Bokhora* is also included in the “new reviews” list in the trade magazine. Most of the members in the Bokhora team also participate in paid activities connected to the website, for example they talk about reading and literature in libraries and bookstores. In the summer of 2010 one Bokhora, Johanna Karlsson, started working for a small independent publisher, X Publishing, and thereby definitely crossing the traditional line between the amateur, unwaged, and the professional, paid for a similar line of work. There are plenty of examples of how they are no longer amateurs, and it is possible to argue that their professionalism lies, among other things, in being able to read and write like “anybody”, something that perhaps traditional criticism has failed to do.

There is no evident or clear division between professional and amateur criticism in the present (Steiner 2008 & 2009). It has been argued that a new kind of amateur has emerged, a group called “the Pro-Ams” (Leadbeater & Miller 2004). According to Charles Leadbeater and Paul Miller, a new kind of amateur has appeared that operates in a more professional manner than previous individuals or groups have done. They are knowledgeable, educated, committed, and have large networks. Leadbeater and Miller argued that pro-ams question traditional hierarchies, though obviously many amateurs reinforce the very same as they climb towards professionalism. However, what is more important, the pro-ams do not regard themselves as professionals, rather they use their amateurism as a tool for networking, writing, and creating new structures. The term amateur has traditionally been used in a derisive manner, to explain that someone is lacking in knowledge, education, and standards. But that is not a useful way to apply the word to contemporary non-professionals. They may lack a certain degree, or the right job title, but they can often work in new and experimental ways. There are also examples of how the pro-ams have influenced and inspired professionals, and this is also the case within the book trade.

Are the book bloggers pro-ams? In some ways, but the range of book bloggers is wide, from the near professional to the dabbling amateurs. At one end of the continuum, there are 14-year-old book bloggers writing personal accounts of their reading experiences. At the other end, there is *Bokhora*, the most professional of all the Swedish book bloggers in the sense that their educational background, present occupation, and position on the literary scene are not characterized by amateurism. However, they did start out as non-professionals, and they can be seen as part of the large group of semi-professionals – such as journalists, authors,
critics, translators, and librarians – who have their own blog. Most of the bloggers are somewhere between amateur and professional, and among the group bloggers, many have studied literature at the university level and/or work with books. Moreover, 30% of the single non-professional bloggers present themselves as having a background or job related to literature. One example is the blogger Anna Winberg [Anna Winberg Knows Good Books], who has a degree in publishing studies and has worked both in bookstores and in publishing. Another example is Sara Britta Jadelius [Brittas böcker och bibliotek], who has a degree in literature and librarianship, and is working as a librarian and web designer, marketing herself through the blog. The line separating the professional from the non-professional is dissolving, and is it probably no longer a valid distinction. Many of the non-professionals, including Bokhora, use professional strategies, values, and language to reach their readership.

Some say that online reviewing poses a serious threat to professional criticism. In the US, a number of critics started The Campaign to Save Book Reviewing in an attempt to create awareness of the differences between professional and amateur writing. They argued that the reviews in daily papers are threatened not only by the Internet, but also by under-qualified journalists and large media companies selling short reviews. One of the defenders of the professionals, Rónán McDonald, wrote in The Death of the Critic (2007) that only printed criticism can create renewed understanding of literature and deepen our perspectives, “quantity is no substitute for authority” (2007: 3). To McDonald, a public sphere has to have limitations, there needs to be an authoritative voice, and the fact that anyone can be a critic will diminish choice and agency for the reader (2007: 16–17). Objections can be raised to the elitism in his arguments and the structure of canon formation, but these are rejected by McDonald, who claimed that only the professional, printed critic with a strong link to academic literary studies offers the source of authority that can challenge people in their reading.

The purpose of professional literary criticism has been debated many times, and the selection processes, power, canonization, and literary value have been called into question. The professional critic is a gatekeeper who consecrates and canonizes authors and their works, and with this power follows a complicated relation to the book trade, the authors, and the literary world. The professional critic may have authority, but is at the same time often a person linked in different ways to the literary world. A critic also needs to market and position him- or herself in relation to others. It is easy to criticize book bloggers for being susceptible to clever marketing, publishing trends, or other bloggers’ views, but not even the professionals are able to isolate themselves from such things.

The example of Bokhora shows that book bloggers may be amateurs in some respects, but have a great deal in common with professional literary criticism. In this sense, they are similar to the American book blog Book slut, or the British Ready Steady Book-blog. These also began as amateurs, but have developed into a
semi-professional sphere with an impact on the book trade. The authors of the popularly written *The Bookaholic’s Guide to Book Blogs*, Gillieron and Kilgarriff, decidedly played down the polarization and animosity between print criticism and the Internet (2007: 170–171). They also argued that the most influential book bloggers are the professionals: publishers, booksellers, journalist, and critics. Their UK examples are indicative of this, but the study of Swedish book blogs also showed that the amateurs have become increasingly important, and that some of the amateurs have become part of the literary establishment. However, the hierarchy in the blog world is a defining trait, and there are huge differences in the status and position of *Bokhora* and the book blog of a 14-year-old schoolgirl.

**The Diary of a Book Blogger – the Non-professional Single Bloggers**

*Bokhora* is an interesting example of a non-professional group blog, despite the above discussions on professionalism, as it is the most established book blog existing in Sweden. But selecting equally good examples from the large group of single non-professional bloggers is not easy, as they are all different and very few have a large readership. Instead the following analysis of the single bloggers will use a number of different examples to show the variety and complexity of this writing.

One general observation of these blogs is that they are often written in an intimate style, similar to a diary. Others have already observed that the blogs are blurring the line between public and private – being written in a personal manner in a space open to anyone. It has been argued that the Internet offers a place for a collective society where individuals connect in large networks. Manuel Castells, on the other hand, claimed that regarding the Internet as a community is misleading, instead it has provided forums for a stronger focus on an I. The process is what he calls the “privatization of sociability” and a “networked individualism” (Castells 2001: 129–130). Individuals may create large networks, but these have specific interests, values, and tastes that have little to do with the Internet in general. A network, whether interested in science fiction literature or Tecktonik music, is developed in social interaction, but is always based in individual selves. Being social has become privatized, but according to Castells, the Internet is not made up of a mere collection of individuals, and it is not in conflict with the individual; instead the Net has become the self. The process is one of an individualist consumerism that often stresses both consumption (possessing, buying, touching) and the individual reading experience (the act). The differences and links between these two concepts have been debated in the research, but if applied to individual book bloggers, it is clear that they are deeply intertwined (Squires 2007).

Almost all of the book blogs written by one person have a personalized style of writing, regardless of whether the person behind the blog has a professional back-
In the posted reviews, there are often comments on the blogger’s private life, the postings about literature are also often intermingled with writing about a cat, walking in the autumn sun, feelings on a rainy Monday morning, etc. These texts promote the blogger as a person, but they are also necessary to give a blog a personalized style. It is not possible for a blog reader to identify the character of someone solely writing about literature, and the main function of the personal postings is to create a relationship with the readers. The more private writing in many ways defines who the blogger is: “Like the writing of paper diaries, blogging is a process that helps shape subjective feelings and identity through affective connections, thus defining a sense of self in relation to others” (Dijck 2007: 73). Even though a book blog is about literature, the personalized tone is necessary to attract readers. A de-personalized blogger without passions leaves no impression, and tends to have few visitors. Consequently, as van Dijck argued (2007: 73), bloggers use technology to express individuality and a self. In this way the blog and the diary resemble one another, and even though the handwritten diary may appear private and secret while the weblog is public and open, the similarities in the act of writing are evident. The blog can also be understood as a ritual process defining an I in relation to others (Dijck 2004). Seen from this perspective, book blogs are only a matter of literature to a certain extent – the main issue is positioning the self in relation to culture, society, and other readers. However, this would not be the first time that media negotiate a self in society. Print, radio, TV, etc. have already transformed the position of the individual in the public sphere, and in this sense transformed people from objects to subjects (Thompson 1995).

Despite all the personal elements, the most common way a single book blog is organized is simply by adding one review to the next, an example being Ylvasläsdagbok [Ylva’s reading diary]. Depending on how many books have been read, the number of postings varies greatly. Some bloggers write long reviews, but most write a short paragraph on what they thought about a particular book. This writing is reminiscent of a primary, or early teenage, school activity, and an exercise book with a list of read novels followed by short reviews. These book blog reviews do not appear to have been written for an audience; instead they have a self-preserving, documenting form. The blogs resemble a diary, photo album, or other kinds of saved documents from a life. Not all book bloggers write like this; many seem to have a readership in mind and will direct questions, tasks, or ideas towards an intended reader. However, “I blog for my own sake” is an often repeated stance. The blogger “Mårten” writes that he blogs to develop his writing, as a process of seeking something, but never for attention because he has never received any (pocketpocketpocket 2009). But even if many bloggers make similar comments, it is difficult to understand why anyone would bother creating a blog if they did not want to be seen. Part of the success of many sites and activities on the Internet is the possibility to participate, share, and network. Charles Leadbeater
argued that those who are part of the Internet movement identify themselves not by their possessions or professions, but by what they put online: “You are what you share” (Leadbeater 2008: 1), the underlying logic being that if your games, videos, texts, etc. are visible on the Internet, you exist. It is fairly easy to disrepute his claim on several accounts, one being that people online are also their profession, their fame, their skills in real life (IRL), and showing these online is an important part of the sharing. However, the reason for allowing Leadbeater into the argument is that he is right about there being a strong desire among many bloggers to display themselves. Sharing yourself with others is an important part of being someone in today’s society.

A number of the book bloggers express their intention to have a professional career in the literary world, and part of the purpose of their blog is to attract attention or give credibility to a CV. Being seen online may be a path to a desired job, or as stated on the video site YouTube: “Broadcast Yourself”. This is mainstream media becoming personalized. However, as British author Andrew Keen argued, there is a risk that everyone is talking on the Internet and no one is listening. Broadcasting yourself, according to Keen, is one big narcissistic move in which people are not meant to digest or distribute culture, but only to produce it themselves (Keen 2007: 15–16). In the case of the book bloggers he has a point, as most of them have very few readers. Apart from Bokhora and a few others who have received attention, most of the book bloggers will have only five to 200 readers a week. Everyone can share, but as these numbers show, there is a strong hierarchy in recognition. Although “[s]haring, recognition, participation” are seen as keywords in understanding the blogging movement (Leadbeater 2008: 222), not everyone is recognized. The position of a particular book blogger is evaluated through the number of visits, being on other bloggers blogrolls, nominations to the book blog of the month, review copies from publishers, or comments from other readers. The single non-professional book bloggers confirm that sharing is easy, but that recognition is difficult to attain.

The third keyword, participation, is essential for an understanding of the purpose of the individual book blogger. For most kinds of social networks participation is important, and for the book bloggers it is a way to be a part of the literary scene, to be an authentic consumer guide. The relation between a blogger and the potential readers is very important, and many postings express a desire for a link to other people. A blog reader can post comments and argue with the writer, and in this there is a contradictory combination of distance and intimacy. The physical distance and the limited knowledge of the person writing the blog creates a space between the blogger and the blog-reader that allows for a different kind of intimacy. The anonymity of the media allows us to be more open about who we are. One consequence is that there are often heightened emotions of all kinds, as writing bland texts gives little to a blog reader. There is a tendency towards what some
researchers have seen as a widened social freedom, where people can express themselves more openly and freely (Katz & Rice 2002).

The existence of non-professional individual bloggers is evidence that readers cannot be reduced to passive consumers. They have become, what Jeff Gomez called, “prosumers”, i.e. a portmanteau for producers and consumers (2008). The term is more often applied to phenomena such as fanfiction, YouTube, or MySpace, but is relevant in describing the complexity of book bloggers. The bloggers are in constant negotiation with literature and literary quality. In this sense, book bloggers have redefined how people make use of and deal with literature; they have also questioned the traditional division between production and consumption of texts.

**Book Blogs and Literature in a MySpace Global World**

There is an often-repeated view that the Internet is global, but anything that is to reach outside national boarders has to be in English. The Swedish book blogs are not. They are almost always written in Swedish, and although some will review or comment on books read in a different language, the most of the reviews are of books written in or translated into Swedish. The book blogs have little to do with the blog mantra of globalism, democracy, or being part of a mass collaborative community. This is not co-created knowledge shared for free, what has been called “wicinomics”, i.e. “Wikipedia-economics” (Tapscott & Williams 2008). The aspirations underlying the book blogs differ in many ways from what is generally written about the digital revolution. Often-repeated code words such as collaboration, democracy, global, or participation culture only apply to a limited extent to this material. Most of the often-repeated and spoken of Internet analyses have been written about the same phenomena: Linux, Wikipedia, YouTube, Skype. But these are nothing like the book blogs, which appear to follow a logic of their own, more related to a literary sphere than to other media. Initially I argued that Elizabeth Long’s concept of the “social infrastructure of reading” (2003) was a useful tool for understanding book blogs, and as has been maintained throughout the article, the bloggers operate in a network with other readers and people interested in literature, and only to a lesser extent with other media consumers.

There is a claim that the blog has become the 18th century coffee house transformed into the 20th century public sphere (Tapscott & Williams 2008: 40). A general critique of Jürgen Habermas’s initial concept of the public sphere is that, in the 18th century, women and people of the lower classes were excluded from the coffee houses, and in this sense these places were not public at all. And perhaps the blogs are equally excluding of large groups, as less than 30% of people between 16 and 74 read blogs (including people who do not use the Internet). Furthermore, this figure excludes the 30% of the population, younger and older, who
most likely read blogs to a varied extent. If blogs are today’s coffee houses, they are still excluding places. It is also a fact that some voices are privileged, although it would take a much more in-depth survey into bloggers to map out exactly how the hierarchies are structured and how power is controlled.

In the introduction, I proposed that the book bloggers have become part of the book trade and as such are actors on the literary stage. Their impact has not been as radical as was previously predicted (Nelson 2006), and most book bloggers, as I have shown, have very few readers. Still the blogs, together with other kinds of social forums, have changed how publishers view the audience and how marketing of literature is carried out. One of the most tangible changes within the book trade has been a shift in production, distribution, and consumption from divided functions to co-productions or co-operative projects. Up until the 1970s in Sweden, and to a certain extent even up until the early 1990s, each part in the process of making a book was carried out by a separate individual or company. One person wrote the book, one was the editor, one the publisher, the printer, the book-binder, the marketing person, the distributor, the bookseller, and one the reader. This is a slightly simplified model, but as a whole a good description of the pre-1990s conditions. The last fifteen years’ digital development, however, has changed the structure of the book trade radically (Söderlund 2009: 87–89). In the contemporary trade, many functions converge in one person, organization, or company. As argued initially in the article, applying Darnton’s (2002) or Svedjedal’s (2000) book trade functions to the book blogs makes their position visible in the overall structure of the book market. First of all the book bloggers are readers, but they are also book buyers, library visitors, and part of the audience at different literary events. These actions, of course, belong to the traditional realm of the reader; what is new is that bloggers also function as reviewers and in this way proliferate texts and market books and authors. As many of the book bloggers work as journalists, librarians, authors, translators, publisher’s readers, and bookstore assistants, they often take on a number of other functions as well. Book bloggers may still make up a tiny part of the book trade, but they are not insignificant, and if seen in a wider perspective, they provide evidence of a transformed trade that is changing the structure of the production, distribution, and consumption of literature.

Ann Steiner is a research fellow in literature at Lund University. Her research focuses on 20th and 21st century literature and book trade. She has written *Litteraturens mittfåra* (2006) on subscription book clubs, *Litteraturen i mediesamhället* (2009) on contemporary book trade, and articles on literature and digital technology. E-mail: ann.steiner@litt.lu.se.
Notes

1 "Jag kan nu se tillbaka på över ett år av bloggande, och konstatera att, som väntat, var det svårare än väntat."

2 The number comes out of the statistics in the National Bibliography (collated by the Royal Library) and is based on fiction for adults in Swedish original as well as translated into Swedish, but not including new editions. Another source, the Publishers Association, claims that their members (i.e. the large publishers) only published 618 titles of fiction for adults in 2008. The great discrepancy can be explained by the large numbers of small independent publishers as well as a large variety of self-publishing and Print-on-Demand-systems (Carlsson & Facht 2010).

3 "Vi går till sängs med vilken litteratur som helst”.

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The Literature Curriculum in Russia: Cultural Nationalism vs. The Cultural Turn

By Karin Sarsenov

Abstract
In Western educational systems, the question “Why study literature in school?” has been raised in connection with the theoretical development often summarized as “the cultural turn.” The author strives to contribute to this discussion by examining the development of educational discourse in Russia. During the Soviet period, literature was – together with history – the subject most heavily influenced by the dogmas of Soviet state ideology. As such, literature enjoyed great prestige and was a compulsory and separate subject from the fifth to the eleventh school years. Since 1991, the educational system has undergone radical reform, but the number of hours devoted to literature has not changed significantly. This would suggest that literature still is perceived as an important means of incorporating children into the national and political community. The target of this study is to identify authorities’ specific aims in devoting so much time to literature in school, as well as to elucidate in what way literature is to achieve these aims. Russian guidelines for the development of literature curricula published in the years 1991–2010 are examined to see just how literature is legitimated as a secondary school subject. Based on this material, the author draws conclusions about the rhetorical practices and ideological development of curricular discourse, its relationship to Soviet educational thought and the extent to which the cultural turn has influenced this sphere.

Keywords: Russian education; secondary school; literature; curricular guidelines; required readings
Introduction

Teaching literature in school is by its very nature a tricky endeavor. On the one hand, the canonical works taught remind us of the ultimate transcendence of the individual. The fact that a particular writer is taught in school means that this person’s views, intentions, experiences, feelings, politics and aesthetics have surpassed their contextual situatedness, overcome the forces attempting to marginalize them, and have emerged as the dominant cultural discourse. In this respect, masterpieces represent the ultimate manifestation of individual agency. In the intimate experience of reading, individual agency is also accentuated – reading is a process which cannot be controlled from outside, and in which the inherent hermeneutical openness of art allows for unexpected – and sometimes perhaps even unwelcome – interpretations.

On the other hand, literature is, together with history, a subject particularly well-suited for implementing the covert and overt agenda of state-administered education. These include objectives such as the Foucauldian subjectification of individuals by means of surveillance mechanisms, “the naturalization of a civil identification with the national political community over time” (Bénéï 2005: 9), and maintaining the dominance of the ruling political, economic and military elite (Apple 2004). Teaching literature in school means negotiating a path in this field rife with conflict and paradox.

In Russia, literature is a compulsory, separate subject from the fifth to the eleventh school year. This would suggest that literature is perceived as an important means of bringing children into the national and political community. The target of this study is to identify authorities’ specific aims in devoting so much time to literature in school, as well as to elucidate in what way literature is to achieve these aims. Governmental guidelines used in curriculum development are helpful in this regard. They might reveal very little about what is actually happening in school, but they can tell us more about the normative foundation legitimizing state power. In literature guidelines, the question “Why read literature in school?” may or may not be addressed explicitly, but the passages describing literature as a school subject do provide useful insights into the authoritative discourses concerning the relationship between the nation (the people and their culture), citizenship (the rights and responsibilities of the citizen) and state power.

This study analyzes Russian guidelines for the development of literature curricula in order to discover how they legitimate literature’s existence as a secondary school subject. Based on this material, I will draw conclusions about the rhetorical practices and ideological development of curricular discourse, its relationship to Soviet educational thought and the influence of the cultural turn.
“Literature” as a School Subject in European Education

The unchallenged position of literature in the curriculum is a rather recent one. Literature was first introduced in elementary and secondary education in Europe as part of Latin and Greek classes, aimed at the elite. Later, poetry began to be read in the vernacular as a way of practicing elocution (Guillory 1993: 101). It was only in the nineteenth century, and in many areas as late as the early twentieth, that a national history of literature was included in school curricula. This was the result of the rise of cultural nationalism and worries about working class unrest, and was intended to promote patriotic values and virtues.

This stage often coincided with the establishment of a general educational system for all social classes, not only the privileged (Heathorn 2000). According to Ball et al. (1990: 49) in Great Britain, English as a subject now had purposes that were seen as stretching from “meeting the demands of industrial competition to reinforcing national solidarity.” It was at that point that schools began to demand an established list of national masterpieces, spurring a debate over what should constitute the literary canon – a secular version of the ecclesiastical practice of discriminating between divinely inspired scriptures and others (Gorak 1991: 64).

Historically, then, the introduction of vernacular literature as a subject of study in the educational system is closely linked to the ideas of the German Romantics, specifically the ones of J. G. von Herder, who saw a unity between a nation (Volk), its language and literature, and regarded literature as an expression of a nation’s specific character (Volkgeist). The proponents of such ideas invested literature with an enormous amount of cultural capital. A new profession was born, literary history, whose practitioners had the task of keeping the records of this rapidly growing field of cultural production (Bourdieu & Johnsson 1993). Although cultural nationalism did not pursue a political agenda in the strict sense, its ambition to revitalize national culture coincided in many ways with one of public education’s own institutional aims: to foster loyalty to rulers and create a common set of values.

Within the academic discipline of literary criticism, the nationalistic view of literature as developed by Georg Gervinus in his *Geschichte der deutschen Nationalliteratur* (1835–1842) was soon challenged, for example by the fathers of comparative literature. They replaced the narrow, nationally-focused approach with a search for universal patterns and currents, studying the movements of ideas, motifs and symbols. By the early 1980s, literary scholars had thoroughly torpedoed the nationalistic, romantic and implicitly elitist heritage of their own profession: the concept of the canon has been questioned, and non-canonical writers who represent socially disadvantaged groups such as women, racial, ethnic and sexual minorities have since entered academic syllabi. The elevated position
of the Romantic genius has been undermined by reader-oriented criticism and structuralism. As a result, the study of elite culture has given way to a booming field of cultural studies, with its anthropological, rather than quality-based and normative definition of “culture.”

These ideas, often referred to as the “cultural turn,” parallel an ongoing devaluation of the liberal arts in general, and literature in particular. Some critics see a causal relationship between the former and the latter, blaming universities’ curricular changes for the drop in the number of students majoring in humanities. If universities disseminate the view that literature functions as the privileged elite’s tool for political manipulation, students might feel discouraged from studying it. Others, like John Guillory (1993: 45), looks for the reason for this crisis in the humanities outside the campus, in the economic reality facing the professional and managerial class, where the cultural capital of the old bourgeoisie is no longer required.

The Cultural Turn in Governmental Guidelines – Western Points of Reference

The theoretical development of the cultural turn has influenced school culture as well – to varying degrees in different countries (for a European overview, see Pieper 2006). However, the image of the literary genius as the quintessential expression of national identity and his work’s benevolent influence on young minds has not been eradicated. In school documents and practice, the time-honored position of the “literary genius” continues a theoretically uneasy coexistence with the cultural turn’s more radical ideas. In the UK’s secondary school program for English (National Curriculum 2007), for instance, this coexistence reveals itself in the following description of “cultural understanding”:

Through English, pupils learn about the great traditions of English literature and about how modern writers see the world today. Through the study of language and literature, pupils compare texts from different cultures and traditions. They develop understanding of continuity and contrast, and gain an appreciation of the linguistic heritages that contribute to the richness of spoken and written language. Comparing texts helps pupils to explore ideas of cultural excellence and allows them to engage with new ways in which culture develops. (p. 62, italics added, K.S.)

In this passage, just mentioning the “great tradition of English literature” in the first sentence refers explicitly to a nation-centered set of ideas. Elsewhere, a pluralistic view of culture is promoted, where the one culture is as good as the other, and different ideas of cultural excellence are allowed. However, only the English tradition is referred to as “great.” Moreover, in a later section that lists compulsory reading, only texts from the English literary heritage are specified by their authors’ names. The curriculum leaves the choice of works from other cultures up to the teachers’ discretion, or leaves open the possibility of omitting
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them all together because of time constraints. This gives a strong indication of which texts are considered most important (p. 71).

The documents that regulate the teaching of literature in Sweden suffer from similar incongruities, which Magnus Persson has documented in detail (2007). The 2000 nine-year compulsory school curriculum states that “[c]ulture and language are inseparable from each other. Language is the site of a country’s history and cultural identity. Moreover, language reflects the multiplicity of cultures that enriches and shapes society” (Swedish curriculum 2000, Translations here and elsewhere by the author, K. S.). Mentioning “multiplicity,” the curriculum’s authors display an awareness of the cultural turn’s critique of hegemonic power structures and the privileging of the majority culture. At the same time, providing social cohesion and integration remains one of the school system’s main functions, and here, majority culture plays a decisive role. The first two sentences demonstrate that this situation has been taken into consideration. The result is a curriculum that helps to shape schools as a means of developing and transmitting cultural heritage – a thought grounded in the ideas of cultural nationalism. When it comes to defining exactly which cultural heritage this is, however, the text is rather vague, since then the nationalistic overtones would become too obvious. The curriculum does not include any required reading at all, leaving the choice to teachers and anthology editors. In Western societies, this is not uncommon: often the establishment of a school canon on a national level is avoided – this is the case in the United States, Canada, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy and Spain, for example (Eurydice).

Compared to the British and Swedish curricula, the French expresses its preference for French literature more explicitly: “Each year, pupils are invited to read numerous classic works, mainly French and written in French, but also European, Mediterranean or more broadly global” (Collection Textes de reference 2009: 9). In practice, however, the curriculum’s detailed list of required reading, which includes many English, German and even Russian canonical works, makes it more pluralistic than the British one. One can detect the influence of the cultural turn in the curriculum’s inclusion of documentary texts, as well as images and film.

The Subject “Literature” in Russian Education

In Russia, ideas borrowed from European Romanticism, idealism and nationalism have exerted a tremendous influence on the understanding of national identity, and of the role of literature in its formation. In Russia, the Romantic period coincided with the appearance of a mature secular literary language, a process delayed by the historical dominance of Old Church Slavonic as the standard written language. Beginning in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the idea of a separate Russian identity independent of Western European models developed, and
literature became both the vehicle for and one of the arguments used by those who sought to further this process (Rabow-Edling 2006). This cultural nationalism was articulated primarily by those who opposed the prevailing autocracy – it glorified the nation, not the state – and as a result it was not incorporated into the curricula of state-sponsored educational institutions.

As was the case in most Western European countries, vernacular literature in Russia did not become an important secondary school subject until the twentieth century. Since the Russian Revolution, however, the importance of the legacy of the nineteenth-century oppositional intelligentsia, the view that literature is inseparable from the very idea of Russianness has only increased. The early Soviet period saw an unparalleled expansion of comprehensive education over the course of just a few decades, which managed to raise the literacy rate from thirty to almost one hundred percent (Lovell 2000: 13). This expansion coincided with an urgent need to accelerate social integration in the multiethnic and socially diversified areas under Soviet rule, a need that translated into the project of creating a “new Soviet man.” Literature played a crucial role in this process. Although the ideology behind the project was declared to be internationalist, it was in practice nation-centered/imperialist – as were educational policies in most European countries at that time (Schleicher 1993: 24).

Moreover, it was explicitly Marxist-Leninist, which explains the sometimes awkward interpretations of literature as taught in Soviet schools. Russian popular culture abounds with anecdotes, jokes and satirical references to the hackneyed phrases that were a common feature of literature classes. In a radio program devoted to a discussion of the required readings in Russian secondary schools, teacher Arkadii Busev describes the Soviet teaching practices in the following way: “The [literature] program was ideologized when we lived under communism. It was organized in such a way that from Old Russian literature to Gorky, the communists were predetermined to seize power; it even came to such absurdities as interpreting Pushkin’s poem ‘October has already come’ [1833] in such a vein.” (“Parents’ Meeting,” 2009). ¹ A new Soviet curriculum emerged, emphasizing the social engagement of authors of works already inscribed in the prerevolutionary canon, diminishing the role of ideologically wavering ones, and adding new socialist realist works to the list.²

After a period of radical methodological experiments during the 1920s, a decree issued by the Central Committee in 1931 put an end to pluralistic and democratic approaches. Literature became a separate subject, independent from Russian, and a detailed list of required reading replaced the more flexible curricula of previous decades. The list was revised at several points in Soviet history, but the general outline remained relatively unchanged. Even after the disbandment of the Soviet Union and the concomitant denunciation of Marxism-Leninism, it is still possible to detect the influence of Stalinist-era curricular choices in contemporary literature programs.
In Soviet schools, literature mainly functioned as a means of moral, social and patriotic up-bringing [vospitanie], rather than an introduction into a sphere of knowledge. Soviet pedagogues had no problems answering the question “Why exactly do we study literature in school?” In his book *The History of Literature Teaching in the Soviet School* (1976, English translation 1980), Professor Ia. A. Rotkovich writes:

A group of colleagues at the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences provided the correct answer to this question. As Titov correctly emphasized, the purpose of literature teaching is to turn pupils into cultured readers. But these readers should be truly cultured, i.e., should be highly educated people who were developed in every way. They must be oriented toward the complexity of life and the social struggle, must consciously determine their position in it, must be able to evaluate a work, must understand the patterns of the historical development of literature, and must master the language of literature; they must be communist-minded and sensitive people, people with a Marxist-Leninist world view. (99)

After 1991, the Marxist-Leninist world view lost its legitimacy and the desire to instill communist-mindedness and awareness of class struggle disappeared. The question of literature’s place and role in the school curriculum now resurfaced. Instead of just one correct answer as there had been during the Soviet period, a host of different, competing answers emerged. Many feared that it would be difficult for the subject to recover from its Marxist-Leninist past. Among teachers, the general consensus is that literature has lost its former significance in the educational system. V. A. Viktorovich writes in his introduction to the volume *Why Literature in School* (2006a: 5): “We speak a great deal today, and legitimately so, about the declining prestige of the school teacher on the one hand, and our ‘philological’ subject on the other. The society and the state obviously underestimate the importance of education in general and literary education in particular.” One tangible manifestation of this declining prestige was the decision in 2008 to abolish literature as a compulsory subject in entrance examinations to all forms of higher education – only Russian and mathematics are now required. Another controversial innovation is the standardized achievement test [EGE, Edinyi gosudarstvennyi ekzamen], replacing the former elaborated literary essay with a multiple-choice test on factual knowledge.

In spite of these gloomy signs, in general literature’s status seems unthreatened. The curriculum of 2010 stipulates an increase in the number of hours devoted to the subject per week – from two hours per week to three hours per week in grades five and six. It continues to be a compulsory, separate subject from grades 5 to 11. The subject of literature seems to have survived the profound social and ideological transformations of the post-Soviet era, readjusting to new demands from state and society.
Required Readings in Russian Secondary Schools

In 1990, Minister of Education Eduard Dneprov was charged with the restructuring of the Soviet educational system. His ideas were liberal, and his influence is apparent in the Law on Education passed in 1992. The law granted individual schools considerable financial and ideological autonomy and diminished state control over textbooks and programs. Although Dneprov was forced to step down in 1992, his ideas continued to wield great influence on the course of reforms over the next two decades (Eklof et al. 2005: 8). The Russian Academy of Education participates actively in the process of redeveloping the curriculum: it provides pedagogical expertise, as well as that related to specific subject matter covered in the various fields of study. The first syllabi were adopted in 1997 (Compulsory Minimum of Secondary Education), but were described as preliminary until a project to develop a National Curriculum was finished. This project was completed in 2004, titled “The Federal Component of the State Standard of Secondary Education.” It began to be revised almost immediately, however, and a “second generation” of curricular guidelines has already begun to be published, the first appearing in 2010.

The most striking aspect of the literature syllabi published so far is their detailed lists of required readings. Not only is every single work specified, the number of hours that should be devoted to its study in class is also given. This is a legacy of the Soviet school system, notorious for its bureaucratic zeal. The most common criticism of the Soviet literature program, that it covers too much, is currently being addressed. The Curriculum of 2004 included thirty literary works of normal book-length (novels, plays, epic tales), as well as numerous poems and short stories. When spread across the five years of secondary education (grades 5 to 9), this meant that all Russian school children were to read six canonical works a year, such as Gogol’s Dead Souls, Pushkin’s Eugene Onegin and Lermontov’s Hero of Our Time. In the most recently published Model Programs of Literature (2010), this number has been diminished almost by half. The reading list could best be described as a revised Soviet canon, focusing on nineteenth and twentieth century masterpieces. The founding texts by nineteenth-century Marxists (e.g., Geogrii Plekhanov) and the socialist realist pieces of the twentieth century (e.g., Ostrovsky’s How The Steel Was Tempered) have been replaced by émigré and dissident literature of the twentieth century (e.g., by Ivan Shmelev and Alexander Solzhenitsyn).

In the 2004 syllabus, the selection process is mentioned explicitly: “The main criteria determining which fictional works are to be studied are their high artistic value, humanistic orientation, positive influence on the pupil’s personality, correspondence to the aims of his development and age specifics, and also the cultural and historical traditions and rich experience of our country’s education.”
The idea that a work’s “positive influence on the pupil’s personality” can be established once and for all pertaining to all prospective readers reveals a view on literature as “self-interpreting,” i.e., that literature is understood to transfer its ennobling moral values more or less automatically to all readers, regardless of their shifting frames of reference (Persson 2007: 116, with reference to Gerald Graff). Reader-oriented theories had obviously failed to impress this curriculum’s authors.

However, in 2010, these ideas do make an appearance. In the section listing the learning objectives of the subject “literature,” grades five to nine, we read: “Literature as an art of the verbal image is a special mode of knowing the world, which differs from the scientific model of objective reality in a number of important ways, such as a high degree of emotional influence, metaphoricity, ambiguity, associativeness and incompleteness, which presuppose the active co-authorship of the reader” (Model Programs of Literature 2010: 4, italics added, K. S.). While acknowledging the ambiguity and incompleteness of literary works, the curriculum is nevertheless rather explicit about precisely which interpretations of the works are relevant to the learning process. The first learning objective listed concerns the ideological function of literature, for which humanism, nationalism and civic consciousness are the key values. From 2004 to 2010, the overall view of what literature’s tasks and functions should be has not changed much. In the latest version, however, a greater awareness is apparent regarding the unpredictability of the reading process and the importance of teaching in terms of accomplishing didactic goals.

If reader-oriented criticism has had some impact on the Curriculum of 2010, other aspects of the cultural turn are conspicuously absent, such as its call for a revision of the literary canon, aiming at social diversity. The 2004 Curriculum listed one (!) female (the poet Anna Akhmatova) out of 112 authors specified by name, and the 2010 version also listed one (the same) out of 74. Even taking into account the prevalence of male authors in the Russian canon, this number is remarkable: canonical authors such as Marina Tsvetaeva, Evgenia Ginzburg and Nina Berberova have been deliberately omitted. The French Curriculum of 2009, which is comparable in size and overall orientation, includes nine female writers.

Although the authors of the 2004 Curriculum purportedly strove to adjust required readings to make them more age-appropriate, few of the works listed were originally aimed at a junior audience. Although some fairy-tales and fables are present, the bulk of the reading consists of canonical works that target an adult audience, and one which was often socially privileged. In the 2010 Curriculum, however, efforts have been made to select works with some relevance to children and teenagers. Special sections focus on literature about animals (e.g., Jack London’s White Fang), literature describing the world from a child’s perspective (e.g., Childhood by Leo Tolstoy) and the theme of childhood in Russian and
foreign literature (including *The Ransom of Red Chief* by O. Henry, among others).

As in most European countries, the list of required reading concentrates on literature originally written in the nation’s majority language, or in languages considered to be its historical predecessors. For instance, the Russian curriculum includes *The Tale of Igor’s Campaign*, an epic poem from medieval Kievan Rus’ written in the vernacular Slavonic of that time. In the Curriculum, *The Tale* is listed under the heading “Old Russian Literature” – a proposition which is at best problematic. “Old Ukrainian Literature” or “Old Belarusian Literature” would be equally correct, since not only Russia, but also Ukraine and Belarus claim to have their origins in Kievan Rus’.

All three versions of the post-Soviet curriculum include a section on “Foreign Literature,” which invariably list masterpieces from the West European canon such as works by Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Goethe, Molière, Byron and Saint-Exupéry. None of the texts are to be read in their entirety, and the section constitutes only a small portion of the overall curriculum. By equating “foreign” with “West European,” this of course excludes masterpieces from the neighboring Chinese, Persian and Arabic cultures, as well as the former Soviet republics. In so doing, the Curriculum’s authors make a clear statement about the Russian nation-state’s preferred cultural affiliation.

In accordance with the declared aim of fostering a multi-ethnic civic consciousness, a separate section is devoted to “The Literature of the Peoples of Russia,” consisting primarily of Soviet-era poets from ethnic groups still present within the Russian Federation today. Most of the non-Slavic ethnic groups, the Tatars constituting a notable exception, did not write in their native languages before 1917 and written national literatures developed only after that time. This is one explanation for the focus on the Soviet period.

It is significant, however, that the Buriat, Kalmyk and Ossetian groups have oral epic traditions. Excerpts from these were included in the 2004 curriculum, but were eliminated in 2010. When faced with the task of reducing the curriculum, the authors gave precedence to works written in a Soviet-Russian cultural context, rather than those constitutive of separate national/ethnic identities, and from periods when the Russian influence was weaker or non-existent in these cultures.

The section “The Literature of the Peoples of Russia” clearly originates in the Soviet curriculum, in which works from the non-Russian Soviet republics contributed to the concept of a common, supra-ethnic Soviet identity. This included pieces by the Ukrainian and Georgian national poets Taras Shevchenko (1814–1861) and Shota Rustaveli (ca 1172–1216). These and other authors from neighboring post-Soviet countries are now absent in the Russian curriculum. This would suggest an understanding of literature as a subject being spatially and temporally restricted to the contours of the present nation-state. The expression “Peoples of Russia” is not synonymous with “ethnic minorities”. The exclusion of
Shevchenko and Rustaveli implies that Ukrainians and Georgians are not “peoples of Russia,” despite the fact that large minorities do live inside the Russian Federation. The curriculum allots space only to those ethnic groups who constitute the titular populations of administrative units.

The changes made to the curriculum in 2010 show an effort has been made to emphasize literature’s nationalistic aspect. The texts from the second half of the twentieth century are an example of this. Russian literature during this period is characterized by two major reactions to Stalin’s coercive cultural policies: representatives of “village” prose expressed resistance to forced modernization, the romanticization of factories and Soviet internationalism by praising simple village life in covert nationalistic terms. Representatives of liberal urban prose, on the other hand, focused on human rights, targeting the absence of a rule of law and freedom of speech – to the extent the censors allowed them.

In the 2004 curriculum, village prose and urban prose were rather evenly represented in the section listing literature from the second half of the twentieth century. It also mentioned works by authors of non-Russian ethnic background who wrote in Russian (Chingiz Aitmatov, Fazil’ Iskander). In 2010, however, liberal critics of Stalinism such as Evgenii Evtushenko, Andrei Voznesenskii and Varlam Shalamov are absent, while “village” authors such as Valentin Rasputin and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn have a stronger presence – both pursued a Russian nationalist political agenda parallel to their writing careers.

The list of literature from the first half of the nineteenth century also shows similar changes. In the 2004 curriculum, most entries only mention the authors’ names, leaving the precise choice of work open. In 2010, all works are specified; much more often than not, these express patriotic sentiments. Anna Akhmatova, for instance, is represented by the poem “Native Soil.” 4 In her poetry, Anna Akhmatova most forcefully protested against state-administered patriotism. She voiced the anguish of Stalin’s victims in “Requiem”, making a clear distinction between “our motherland” and “theirs”. Susan Amert has convincingly demonstrated the intertextual references in “Requiem” to the “unofficial national anthem” of the Stalinist period, “Song to the Motherland” (Amert 1992: 43). In line after line, “Requiem” negates the ostentatious claims of the song, for instance by contrasting the song’s “freely breathing” people to the people of the poem, who are “more breathless than the dead.” The inclusion of “Native Soil”, but not “Requiem” in the curriculum makes sure that Akhmatova’s mockery of state-sponsored patriotism goes unnoticed.

**Why Study Literature in School?**

What arguments support the presence of literature in the school curriculum in general, and this specific nationalism-tinged selection of literature in particular? Following Persson’s study of the Swedish curriculum (2007), I have extracted
passages from the three post-Soviet curricula, grades 5–9, that provide the answers to these questions. In comparing the lists, a pattern emerges, correlating loosely to the paradigms discussed by Ball et al (1990: 76) with reference to the English. In all these versions of the curriculum, three types of arguments underlie the reasoning:

1. Arguments based on society’s desire to mold the individual according to norms facilitating human interaction and political stability,
2. arguments focusing on the individual and his or her development,
3. arguments presenting the reading of literature as an end in itself: the question “why read literature?” is answered with variations on the theme “in order to become a better reader.”

I have adhered to these categories in presenting the results below.

The 1997 Curriculum

The 1997 Curriculum is the most concise: it consists merely of a list of what is to be learned (required readings, facts from literary history, literary terminology) and a statement by the Ministry of Education outlining its view of literature as a school subject – its objectives and place in the curriculum as a whole. This text contains five separate arguments for studying (Russian) literature in school (Kalganova 1998: 3–10):

Pupils should read literature in school because it:

1. facilitates the formation of a humanistic worldview,
2. grants the pupils freedom when choosing their career,
3. supports the pupils in their search for the meaning of human existence,
4. has constructed and helped us to gain knowledge about the different worlds that humanity has experienced during its spiritual history,
5. and also because classical Russian literature is characterized by a high level of spirituality, civic consciousness and “universal responsiveness” [and the reading of such literature transmits these qualities to the pupils].

Thus, the subject is seen as a means of ideological upbringing (1) and (5), a resource in personal development (2), a guide to existential questions (3), and a means of cognition (4).

In the first statement, the term “humanistic” refers to a set of values that promotes the rights and the integrity of the individual, in contrast to the Soviet privileging of collective units such as “the people” and “the state” (Muckle 2005: 329). The first three statements, then, indicate and establish a dissociation from the Soviet collectivist heritage: during the Soviet period, both the pupils’ choice of career and the meaning of human existence were areas in which the party administration strove to wield influence.
In the fourth statement, the expression “spiritual history” reveals an affiliation with nineteenth-century historicism, connoting the idea of a continuous dialectical spiritual development. In this case, this denotes both religious and cultural values. The expression recurs in discourse that is grounded in cultural nationalism, which since 1991 has become the most influential type of nationalism in Russia (Sakwa 2009). Like the first three statements, the fourth also contains an implicit repudiation of Marxism-Leninism, which rejected any autonomous spiritual realm of history, separate from the material one, based on the distribution of the means of production.

The fifth statement defines three characteristics of Russian literature, using terms strongly connected to cultural nationalism – spirituality, “universal responsiveness” and civic consciousness. The idea of Russian culture’s spiritual nature is a cornerstone in Slavophile philosophy. In 1880, Fyodor Dostoevsky expressed this idea in a speech he gave in connection with the unveiling of the Pushkin monument in Moscow. It was Dostoevsky who in this speech coined the expression “universal responsiveness” [vsemirnaia otzyvchivost’], referring to Pushkin’s capacity to assimilate foreign literary models and transform them into something quintessentially Russian. Finally, the term “civic consciousness” [grazhdanstvennost’] is a multivalent one. The Russian word may also be translated as “citizenship,” i.e., the relationship between a free citizen and the state in terms of rights and obligations. Since the nineteenth century, however, grazhdanstvennost’ has acquired a somewhat different meaning in Russia. It denotes a feeling of responsibility for the development of Russian civilization, a defining feature of the Russian intelligentsia. This sense of responsibility often led to conflict with the autocratic imperial state (Sakwa 2009 with reference to A. Walicki). While the first meaning of the word may be removed from cultural nationalism, the second one nevertheless constitutes one of its core values.

In the text, the notion of “classic Russian literature” is not questioned – “classic” is implicitly seen as an objective judgment of time. The text does not take into account the intricate process of canonization, in which the symbolic, social and economic capital of different groups and individuals come into play. The reverence shown to literary culture, which distinguished pre-revolutionary Russian and Soviet society, is undiminished in these documents. Even though the Marxist-Leninist heritage is less visible, literature is still assigned an array of ideological tasks: the first argument mentioned presupposes a need to form the pupils’ worldview. According to the politics of this document, this worldview should first of all be humanistic, and then culturally nationalistic.

The 2004 Curriculum

The 2004 curriculum contains more structured and elaborate information about the objectives and priorities of the teaching of literature. Justifications of
literature’s place in the curriculum are found under the headings “General description of the subject,” “Objects of the study of literature,” and “Learning objectives.” Since these statements often overlap, passages with similar meaning have been condensed to a total of seven arguments (Dneprov & Arkad’ev 2007: 14, 26, 94–96).

Pupils should read literature in school because it:

1. fosters a humanistic worldview, a civic and national consciousness, a patriotic feeling, love and respect for literature and the values of our country’s culture, and because it molds pupils’ spiritual character and moral standards,
2. helps pupils understand the categories of goodness, justice, honor, patriotism, and love to mankind and one’s family; and that the nation’s uniqueness reveals itself in a broad cultural context,
3. cultivates a spiritually developed personality, supports pupils’ emotional, intellectual and aesthetic development, develops their figurative and analytical thinking and creative imagination,
4. instills basic notions about literature’s particular nature as compared to other art forms. It also develops pupils’ emotional perception of artistic texts, a culture of reading and their understanding of the authorial position, and also creates a need for independent reading of fiction,
5. trains pupils to perform a literary analysis of fictional works, using theoretical terminology and knowledge about literary history, and develops pupils’ capacity to express their relationship to the readings,
6. develops pupils’ oral and written language skills, and reveals the wealth of the national language,
7. complements other subjects, such as Russian language, the arts, history and civics.

Through these arguments, we see a vision of literature as involved primarily with cultural heritage, formation of personal and national identity, and the improvement of communication skills, one which is widely accepted internationally (cf. Persson 2007: 121; Ball, Kenny & Gardiner 1990: 67). Arguments based on the society’s needs (collected in statements 1 and 2 above) are generally mentioned first under the respective headings, occupying considerable space. Arguments related to personal development are mentioned next, but are not elaborated to the same extent (cf. no. 3, 6 above). Arguments in which the reading of literature is taken for granted, and which argue that literature enhances reading skills (cf. no. 4, 5 above) go into great detail. They also emphasize the great respect shown to literature – which characterizes the curriculum as a whole.

The 2004 curriculum expounds on literature’s moral function, and also promotes humanism and cultural nationalism, as the previous curriculum did. It places great trust in literature’s capacity to inculcate values facilitating human
interaction (goodness, justice, love to mankind) and social integration (patriotism). Somewhat surprisingly, “tolerance of other nationalities” is not listed, an attitude which would forcefully promote social integration, and which in most Western societies is a common element in school policy documents. Instead, the call for patriotism is balanced only with a call to include an international perspective, in order to fully appreciate the unique aspects of national culture. The curriculum’s authors justify this emphasis on national values by pointing out that such values ostensibly were lacking during the Soviet period (Dneprov 2004: 44). Ethnic nationalism was strictly limited during the Soviet era, which also in some respects applied to Russian nationalism.

The 2010 Curriculum

In the 2010 curriculum, statements yielding answers to the question “Why study literature in school?” are found under the headings “The contribution of the subject ‘Literature’ to the achievement of the objectives of secondary education” and “Results of the study of literature.” A total of seven statements emerge after consolidating similar statements (Model Secondary School Programs: 2010: 4–9):

Pupils should read literature in school because it:

1. fosters a humanistic worldview, national consciousness and an all-Russian civic consciousness, patriotic feeling, love for one’s multiethnic motherland, respect for Russian literature and the cultures of other nations,
2. provides access to the spiritual, ethical and humanistic values of Russian literature and culture, and the possibility of comparing them to the values of other nations; it also provides access to mankind’s universal values and to the Russian nation’s spiritual experience, and to the spiritual and ethical potential of multiethnic Russia,
3. molds a well-balanced, developed, harmonious, and emotionally rich personality, and improves a person’s spiritual and ethical qualities, develops the pupils’ intellectual and creative faculties and shapes their aesthetic taste,
4. helps pupils to understand, comment on, analyze and interpret the masterpieces of Russian and world literature, to articulate their own relationship to them and their assessment of literary works, to understand the authorial position and their own relationship to that position,
5. provides access to authentic artistic values, the opportunity to enter into a dialogue with authors of all backgrounds and generations, expands the pupils’ horizons regarding the wealth and the diversity of the arts,
6. develops linguistic culture and pupils’ communication skills,
7. supports the development of general learning skills, and the ability to
develop coherent arguments.
These points remain relatively unchanged, as does their organization into groups
focusing on society (no. 1, 2), the individual (3, 6, 7) and literature as such (4, 5).
Greater attention is however paid to other nations in statements promoting
patriotic feelings. Passages that might be interpreted as advocating tolerance are
now included, cf. “respect for the cultures of other nations.” The comment about a
“well-balanced personality” implies a continuation of Soviet pedagogical
discourse (Muckle 1988: 9). In this discourse, it is associated with the project of
creating a non-alienated new Soviet man, following Marx’s vision of workers’
liberation from the specialized training and monotonous work of industrial
capitalism.

In post-Soviet curricular guidelines, the understanding of literature as a school
subject remains fundamentally the same as during the Soviet period: literature is
seen primarily as a means of moral, social and patriotic up-bringing. The most
significant change is the replacement of the Marxist-Leninist terminology with
one colored by cultural nationalism. The faith in literature’s capacity to imbue its
readers with moral qualities remains, despite the lack of empirical evidence to
support such a case.

The curriculum’s latest version shows minor signs of the recent theoretical
developments within the field of literary criticism – reader-oriented theories are
mentioned, as are the “cultures of other nations”, which might indicate a move
towards the pluralism characterizing the British curriculum, for instance.
Generally, however, the curriculum’s authors do not shy away from the quasi-
religious pathos and nationalist pomp that post-war literary criticism has done its
best to eradicate.

Within literary education, there are plenty of voices critical of state policy.
Professor V. Viktorovich describes the situation thus: “Today, attempts are being
made to execute an ideological volte-face, to replace the one single true doctrine
with another. This reminds me of Platonov’s short story ‘The Innermost Man,’ in
which an artist, a former icon-painter, portrayed St. George with the face of
Comrade Trotsky. This current process, although moving in the reverse direction
(from Comrade Trotsky to St. George the Victorious), does not change anything in
the methodology: only the ideological contents should be replaced.” (2006b: 11p)
Instead of a simple change of ideas, he advocates a shift from extensive reading to
one that is instead intensive, emphasizing the intimate dialogue between reader
and author, referring to Mikhail Bakhtin (Ibid.,15). In a recent discussion on the
radio program “Parents’ Meeting” on the liberal channel Echo of Moscow,
Evgeniia Abeliuk, a teacher, repudiates any attempts to force pupils to read
anything at all. She regards literature exclusively as a source of pleasure
(“Parents’ Meeting” 2009).
These passages articulate a view of literature based on the individual’s perspective. This view is present in the curricula as well, in the statements focusing on personality development. However, this role is downplayed in favor of those focusing on society’s needs. In the curricula, the state declares which values constitute the foundation of the social contract, and the values chosen inevitably limit the space of the individual’s development. A Russian pupil’s reading of the classics should not, for instance, lead to his or her questioning of Russian literature’s spiritual character. Similarly, British pupils’ reading of English classics should not end with them questioning their greatness. As long as the nation-state remains the primary site of political power, national literature is necessary in order to help legitimate this form of social organization. The Russian curriculum, with its stoic imperviousness to the cultural turn, exhibits a pragmatic stance. It does not allow critical perspectives to undermine the force of its argumentation or to give rise to theoretical incongruities. Instead, it retains an essentialist view of the canon, proclaims its authors’ heroic status and uses terms like “patriotism” and “motherland,” leaving no doubts as to why the state continues to invest in literary education.

Karin Sarsenov is a research fellow at Lund University. She received her doctorate in 2001; her dissertation focused on the contemporary Russian writer Nina Sadur. She is the co-editor of an anthology on Nina Sadur's oeuvre, published by the University of Pittsburgh. She has conducted projects on Russian women's marital migration, Russian women's autobiographies, and the Russian literature curriculum, which have resulted in numerous articles. Currently, she is involved in a multidisciplinary project at Lund University, focusing on the public spheres of literature.

Notes
1 V. Viktorovich, a professor of literature, describes the situation in a similar fashion: “Since then, the whole history of literature was officially regarded as preparation for the formation of the ‘only true doctrine.’ Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol and Tolstoi were estimated as (there was such an expression) the progenitors of our idea. It was more difficult with Dostoevsky, but finally, after a long period of embarrassment, they included him as the glorifier of the insulted and the humiliated” (2006b: 11).

2 On the details of this process, see Rotkovich (1980) and Dobrenko (1997: 146-180).

3 As for now, the curriculum of grade 10-12 (senior secondary education) is not yet published. Authors and works discarded from the 5-9 curriculum might very well appear in the required readings for older pupils. However, grade 10-12 is not compulsory, and therefore the works listed here will reach a smaller number of pupils.

4 The title might evoke associations to nineteenth-century native soil conservatism, as promoted by Dostoevsky, for example. However, the poem lacks any reference to Russia or praise of any particularly Russian virtues. It is a low-key lyrical poem that laconically states
our mundane relationship with the mud under our feet. In the last line, finally, the soil’s “nativeness” is anchored in the ephemeral quality of our bodies – in the fact that, after death we turn into this very soil. For English translation of the poem, see Akhmatova & Thomas (2006: 171)

The categories used by Ball et al. are: “English as skills”, “English as the great literary tradition”; “progressive English” (English of individual creativity and self expression) and “English as critical literacy” (class conscious and political in content), (1990: 77-80).

Cf. this quotation from the speech: “In fact, the European literatures had creative geniuses of immense magnitude – the Shakespeares, Cervanteses, and Schillers. But show me even one of these great geniuses who possessed the capacity to respond to the whole world that our Pushkin had. And it is this capacity, the principal capacity of our nationality, that he shares with our People; and it is this, above all, that makes him a national poet.” (Dostoevsky 1994: 1291p).

In Russian, “national” as in “national consciousness” refers to ethnicity, while “all-Russian” (obsche-rossiiskii) means “including all ethnicities residing within Russian Federation.” “Russian” could not be used in this context, as it is an ethnic denominator, not a civic one.

References


Why ABC Matters: Lexicography and Literary History

By Jon Helgason

Abstract

The purpose of this article is twofold. First, I wish to discuss the origins of The Swedish Academy Dictionary against the backdrop of the social and cultural history of lexicography in 18th and 19th century Europe. Second, to consider material aspects of lexicography – the dictionary as interface – in light of German media scientist Friedrich Kittler’s “media materialism”. Ultimately, both purposes intend to describe how letters and writing have been constructed and arranged throughout the course of history. In Kittler’s view, “the intimization of literature”, that took place during second half of the 18th century, brought about a fundamental change in the way language and text were perceived. However, parallel to this development an institutionalization and disciplining of language and literature took place. The rise of modern society, the nation state, print capitalism and modern science in 18th century Europe necessitated (and were furthered by) a disciplining of language and literature. This era was for these reasons a golden age for lexicographers and scholars whose work focused on the vernacular. In this article the rise of the alphabetically ordered dictionary and the corresponding downfall of the topical dictionary that occurred around 1700 is regarded as a technological threshold. This development is interesting not only within the field of history of lexicography, but arguably also, since information and thought are connected to the basic principles of mediality, this development has bearings on the epistemological revolution of the 18th century witnessed in, among other things, Enlightenment thought and literature.

Keywords: Lexicography, media archaeology, Friedrich Kittler, technological threshold, Walter Ong, Benedict Anderson, Swedish Academy Dictionary, saob
Introduction

According to the German media scientist Friedrich Kittler, the very moment I sit down to read aloud to my children I also reproduce one of the key scenes of modern literary culture. Kittler argues that around 1800 literature constituted a cultural inscription programme tied to the rise of the bourgeois family and the bourgeois individual. Kittler’s analysis of the “discourse networks” of the end of the 18th century in his work *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* is based on, among other things, social and psychological models of interpretation where, for instance, children’s acquisition of reading and writing skills within the intimate sphere is regarded as pivotal to the rise of modern culture of literacy. Around 1800, the activity of reading became linked with an intimate process of literacy. New learning techniques connected to reading and writing acquisition, such as sounding, marked, according to Kittler, a radical break with previous traditions of teaching, where reading was based on orthographic recognition and instead each letter was connected to a specific sound. This change in learning techniques corresponded to a change in both handwritten and printed texts. Gothic script (Fraktur style, black letter) was gradually replaced by the softer letters of the cursive style (antiqua). In Kittler’s view, the intimization of literature brought about a fundamental, radical change in the way language and text were perceived. The learning techniques that were developed involved reading and writing techniques that rendered them automatic – as something incorporeal and general. In the reading process language became transcendental. Individual letters and single words ceased to exist. The text became a transparent carrier of meaning.

It is highly significant that this process coincided with (and contributed to) the increased significance of emotion in literary interpretation. This development took place about the same time all over Europe, during the second half of the 18th century. For instance, around 1770 the German education system began to emphasize the significance of emotion in the interpretation of literary texts. Authors were not primarily judged, as previously, on whether they could be recited or imitated, but on how they could be interpreted and understood by the reader on the basis of moral and emotional values. For Kittler these processes are intimately connected. They show that information and thought are connected to the basic principles of mediality. It is this inner production of meaning, an internal realization that Kittler refers to when he writes: “Literature established itself as a medium that could transform words into flowers and flowers into women. Not technically, but psychologically; not by the aid of machines but through human interfaces” (Kittler 1985: 414).1

Kittler views the establishment of philosophical aesthetics and aesthetical sciences, such as the history of art and literature, as symptoms of this process. Literature was attributed a function as a source of morals and values within a rational, humanistic educational system which focused on the production of civil
servants who were meant to implement the values of the increasingly influential bourgeois public sphere. The function of literature within the educational system was that of a medium of cultural memory and social knowledge.

It is however possible to turn Kittler’s reasoning upside down. It is equally true that this era not only brought about an intimization of language and literature but also an institutionalization and disciplining of these two functions. This line of thought constitutes a bridge of sorts between Habermas’ theory of public spheres in The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society (1962) and Kittler’s media archaeology. One of the most fundamental historical changes concerns what I wish to call the disciplining of public language.

Coinciding with “the intimization of literature” there were radical institutional attempts to, on scientific grounds, regulate and discipline language, to codify spelling, inflection and, not least, meaning. The craze for systematization of the 18th century can also be attributed to “The Encyclopaedic Idea” – the will and ambition to collect and order all human knowledge. Works such as Johann Heinrich Zedler’s Grobes vollständiges Universal-Lexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste welche bishero durch menschlichen Verstand und Witz erfunden und verbessert wurden (1731–1750) and Johann Georg Sulzer’s monumental theory of art, Allgemeine Theorie der Schönen Künste in einzeln, nach alphabetischer Ordnung der Kunstwörter auf einander folgenden Artikeln abgehandelt (1771–1774), can be regarded as a symptomatic expression of these ideas. The concept of national literatures thus coincided with the need for a public language. Ideas concerning national literature and the significance of the language of the nation were furthered by and reproduced through the development of the educational system during the 19th century. The importance of Latin was significantly reduced during the 18th century and, through the growth of literacy, the written vernacular had a growing influence on refined language. This influence constitutes a significant linguistic foundation to the public spheres described by Habermas.

The purpose of this paper is twofold: first I will describe the origins of The Swedish Academy Dictionary against the backdrop of the social and cultural history of lexicography in 18th century Europe; and second, to consider material aspects of lexicography – in this case the rise of the alphabetical dictionary – in light of Kittler’s “media materialism”. “Materiality” in this sense can, in a broad sense, be seen as the result of the interplay between physical reality and the technology we humans use to shape and create meaning.
**Disciplining Language**

Benedict Anderson writes that more than any other factor capitalism has contributed to the merging of closely-related vernaculars. A mechanically reproducible print language for the dissemination of texts to the market lay in the interests of capitalism. The interplay between capitalism and printing created single language mass audiences by establishing unified areas of exchange and communication. Print capitalism created a language of the public sphere that contributed to the weakening of some dialects. Even ethnic groups that did not comprehend each others’ dialects, something that was the case in many European countries, could understand each other through printed matter. This gave a new stability to language. The difference between public and private language was reduced as dialects were forced to retreat in the face of an expanding culture of literacy. The specific language traits of the nobility and upper classes faded gradually during the 19th century and refined spoken language approached that of the written language.

Printed matter after the Gutenberg Revolution contributed to the formation of an understanding of the past that later became central to the subjective idea of the nation. The prerequisites for the imagined communities of the modern nation originated in the interplay between capitalism, technology and language diversity.3

For these reasons, the 19th century was a golden age for lexicographers, grammarians philologists and scholars whose work focused on the vernacular. Vernacular languages were an important tool in the administrative centralization that took place in Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries. The great European dictionary projects were powerful instruments in the process of standardization that most European languages underwent during this period. The history of lexicography is for this reason a part of the history of the written language and thus a part of the history of public language.

The creation of rules for commodity production within the bourgeois public sphere was vital to the authority of the sphere of public power. One of the essential perquisites for this regulation, which is evident in Anderson’s description of the importance of print capitalism, was that the potential of writing as a mass medium was realised during the 18th century.

Even today, writing is perhaps our most efficient medium. As a medium, writing has an unsurpassed stability when it comes to preservation, transport and duplication. It is this quality which provides the public sphere with part of its authority. The claims of science in the 18th and 19th centuries were furthered by the fact that writing as medium could ensure that the scientific observation of complex processes could be correctly verbalised (Cfr Ong 2002: 125). At the same time, language was conceived of as more “textual”. The printed text became its most
complete, paradigmatic form. The standard of the language for compilation in the
dictionaries was the language used by authors writing texts intended for printing.
The printed text became a putative definitive form. Changes could not be added as
was previously the case with the hand-written text. The literary text was viewed as
denser, more verbally (textually) closed. A printed work was complete and separate
from other works. It was from this perception that the humanities derived
their claims to scholarship. Scholarship in the humanities has been defined as re-
searching texts in their capacity as sources. This is the reason why the elucidation
of the authenticity of the sources, their tendency and intention has characterised
almost all humanistic research.

In Sweden (as with many other European countries), this progress was mani-
fested in the expansion, adaptation and modernization of the vocabulary to Swed-
ish conditions. Orthography became more uniform and the alphabetical order thus
became more consistent. Lexicographical information expanded and became more
precise. Concurrently with this intense phase of development in lexicography, a
Swedish written language was stabilised – an important prerequisite for an exten-
sive literary public sphere.

Lexicography was a node in a network of institutions formed to support the
public sphere around 1800. A dictionary is, from an historical perspective, often a
cementation of a local dialect that for political, geographical or religious reasons
later becomes accepted as a national language. The printed dialect – the grapho-
lect – has a much greater degree of normative force than the dialect. The veritable
explosion of dictionaries during the 18th century is, therefore, a significant marker
of the transition from an oral to a written culture.

The dictionaries brought about the understanding of language as an historical
product as well as the idea of “correct language” and accordingly the possibility to
normatively affect language use. However, at the beginning of the 19th century,
none of the Nordic countries had achieved lexicographic descriptions in monolin-
gual, defining dictionaries.

The Dictionary as a National Monument

The Swedish Academy Dictionary (henceforth the SAOB) is a monument to writ-
ing and as such a manifestation of the public spheres of literature. The first in-
stallment of the SAOB was published in 1893 and the first volume in 1898. The
last volume is planned for publication in 2017. However, the ideological incentive
for the SAOB project originates to a great degree from the national romantic pe-
riod and the world of ideas that have been mentioned previously in this essay. The
SAOB is a national, scientific dictionary of Modern Swedish as it appears in writ-
ten sources. Within the context of the history of language the period of Modern
Swedish begins in 1526 with the first Swedish translation of the New Testament.
The SAOB is primarily a historical dictionary that stresses written language. It
describes not only words actively in use, but also words that have gone out of use as well as meanings that never or almost never appear in contemporary usage. The SAOB describes the vocabulary of written Swedish, but not without restrictions. As a rule names of persons and places, technical terms and dialect words are omitted.

The dictionaries in the Germanic languages that are roughly comparable in scope, historical extension and ambition to The Swedish Academy Dictionary are the Grimm’s Deutsches Wörterbuch (1852–1961), Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal (1864–1998) and the New English Dictionary on Historical Principles (1888–1928), officially re-named The Oxford English Dictionary from 1933 onwards. The establishment of the two first-mentioned was associated in particular with one of the basic tenets of nationalism: One nation, one people, one language. In several Central European countries, among them Czechoslovakia and Hungary, the birth of the nation coincided with the lexicographical enterprise. The 19th century definition of a nation, that it comprised a community of language, strongly contributed to the formation of the German Reich and to the national processes in the Netherlands and Belgium. Although the SAOB is characterised by the same ideas, the connection between language and nation is not as explicit. Modern linguistics had gained too strong a foothold in Sweden at the time the SAOB project actually started for this to happen. Instead, the raison d’être for the SAOB was essentially to make the literary heritage of the nation available to its citizens. This connected literary heritage to the history of the nation and of its language. This was an idea that could easily be reconciled with the rise of modern linguistics during the latter half of the 19th century.

The commission to compile a dictionary was incorporated into the Statutes of the Swedish Academy from 1786. In §22 of the Statutes it states “That the finest and most pressing duty of the Academy” is the work “on the purity, strength and nobleness of the Swedish language”. The aesthetic refinement of language was seen as an important task for any nation with self-esteem. The SAOB was to contribute to the embellishment of the Swedish language by providing guidance on the correct spelling of words, their inflection and meaning – all in accordance with the wishes of the founder of the Swedish Academy, Gustav III of Sweden, who wanted “to make Laws for the language” because “no language can be written well without firm rules”. On the 10th of February 1787 the decision was taken to start work on a dictionary of the Swedish language and the work was to be modelled on that used in compiling the dictionary of the French Academy, Dictionnaire de l’Académie française. Following in the footsteps of the French Academy, the members of the Swedish Academy simply divided the letters of the alphabet among themselves: the poet Johan Henric Kellgren (1751-1795) was allocated the letters A and U, and the historian Anders af Botin (1724-1790) was allocated the letters H and S. However, this working method proved far from efficient. In 1808 the poet and linguist Carl Gustaf af Leopold (1756-1829) was appointed editor of
the SAOB, but his interest diminished over the years, and the project came to a standstill in 1814. Several years later, in 1883, the project was recommenced, when Knut Fredrik Söderwall (1842-1924) was appointed editor of the SAOB.

The vocabulary that is treated in the SAOB is Swedish written language from 1521 to present day. The examples of usage are “authentic”, meaning that they have been selected from a comprehensive data bank containing excerpts from actual texts. Some sources have been subjected to a more comprehensive excerption than others. This applies of course to the Bible (first translation in 1541) and the Swedish Hymn Book, *The Official Registrature of Gustav Vasa* (*Konung Gustaf den förstes registratur*), Excerpts from public records since 1718 (*Utdrag utur allé ifrån ... 1718 utkomne publique handlingar*), encyclopaedias, records of the city courts of law, the parliamentary records of the Swedish Parliament, *The Work and Letters of Axel Oxenstierna* as well as the records of the Swedish Academy and the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. The sources listed above clearly show the strong attachment of the SAOB to the public sphere. As a consequence women’s language has been less well documented than men’s and the documentation of female experience has been underrepresented (Cfr Mattisson 2006).

One of the most interesting phrasings in the commissioning of the SAOB is that “important works of literature and well-known literary passages are to be prioritised”. And it is particularly pertinent that Gustav III of Sweden did not, in the first instance, appoint linguists or grammarians to the Swedish Academy but poets, politicians and men of state, i.e. men who could provide practical guidance in poetry and eloquence. The principal idea being that their own feeling for language should be codified.

Both of these factors are to this day still reflected in SAOB. “Vitterhet” (belles-lettres) is by far the largest category among the sources of the SAOB. Swedish 18th and 19th century literature is particularly well excerpted. In the (isolated) studies that have been made, “belles-lettres” accounts for 42% of the total sources for the year 1975; for the year 1898 the same figure is 29% and in 1939 it was nearly 22%. These two last-mentioned figures are in reality higher since several “collected works” were treated as a single source at this time (Svensson 1992: 372-373). In 1990, this figure was 18%. In the SAOB, at least, the Swedish national romantic poet Esaias Tegnér lives up to his fame as the national poet. He is by far the most quoted author and before the SAOB is completed he will have been quoted more than 10 000 times. *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*, the children’s story by the Noble Laureate Selma Lagerlöf, is the single most quoted work (slightly more than 1 400 times), followed by *Jonas och draken* (“Jonas and the Dragon”, 1928) the work of the early 20th century author Sigfrid Siwert and *Vapensmeden* (“The Weapon Smith”, 1891) by the 19th century author Viktor Rydberg (Mattisson 2006: 63-64).
The Alphabetical vs. the Topical Dictionary

One of Kittler’s basic assumptions is that technology possesses the power to shape and control human lives as well as our ability to critically think about these phenomena. This is a perspective that focuses on the material structures of technology rather than the meaning of these structures or the messages they convey:

What remains of people is what media can store and communicate. What counts are not the messages or the content with which they equip so-called souls for the duration of a technological era, but rather (and in strict accordance with McLuhan) their circuits, the very schematism of perceptibility. (Kittler 1999: xli–xlii)

Kittler focuses on the historical conditions of the emergence of new media and the structures of communication and understanding they bring forward. Kittler has paid special attention to “technological thresholds”, i.e. points in history where different media networks compete with one another. Arguably, one such threshold is the rise of the alphabetically ordered dictionary and the corresponding downfall of the topical dictionary that occurred around 1700.6

Nowadays the most common macrostructure of dictionaries is the alphabetically ordered. “Macrostructure” is a term used to describe the organization of lexical entries in a dictionary in either lists (semasiological; from Greek *semasia*, meaning of a word, or alphabetical dictionaries), tree structures (onomasiological; from Greek *onoma*, name, or sometimes called topical, thematic, conceptual or ideographical dictionaries) or, in our present day, networks (electronic or online dictionaries). Semasiology is a term belonging lexicography. It is a term which denotes the co-ordination of language and meaning, of linguistic form and matter, by listing lexemes in the arrangement of the alphabet. Onomasiology, on the other hand, is a term which denotes the co-ordination of meaning and language, the technique of listing lexemes according to some order which is not that of the alphabet.

It is known that historically the onomasiological dictionary precedes the alphabetical one. The construction is basically as old as written culture in Europe (Hüllen 1999: 15).

The onomasiological dictionary orders its entries according to the presumed encyclopaedical type of its users. The arrangement of entries in non-alphabetical type of dictionaries indicate that the order of entries is not determined by external criteria but by a certain attitude towards the relation between meaning and form in language (Hüllen 1999: 16). Generally, onomasiological dictionaries were ordered by keywords into semantic domains. The first domains would typically include God, the universe, heaven and nature. These would be followed by categories relating to man as a physical, spiritual and social being. Parts of the human body were given from head to foot. Typically, visible parts of the human
body outnumbered those of the inner organs whereas the lower domains would include insects, stones etc. Although such a list is an important document of the biological and medical knowledge of the time, Hüllen warns that such lists represent a tradition of words rather than of things. They cannot be regarded as fully realistic mirrors of the world of their time (Hüllen 1999: 132).

The structure of onomasiological dictionaries remained remarkably consistent throughout the centuries. There was, as McArthur describes, a “core” of thematic ideas that showed “a considerable consensus down the centuries, in the Classical-to-Christian-to-Rationalist culture of the Western world, as to what the primary categories need to be in any ordering of cosmos from a human point of view.” (McArthur 1986: 151) The structure of the onomasiological dictionary into thematic, philosophically meaningful semantic categories can be regarded as remnants of a mnemotechnical organization of data originating from the oral tradition of the classical and medieval world. The art of memory (ars memorativa) recommended a “spatial” arrangement of knowledge by associating memories to visualized locations. This arrangement was based on presumed harmony between the structure of memory and reality (Hüllen 1999: 50).

The hierarchy of the system included above and below, high and low, outward and inward, life and death, animate to inanimate. Contrary to an alphabetically ordered dictionary, an onomasiological dictionary does not per se explain what is unknown in language. Rather it is a classification of concepts in taxonomy or ontological structure, that was constructed to facilitate the transformation of general encyclopaedic knowledge into concrete linguistic knowledge. This means that topical dictionaries typically are organized according to the semantic structure of a whole language. This structure, Hüllen states, “depends on the structure of reality as language users believe they understand it at a given time” (Hüllen 1999: 15). They contain an ontology – a theory of the world.

**Dictionary as Interface**

The intention of the onomasiological dictionaries up to 1700 was to present a comprehensive image of the world in its entirety. The underlying lexicographical matrix was that of the liber naturae. The world was regarded as book written by God. The dictionaries were conceived as mirrors of this book. The dictionaries were written by authors who had read and fully understood the world as God’s scripture. For this reason the dictionaries often had titles containing words such as imago (likeness) or speculum (mirror) or thesaurus (treasure). Thereby either stressing the character of these books as reflections of the world and its divine order or that their wealth of information was an analogy to the grandeur of God’s creation (Hüllen 1999: 438).

The onomasiological dictionary differed also in terms of use from its semasiological counterpart. The former were intended for encyclopaedic and didactic pur-
poses, constructed to store knowledge and to be used as textbooks. They were intended to provide new words as the carriers of new knowledge. The order in which the new words and their meaning were arranged also acted as a principle for teaching and learning. These functions were fused (Hüllen 1999: 24-25). Also, it was common to learn long passages of word-lists and even entire dictionaries by heart. Onomasiological dictionaries were used as texts and conceived as a textual unity. This makes the usability of onomasiological dictionaries much wider. This can be illustrated by the fact that the onomasiologically ordered children’s dictionary *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (World in Pictures, 1658), by Czech scholar John Amos Comenius (1592–1670) became one of the most widely circulated school textbooks in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries.

The onomasiological dictionaries up to 1700 were important precursors to the terminological systems that became increasingly important within several fields of science, perhaps most notably in botany (Hüllen 1999: 442). However, from the 17th century onwards there was a strong decline in the onomastic tradition. McArthur stresses the basic materiality that paved the way for alphabetic arrangement:

> Although some properly alphabetic works appeared before Gutenberg printed his first book, the printing press seems to have been the factor that changed everything in favour of non-thematic ordering. Compositors were constantly re-shuffling the letters of the alphabet around as small hard metal objects in trays and in composites. They and their associates – which included many writers who were wont to frequent print shops – became as a consequence increasingly at home with the convenience that the alphabet offers an invariant series. [...] Sheer familiarity with hard physical objects in a very practical craft appears therefore, to have promoted interest in ABC order in other, related but more abstract fields. (McArthur 1986: 77)

Onomasiological dictionaries continued to be re-edited and new ones appeared but by mid 18th century they became more and more scarce (Cfr Hüllen 1999: 26-27, 443-444). This is illustrated by the fact that Samuel Johnson, in his great *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) with perfect authority could define a dictionary as a book “containing the words of any language in alphabetical order, with explanations of their meaning”.

The matter I wish to address are not the facets of an historiography of consciousness imbedded in the semantic categorization of the onomasiological dictionary, but the question of technological ordering, directionality of reading paths and the dissemination of data that lies embedded in the “interface” (i.e. a point of interaction that communicates information from one system to another) of a dictionary (Cfr Kress 2003: chapter 4 & 9). Because, unlike the onomasiological dictionary, the semasiological dictionary is concerned with words and word use, rather than with the classification of concepts. Typically it may provide information on orthography, syntactic class, pronunciation, inflections and etymology, as well as meaning. More importantly in this context, the alphabetical structure, an “invariant series”, does not encompass an ontology:

> This is an epistemological framework which, being entirely free from metaphysical concepts, places the acquisition of knowledge solely on words. It is their function to
bind together the various simple ideas which are integrated into one hole, to act as a node. Words are not oriented towards a preordered reality, they mean a creatively collected bundle of simple ideas which they stabilize for recording and communication. (Hüllen 1999: 446)

As such, the alphabetical order placed no necessary limits upon human knowledge. The notion of Divine Order could be replaced with a radical humanism based on belief in social progress, social equality and the perfectability of society and the individual (McArthur 1986: 105).

III

This essay is, to some extent, inspired by the ideas of the Swedish critic Thomas Götselius who conceived a “literary historiographical research without literary history”. His materialist literary history, influenced by Kittler, involves “a literal history of literature”: a historia litterae – a history of how letters and writing have been constructed and arranged throughout the course of history (Götselius 2008: 12). In this essay, following in the footsteps of Kittler, it has been possible to sketch a primitive line of development from the papyrus scroll to the parchment codex, from hand-written copies to the serial printing of the print revolution and in its wake follows pagination, table of contents, the index et cetera, by highlighting the materiality of lexicographical indexing (Cfr Kittler 1988).

The index, i.e. an arrangement that ranks and refers to entries, not only horizontally or vertically but also crosswise – such as in the typical instance of a alphabetical dictionary – represents a way of thinking that differs from that of the processes of oral language. The use of the neutral spatiality of writing far exceeds what had previously been possible. Oral cultures have “no experience of a lengthy, epic-size or novel-size climactic linear plot.” (Ong 2002: 140) Oral works are seldom constructed with a climax or peripeteia – something that is included in the horizon of expectation of the modern reader. During the 18th century the “flat” character was replaced by a more complex, psychologically “round” character, made possible by the rise of the novel (Cfr Ong 2002:148-149). It is this textual organization, the increasing interiorization of the world, that Benedict Anderson refers to, when he writes about “the structural alignment of post-1820s nationalist “memory” with the inner premises and conventions of modern biography and autobiography” (Anderson “Preface to the Second Edition” 2006: xiv).

The encyclopaedic and lexicographic boom of the 18th century was one of the factors that finally affirmed the cultural authority of the printed word. This process was, as I have tried to demonstrate, furthered by the ontological void of the alphabet. The breakthrough for a culture of literacy meant that information exchange became standardised to a larger extent than had previously been possible with the human voice or the hand-written document. Skills in reading and writing thus became an important indicator of social class. Reading and writing became activities that demanded seclusion. As Ong writes “what is inside the text
and the mind is a complete unit, self-contained in its silent inner logic” (Ong 2002: 147). Literacy in this sense thus contributed to strictly internalised and individualised modes of reflection – one could say a textual organization of consciousness.


Notes
1 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. In the original German: “Dichtung etablierte sich als ein Medium, das Worte in Blumen und Blumen in Frauen verwandeln konnte – nicht technisch, aber psychologisch, nicht durch Maschinen, aber durch menschliche Interfacetes.”
2 It should be noted that Habermas’ concept of “bürgerliche Gesellschaft” should be interpreted in terms of a “civil society”.
3 Anderson’s use of the word “imagined” as in “imagined communities” should not be interpreted as “invented” or “fake”. The community is imagined in the sense that an individual of the nation does not know each and every one of the citizens of the nation, none the less these citizens share an imagined understanding of a national community. To Anderson this is the prerequisite for those mental and psychological, basically irrational forces that constitute the individual’s feeling of participation in a national collective (regarded as a psychological mass-movement) and the construction of the nation as a mental landscape.
4 For DWB and OED the year stated is when the first volume was published, for WNT when the first instalment was completed.
5 The Swedish category “vitterhet” is a somewhat imprecise term covering a wide field. It is often translated as “belles-lettres, i.e. a term which the OED describes as sometimes used for elegant or polite literature or literary studies and sometimes used in the wide sense of ‘the humanities’.
6 The historical description of the onomastic tradition is largely based on Hüllén (1999, in particular chapters 1, 2, 9 and 11) and, to a lesser extent, McArthur (1986). I wish to stress that I have not attempted to give a complete overview of the history of the onomasiological dictionary. Certain aspect have been highlighted in order to draw tentative parallels to the developments outlined by Kittler (and Ong).
7 This is of course particularly the case for oral epic poetry. The term “peripeteia” was coined by Aristotle in his description of the ancient Greek drama.
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The Author on Stage: 
Björn Ranelid as Performance Artist

By Torbjörn Forslid & Anders Ohlsson

Abstract

Media development has profoundly affected the literary public sphere. Authors as well as politicians may feel obliged to follow “the law of compulsory visibility” (John B. Thompson). All contemporary writers, be it bestselling authors or exclusive, high brow poets, must in one way or another reflect on their marketing and media strategies. Meeting and communicating with the audience, the potential readers, is of critical importance. In the article “The Author on Stage”, the authors consider how different literary performances by Swedish novelist Björn Ranelid (b. 1949) help establish his “brand name” on the literary market place.

Keywords: Björn Ranelid, performance studies, literary performance, author readings, Richard Schechner, Erika Fischer-Lichte.
Introduction

“Writing at its best, is a lonely life” – Ernest Hemingway’s well-known words about the author’s existential predicament are still valid to this day. The pen and typewriter may perhaps have been exchanged for the word processor – yet the state of loneliness at the writing desk is still a prerequisite of the creative process. Nonetheless, it is evident that today there is a diametrically opposite tendency in the field of literature. Nowadays, authors must, in a whole new way compared to before, step out of their writing chambers in order to market or make manifest their message to the public. Meeting and communicating with one’s audience, the potential readers, in different ways is of critical importance. These reading meetings may actually take place physically in conjunction with writers’ talks in bookshops, at libraries and at book fairs. But, they may also be in the form of interviews and talks that are mediated via radio and television. Apart from serving to market one’s authorship, these performances have a very tangible economical dimension. Just as rock stars of today often earn more from their concerts than from their record sales these performances function as a not so insignificant source of income for the writers. The Swedish Writers’ Union therefore recommends that their members ask for a remuneration of at least SEK 5 500 per “small prose performance” and at least 15 000 for a “larger event” (Författarförbundet 2010).

Such appearances made by writers are naturally no new phenomenon. In earlier times too, writers have made use of this opportunity to create an image of themselves and their authorship among their audience and, in so doing, strengthening their own trademark. For Charles Dickens, who toured the United States between 1867 and 1870 reading aloud from his books, it was precisely the economy that was an important factor: appearing in front of an audience and reading from his own novels gave him an income that compensated for the revenue loss that arose due to there not being any copyright law in “the new world” (Andrews 2006). In a similar way Selma Lagerlöf made herself a name as a skilful and captivating reader of her own texts (Vinge 2005).

Björn Ranelid, born in 1949, is today, without a doubt, one of Sweden’s authors who has attracted the most attention and is most acknowledged. This is largely due to his comprehensive activity as a performance artist. On his website, Ranelid presents himself, not only as a “writer and columnist” but also as an “entertainer”. In other words, not only does he devote himself to writing novels and articles, but he also appears – usually on his own – on various stages and platforms. The appearances of the last few years can be found listed on the author’s website. It is a touring plan worthy of a rock star. According to Ranelid himself, he has given more than 3 000 such stage appearances since his debut in 1983. Considering that
Ranelid appears on stage approximately 100 times a year (and often more than that) this means an annual salary that is above the average in Sweden.

Ranelid holds a position in contemporary Swedish literary public life that in many ways is unique. He moves between different, normally incompatible positions. On the one hand, the lofty and highbrow poet, who preaches goodness, love and the holiness of the word, and whose poetic and metaphor-charged language has even been given its own name: “Ranelidish”. On the other hand, the commercially conscious writer, who builds his author’s trademark by driving around in a shining Jaguar with “RANELID” on his number plates and by participating in advertising campaigns of various kinds (Forslid & Ohlsson 2009). “Referring to him as being ‘known from the radio and television’ would be to make an understatement”, a paper wrote towards the end of the 1990s (Carlsson 1997). This utterance is no less true today. Not only does Ranelid participate in traditional literature and culture programmes on television, he is also a frequently appearing guest in entertainment programmes showing on prime time. Thus Ranelid is the prototype of a modern medialised author.

A pivotal aspect of this medialised author’s role is that of Ranelid’s fighting-and provocative spirit. He knows how to use his strong public position, from where he constantly, with his fighting spirit and desire to debate, time and time again calls attention to himself and his authorship. This emphasis on struggle and debate can certainly be regarded as fundamental to Ranelid’s entire production and his role as a writer. Jonas Frykman, Professor of Ethnology, has aptly called him “the Mohammed Ali of literature” on a TV show (SvT 2002). The struggle and fighting therefore function as a successful strategy for getting attention from the media. But it is also an effective way of charging his authorship with energy and power.

However, Ranelid distinguishes himself from most other authors who are highly exposed to the media, by way of his classical romantic-modernistic artist’s role and his high-brow literary claims. His debut novel, Den överlevande trädgårdsmästaren (1983; “The Surviving Gardener”) consequently follows a traditional modernistic aesthetic, with an experimental imagery that might be hard to fathom. With his subsequent novels Ranelid developed into somewhat of a favourite among critics. In the middle of the 90s he was placed within the circle of highly acknowledged contemporary authors such as Per Olov Enquist and Kerstin Ekman (Franzén 1996). Ranelid also came to be associated at an early stage with Lars Ahlin, one of Sweden’s leading modernist writers of prose (Eriksson 1990: 125).

Already a few years after his debut the term Ranelidish began to be used about the author’s distinctive and personal style of prose with its meandering metaphorical formulations. In order to exemplify this Ranelidish virtually any opening line in the author’s novels could be used, such as this one from Mitt namn ska vara Stig Dagerman (1993; “My Name shall be Stig Dagerman”): "My soul weighs
less than a dream in a butterfly, but it holds so much that God needs to use his biggest compass to close the circle”.

A consequence of this variety of pursuits with its role changing is that it is hard to place Ranelid the writer into any given category. He moves between different positions. One moment the aristocratic modernist who preaches the holiness of the word. Next moment the ex football player who chooses sides in politically controversial matters. Thus the public opinion of Ranelid is also divided. Depending on which aspect is being discussed he may be both praised and blamed. “No-one has written about the handicapped as well as he has”, someone might say. “An arrogant son-of-a-bitch”, says another.

The fact that the first of these utterances – that are authentic ones, uttered in our proximity – refers to Ranelid’s text and the second to his person is quite typical. Far from all Swedes have read a novel by Björn Ranelid. But almost all adults know who he is and have an opinion of him. In literary studies the discussion on the relationship between life and work was long regarded as problematic. In Ranelid’s case this is virtually inevitable, at least with regard to the connection between public person and works. Ranelid appears continuously in the media, where he states his opinions and views on various matters. How then, could you disregard this when reading his books? You can see his face in front of you. You can hear his voice with its particular phrasing and Scanian accent.

For better or for worse the writer is once again a part of his/her text before the literary public of today – and this applies to a particularly great extent to Ranelid.

Even if Ranelid has been both criticised and praised through the years there is an obvious dimension of time. At this point in time he is certainly one of the most known and read authors in the country. Yet, at the same time as Ranelid has become an acknowledged author and is loved by many, his status within the cultural Establishment has, to a certain extent, declined. The lofty prose and the religiously tinted message of love which at the beginning of his career as a writer secured him a unique position, is seen today by many people as being provocative and challenging. Others see him as somewhat of a medial buffoon (compare “the Mohammed Ali of literature”). But Ranelid’s massive exposure to the media has also implied that he has reached new groups of readers and fans, not least among the younger generation where he at times has been assigned cult status.

In this article we will illustrate an essential aspect of Ranelid’s medial role as an author – his activity as a performance artist. This meeting between author and reader is an important but often overlooked aspect of literary public life of today. Our point of departure is that it is impossible to understand Ranelid’s position in literary public life, and in the Swedish social debate as a whole, by merely reading his books. The perspective must necessarily be broadened to include more than textual analysis. Theoretically we have our point of departure in “performance studies” in Richard Schechner’s (2006) and Erika Fischer-Lichte’s (2008) versions. This is also where we find the methodological devices that we present con-
tinuously. Even though Fischer-Lichte focuses on avant-garde performances and theatre, the concepts and methodology she has developed may in our opinion also be applied to Ranelid’s performances. A performance, in the same way as a theatrical event, is of course impossible to preserve for posterity or to recreate. Video documentations – that are of necessity imperfect – of Ranelid’s appearances are all that is left of this momentary art form.

We will analyse three of Ranelid’s many appearances in recent years. Two of them in small places in Southern Sweden, in Vinslöv (27/11, 2007 and Ystad (6/2, 2009). The third was recorded in a TV studio and broadcasted in the programme “Go’ kväll” (“Good Evening”) on Sveriges Television (19/10 2007; Sweden’s Television, national public service broadcaster).

Every such appearance – or performance – is of course unique. Their character changes as we will see, depending whether, for example, the meeting with the audience takes place face to face or is mediated via TV cameras. Naturally, the context and the audience in front of which Ranelid performs are also significant. We will shed some light on how he goes about staging himself and his authorship under the rather varying conditions prevalent on these three occasions. The differences are obvious. The meeting with the anonymous and rather heterogeneous TV audience is strictly structured (by the producer and the presenter). In Vinslöv the author had the possibility of arranging his appearance according to his own wishes. Finally, in Ystad Ranelid was interacting with a music group. Moreover, the differences between the events in Vinslöv and Ystad were quite substantial as regards the composition of the audience and the institutional framework. The result is three performance appearances with varying character. Ranelid takes on, and is given, different roles. We see him as a literary stand-up artist, as a “prophet” and as an artist.

**Ranelid – The Literary Stand-up Comedian and the Entertainer**

An essential part of Ranelid’s appearance – his performance – in Vinslöv and in other places, is the actual framing. First of all Ranelid enters onto a simply built up stage with colourful advertising signs in the background. Art and commercialism go hand in hand. The author is dressed in a black blazer and a white unbuttoned shirt. The shirt collars are spread over the lapels of the blazer like a classical Schiller collar. After some playful small talk with the audience and some tens of seconds of silence comes the introductory line:

Paradise has thin pages and you have to turn them with a needle in your hand. Show me anything else on Earth that has that density, that weight, that mass which words have. It is all that rises from the dead. Now black letters lay on white pastures that from time to time are called the pages of a book, and so I sharpen my pencil so that it becomes like a shepherd’s staff and thus the words will follow me, one by one, over the face of the Earth.
Ranelid’s voice is loud and clear, finely tuned and poetic as is befit an author who dresses in a way that leads one’s thoughts to a romantic character such as Lord Byron. His Scanian dialect bears a tinge of a Central Swedish accent with its lighter diphthongs and more complex intonation. The opening line is a typically Ranelidish one, a well-formulated phrase which, like a refrain in a popular song or a rock tune, is easy to recognise. It is taken from *Min son fäktas mot världen* (Ranelid 2000; “My Son Crosses Swords with the World”) but recurs and is re-used in various performances, books and articles. The idea is that the faithful audience of readers and listeners will recognise the opening line and nod in assent – this gives a feeling of belonging, both with the author and within the audience. On this evening the latter is comprised which is very unusual when it comes to Ranelid, of only men plus one woman journalist.

Although the theme of Ranelid’s appearance in Vinslöv is *the word*, it soon becomes obvious that it is not only the spoken word – no matter how equilibristic and well-formulated Ranelid is this evening – that brings the, initially clearly reserved, audience to line up after the performance in order to buy his novels. If one wishes to better understand the audience’s experience and the effects of a performance such as that of Ranelid, one must take a number of different factors into consideration. As early as around the turn of the last century research showed that if one were to understand communal phenomena such as theatre performances or rituals in non-western cultures, one could not merely make do with the actual spoken language; one must, for example, also take into consideration the institutional framing or the actors’ ways of using their bodies. Thus it is advantageous for anyone trying to describe and understand various types of performances to refer to the comprehensive research that has been conducted about theatre and other ritual events. The German theatre researcher Erika Fischer-Lichte writes about this shift of perspective in *The Transformative Power of Performance*:

> …both ritual and theatre studies repudiated the privileged status of texts in favour of performances. It could thus be said that the first performative turn in twentieth-century European culture […] occurred much earlier with the establishment of ritual and theatre studies at the turn of the last century. (2008: 31)

Essential for a performance, Fischer-Lichte points out, is the *concurrent* physical presence of the actor or actors and the audience. In this way the prerequisites for the audience’s more or less active participation in a performance are created and this can thus be described as a happening that occurs *between* actors and spectators (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 32).

Ranelid also comes back to and continuously reminds us, in his various appearances, of the relationship and sense of belonging between himself and the audience: “As you know, I have said that one swims from the shore I, to the shore you, in the ocean we. This ocean we all have within us”. With a slight gesture – he quickly bows his head to the right – Ranelid accentuates the rhythmical direction away
from the self to the other. Ranelid also emphasises that it is the support of the audience that has helped him to avoid getting stuck during the performance.

Richard Schechner, one of the main names in the American tradition of Performance Studies, traces features of performance in a large number of human activities, in everything from play, sports and rock galas to theatre performances and rituals (Schechner 2006: 31). The key categories here are ritual and play, which are present in all performances to varying degrees. Rituals provide people with a sense of belonging and a communal experience. Furthermore, rituals help the participants to relate to difficult upheavals and transitions in society or private life, to relate to hierarchies of various kinds as well as taboo-like or risky events that cannot be given expression in daily life. In rituals the experience of border phenomena and the crossing of borders are of critical importance. Both ritual and play create a “second reality”, that distinguishes itself from daily life, writes Schechner. With various, more or less conventional means a stage is created where ritual and play take place (2006: 52).

Ranelid’s performance in Vinslöv gets its dimension of ritual both from the introductory meal that is eaten together and served before his appearance, and from listening to Ranelid’s elaborate and dedicated use of language. Even the actual performance is of a ritual character and leads one’s thoughts to situations like the presentation of an authorship or authors reading aloud. By comparing his pencil to a “shepherd’s staff”, Ranelid places himself in a sort of Christ-like or preacher’s position.

Ranelid’s performance in Vinslöv, which lasts slightly longer than an hour, is built on his own authorship. His point of departure is taken from some of his novels that are lined up on a small table on the stage, blatanty visible just as in the case of “talking about books” in a library. But before coming to his authorship, Ranelid sets the tone of the evening in a prologue-like section by evoking the presence of three persons. Onto the stage he invites, one after the other, Swedish poet Tomas Tranströmer, Nelson Mandela and, the Cambridge professor Stephen Hawking.

The presentation of Tranströmer turns out to pay homage to Art with a capital A. The poet is said to come sailing in on a “gondola of grief” – which, by the way, is the title of one of Tranströmer’s poem anthologies – navigated by his wife. Here, Ranelid alludes to Tranströmer’s poem “Storm” from the collection 17 dikter (1954). According to Ranelid, this is one of “the world’s most skilful, generous, equilibristic poets” and time and time again he proves his mastery in spite of his suffering from aphasia after a stroke. Great artists have power over the word which, according to Ranelid, allows them to compare favourably with all the worldly power magnates.

When presenting both of the other guests of honour – Mandela and Hawking – Ranelid introduces the ethical stance that runs all through his performance. Mandela who chose to turn away from “hatred, revenge and vendetta” despite having
been imprisoned for 27 years on Robben Island. Hawking, the much acknowledged physicist and mathematician, who is gravely handicapped by the disease of ALS, but if “Adolf Hitler had been allowed to decide and had been a contemporary of his he would not have been deemed worthy of living”, despite the fact that his brain functions better than most people’s. Ranelid summarises his ethical stance – his conviction of man's inviolable value – with one sentence that he self-consciously nominates as “Vinslöv's and Sweden's and the world's most beautiful sentence”. It runs: ”Every single person on Earth exists in one unique sample and when she is gone she can never be replaced by anyone else”. In a way that is typical of the performance arts: aesthetical, social and political aspects are interwoven already in the prelude. Art is brought into contact with the world (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 44).

Thus the theme of the prologue-like introduction in Vinslöv is the power of the word and the inviolability of human life. But Ranelid does not only merely rely on his own spoken words to reach out with this message. As all performance artists do (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 40), he also uses the language of his own body. During the performance Ranelid is in constant movement in the room. He steps down from the simple stage, where he starts his appearance, and interacts with the listeners. In addition to this he uses the premises in a spontaneous fashion, for example by sometimes hiding behind a column. At this moment in time it is possible to identify two superior and interacting strategies of Ranelid’s which can be found to occur amongst most performance artists. On the one hand a striving to achieve a (temporary) feeling of belonging between himself and his audience. On the other hand the ambition to achieve a mutual, physical contact with the listeners.

When Ranelid leaves the stage and moves around in the room he shows quite clearly how he attempts to bridge the gap between the stage and the auditorium and how he tries to avoid addressing his audience from a top-down perspective. Otherwise the whole situation is designed for precisely that: on the stage we have a literary celebrity with his familiarity with the media and other authorities who is inevitably in a superior position in relation to his listeners. In a way that is typical of performance artists he thus observes his audience and interacts spontaneously with it instead of directing his words to an anonymous mass. The spectators, who normally watch, now find themselves being watched by the actor. On one occasion Ranelid jokes, to the delight of the audience, about a man sitting in the first row who obviously has not reacted quickly or strongly enough to an anecdote: “You’re not keeping up. Have you brought your pillow? It’s time to sleep now. Have you got an alarm clock also?” Here we have a situation where the tables are turned: an observer who himself is being observed by someone whose primary task is to act, something which, according to Fischer-Lichte (2008: 40), is another common strategy used within the performance arts.

Ranelid also makes use of the opportunity on one occasion to touch one of the spectators lightly. This touch is no doubt a surprise for the man in question.
Whoever seats himself in a theatre hall naturally expects to take part in the performance by seeing, in the capacity of spectator, what takes place; compare with the Greek word “theatron” from “theastai” that means precisely “to see”. When an actor thus breaks with this convention this can contribute indirectly to the achievement of the main goal of a performance, namely that of creating a sense of belonging. The reason for this, as Fischer-Lichte maintains (2008: 60–62), is that various forms of physical contact temporarily upset the opposition between seeing and feeling, between public and private, between distance and closeness, which in turn leads to emotional responses. Something similar also happens on the occasions when Ranelid moves around in the room and approaches individual spectators – without actually physically touching anyone – bends forwards towards them and addresses them with the Swedish informal form of you or their personal name and looks into their eyes. Fischer-Lichte writes: “A glance exchanged between two people can constitute closeness and intimacy similar to physical contact. Seeing stimulates the desire to touch” (2008: 62). The sense of belonging between the entertainer Ranelid and his audience is also strengthened by laughter and satire against power and authority. The parties are united on such occasions in a bottom-up perspective where Ranelid becomes just like anyone else – in a collective we – that is directing criticism towards all of those “up there”.

Another strategy from Ranelid’s side for melting in with the crowd, for showing the spectators that he is one of them, is the ideal of conscientiousness he continually assigns himself. He is no non-committed sort of person who takes liberties. One aspect of this is to always do one’s very best in every situation, to make an effort. Ranelid declares sharply: “Don’t come and say that I didn’t do my best. You can say that I was bad, that I was worthless, but don’t say that I didn’t do my best. Don’t say that I didn’t do my very best. Don't say that I didn’t strain every nerve to the utmost”. Ranelid refers to his “ethos”, that is, to his personal traits and his character, as a guarantee of the credibility of his message (Johannesson 2003).

Ranelid’s striving to establish a common ground and feeling of belonging with the listeners in Vinslöv around his ethical message has a good chance of succeeding, since it is the local Lions Club that has invited him to talk. Lions, founded in 1917 in the U.S, are an international network with 1.3 million members – both women and men – in 205 countries. One works to “create and foster a spirit of understanding among all people for humanitarian needs by providing voluntary services in conjunction with social commitment and international collaboration” (Lions 2010). The spirit of community and the ideological affiliation among the audience is, so to speak, already in place. Apart from the fact that they are all in some way associated with Lions, it is likely that many of them already know each other; the village of Vinslöv is no bigger than that. The bond between the listeners is stronger in such a relatively closed company than in a more official Ranelid event. It is “just” for Ranelid to step into the fellowship, which is thus facilitated
by the sympathy for and understanding of the ethical message presumably harboured by the Vinslöv audience. The bonds of fellowship that are established during each performance – in Vinslöv it is both about the bond between Ranelid and the listeners and between the individuals in the audience – facilitates for the individual to connect to the values that form the foundation for the work of both Lions and Ranelid. A performance, Fischer-Lichte emphasises, normally creates rather temporary fellowships (2008: 55).

Ranelid’s appearance in Vinslöv, just like the performance arts in general, is thus characterised by a tangible bodily presence. Ranelid regularly dresses in generously open – preferably short-sleeved – shirts, allows himself to be photographed with a bare torso or discusses the meaning of being well-trained and of leading a healthy life. Therefore it comes as no surprise that he also during the Vinslöv appearance uses his body in different ways. For example, he shows how, being a former elite player himself, his parents used to dream when he was growing up about how their sons would become football players just as famous as the Swedish Italian pros Gunnar Green, Nisse Liedholm and Gunnar Nordahl by, for every name, make-believe heel-kicking a football or slap kicking a side-foot.

If therefore, Ranelid on stage – not without pride – shows up a body that can breed jealousy among certain spectators, the story about his earlier and present bodily exposure and failings are a regularly returning feature during his performances. As Fischer-Lichte claims, this is also applicable to the performance arts in general (2008: 82). The stories about his childhood skull fracture and growing upper lip that continuously surface in Ranelid’s appearances further strengthen the character of ritual. These elements are constantly present. The sympathy of the audience may be an advantage for the ethically demanding sermon. As an advocate of truth Ranelid has had a high price to pay: "No one has been so slandered, no one has been so derided, and no one has been so lied about as I have been". In Vinslöv Ranelid refers to his autobiographical book Till alla människor på jorden och i himlen (1997; “To all people on Earth and in Heaven”), in which the accident when he, at five years of age, falls down the cellar stairs and fractures his skull, is a pivotal event. But, according to Ranelid, this is also the explanation for how he can perform as he does – without a manuscript – without losing his thread: the high-pitched tone ringing in “… (my) head is a part of the explanation for me being able to be so concentrated when I talk. I am namely always in the present. I’m sentenced to being in the moment. [– – –] I have a radio in my head that I turn on and off”. In Ranelid’s understanding of himself this means that he has turned a threat of catastrophe into something productive and successful. Paradoxically, his whole success story as a writer and entertainer probably derive from this fracture.

Ranelid’s other bodily trauma as a child – his upper lip that, without any explanation, starts to grow when he is in his teens – is also a part of the Vinslöv appearance. He recounts how the event still stalks him. But Ranelid knows how to take revenge on those who called him “nigger lip” when he was growing up and
even later. “You take revenge”, Ranelid goes on cheerfully and to the audience’s great delight, not by force but “by being elected one of Sweden’s ten sexiest men. How about that? Good Lord!”

Ranelid’s performance in Vinslöv is based on the author’s humanistic sermon on the inviolable value of man and the importance of taking an individual responsibility in an existence in which everyone is fundamentally dependent on one another. However, this does not stop Ranelid from sailing close to the wind, from making jokes about and making fun of other actors in public life. In this circle of (ethically) like-minded people, male Lions supporters and people living in Vinslöv, Ranelid lets go in a way that he does not do when performing in front of an anonymous TV audience. Towards the end of his performance he declares: “…you know, I can say what I want to now; it’s so wonderful”.

Ranelid – The Prophet

The TV programme “Go ‘kväll” (Good Evening) is broadcasted every evening Monday to Friday between 6.15 and 7.00 pm on Sweden’s National Television and has the character of a lifestyle programme aimed to serve an audience comprised of people who are upper middle aged and older. The features included concern fashion, food, culture and existential questions. A standing point in the programme on Friday evening broadcasts is that of a medically well-known person pretending to be the host of an imaginary dinner party – a feature that normally takes about ten minutes. The host of the dinner and the presenter of the programme take a seat at a neatly set table where four seats are empty. They chat about the menu and the setting of the table as well as about the four absent – yet present in the imagination – guests. This talk about the food that is served, where the dinner takes place and, not least, the choice of dinner guests, functions as a performance, in which the host stages his own person and role in the public eye.

Ranelid chose to invite two men and two women to his dinner party. These were then seated as two couples at the long ends of the table, while Ranelid and the programme presenter sat opposite one another on the short sides. The men who were invited were world-famous: the South African bishop Desmond Tutu as well as the then American President George W. Bush. The two women on the other hand were unknown to the general public. Elisabeth B. Lindgren, Chairman of the Board of the Temperance Society in Örebro as well as Inga Pagrèus.

One might ask oneself whether Ranelid’s dinner party on “Go ‘kväll” really is a performance fully comparable with the one in Vinslöv? Several of the characteristics of performance art are missing, especially the live character and the concurrent presence of actor and audience. Fischer-Lichte also draws a sharp line between live performances and medialised performances: “Live performance seems to carry remnants of an ‘authentic’ culture that fortifies the opposition to media-
lised performance as a product of commercialism created by market interests” (2008: 69).

However, the opposition between a live and a medialised performance is not, at least as far as we can see, quite as absolute as Fischer-Lichte would have it. Firstly, performance artists who appear live today are often completely dependent on mediating electronic or digital techniques, in the form of microphones and speaker systems or various kinds of image or sound reproductions. Secondly, a performance artist can interact with the audience that is present in, say, the TV studio (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 69). Furthermore, Ranelid’s contribution to “Go ‘kväll” can hardly be described as a straightforward TV interview. The programme presenter takes on a very subordinate role. His contribution is confined to just a few random lines, while Ranelid totally dominates the stage.

The description and analysis of Ranelid’s participation in “Go ‘kväll” as a performance, is also supported by the fact that this feature of the programme is framed in and divided from the rest of the programme in a very clear way, which according to Schechner (2006: 2) is one of the defining characteristics of a performance. After having conversed with two other participants the programme presenter stands up and says: “Now I can smell food”. A dimension of play, also a prominent feature in the performance arts, is thus made apparent. We are all meant to imagine delightful aromas of dinner, in spite of the fact that food and drink are so clearly absent during the feature. The line fills the same function as when children who are eager to play open with “do you want to play with me?” Ranelid’s answer to the question about where the dinner party is to take place – “next to the apple grove in Kivik” (Kivik is famous for its apples) – shows that yes, he would like to play.

The subdued dinner table where Ranelid and the programme presenter sit down is set for a traditional middle class party with tall wine glasses and broken serviettes. The dinner table creates its own stage within the TV studio, which differentiates itself from the bar counter where the other interviews took place. This dinner party feature is thus made up as a stage setting of its own within the framework of the staging of the whole TV programme.

The actual physically present audience during Ranelid’s TV performance is, as mentioned, small. However, the stage-setting in itself reveals a striving for involving the anonymous TV audience in the feature, thus creating prerequisites for the kind of togetherness that a performance aims to achieve. Various means are used to create closeness between Ranelid and the TV audience. The viewers are invited to join in the game and in their imaginations take a seat at the ceremoniously set table in the Ranelidian summer home in Kivik, Österlen. This is emphasised by the chairs that, in keeping with the logic of the game, remain empty during the feature. Here there are seats that are literally empty to allow for the viewers’ own identifications.
There is also a clearly ritual dimension in Ranelid’s TV appearances just as in a traditional live performance. The whole concept of the programme is built on one of the holiest rituals of secular private life: the middle class dinner party with all of its tacitly implied codes and rules. Moreover, the imaginary dinner party comprises an important and recurring ritual in the actual programme. It is one of the cornerstones in the Friday broadcasts. It is also logical that the dinner party takes place on the last day of the working week. A large number of viewers find themselves in the borderland between work and leisure. The much longed for weekend has just been initiated with opportunities for, and features of, playing and games.

Ranelid’s TV performance was directly linked to his book of current interest in the autumn of 2007, *Öppet brev till George W Bush* (“Open letter to George W Bush”). It follows that three of the guests at the fictive dinner party are also in the book which is not a novel but a personal reflection on the state of the world and the suffering of mankind, something which, all in all, has lead Ranelid to the edge of despair. In *Öppet brev* he addresses the American President with an informal “you” – compare the letter form – and accuses him of a lack of righteousness in his war on terrorism, but also in relation to the poor and destitute in his own country.

As one can see, the production and institutional framing of this TV performance differs from that of the Vinslöv performance. The format is both shorter – just more than a quarter of an hour instead of an hour – and stricter. Ranelid remains seated at the short end of the table and can thus not use his body in the same way as in Vinslöv, where he could, by using gestures and movements, support his message and create a feeling of closeness with his audience. He is thus forced to a greater extent to trust in the spoken word, even though the TV audience is naturally exposed to his well-trained body and styled image. Moreover, he appears more austere and has a more serious profile during the dinner party on TV. He does not allow himself to take liberties like he did in Vinslöv, for example he avoids, in so far as possible, joking about and criticising well-known people.

This means that Ranelid in his TV performance remains in the authoritative position where he, as a medial celebrity, is naturally at home. His possibility of creating closeness to the audience is limited in an entirely different way than during a performance. Now he is forced to be in a high position, from which he talks to his listeners with a top-down perspective. In Vinslöv he strove to be in a low position, which meant that he instead talked with the audience from a more equal we-perspective or, alternatively, from a bottom-up or victim’s position. In the TV studio Ranelid rather chooses a number of different strategies in order to mark his high, superior position. One is the use of long, expansive lines that aim to create authority, to give the impression that he knows what he is talking about.

Another and more important circumstance that places Ranelid in a high position in relation to the viewers – as well as to the American President – is that he takes on a sort of prophet-like role. On the whole there is a dimension of the Old Tes-
tament and Christianity in Ranelid’s TV performance. At least three of the guests are believers, both the “good” guests like Desmond Tutu and Inga Pagréus and the “bad” guest, Bush. Ranelid himself bears witness to his own strong faith ever since he “…accompanied Mom and Dad to the Elim Church in Malmö. And, what’s more, I’ve found, that all the mysteries that exist in the world today, all the miracles that exist in the world today, they are immune to all scientific and technological explanations. There isn’t one single Nobel Prize winner in Physics or in Chemistry who can explain laughter, sensuality and eroticism and beauty on Earth, there isn’t anyone who can explain that”.

Ranelid’s language thus often borrows expressions and figures of speech from the religious sphere: “I have sentenced myself to never deride or violate another human being”.

Another circumstance that shows that Ranelid takes on some sort of a prophet-role is that he does not behave at all like a conciliating, middle class dinner party host who will do everything in his power to ensure that the guests will enjoy themselves. Instead he confronts the American President and makes him accountable for his war on terrorism. In this confrontation the dinner host also accepts assistance from the other guests:

And now I think that Desmond gets up and says a few words to George Bush and the words will burn like laser beams right through the man, and then I’ll say to George Bush that you should now pick up your shining knife, and then you shall look at the reflection of your own face there since it fits into that narrow blade of the knife, and when you have observed your face for long enough you’ll see that you, yourself, are your worst enemy.

When Ranelid in this way condemns the American President he also resembles an Old Testament prophet. In Öppet brev till George W Bush this connection between Ranelid’s words to the president and the prophets of the Bible is even more direct: “I write these words to you, since they say more about humanity than all of your advisers’ opinions. Many people in history have claimed to be prophets, but only very few have been true prophets. A prophet who says that he/she has received a revelation from God must be a loving person and be more good than evil” (Ranelid 2007: 46).

Thus Ranelid acts as a judging prophet, who surrounded by his good and loyal disciples exhorts and admonishes the sinful disciple – George W bush – who has not understood how best to serve the will of God. From his elevated position the dinner host talks to “the world’s most powerful man”, the presiding American president. The judgemental dimensions of the prophet role – the dinner party’s features of debate and struggle – blend together well with the dramaturgy that governs talk and discussion programmes on TV. This, in turn, can be seen in the light of the tendency towards struggle that characterises the spoken word in general, not least in the so-called “primary oral culture” (Ong 2002: 32)

Ranelid’s description of people’s exposure and vulnerability is striking. In this case it also becomes clear that his prophetic speech not only addresses itself to the
most powerful men in the world, but to each and every one of us. He makes an impression by talking in terms of “we”, that it is about all of our responsibility. In answer to the question of how important it is to hand out food to the homeless in Stockholm he says:

It’s extremely important. Because this has nothing to do with glamour, nothing to do with honour or with money. This comes straight from the heart. This is where the little and the big person meet. The whole future of the human race begins in your heart as a human. [– – –] And there is no such thing as war inscribed in human genes. Not one single person on this Earth exists who has been born with evil, hatred, revenge and vendetta inscribed in their genes.

Thus in his TV performance Ranelid is forced, to a greater degree than during the Vinslöv appearance, to put his trust in the spoken word. The position of stiff dinner party host in a TV studio allows for less freedom of bodily exposure and use of gesture. On the other hand, Ranelid has in general – both in his role as performance artist and author – a strong confidence in the intrinsic power of words. This applies both to the word in writing and in speech. This is made obvious in Öppet brev:

Words fly faster than the hawk and the falcon and they live longer than the elephant and the oldest tree on Earth. [– – –]

The word is alone on Earth in its ability to rise from the dead. Man closes the book. Then the black letters lay as lambs on the white page. The pencil is a shepherd’s staff. When you move it over the paper, then all the letters of the alphabet play, dance or behave according to the gravity of the moment. Seat yourself in your reading corner in the evening. Turn on the light and once more start again.

In the beginning was the Word.

The power of the word is strongly emphasised here; as Christ it can rise from the dead. On the whole the Biblical connection is tangible – the lamb, the staff of the shepherd – just as the closing sentence, that directly cites the so-called Johannes Prologue in the Bible translation of 1917.

And so, the “prophet” Ranelid, equipped with the strong and powerful word, pronounces his sentence over President Bush and anyone else who has not understood that he/she needs to follow the message of God in the right way. However, this is only the one part of the author’s sermon which, in its entirety, does not only consist of condemnation. He also points to the opportunities for ethical actions that are open to every person. He does this by bringing to the fore his three “good” guests as worthy examples. Desmond Tutu, the South African bishop; Elisabeth B Lindgren who after 22 years as a drug addict now runs a cooperative rehabilitation centre – she stands, together with her husband, “for some sort of hope for mankind”. And finally, Inga Pagréus, the deacon, who together with a group of volunteers – Ranelid is one of them – hands out food to alcoholics, drug addicts, prostitutes and the homeless in Stockholm City: “And then I make Sergel’s torg [a town square] the hand of God. And where we should be pumping in oxygenated blood, we see to it that we pump in hepatitis, HIV and AIDS. And on
Sergels torg that is the Aorta of Sweden, we let people die with their tongues in a pool of urin”.

In sum we can maintain that Ranelid’s TV performance combines the religious and the secular, ritual and play. In a similar way it finds itself in the field of tension between seriously directed messages and entertainment (Schechner 2006: xx). This is the actual idea of the programme “Go ‘kväll”: a pleasant and entertaining start to the weekend that can nevertheless contain existentially thought provoking and serious features. And Ranelid’s sermon is to a great extent serious. It is the Christian ideal of love he preaches from his secular pulpit. And it is hard not to be moved, even if one’s first reaction might be to smile a faint, amused smile. Both Ranelid’s appearance, his clothes and his language are exaggerated and blown-up. But after a couple of minutes, when the initial surprise has settled, one becomes captivated by the power in the message and the words. One feels powerless when the author speaks of the exposed and vulnerable people on Sergels torg, a place he metaphorically sees as Sweden’s aorta. The image-packed turns of speech, whose significance might not be immediately clear to the listeners, and that can be difficult to digest when seen in print, seem none the less seductive in the actual moment of delivery. However, the situation and the framing involve a number of limitations compared to Ranelid’s live performance in Vinslöv. The result is a less laid back and more strict performance. It is the prophet Ranelid who sits at the table in the TV studio.

Ranelid – The Jazz & Poetry Artist

The third and last Ranelid performance we analyse in this article thus took place in a well-respected Cinema Theatre in Ystad in February 2009. Here films have been shown since 1910. However, during the period of the last ten years the premises have been totally renovated. Today the company is run by a non-profit association and its programme includes over and above the showing of quality films also music and song, theatre and lectures, meetings and information evenings.

Shortly after nine in the evening Ranelid stepped down from the stage. Already then it became clear to us that what we had just witnessed diverged from both the other appearances in Vinslöv and the TV studio respectively. This was a different experience. We were not surprised and slightly embarrassed – as when we saw “the prophet” Ranelid on TV the first time – but rather moved. Neither were we alone with our reaction: An enthusiastic audience managed to get an extra number after the standard performance. The local newspapers stated the next day that “Ranelid spellbound the Scala” and transformed the old cinema into a “church building” where there soon arose an “intimate and spiritual atmosphere” (Nilsson 2009). What then, was the difference between the performance in Ystad and the ones on TV and in Vinslöv respectively?
Already the institutional framing was different. Here it was an intimate room where also on other occasions an ambitious cultural and artistic activity is pursued. The mixed audience that fills the room till the last seat has left the duties of everyday life behind them; the performance was on a Friday. People have seated themselves in premises where artistic – aesthetic- experiences are usually served. This creates certain expectations, which are fulfilled. The audience is given from the first moment the impression of being a part of an artistic performance. Ranelid performs now as an artist, not only as a preacher and prophet – or entertainer. In Vinslöv the show was framed by large, conspicuous advertising boards. In Ystad the commercial side of the appearance is toned down, actually almost absent.

Perhaps the most important explanation for why the Ystad performance has such a clear aura of art is that Ranelid appears here together with the band “Tales”. The group that was founded in 1996 fetches inspiration from Nordic ballads, meditative jazz and folklore. Improvisation also plays an important part in their music. The band released its first CD in 2000 and started working together with Ranelid two years later (Tales 2010). Together, Tales and Ranelid have given a great number of concerts around the country, often in Southern Sweden. In January 2009 they released a CD they had made together.

As we shall see Ranelid functions as some kind of an extra “singer” in the band, when he recites his one-liners – his recitations – to music. His basic position during this performance or concert is also among the musicians on stage, where he either stands up or sits on a chair. In the background a suggestive photograph of the group; no advertising boards.

During his recitals Ranelid moves around in the room, so as to create a closeness to and contact with the audience. The whole performance gives a stronger impression of planning, of being staged: Ranelid often looks at his playlist to remind himself of the order of the songs and his own contributions – and he chats to the leader of the band before performing his own numbers. In total Ranelid stands for twelve such interpositions or numbers during the evening. In sum the institutional framing – from the premises to the stage that has been clearly arranged for the concert – makes this performance seem like an artistic happening or concert performance (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 201).

Already in the prelude to the performance, which including the interval is almost two hours long, it is quite clear that Ranelid not only talks or preaches but also takes on the role of singer. Ranelid does not begin, as he has done in other performances, with anecdotes or short jokes. Instead he recites something that is much more like the lyrics of a song – or a prose poem. His speech is organised in a more lyrically unpredictable way than as a narrative at the Scala in Ystad. For example in the fifth number of the evening he cites from the introduction page in a novel by Stig Dagerman with the support of the saxophone-dominated music. First in Swedish – just like in Vinslöv – later also in English. Ranelid makes here a definite entry into the Jazz & Poetry tradition (Baumgartner 2001).
In Ranelid’s first number one can differentiate two themes that are well-known to anyone who knows their Ranelid. First of all it is about the power of the word. Secondly it is about the unique and inviolable dignity of man.

The part about the power of the word in the first number is introduced with the sentence: "Show me anything on Earth that has the density and the weight and the mass that the word has". During the time – approximately one minute – that it takes for Ranelid to perform this first part about the possibilities of words, this sentence is repeated at least twice. In this way it gets the character of a refrain or chorus that frames the other sentences that vary the theme.

In a similar way Ranelid uses one and the same sentence in the second thematic section – "Every person on this Earth exists in one single sample and when she is gone she can never be replaced by anyone" – three times and lets it frame lines such as "You are tall, you are short, you are feeble-minded, you are mentally retarded, you are even equilibristic in the expression of language".

Thus Ranelid works throughout with repetitions of single words, groups of words and full clauses. When it comes to singing – a genre he approaches in Ystad – this is nothing strange. But anyone who has read or listened to Ranelid will know that these repetitions and reuses apply to all of his oral appearances. Neither is this surprising bearing in mind that Ranelid, as he himself emphasises, does not use a written down script in the role of entertainer. This naturally requires that the speaker has a memory bank that is quite comprehensive with ready-made formulas and expressions to lean on and make use of. This practice is, to a certain extent, in conflict with the originality requirement that is a fundamental prerequisite in the romantic and modernistic tradition that Ranelid, at least in the beginning of his writing career, had as his point of departure. At the same time these formulas and expressions are Ranelid’s own expressions. They are not anyone else's words that he imitates or repeats. Ranelid of today finds support in Ranelid of yesterday.

Ranelid’s appearances thus show all the typical signs of oral narration. As a performance artist without a script Ranelid can be compared with the rhapsodes who during the pre-classicistic era – before the art of writing – with the help of special formulae could recreate long stories off by heart. Traces of this can for example be found in the Iliad and the Odyssey. These works were probably written down on a particular occasion with a specific oral appearance in mind. Thus they display a number of characteristics – writes Walter J. Ong in his classical study Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word that are typical of speech in the early oral societies, in so-called “primary oral cultures” It is a matter of “heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns, in repetition and antitheses, in alliterations and assonances, in epithetic or other and other formularexpressions, in standard thematic settings” (2002: 34). Such formulae are to be found on different levels. It can be anything from the use of standard words and expressions, such as, for example, Ranelid’s continually appearing phrase “it’s as simple and as great as that”. To the reuse of entire episodes, such as when Ranelid in all of these ana-
lysed appearances tells the audience about the skull injury of his childhood and the subsequent tinnitus problems which he sees as a fundamental part of his artistry.

As an entertainer Ranelid works today in what has been called “the secondary spoken language culture”, in other words, in a written-language dominated society like our own, which is nonetheless experiencing a renaissance for the spoken word. This rebirth includes the use of new electronic and digital techniques: from the telephone and radio to the television and mp3-players. And naturally there is a great difference between our day’s spoken language culture and the conditions for words and communication, thought and knowledge that prevailed in primarily oral cultures. Secondary spoken language is “more deliberate and self-conscious” (Ong 2002: 133). Yet still, in Ranelid’s use of language as a performance artist, one can see traces of classical oral story-telling (Ong 2002: 32–76). This kind of speech is often bound to a specific situation; since concepts in oral cultures tend to be used in specific situations, close to the experiences of human life. Thus the situations that form the starting point of Ranelid’s ethical sermons are consistently concrete situations – often self-experienced.

Furthermore, Ranelid’s oral appearances are characterised by a wealth of words and a surplus of information – so-called redundancy. This is because one's thinking cannot proceed as quickly in speech as in writing. By using different oral expressions for one and the same thought the speaker can carry on thinking without having to be quiet.

Moreover oral speech tends to be aimed at struggle. This is because in societies without a written language it was difficult to store knowledge and know-how. The only way of communicating it was to repeat it to each other, to speak to each other face to face. This could easily lead to strife and physical behaviour. We have already seen how Ranelid during his dinner performance verbally attacked Bush’s war on terrorism. In Ystad Swedish football player Fredrik Ljungberg and Simone de Beauvoir are among those who land up in the line of fire. Alongside struggle and confrontation in spoken language situations, one can also find examples of the opposite: empathy and participation. Just as Ranelid contrasts George W Bush with Desmond Tutu at his dinner party, in his sixth number in Ystad he contrasts Fredrik Ljungberg with Zlatan Ibrahimovic. And there is no doubt as to who is the “good guy” of the two. The empathy and admiration are both completely on Zlatan’s side. This is made clear in the quotation below both with the description of Zlatan’s artistry on the football field and with Zlatan himself being seen as connecting with Ranelid’s humanistic message:

Now Zlatan comes in here. Now he writes a Z with white chalk over Ystad’s and Malmö’s dark skies. Now white flakes from the chalk fall down and settle next to the black sheep. Now he does a roll & scissor. Now he does sixteen of them. Now he flies. Now he makes sure to keep the ball close to his feet. Now he stretches Sweden’s broadest grin between Smygehuk in the far south and Jukkasjärvi in the far north. Now he dribbles, now he jinks, now the back starts running in the wrong di-
rection. Now he’s a sibling of Nacka, now he’s a sibling of Romario, of Ronaldinho. Now he’s a sibling of all the great players. Now he comes from the town of Rosengård. This is how one describes the world’s longest and best and most beautiful class travel.

This part of the Ystad performance has a very special character. The son of Malmö and the former player in the town’s best football club – Malmö FF – praises here another son of Malmö and MFF-player. The tone is humorous but still warm when he imitates Zlatan’s special Malmö dialect – and comments: “Zlatan – he must always maximise” – about the luxuriously renovated house at the finest address in Malmö. Ranelid comments on Zlatan’s broad smile – one of the Zlatan brand’s most obvious “product attributes”. As time goes on Ranelid becomes more and more involved, the intensity is raised: the words clatter on. The accompaniment of the band gets the pulse rising even more. The repeated word “now” also contributes. During the number Ranelid moves smoothly around in the room as though to bring forward the image of a dribbling football player and thus illustrate the opening line: “Now Zlatan comes in here.” The audience, who is thrilled, gets a feeling of how Zlatan “flies” forwards over the green grass with the ball close next to his feet. Ranelid evokes a warm-hearted image of Zlatan with the big smile, the equilibristic technique on the field and the generous attitude to his old home-town. Some of this energy and empathy most likely stems from the fact that Ranelid himself has travelled on a similar class journey – from the working class quarters of the eastern parts of Malmö to the centre of the Swedish media scene – even if at a lower level as far as money is concerned.

The tendencies we have looked at in Ranelid’s Ystad appearance – the use of formula-like repetitions, its constraints of the here and now, the wealth of vocabulary, the element of struggle but also the empathy and striving to accomplish a feeling of togetherness – are naturally also a part of the author’s other appearances on stage.

At the end of the day the question remains: what was it that triggered the concentrated, almost sacred atmosphere during the appearance in Ystad – an atmosphere we could all feel and that was also lifted forward in the review done by the local newspaper? So far we have shown with different examples that this performance bears a stronger stamp of artistic staging – of being aestheticalised – than both the others we have analysed. Yet it is nonetheless obvious that it is not enough to point to the degree of aestheticalisation to explain the stronger experience. This aestheticalisation collaborates namely with other pivotal aspects, and then, not least the religious element.

As Fischer-Lichte points out rituals often have a recurrent, trisected structure (2008: 175). In the first phase the participants leave their daily lives behind them. Translated to Ranelid’s Ystad performance this implies that we and the other spectators took ourselves to the cinema theatre Scala at the end of the work day, where we seated ourselves in front of the stage. The second phase – the actual “transforming phase” – implies that the people who have been separated from
their daily contexts take part in a strong, “transforming” experience that ideally gives them a new identity. For example in initiation rites of manhood young men are exposed to diverse physical ordeals and hardships. By managing these they prove themselves worthy of being taken up into the circle of real men. This second phase thus takes place between two “thresholds”: the participant has taken the step over the threshold that separates daily life from the place of the actual ritual, which in turn is one threshold away from the daily life context that the participant of the ritual finally re-enters into. This step back into daily life is namely the third phase: the, by ritual transformed, participants re-enter into their original contexts, but now with another identity and status.

As mentioned previously: one should take care when drawing parallels between various types of rituals. When we say that we to a certain extent were “struck” by Ranelid’s Ystad performance, we perhaps do not mean that it was an experience that changed our lives and forever left us with a change of character once we crossed the “threshold” between the Scala and the reality of daily life – this however, does not mean that such an experience would be impossible. On the other hand we do mean that the performance/ritual in its “second phase” gave us strong, maybe even “revolutionising” experiences that had the effect of bowling us over as least as long as we found ourselves within the threshold. The transformation may be described as temporary rather than constant; the latter is the pronounced goal in more traditional rituals. The journey that is the actual performance – not the destination – seemed for us in Ystad to be the strong experience. But this can of course vary between individuals in the audience (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 199–200).

Fundamental for a “threshold experience” is such a feeling of community – with an audience that is spoken to and that participates in different ways – as we have pointed out during Ranelid’s various performance appearances. As Fischer-Lichte points out, such an artistic performance therefore implies a transgressing and crossing of different kinds of borders:

Among these supposedly natural borders are the borders between art and life, high culture and popular culture, and Western art and non-Western-art. [...] its aim is to transcend rigid oppositions and to convert them into dynamic gradations. The project of the aesthetics of the performative lies in collapsing binary oppositions and replacing the notion of “either/or” with one of “as well as”. (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 203–204)

One obvious such opposition, which Ranelid negotiates during his Ystad appearance, is the one between ethics and aesthetics, between the right way of acting in life and art. Towards the end of the evening this becomes particularly clear. The band Tales have just performed Joni Mitchell’s well-known “Both Sides Now”, which has made a strong impression on the audience and results in the longest applause of the evening. The leader of the band happily hugs the other band members. The Ranelid number that follows after this evening’s aesthetical peak illustrates the striving to build bridges between aesthetics and ethics. Still moved
after “Both Sides Now” the individuals in the audience have their senses wide open for the “preacher” and ethicist Ranelid. This goes back to the feministic discussion or “provocation” in the novel Kvinnan är första könet (2003; “The Woman is the First Sex”). It concerns an existential view of woman – and not least an honouring of her as a mother: “There is nothing more beautiful on this Earth than a mother breastfeeding her child”. Thus, Ranelid says, a woman can never be the “second sex”, which is the title of Simone de Beauvoir’s classic from 1949. The provoker Ranelid, who is critical of de Beauvoir, is careful to express his disassociation in an original and aesthetically effective language. He criticises de Beauvoir for passivity in the face of the burning issues of the time and claims that she merely “sat amongst the upper class and hid her face in the wreaths of smoke from Jean-Paul Sartre”. In immediate connection to this he turns to a listener and reminds us of his inventiveness in language: “Where do I get it all from?” – The audience cheers. Ethical preaching and aesthetical ambition go hand in hand.

Ranelid’s attempts at, especially in the Ystad performance, in different ways transgressing the opposition between art and life, between global and local etc, can be seen from a wider perspective. To think about and understand the world in terms of such binary oppositions is an inheritance from the rational philosophy of Enlightenment of the 18th century. The Age of Enlightenment sought to “demystify” the world. By referring to the laws of nature and reason one wished to explain everything that had previously been seen as mystical, magical or difficult to comprehend. This was attained by dividing existence into oppositions: heaven against earth, soul against body and, towards the end of the 1700s, also art against life (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 206).

Therefore one could perhaps claim that this ambition to transgress borders becomes a way of “re-mystifying” the world. Today we also know – not least thanks to the natural sciences – that there are powers and aspects of the world that cannot be explained rationally with the help of enlightenment-inspired reason. “Today, chaos theory, or microbiology in particular, bring home the fact that the world is ‘enchanted’ and that it forever eludes the grasp of science and technology” (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 206). The border-crossing and abolition of borders that is staged during a performance can therefore be experienced – if only temporarily – as the re-creation of the magical dimensions of existence. An audience that has left the chores of everyday life on the other side of the threshold can be receptive for such a performance, experience it as revitalising, as challenging and jolting (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 207). This was the case when Björn Ranelid and Tales stood on stage in Ystad’s renowned cinema theatre. Ethics and aesthetics are twined together. Music and song and speech are united. For a while the world seemed once more to be “enchanted” to the spectators of the performance.
Anders Ohlsson is professor of Literary studies at the Centre for Languages and Literature at Lund University. He has published a number of books, e.g. on intermediality and on the literary public sphere, most recently - along with Torbjörn Forslid - "Fenomenet Björn Ranelid" (2009). E-mail: Anders.Ohlsson@litt.lu.se.

Torbjörn Forslid is associate professor of literary studies at the School of Arts and Communication, Malmö University. He has published a number of books, for example on masculinity in Swedish literature and on the literary public sphere. His most recent book – together with Anders Ohlsson – is "The Björn Ranelid Phenomenon" (2009). E-mail: Torbjorn.Forslid@mah.se.

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Uses of the Past;
Nordic Historical Cultures in a Comparative Perspective

By Peter Aronsson

Norden Unbound

The representation of Nordic cultures has a historical reputation that stretches from an older bellicose layer to a modern welfare dimension. Images and narratives span the Vikings and the Thirty Years’ War to a Nordic welfare state characterised by a generous public sector, gender equality, strong child protection and so on – all of which are communicated within Norden and abroad. A strong and long prevalent idea of cultural similarity based on a shared Nordic culture can be argued.

Yet, history in Norden is, like elsewhere, marked by differences in class, gender and regional affluence which are negotiated by cultural representations. This is done everywhere, but at different nodes and with different means. Lieux de mémoires such as memorials, museums and rituals combine mental and material spaces with reference to a meaningful past (Nora & Kritzman 1996). Chronotopes, like the Viking Age, create a unity of values, space and time (Bachtin 1981). The stories and representations reaching hegemonic strength hence look very different in different countries. The Nordic states themselves have had relatively varied experiences of state-making and violence which, in spite of contemporary similarities in political culture, are accordingly reflected in different historical cultures. Perhaps there is less in common than the Scandinavian rhetoric suggests?

For over a decade studies of the uses of the past have been a prominent trait of cultural research when it comes to fields such as nationalism, monuments, museums, commemoration and popular culture. Quite surprisingly, reflections on public historical culture have not been de-nationalised by comparative approaches to the same extent as research on nationalism. The competence needed for analysing public historical culture is multidisciplinary and thus easily fragmented. There is therefore a pressing need for trans-national and trans-disciplinary action to connect research and knowledge.

Relevant research does exist and is brought together in anthologies, although these have rarely been utilised to answer cross-disciplinary and comparative questions. Investigations into monumental representations in historical culture, the lieu de mémoire, have been ignited by Pierre Nora and others following in the lead, but rarely have Nordic experiences been related to European cases (Nora &

Two exceptions to this rule are Holocaust studies and research on national museums (Karlsson & Zander 2003; Knell et al. 2010). These reveal a new drive for comparative reflection – something that this special thematic section seeks to reinforce with contributions (by research) on the uses of the past with instances of both intra-Nordic and international comparative potential. The invited themes were:

- images of Nordic history produced in Europe and overseas;
- institutionalised historical culture in museums negotiating politics and knowledge;
- public debates on uses of the past, construction of canons and curricula;
- the public role of the past in celebrations, jubilees and education; and
- the popular uses of the past in re-enactments, local societies and theme parks.

Hence the contributions were invited to test the long-standing tension between a shared Nordic culture against the existence of a strongly nationalised historical culture as well as challenges from a constructivist attack on both as part of a post-modern situation, relativising both or at least adding multi-cultural and post-colonial discourses.

The priority for institutionalised culture emerges because in those cases a more thorough negotiation has to precede the realisation and hence entail and reveal the social embeddedness of historical culture. The power of commercial popular cultural might be stronger but is less marked by the quality of negotiation across political, cultural and economic logics to reach for existential desires.

This thematic section will add to the conversation on the dynamics of historical cultures with its articles on Nordic experiences of uses of the past in a European and international context. It has never been exactly clear what to incorporate in the Nordic, Scandinavian or Baltic area. How are unity construed and difference dealt with to reconstruct and renegotiate national identity? This ambivalence has been productive and transported images and values across borders and spheres. Different images and definitions have been connected to various goals.

**Musealised Landscapes**

*Norden* has been portrayed in narratives, images and public representations as a region and as a concept over a period of more than 200 years. Images from outside communicate with self-produced images and so-called factual history in several interconnected cultural negotiations (Grandien 1987; Stråth & Sørensen 1997; Raudvere et al. 2001; Arvidsson et al. 2004; Stadius 2005; Sørensen & Nilsson 2005). A communal past of two belligerent conglomerate mediaeval states wrestling between a complex union and attempting hegemony through war sets the
long-term scene where ideas of the impact of the cold climate, brutal Vikings, strong women and a protestant and democratic culture set the frame. Somewhere in the 18th and 19th centuries harsh competition on the battlefield was changed for the cultural negotiation of shared brotherhood, strong enough to live through a series of secessions, creating Norway, Finland and Iceland without internal war. Yet Sweden is the only state not sharing the Second World War experience of occupation, making its nationalism the least articulated.

We may ask how images of both national and regional identity have been utilised in the periphery of rapid change from very poor to affluent conditions, during a period when the region has had to adapt to challenges in a changing world, namely by deploying culture and history to negotiate and communicate new understandings of political and cultural identity. How important has the whole idea of a Nordic community been in creating relatively egalitarian and non-aggressive neighbourhoods? Are the various elements in the historical cultures drawing on the same – or on different – directions in these respects?

International perspectives in the field are still mainly caught in the circle of nationalism and heritage understood as either unique but parallel processes in each country or as parts of a universal modernisation trajectory. Several weighty readers provide perspectives on museums, nations and nationalisms (e.g. McIntyre & Wehner 2001; Preziosi & Farago 2004; Bennett 2004; Carbonell 2004). In the Nordic context, the literature is slight but growing and, with a few exceptions, operates only within national contexts (Amundsen et al. 2003; Ingemann and Hejlskov Larsen 2005; Alzén and Aronsson 2006; Eriksen & Jón Viðar 2009; Ekström 2009; Kayser Nielsen 2010). The literature on memory and nationalism is more comprehensive (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1992; Nora & Kritzman 1996; Gellner 1999; Hroch 2000; Smith 2001). The discussion of the relationship between history proper and the public cultural heritage has been animated by both questions of vulgarisation and ownership (Lowenthal 1996; Barkan & Bush 2002; Hodgkin & Radstone 2006). Analyses of narration and performance range from narrative theory to visitor evaluation (Hooper-Greenhill 2000; Ricoeur 2004). Lately, the contributions of popular and commercial culture have been investigated (De Groot 2009).

Whilst the national dimension has quite understandably been emphasised and analysed by researchers of national history in the 19th and 20th centuries, the actual national cultural homogeneity and state control has been exaggerated and to a varying degree been more of a programme and utopia. The state control over public images, in part through the formation of cultural policies, heritage institutions and museums, is far from total: the narratives and functions must have a more negotiating character in praxis in order to be nationally integrative. Already in the early 19th century, museums worked within a complex setting of “hybrid” forms of cultural representations: the market place, wax cabinets and funfairs, industrial exhibitions, private collections, and dedicated associations for regional culture
were clearly visible. From the citizen’s perspective, as well as for museum reformers, the public landscape was fluid and hybrid – prefiguring a post-modern description. As to content, it had to negotiate difference to foster unity, where class disparity, gender inequality and foreign ambitions and claims were at play. The creation and persistence of a transnational cultural heritage provides a vital platform for integrative and sometimes expansionist endeavours to negotiate historical change: to what (changing) extent is a Nordic, European and global dimension present in historical culture?

The carriers of Norden as an idea are manifold: political rhetoric, landscape paintings, artists, authors, cultural institutions, the branding of places. To what extent are they working within the same framework or general idea of Norden, exploring different facets and reinforcing the general imaginary by adding to the concert? To what extent is Norden a “Mädchen für alles” allowing for the construction and exploitation of any message from Aryan dreams of burning violence as well as acting for world consciousness and peace negotiations? Together, they create a traditional “archive” of “frames” that can be activated as actual “wrappings” for narratives and cultural artefacts presented and communicated internally and externally.

As parts of cultural policy, museums have played an important role as officially sanctioned arenas for the establishment of national unity. Today, they are part of the re-negotiation of what it means to be a nation in a late-modern world of migration, internationalisation, and globalisation and, in Europe, a growing community: namely the EU. As vital elements of public historical culture, museums interact intensively with the creation of a political community. This is especially true of national museums that negotiate, sanction and perform visions of kinship, uniqueness, destiny and borders.

Since the late 20th century a strong discourse of post-modern developments has called for cultural policy to overcome the essentialist and naturalist national ethos of many cultural institutions. Contrary to contemporary self-understanding of a radical shift in national cultural strategies, cultural heritage and museums are still dealing with similar opportunities and dilemmas in an effort to navigate and negotiate integration within and between communities, including national entities. The differences and communities in need of being negotiated might shift slightly, but not nearly as radically as the discourse of a post-national rupture suggests.

By observing the persistence of a Nordic dimension in the construction of national ideology since the 17th century, energising this interplay is a dynamic public history which appears and reappears in various conceptions of Norden over the centuries, be it the Vikings, Goths, Norse Saga, Scandinavism or the Nordic model. This line of thought is open to alternative nationalisms and internationalisms; interplaying with power struggles between the Nordic countries and, later, as a force in the negotiation of other political communities such as NATO and the EU.
Framing Norden

The political organisation of Norden has a story that is parallel to that of the European Union. The free movement of people, capital and cultural exchange developed earlier and has survived the expansion of the EU without Norway and Iceland taking part as full members. Research collaboration has a standing organisation in place but also takes on larger ad hoc commitments. The aim of one of these, the International research programme Nordic Spaces: Formation of States, Societies and Regions, Cultural Encounters, and Idea and Identity Production in Northern Europe after 1800 is to generate new research on Northern Europe and research collaboration within the region. In that sense, it is also a child born out of the force of the Nordic imagery that is still alive, although more energy and funds are allocated to pan-European collaboration.

Several of the nine research projects have questioned the uses of the past and are contributing to this special section. National History – Nordic Culture: Negotiating Identity in the Museums is co-ordinated by the author of this introduction. Stuart Burch, Magdalena Hillström, Peter Stadius and Egle Rindzeviciute are participants in the same project.

Stuart Burch is troubled by the persistence and formlessness of claims covered by Nordic, especially as used in the art scene. Using the concept of “frames” and “metaframes”, he presents a novel way to think about the capability of a concept to survive and be implemented in a very different context, without being completely devaluated. Norden has been established as a frame that makes it possible to present a unity for very different sceneries in contemporary society.

This means that the presence of Norden is not equally persistent at all times and all contexts. Magdalena Hillström argues that Norden not only presented an extra layer of cultural meaning which was interplaying with the political nationalisms in the 19th century, but that it was in fact the primary form of identification for the innovative institution created by Scandinavian museum founders of cultural museums in Sweden and Norway. The people and culture to be represented was the Nordic people. This view became increasingly contested with the growth of nation-state nationalism and turned into museum policy by pragmatic actors who, at the turn of the century, got the upper hand with sharper controversies leading to the dissolution of the union of Sweden and Norway.

This argument can perhaps be expanded to understand the general question of a tendency to solve intra-Nordic conflicts peacefully and the early and deep cooperation that also evolved in the 19th and 20th centuries. The cultural museum not only reflected that mentality but actively constructed, materialised and proved its existence.

Peter Stadius and Carl Marklund also undertake an international comparison, this time on a core dimension of the Nordic welfare state, the rapid and high-profile introduction of modern aesthetics, functionalism, at an exhibition in Stockholm in 1930. Comparing it with the world’s fair in Chicago 1933-34, they
argue that even though this trend was international and driven by architects in Germany and France, there was indeed a thorough and deep implementation in the Nordic countries, utilising ideas of a historical tradition of pragmatism and functional solutions to real-life problems, while simultaneously arguing against the power of any heritage of bourgeoisie or nostalgic aesthetics. The format should be radically revamped while the essence of national culture was liberated in the modern welfare state. In Chicago the contemporary exhibition was more of a defence of a century of achievements, whereas the Swedish one was anticipating the century to come. While Stockholm might have hoped for political support for the vision of a single road to modernity, Chicago tried to defend the value of autonomous markets and technology-based science, that are best left alone to promote progress: “While the Swedish backers of modernism came up against the challenge of marrying nationalism with rationalism in order to make modern aesthetics palatable to a traditionalistic majority, the American proponents were more concerned with the task of combining industry with science in order to defend modern capitalism in the eyes of a more radicalized American working class.” The modernisation process is thus nationalised with these cultural representations, and made to fit dominating political directions for the future based on the version of the past they represent. Part of the progressive message was very explicit, the parallel racist discourses were more implicit, but helped normalise the activist version of the white male majority culture of both countries, marginalising both ethnic minorities and (perhaps the majority of) people.

The experience of peace for 200 years sets Sweden apart from most countries in the world, including its Nordic neighbours. The country does, however, share the consequences of the end of the Cold War. In *Swedish Military Bases of the Cold War: The Making of a New Cultural Heritage*, Per Strömberg maps dimensions and forces in the process of changing the valorisation of military secrets to assets in the experience economy. They show striking similarities with the parallel process of the creation of industrial heritage (being historically important but ugly, huge structures that are difficult to preserve) but are marked by their strict state provenience. A mixture of scientific arguments of representation, nostalgic desire of former employees and local entrepreneurs are more decisive than formal decisions of heritage authorities on whether or not and how the road to heritage is to be pursued.

**Nordic Culture Unbound**

Where does Norden stop? The term is preferred here because it unambiguously comprises Iceland, Denmark (with Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Norway, Sweden and Finland (with Åland). Scandinavia is sometimes used to mean the same territories in English but can also designate the geographical Scandinavian Peninsula (Sweden and Norway) with Denmark. Historically as well as in con-
temporary politics the delimitation has opened up again. Are not the Baltic countries also part of Nordic history and culture? What about Russia? Northern Germany? The diasporas in Northern America and elsewhere?

Egle Rindzeviciute treats the representation of history in national Lithuanian museums to analyse how trans-national concepts are utilised. Creating a Lithuania nationhood itself has been dependent on tuning down or forgetting the role of German and Jewish communities. The Baltics have had a stronger appeal with ideas of heathen culture and amber as 20th century constructs. Scandinavia has transformed from a source of destruction and oppression during Soviet rule to a source of possible affinity. In Soviet and post-Soviet Lithuanian museums the North played an increasingly important role in the discursive and material articulations of the regional situation of Lithuanian national identity. Baltic and Northern dimensions seemed to get closer to each other at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty first centuries. The idea of Baltic Vikings is one of the most telling inventions. The options are manifold and so are the challenges.

Yet when the Baltic countries have Knocked on the door to the more formal institutions of Norden during the last decade, they have not been welcomed. Such requests have upset the balance among the old countries: with Estonia being regarded as more of a regional question of interest mainly to Finland; the multitude of religions as problematic, the provocation of Russia as a possible cost etc.

Images of Norden are used to a significant extent to communicate outside the Scandinavian area, to contrast and identify communities. In Nordic Spaces in the North and North America: Heritage Preservation in Real and Imagined Nordic Places ethnologists, folklorists and theatre scholars collaborate to bring forward the dynamics of Nordic identities in the North American diaspora as an act of reconnecting the distance created by migration. In this volume, Lizette Gradén, who leads the project mentioned above, analyses the roles gifts can play in creating and recreating connectivity between the old world and the new. By describing the transfers and transformation of a transatlantic gift in both institutional and individual life, she sheds light on how people perform their identity as hybrid Nordic-American, Värmland-Minnesota, when national relationships might be more strained. The “heritage gift”, where the prime object is a bridal crown, acts both as part of a museum collection and as a central object in performances of actual and symbolic marriage. These performances not only negotiate territorial belonging, but also the past and present to secure a vision of futures, male and female imaginaries, in reviving the relationship established by a collective act of giving and receiving a gift.

In the Nordic Spaces project Arctic Norden: Science, Diplomacy and the Formation of a Post-War European North, Anders Houltz is examining the role of musealised memory in promoting different national ideals of what it is to be a “polar nation”. In “Captives of Narrative, Scandinavian museum exhibits and polar ambitions” the interaction between national master-narratives and the public
performance of heroes like Fridtjof Nansen and S.A. Andrée locks the musealisation process into very different trajectories. The Fram museum of Oslo is an icon in a cluster of heroic, national and male maritime museums, while the legacy of Andrée as a scientific endeavour has had trouble finding its symbolic place both because of its tragic ending and tug-of-war between several museums in the capital and the museum of his birthplace in Gränna, Sweden. They do produce narratives of the polar dimension in the Nordic countries, but are likewise formed by the national narratives that frame the institutionalisation of memory.

The Nordic framing is extended and challenged in two contributions from outside the Nordic Spaces programme. One compares the hegemonic national narrative in Norway with China and the other the universalised and yet localised hero of Raoul Wallenberg in an international historical culture. What is the legitimate role of historians, politics and popular culture in the creation of heroic icons of the past?

All nations tend to emphasise the unique qualities of their own historical trajectory. This also goes for regional ideas of identity such as the Nordic one. At a narrative level of the plot, this is of course true as much as any two individuals do not share the same life story. Yet changing the perspective to the more grammatical level of narration changes this. Marzia Varutti makes a breath-taking comparison in *Using different pasts in a similar way: Museum representations of national history in Norway and China*, suggesting for Norway that in its core plot “Museum displays of national pasts in Norway develop around a set of themes including myths of ancestry and descent; epics of resistance leading the embryonic nation through a dark era and towards a ‘Golden Age’; a core of moral and aesthetic values; notions of national modernity; and selective amnesia”. China is not all that different in spite of the comparative strategy coming close to one of selecting the “most-different” case in order to explore deep structural commonalities. A genre of national and museum narratives seems to set the story in a similar manner in very different settings: a truly global “coagulation” of museum representation is suggested by Varutti. However, the two countries are dissimilar in size and geographies not so estranged when it comes to state-making. An early autonomous culture becomes ruled from abroad and only in the 20th century set within its own political sovereignty. Within the grammar of national narrative and representation in national museums this produces a similar stress on glorious pasts, struggle and successful modernisation as parts of a coherent and comprehensive whole. This pattern might produce another national representation than a long history of being an empire or a small independent state (Aronsson 2010). Further, the comparison goes beyond the observation of Nordic similarities and distinctions and produces a perhaps provocatively more universal pattern for understanding the creation of national narratives.

A significant frame for European and Western historical culture during the last decade has been the remembrance of the Holocaust. It connects the West by way
of a mutually shared trauma, also producing a setting for distinct national variations (Young 2000; Carrier 2004; Karlsson & Zander 2006).

Tanja Schult presents an analysis of how one man has been contextualised and nationalised differently with a rising status as a hero, in *Whose Raoul Wallenberg is it? The Man and the Myth: Between Memory, History and Popularity*. The circulation of images of the Swedish hero has been intensive and it is not possible to exclude the mythical dimension in any of them. The need for a hero is too strong to be disregarded in analysing the role of a historic person. It thus becomes an example of the intrinsic relationship between myth and history, politics and knowledge – when the past does matter in contemporary society. The usual confrontation between myth and history does not hold. The two are mutually dependent and claiming science to launch one version might in fact be an abuse of the power of legitimacy.

**Norden – The History of a Productive Myth**

The mythical North lends itself to both degrading and saluting varieties. Evolutionary narratives blend with universalist ethics, whether the North harbours the absolute evil or a Golden Age of natural order. Tacitus already contrasted civilisation with the barbaric North in an ambiguous mode: it was both inferior in civilisation but more robust in its constitution and values. Civilisation, or at least the version of a just Welfare State, is today claimed to be defined by the North while the Orient or the South is still used as mirrors.

Distinctions are one of the main tools of cultural researchers. Yet this productive perspective might overemphasise difference and change. It is possible to compare narratives in museums in Norway and China and find strong similarities. Every distinction creates new exclusions. Where in the Baltics does the North end? Which elements are to be counted as characteristics? The very idea of Norden has a strong prevalence and useful to make a defence against the unwanted, be it contemporary neighbours in the USA or Catholics in 17th century Germany. It does create a frame for collaboration and sometimes mobilisation across borders within an expanding Norden. One price to pay is the contrast with the Others outside and the other is flexibility in content. Corollaries are that the more inclusive a narrative is, the more of a metaframe, and the less mobilising it becomes. Further, the more definite, less inclusive the more directly political conclusions follows out of the narrative.

This is the same game played within more successful nationalisms, but also and more surprisingly in the construction of strong field of gender studies from the 1970s, understood as boosted by a specific Nordic culture and network, later questioned for its implicit assumptions of a we excluding other subject positions (Manns 2009). The dynamic is contradictory, but not futile. By having this level of cultural representation in the arsenal, ethnic nationalism and cultural under-
standing of community becomes somewhat more open-ended, but always creating new boundaries. The success of the concept of Norden in cultural practice and politics might be measured with the lack of military conflict where that might have been the case. Sweden did not reclaim Finland. War did not break out in 1905. The conflicts around Åland were dealt with through international reconciliation. Nordic citizens in diaspora have integrated fairly well, collaborative welfare states have evolved in the Nordic Space. I argue this is partly due to the plastic prevalence of a frame represented as Nordic Culture. However, this act has had a price. The idea of a Nordic race can be perverted into racism or a mere reluctance to allow new members into the family, which has been the case with the Baltic neighbours.

Peter Aronsson (1959) is Professor in Cultural Heritage and the Uses of at a multi-disciplinary Culture Studies department, Linköping University. His dissertation dealt with the historic conditions for creating a durable democratic culture. The role of historical narrative and consciousness to direct action has been focused in recent research both as regards historiography proper and the uses of the past in the historical culture at large. Currently he is co-ordinating several international projects exploring the uses of the past in National Museums and participating in a large project on historical consciousness, exploring the general concept of history. See, www.nordicspaces.eu, www.eunamu.eu, www.histcon.se. E-Mail: peter.aronsson@liu.se

References


Norden, Reframed

By Stuart Burch

Abstract
This paper calls for Norden to be understood as a *metaframe*. Related formulations like “Nordic art” or “Nordic welfare” function as *mesoframes*. These trigger multiple *framing devices*. A cache of related framing devices constitutes a *framing archive*. Framing devices work best when operating unobtrusively such that inclusions, exclusions and inconsistencies are condoned or naturalised. Their artifice, however, becomes apparent whenever a frame is questioned. Questioning or criticising a frame gives rise to a *framing dispute*.

The theoretical justification for these typologies is provided at the outset. This schema is then applied to a select range of empirical examples drawn largely from the *disciplinary frames* (Ernst 1996) of art history and museum studies. Despite this specificity it is envisaged that the general principles set out below can and will be used to address a variety of devices, disputes and archives in Norden and beyond.

**Keywords:** Art, Baltic, frame, framing, museum, Norden, Nordic, Scandinavia.
Setting the Frames

The literature on framing is as vast as it is amorphous (Entman et al. 2008: 175). This is ironic given that the very purpose of a frame is to bring order and focus. A frame is a filter, seeking to include only that which is deemed to be relevant whilst excluding or marginalising all else (Bateson 1954: 187; Schön & Rein 1994: 26; Snow 2004: 384). Some of the ways in which this operates in practice are explored by Erving Goffman in his seminal book *Frame Analysis* first published in 1974. It demonstrates how frames enable individuals and groups “to locate, perceive, identify and label” aspects of the real world (Goffman 1974: 21).

Deborah Tannen’s edited volume *Framing in Discourse* (1993) charts how Goffman’s sociological study had informed two decades of research into an array of subject areas ranging from linguistics to anthropology, artificial intelligence to cognitive and social psychology, and indeed any field that seeks “to investigate the socially constructed nature of reality” (Tannen 1993: 5–6; Tannen & Wallat 1993: 60).

This is elucidated further by the associated discipline of critical discourse analysis. Here a frame is understood as “a cognitive model” (Bloor & Bloor 2007: 11). Made up of “broad, culturally shared systems of belief” such a paradigm establishes the mental connections that are needed to make sense of the world around us (Schön & Rein 1994: 32; Lakoff 2004: xv). Bateson (1954), Tannen (1993) and Schön & Rein (1994) have differing idioms for this overarching frame or “message”, but all share the prefix “meta–”. This, plus the existence of a cognate term such as “metaculture” (OED 2010), has prompted me to adopt the concept of a *metaframe*. There are precedents for this, as when Gold (1993: 123) uses it in relation to the “expository model” of the museum. Norden’s status as a metaframe will be addressed in detail shortly. As understood here a metaframe provides the essential context to all forms of communication and meaning-making (Snow 2004: 384). Bloor and Bloor (2007: 11) note that such a frame “operate[s] automatically” and is habitually “accepted as everyday common sense”. Its tacit acknowledgment means that this primary frame of reference is normally overlooked and rarely questioned (Schön & Rein 1994: 23).

Under the mantle of this metaframe are a series of middle or intermediate *mesoframes*. These are fundamentally discursive entities: defined concepts that carry meaning within specific disciplines. A mesoframe seeks to delineate a distinctive subset of a given specialism. A clear demonstration of this is the “Nordic” tag applied to architecture (Lund 2008), music (Yoell 1974), literature (Grønn 2005), landscape (Jones & Olwig 2008) and so forth. Functioning as both bracket and modifier these mesoframes seek to verify the claim that the associated metaframe – Norden – has a distinctive and special contribution to make.

These discursive forays are invariably accompanied by more tangible corollaries. In the case of visual art such devices commence with borders around
paintings and go on to encompass museums and organisations; exhibitions and catalogues; awards and grants etcetera (Oberhardt 2001; Carter & Geczy 2006: 164ff). Each device is delineated in some way and underpinned by the accepted truths or generally held assumptions that make up a particular metaframe. Every time a recurring device is reintroduced or a fresh one implemented, another layer is added to the framing archive. The mediation and consumption of this store of devices occurs at the discursive level of the mesoframe, which in turn both sustains and replenishes the overarching metaframe.

Explicit and indirect connections are fostered across this compendium of frames. This occurs through a complex chain of “generative metaphors” (Schön & Rein 1994: 26–27). New framings will draw on the meta- and mesoframes and their associated archive. Novel insights are engendered through such strategies as innovative inclusions or unconventional omissions. The resulting devices lead to inventive interpretations that their instigators hope will be praised for casting “new light” on a familiar subject – as we shall see in the case of the mesoframe that is “Nordic art”.

This, however, leads to an innate tension between continuity and change. It is when the latter takes precedence that a framing dispute is likely to occur. As a result the frame itself shifts into focus (Tannen 1993: 4). Such disagreements are most evident within the frame of party politics and policy controversies (Schön & Rein 1994; Klandermans 2004: 368; Snow 2004: 384–5). It is for this reason that frames play such an important role in protest movements. Campaigning groups thus do what policy makers do: frame reality to match their beliefs (Snow 2004: 384). Hence Lakoff’s (2004: xv) pithy observation: “Reraming is social change”.

So, despite a metaframe’s regulatory function, the meaning of objects and ideas couched within is neither inherent nor fixed. Significance is instead determined by the mode of framing. With each reframing different aspects come to the fore, altering the relationship between actors and objects (cf. Snow 2004: 384). Framing devices are thus cognitive strategies. They compete symbolically for legitimacy in relation to the archive of other framing devices – both of the past and of the present. Each new device seeks to influence the future trajectory of that archive, its mesoframe and, ultimately, its metaframe (cf. Bourdieu 1985: 728).

This intentionally concise and consciously partial overview of a select range of texts dealing with frames and framing has enabled me to construct a typology of devices, archives and disputes encapsulated by an overarching metaframe and at least one intermediate mesoframe. In the next section I will begin to apply these to my empirical material. Prior to doing so, however, it is perhaps instructive to foreground the main tenets of my argument. It centres on the word Norden, the literal meaning of which is “the North”. Norden will be treated as a metaframe: an endemic condition that serves as a point of reference and recognition for multiple mesoframes and an extremely diverse archive of framing devices. These devices
are “articulation” or “focussing” mechanisms (Douglas 1984: 64; Snow 2004: 384). They operate like a frame around a painting, valorising what is enclosed within its borders and channelling a viewer’s perception accordingly. Such frames are meant to be subordinate but they play much more than simply a marginal role (cf. Penny 2005: 6). This becomes evident whenever a frame is disputed. It is then that the frame comes into its own, emerging like an exoskeleton to be defended or undermined.

Framing is, in short, essential to meaning-making. There is of course a neat irony that this assertion should appear in a journal entitled *Culture Unbound*. Culture is always bound. For, as John Cage (1939/1973: 113; Springfeldt 1982: 115) put it:

| Structure without life is dead. | But Life without structure is un–seen |

It follows therefore that Norden and the suite of devices of which it is composed is an impossibility without being placed within some sort of bounds, structure or – as it is named here – frame. Yes, Norden can, and frequently is, reframed. But it is *never* unbound.

### Applying the Frames

If one accepts the premise – Norden is a metaframe – what “broad, culturally shared systems of belief” does it connote? Well, when it comes to “northern Europe, stereotypes of untouched nature, clear light, cool oceans, melancholy and mythical figures often dominate the picture” (NIFCA 2000; cf. Palmqvist 1988: 9). For additional “mental connections” we need look no further than this special issue of *Culture Unbound*. Under the title “Uses of the Past – Nordic historical cultures in comparative perspective”, the guest editor, Peter Aronsson, chose to begin his call for papers as follows:

> Nordic cultural representations have a historical reputation that stretches from an older bellicose layer to a modern welfare dimension. Images and narratives span the Vikings and the Thirty Years’ War to a Nordic welfare state characterized by a generous public sector, gender equality, strong child protection and so on – all of which are communicated within Norden and abroad.

Present-day notions of “the North” are thus built on conceptions and associations that are as longstanding as they are divergent. In a certain context and at a particular historical moment Norden connotes conflict (“an older bellicose layer”), whilst in another it equates to childcare (“a modern welfare dimension”). Paradoxically enough, these and other inconsistencies confirm rather than counter Norden’s status as a metaframe. It is so entrenched that incongruities and contradictions can be enlisted in its defence. Each and every intimation or refutation of Norden – including the very article you are reading – makes it “real”.

This Nordic-themed special issue of *Culture Unbound*, like all such framing
devices, builds on and augments the metaframe that is Norden. New formulations overlay those that have gone before in the framing archive. This explains why Stephan Tschudi-Madsen (1997: 8) chose to begin his introduction to the UNESCO book Our Nordic Heritage with reference to Pytheas, Pliny the Elder and Procopius and their ancient notions of “Thule”. This Greek and Latin name for what Pytheas took to be the northernmost region in the world was revived in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Nilsson (n.d.) charts this through the writings of Goethe and the landscape paintings of Caspar David Friedrich to its “ultimate perversion during the Nazi regime” and then, in the post-war period, an internal strengthening of a shared Nordic sensibility “with new financial, political and cultural networks.”

A pivotal player in such networks is the Nordic Council and its related institutions (Jones & Hansen 2008: 566). Formed in 1952, this body, through the auspices of the Nordic Council of Ministers, is responsible for co-operation between the five states and three semi-autonomous areas that make up Norden as it is most commonly understood. These are respectively Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden plus Åland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands. Scandinavia, meanwhile, is a more geographically circumscribed frame, referring as it does to Denmark, Norway and Sweden or, less frequently, the peninsula made up of Norway, Sweden and the north-western part of Finland (Grønn 2005: 4).

The Nordic Council facilitates the furtherance of Norden “from above” by fostering activities and sentiments that sustain it “from below”. With reference to the latter, Henrik Stenius (2003: 21) has opined that “Nordic citizens feel that they are members of an (invented) Nordic family”. Jonas Thente (2010) has recently speculated that, whilst this familial sentiment is arguably evident among older residents of the Nordic region, the same cannot be said for younger citizens of an increasingly mobile, interconnected world. It is notable, however, that Thente’s cautionary remark came as he reported on that year’s Nordic Council Literature Prize. Thente allayed his concerns about the diminution of Nordicity by looking upon this prize as a token of togetherness: Nordic affinities might well be being eroded, fretted Thente, “but at least we have the Nordic Council Literature Prize in common” (Thente 2010).

Intended to “increase interest in the literature and language of the neighbouring countries”, the Nordic Council Literature Prize dates back to 1962 when it was first presented to the Swedish author, Eyvind Johnson (1900–76). Three years later his compatriot, the composer and conductor Karl-Birger Blomdahl (1916–68) became the inaugural winner of the Nordic Council Music Prize. In 1995 these awards were complemented by the Nordic Council Nature and Environment Prize and, a decade on, the Film Prize. The Nordic Council is not the only organisation to oversee such competitions. A case in point is the Carnegie Art Award established in 1998 “to promote Nordic contemporary painting”.
Jonas Thente is surely correct to look upon these devices and their associated mesoframes – Nordic art, Nordic literature, Nordic music – as strategies for sustaining a northern kinship. The debates triggered by the conferral of each and every “Nordic” award guarantees the prolongation of Norden. Thanks to them its future is assured, even if the art, literature or music being discussed are devoid of any purported “Nordic” traits that might be associated with that metaframe.

This becomes a bone of contention, however, whenever attention shifts from the Nordic parameters of a given prize to the Nordic credentials of its contenders: an action that often leads to much soul-searching about the particular Nordic qualities of whatever cultural manifestation is being scrutinised. Thus the Carnegie Art Award of 2008 sparked off the oft-asked question: “Do we have contemporary Nordic art?” (Kristensen 2007). Ten artists featured in that year’s competition were quizzed about this. Two were categorically of the opinion that it did not exist. Three more were uncertain. Another felt that contemporary Nordic art probably did exist, but that it was of no interest. Three answered in the affirmative, although they each found it “difficult to say what it is”. The Norwegian, Tor-Magnus Lundeby, for example, was unable to decide if Norden’s aesthetic imprint stemmed from site-specificity or some sort of ill-defined Nordic temperament.

Of the ten shortlisted artists probed about their views on Nordic art, it was the Finnish painter Silja Rantanen who provided the most emphatic response: “Contemporary Nordic art is art made by Nordic artists” (cited in Kristensen 2007: 10). She went on to add that what bound these artists together was the shared experience of living in countries that are inhabited sparsely by wealthy, educated people. Yet even she discerned aspects of these “caring” societies that, in her opinion, fail to manifest themselves in the art produced there. Rantanen was also uneasy about making generalisations, cautioning that they tend to lead people to resort to “ready-made interpretative models” (i.e. frames) rather than “looking at individual works”. This can be construed as meaning that critics and other commentators have a tendency to seek out a priori qualities framed as “Nordic”. The resulting findings are then used as evidence to support the framing thesis: “Yes, we do have Nordic art”.

The final word on the existence or otherwise of contemporary Nordic art goes to Fie Norsker from Denmark. If forced to select just a single “common element”, Norsker mused, “it would probably be [an] interest in art outside the Nordic countries” (cited in Kristensen 2007: 10). This amounts to a negative affirmation of the Nordic frame.

Norsker is far from alone in being coy when it comes to (not) defining contemporary Nordic art. Nordic-themed exhibitions and their accompanying texts distinguish themselves by their equivocation on this very matter. More often than not they end up reaching conclusions that “point in several different directions” (Gether & Helveg 2008: 16). Other devices take this a stage further by
sustaining the Nordic metaframe through overtly questioning, fragmenting and undermining the very homogeneity that one might think was essential for it to retain any semblance of unity based on thematic or stylistic equivalence (see e.g. Gronn 2005). As intimated above, however, equivocations and flat denials, paradoxically enough, play a crucial role in populating the mesoframe of “Nordic art”, enhancing its archive of framing devices and reinforcing the commonsense notion that Norden is something palpable, if not exactly definable.

This is not to say that all attempts at definition are lacking. Take, for instance, the catalogue to the 8th International Watercolour Festival of 2007. In it, Piet van Leuven, the coordinator of the European Confederation of Watercolour Societies, set himself the task of characterising “Nordic watercolour”. His “personal opinion” was that paintings that fell into this category were marked by informality, experiment and unorthodoxy. Van Leuven (2007: 6), seemingly without a trace of irony, professed his uncertainty as to whether the latter stemmed from the fact that a formal society for Nordic watercolour had only been in existence since 1989 or if unorthodoxy was “an atavism engendered by fierce, world-exploring Scandinavian ancestors”.

Another thing that struck van Leuven (2007: 6) was the Nordic watercolourist’s predilection for the extreme use of light and dark. Was this, he speculated, a result of “climatic conditions”? Whilst this question went typically unanswered, one thing is certain: light serves as an essential point of reference for all so-called “Nordic art”, whether painted in watercolour or oil. For many art critics and art historians, light is Nordic art’s leitmotif. A point of origin for this was the 1982 Brooklyn Museum exhibition “Northern Light: Realism and Symbolism in Scandinavian Painting, 1880–1910”. In the wake of this show the Swedish art critic and curator, Sune Nordgren (1983: 43) credited its American initiator, Kirk Varnedoe, with “cast[ing] a new light over all our national painters.”

Over a quarter of a century later, light continues to shine as a trademark for the art of “the North”. Two recent examples, both from Great Britain, illustrate this and show how light is used as a metonymy for Nordic art on a variety of scales. First, “Northern Lights: Swedish Landscapes from the Nationalmuseum, Stockholm” mounted by Birmingham University’s Barber Institute in 2009. Here a single Nordic nation – Sweden – came under the spotlight (Burch 2009: 334–335). A year later the national galleries of London and Edinburgh collaborated to bring “Christen Kobke: Danish Master of Light” to a British audience. In this particular instance the gilt-framed canvases of a solitary Nordic artist exuded and radiated the “clear light” of Norden. And, as was noted at the start of this section, “clear light” is seen as a hallmark of this metaframe.

“Northern Light” – this time in the singular – has also been used to market Swedish art for an Australian audience (Cross 1997). This, plus the two examples mentioned above, pay testimony to the enduring legacy of Kirk Varnedoe’s “Northern Light” exhibition of the early 1980s. This was reinforced by his
subsequent book, *Northern Light: Nordic Art at the Turn of the Century*, published in 1988. The shift from “Scandinavian” to “Nordic” in the subtitles of the exhibition and book reveals the flexibility of the terminology at play when it comes to the art of “the North”. The constituent parts are equally fluid, as is apparent from the trend for travelling, temporary displays of fine art from the Nordic region that came in the wake of the Brooklyn Museum show. Subsequent manifestations, such as the London Hayward Gallery’s “Dreams of Summer Night” (1986) and, more recently, “A Mirror of Nature: Nordic Landscape Painting, 1840–1910” (2007) can and should be seen as subtly different manifestations of the archive of framing devices that articulates and animates the mesoframe that is Nordic art.

These and other shows tour Norden’s museums and, very often, incorporate a more far-flung destination in their itinerary. Thus, during the period spanning the Spring of 2006 and January 2008, “A Mirror of Nature” moved around the national museums of fine art in Finland, Sweden and Norway. It then relocated to Minnesota in the American Midwest before coming to a close at Statens Museum for Kunst in Copenhagen. This diversion over the North Atlantic marked an anniversary: for the same destination – the Minneapolis Institute of Art – was one of the venues for the “Northern Light” exhibition of 1982–83.

This confirms Peter Aronsson’s point about Nordic cultural representations being “communicated within Norden and abroad”. An exhibition such as “Northern Light” provides a means of marketing Norden to the world. The true promotional potential of this was realised in the “Scandinavia Show”, a two day showcase of “Scandinavian design, travel, lifestyle, fashion and food” held in central London in October 2010 (Scandinavia Show 2010). This event demonstrated how the Nordic fellowship accords the sparsely populated nations of northern Europe a platform on the global stage. Recalling Erving Goffman it is possible to consider Nordic-branded culture as a frame for locating, distinguishing, identifying and labelling Norden in the international marketplace. And – to echo John Cage – Norden’s Nordic art provides a convenient structure to make it “seen”.

Brooklyn Museum’s “Northern Light” exhibition is a particular effective illustration of this because its display of nineteenth and early twentieth century painting was part of a wider initiative entitled “Northern Visions”. This featured solo exhibitions of contemporary art by Asger Jorn and Öyvind Fahlström as well as *Sleeping Beauty – Art Now: Scandinavia Today*, a group show first presented at the Guggenheim in New York before travelling to Philadelphia and Los Angeles. The fact that these coincided with Brooklyn Museum’s “Northern Light” cultivated a link between the art of the past and the art of the present. They were thus vehicles for the continuance of a tradition and strategies for consolidating its archival inheritance.
A central component of that archive is a careful selection of artworks painted around the turn of the twentieth century, a period when the art of “the North” was first codified (Burch 2009: 336). The supreme example of this is Richard Bergh’s painting _Nordic Summer Evening_ (1899–1900, oil on canvas, 170 x 223.5, Göteborgs Konstmuseum). This rendering of “light and landscape… [and] psychological tension” (Varnedoe 1982: 83) is iconic precisely because it distils the Nordic metaframe. And it continues to act a catalyst for Nordicity. One of its many reframings includes being reproduced in the catalogue to the 2006 exhibition “Bent: Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Scandinavian Art” where it appears alongside Annica Karlsson Rixon’s photographic series _Nordic Light_ (1997–98) (Chadwick 2006: 12). This juxtaposition visualises the metaframe of Norden and the mesoframe of Nordic art: frames that habitually evoke expansive landscapes, light summers and dark winters, nature – and introspection. In _Bent_, the latter quality is highlighted and used to connect with Eija-Liisa Ahtila, a contemporary Finnish video artist whose work apparently “shares an introspective tradition among earlier Nordic artists from Edvard Munch and August Strindberg to Ingmar Bergman” (Chadwick 2006: 13). These supposedly inherited qualities can and should be seen as the sorts of “generative metaphors” that are instrumental to the articulation of Norden’s archive of framing devices.

The curator of “Bent” was Whitney Chadwick: a sort of Kirk Varnedoe for a new generation of consumers of Norden. However, unlike her predecessor, Chadwick was eager to point out that, in choosing her artists, she was not aiming to seek out “a shared or ‘authentic’ Nordic or Scandinavian sensibility in their work” (Chadwick 2006: 9). But this did not stop her alluding to familiar tropes voiced years earlier in Varnedoe’s “Northern Light”.

It is not unusual to come across instances where Norden is invoked – and then almost immediately disavowed. A further example is _Like Virginity, Once Lost: Five Views on Nordic Art Now_ (1999). Its authors, lest we be misled by the book’s title, stress that their initiative did not seek “to define a geographical region” or even “contemporary ‘Nordic art’” (Birnbaum & Nilsson 1999: cover & 9). A similar incongruity occurred nearly two decades earlier in the form of the previously mentioned “Northern Visions” project – an archival antecedent that is actually cited at the start of _Like Virginity, Once Lost_. Its co-commissioner, the Swedish curator and museum director, Pontus Hultén was almost apologetic about the regional grouping he had helped facilitate. He urged that any Nordic similarities that might be sensed were illusionary and merely the result of looking at the countries of northern Europe from the distant vantage point of North America (Hultén 1982: 11).

Hultén’s compatriot, Sune Nordgren would make a similar remark some years later when he dismissed the so-called “Nordic fellowship” as a “fabrication” only given credence by “New World” curators such as Kirk Varnedoe. Nordgren,
writing in 1990, considered the construction “Nordic art” to be “no longer something worth pursuing”. It was, and always has been, “a case of romantic self-deception... that has never functioned... [and that] is kept alive today by means of artificial respiration” (Nordgren 1990: 7).

Sune Nordgren, it must be stressed, was the exact same person who had praised Varnedoe for reframing Nordic art back in the early 1980s. Even after voicing his trenchant criticisms, Nordgren seemed happy to continue his involvement with Nordic-themed exhibitions, penning articles perpetuating Norden’s reputation for “barbarians and vandals” (Nordgren 1993).

This schizophrenic attitude towards the “fiction” that is Norden is par for the course (Per Unckel cited in Halén & Wickman 2006: 5). No wonder then that even a journal devoted to all things Nordic is able to conclude that Norden exists whilst not existing (Frenander 2009: 4). Such bewilderment is a confusion brought about by staring fixedly at the picture whilst overlooking the frame. This is because the images on show are contingent, capricious and cloaked in obfuscatory “explanations”. Sune Nordgren was right to talk of “artificial respiration”. But he failed to grasp that these respirators are frames: the very lungs that breathe life into Norden. Without them Norden would expire. That’s why Norden appears to fight for breath every time a framing dispute threatens to constrict its airways – as we shall see in the next section.

Disputing the Frames

During the period 2007–2009 the Nordic Council sought to use its “Art and Culture Programme” to “renew and revitalise the Nordic art and culture co-operation in the Nordic region” (Nordic Culture Point 2007). Knowing as we do that “reframing is social change” (to recall Lakoff 2004: xv), this seemingly unremarkable assertion of rejuvenation is indicative of more than a mere administrative or discursive shift.

The reframing led to the termination of NIFCA, the Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art. This was the Nordic Council of Ministers’ “expert organ for visual culture” from 1997 until 2006 (Gelin 2006: 6). An indicative example of the sorts of activities supported by this organisation was Kunsthalle Wien’s Norden: Zeitgenössische Kunst aus Nordeuropa (Folie & Kölle 2000). NIFCA’s leadership used this ambitious survey of contemporary practice as evidence that Nordic art had “moved into focus more than ever” (NIFCA 2000). Those in power at the Nordic Council clearly had other ideas, however, when they chose to disband what had hitherto been one of its principal policy or “action” frames (cf. Schön & Rein 1994: 32).

A flavour of this framing dispute is evident from Cecilia Gelin’s (2006: 6–7) foreword to the book Art and Its Institutions: Current Conflicts, Critique and Collaborations. In it Gelin announced the imminent demise of the organisation
she had led in its final years. NIFCA’s cessation was part of the above-mentioned “renewal” process that would, according to Gelin, see the closure of nine of the twenty-one Nordic Council organisations and committees concerned with cultural collaboration. Gelin was at the time unaware of what was going to replace them. She was, however, certain that the “programming” of the new structure was going to be “decided by politicians”. Gelin’s framing of the situation led her to interpret this as further confirmation that “institutions and spaces for thinking processes and critical discourse are gradually [being] squeezed out of societies in the Nordic countries” (Gelin 2006: 6).

Whilst Gelin might have opposed the decision to end NIFCA, she did concede that cultural collaboration in Norden was in need of overhaul (Gelin 2006: 6). NIFCA’s successor as the “counterpoint” for such co-operation was Kulturkontakt Nord. The evidently acrimonious realignment that led to this change confirms Schöan and Rein’s (1994: 29) point that “[f]rames are not free-floating but are grounded in the institutions that sponsor them, and policy controversies are disputes among institutional actors who sponsor conflicting frames.” With this in mind it is pertinent to examine how Kulturkontakt Nord characterises Norden. It is notable, for instance, that an expanded concept of Norden is promoted from the very moment that one accesses its website (Kulturkontakt Nord n.d.). Its homepage features a map plotting the various “Nordic Houses” and “Nordic Institutes” in Iceland, Greenland, the Faroe Islands, Finland and Åland as well as Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. This can be interpreted as an attempt to realise some of Cecilia Gelin’s aspirations voiced as the curtain fell on NIFCA. She had urged for a transnational approach, shifting the focus to “the so-called peripheries” in an effort to scrutinise “the history of colonialism in the Nordic countries” (Gelin 2006: 7).

Kulturkontakt Nord’s elevation of the Baltic States and the semi-autonomous components of the Nordic region is not the only instance of an expanded, “post-colonial” treatment of Norden. In the process of researching this paper another Nordic-themed house – Voksenåsen in Oslo – hosted an exhibition featuring “ten artists with an immigrant background from Norway, Sweden and Denmark” (Leadership Foundation 2010). Its title – “New Nordic Art” – is indicative of an incipient process of reframing. The same phrase features in the promotional material of Muuto, a business that likes to promote itself as a unique proponent of “new Nordic design” (Danish Edge 2008). The company states that its designers “are striving to expand the Scandinavian design tradition with new and original perspectives.” This is confirmation that naming and framing are complementary processes (Schön & Rein 1994: 26) given that Muuto is derived from muutos, a Finnish word meaning “new perspective” (Muuto n.d.).

Muuto represents a practical example of a “generative metaphor” whereby “a familiar constellation of ideas is carried over... to a new situation” (to recall Schön & Rein 1994: 26–27). The term “Scandinavian design” was first coined in 1951
and is by now a well enough established mesoframe to tolerate novel adaptations. Its frames are tested to the limit by the emergence of the design store *Nu Nordik* in the Estonian capital, Tallinn. The firm’s founder, Anu Samarüütel, chose this name based on her belief that “Estonian culture and attitude is closer to that of the Scandinavian countries than to Eastern Europe” (cited in Charles & Marie 2008). This contentious claim is part and parcel of the reorientation of the so-called Baltic States in the final years of the twentieth century. Their shift from the Soviet Union to the European Union and the impact of geopolitics on the makeup and role of “northern Europe” marks a process of reframing on a continental scale.

Belonging to a region – or being so framed – can be a positive or negative thing. Indeed, framing forms a distinct strand in international relations literature (see e.g. Mintz & Redd 2003). A good example of this is the mesoframe “Eastern Europe”. Webb (2008: xi) explains that this term was used between 1945 and 1990 to describe the then Soviet bloc countries, but that it did not include the Soviet Union itself. Czepczyński (2008: 3) in his book, *Cultural Landscapes of Post-Socialist Cities* notes that, since the fall of the Berlin Wall, many commentators from the newly independent states of Europe have expressed their dislike for the label “Eastern Europe” given its connotations with “the Soviet empire and Russia”. By this logic, “Eastern Europe” means “post-Communist” – an equally contested term. Czepczyński (2008: 149) favours “Central Europe” or the “re-branding of the region” as “New Europe”. But in doing so he almost entirely occludes the three Baltic States from his study. They clearly fall outside his framing of “Central Europe”. But if this is so, and if Webb is correct to say that “Eastern Europe” described the Soviet bloc but “normally excluded the Soviet Union itself”, where does this leave the former Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic?

Such uncertainty and the negative connotations of being categorized as “Eastern European” or “post-socialist” helps explain why Estonia’s current president, Toomas Hendrik Ilves has sought to frame his re-independent nation as a *Nordic* rather than a *Baltic* country. For Ilves (1999), the Baltic States were united only in misery: if the Baltic metaframe is evocative of anything, he argues, then it is the shared memory of military occupation by hostile powers.

However, it seems that “occupation” is not always something to be lamented. In stark contrast to attitudes concerning the belligerence of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, present-day Latvia and Estonia look back on the seventeenth century as the “happy Swedish time” (Burch & Smith 2007: 920; Burch & Zander 2008). Such munificence towards Sweden’s long-gone imperial heyday explains – in part at least – the re-branding exercises that occurred in the run-up to two events in Estonia’s recent history: the first relating to the 2002 Eurovision Song Contest held in Tallinn; the second concerning Estonia’s accession to the European Union two years later. Under the mantra “positively transforming”,...
Estonia sought to divest itself of its Soviet heritage by completing a “return to Europe”. A means to this end was the decision to market Estonia as “a Nordic country with a twist”. This, it has been argued, represented an attempt, not only to embed Estonia in Norden and free it from its Soviet past, but also to differentiate it from present-day Russia to the east and its Baltic neighbours to the south (Jarvis & Kallas 2006: 161). So, whilst differentiation is essential to destination branding, identification with others – i.e. Norden – is equally important.

Of course, Estonia could hardly pretend to be exactly the same as the entrenched members of Norden. Instead, access was sought through humour and the gentle disparagement of its privileged neighbours to the north. One advertisement (i.e. framing device) drew on Norden’s metaframe of accepted images and ideas in order to subvert them:

You like a stormy view, rough coastline, snowy forests, minimalist churches, clean streets, well-groomed gardens, intriguing stone architecture or modern glass edifices, and many blondes – but you know that Scandinavians may be so boring and sterile. Come and see the effect of a dose of extravagance, irony and experimenting in Estonia. (cited in Priks 2008)

Here we have an alternative and less immediately favourable inflection of Norden: not so much a case of Scandinavia than Blandinavia (cf. Foreman 2005). Estonia has sought to position itself as a potential antidote to this by arguing that the staid Nordic brand would be refreshed and reinvigorated by its inclusion. With this in mind, Estonia could be seen as a foil to Norden; a sort of “borderzone” or “bufferstate” perched on its edge – its frame (cf. Hjort 1991: 37).

Whether Estonia remains a peripheral Nordic “outpost” or becomes conceptually manoeuvred to Norden’s core will say a great deal about future framings of Europe (cf. Pousette 1993: 5). What is clear is that the Norden of tomorrow will differ in all sorts of major and minor ways from the Norden of the past and, indeed, the present. By excavating the layers in the framing archive and honing in on disputes and reframings it becomes possible to chart the mutations of this metaframe. In so doing we will be able to detect aspects that differ from today’s commonsense associations. After all, “whatever happened to sex in Scandinavia” (OCA 2008)? Will it always be possible to speak of a distinct “Nordic model” when it comes to the welfare state? And how will Norden’s reputation for democracy and equality fare given that, as I write these words, the world’s media is training its lens on the electoral successes of the far-right in Sweden? The last of these speculations reminds us that we should be mindful of our frames, otherwise we may well find that groups less palatable than our own will do the reframings for us.

**Reframing the Frames**

This paper has made the case for the framing of Norden. The schema presented here incorporates a diversity of tangible and discursive frames under one
overarching metaframe. Evidence for this has come in the form of multiple framing devices, a small sample of which has been addressed above. However, whilst this archive of devices helps substantiate the claims made about Norden, it needs to be stressed that this metaframe fits within an even more pervasive “system of belief”: the metaframe of nationalism. It is this that is the true “endemic condition” in northern Europe as everywhere else (Billig 1995: 6). Even the most ardent expression of Norden is framed in national terms. The inaugural Nordic Art Triennial held in the Swedish city of Eskilstuna in 2010 was organised, implemented and presented along national lines (Pantzare 2010). This was equally the case in 1982 when the Guggenheim structured its “Sleeping Beauty” exhibition around an equitable selection of two artists from each of the five nations of Norden (Hultén 1982: 14).

Analyses of Nordic sentiment and understanding confirm it to be subservient to that even more powerful framing construct: the nation (Frenander 2009: 4). Indeed, one of Norden’s strengths is its subservient status. It does not impinge in any serious way on the metaframe of nationalism. Estonia’s Nordic ambitions are undertaken to strengthen not diminish its national identity. Kirk Varnedoe might have “cast a new light” over Norden’s “national painters” with his “Northern Light” exhibition. But these artists remain national first, Nordic second. The exact same artworks enlisted to Norden’s cause slip seamlessly back to where they “belong”: the national canons and national museums of Norden’s constituent states and autonomous regions.

Put harshly, Norden is an add-on; a pleasant diversion; a convenient tool for marketing and a means for the affluent nations of northern Europe to have a profile that belies their international importance. But this is not to belittle the significance of Norden as a subject for study. Indeed, the fact that Norden can accommodate so many inherent contradictions makes it a fascinating topic for analysis. Any such investigation will surely conclude that Norden is a very flexible phenomenon. Funders and policy makers ought to recognise this so as to avoid repeating humdrum framings. That Norden can tolerate all manner of divergence should give scope for inventive reframings by curators, scholars and sponsors alike. The Nordic Council has opened the way for a more expansive definition of Norden – and with it the frames will follow. If this leads to frame disputes then that is all well and good, for they will help expose Norden’s fault-lines and delimitations.

Yet for these flaws to be properly appreciated we must sharpen our framing faculties. This will dispel many misconceptions held even by those driving the framing devices. It is, for example, troubling that the instigators of the first Nordic Art Triennial could claim to have approached Norden “as a nought, as an unwritten sheet” (Pantzare 2010: 10). Equally problematic is the fact that the authors of *Like Virginity, Once Lost: Five Views on Nordic Art Now* could countenance their vision of Norden as “a fantasy that lives only within these
pages” (Birnbaum & Nilsson 1999: 9). These assertions are indicative of serious and fundamental misunderstandings. The exhibition and the book are only explicable because of a vast and multifaceted pre-existing metaframe constituted of an ever-expanding archive of devices and disputes.

To really grasp the framing features of Norden one would do well to consult the writings of Gregory Bateson, an early exponent of frame analysis and author of “Theory of Play and Fantasy” first published in 1954. This makes plain that, in order to assess the “semantic validity” of the sort of “fantasy” put forward by Birnbaum and Nilsson, we must “examine the nature of the frame in which these interpretations are offered” (Bateson 1954/1972: 184). This is precisely what I have endeavoured to do in this playful paper.

Stuart Burch is a Senior Lecturer at Nottingham Trent University where he teaches museum studies, heritage management and public history. He is currently conducting research into national art museums in northern Europe as part of “Nordic Spaces”, a four-year multinational project funded by a consortium led by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond. E-mail: stuart.burch@ntu.ac.uk.

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Contested Boundaries:
Nation, People and Cultural History Museums
in Sweden and Norway 1862–1909

By Magdalena Hillström

Abstract

It has become commonplace to assert that museums embody, perform and negotiate national identities. Many researches in museum history have stressed a close relationship between nation building and the origin and formation of the modern public museum. Museums, it is argued, contributes to the construction and representation of the ethnical and historical distinctiveness of the nation’s self. This article explores the ambiguities of the concept when applied to the establishment of cultural history museums in Sweden and Norway during the latter half of the 19th century. It shows that the relation between nation building and early museum building in the Scandinavian context was more intricate than earlier has been assumed. Museum founders like Artur Hazelius, who opened the Scandinavian-Ethnographic Collection in 1873 (renamed Nordiska museet 1880), was deeply influenced by Scandinavianism, a strong cultural and political force during the 19th century. Union politics played an important role for museum politics, as did the transitions of the concepts of “ethnography” and “nation”. At the very end of the 19th century the original concept of “nation” meaning people and culture gradually was subordinated to the concept of “nation” as state and political territory. In early 20th century museum ideology cultural history museums were strongly connected with “nations” in the modern sense. Consequently, efforts to “nationalise” the folk-culture museum were made both in Norway and Sweden. A contributory force was, naturally, the dissolution of the Swedish-Norwegian union in 1905.

Keywords: History-19th century, Museumhistory- 19th century, Nationalism, Scandinavianism, Nordiska museet, The University Museum of Ethnography in Oslo, Norsk Folkemuseum.
Nordiska Museet: A Museum of and for the Swedish Nation?

It has become commonplace to assert that museums embody and negotiate national identities. Many researches in museum history have stressed the close relationship between nation-building and the origin and formation of the modern public museum. Museums, it is argued, contribute to the construction and representation of the ethnic and historical distinctiveness of a nation’s self (Bennett 1995; Duncan, 1995; Boswell & Evans 1999; McClellan 1999; Knell et al. 2010). In Sweden, this dominant academic perspective has played an important role in the description and analysis of how the Nordiska museet in Stockholm was established. The museum was opened to the public in 1873 and moved to its current premises at the beginning of the 20th century. Many scholars have suggested that Nordiska museet should be analysed within the perspective of nationalism and the construction of national identity. The inclusion of folk culture as part of the national heritage to be displayed in the museum has helped to establish, demarcate, propagate and visualise the national identity.

In the book Historia, museer och nationalism, the ethnologist and museum historian Stefan Bohman (1997) focuses on the relationship between museums and national identity. He argues that during the 19th century people from aristocratic and middle-class circles promoted the idea that the people’s national feelings and loyalty must be strengthened. Therefore, the people in these social groups tried to propagate an accurate meaning of Swedishness. According to Bohman, one of the most important actors was Artur Hazelius (1833–1901), the founder of Nordiska museet and the open-air museum Skansen. Bohman argues that Hazelius contributed successfully to the symbolic construction of the national past, emphasising Swedish history – the kings, the great Swedish artists and, most importantly, folk culture. The old Swedish peasantry (allmogen) signified a national Swedish identity worthy of imitation. The Swede should get to know himself/herself through an encounter with unspoiled and original folk culture (Bohman 1997: 21).

A related viewpoint is articulated by the historian Sverker Sörlin (1998). In the introduction to the anniversary book Nordiska museet under 125 år, Sörlin asserts that Artur Hazelius was involved in many projects that contributed to the establishment of a national consciousness. This process included a mapping of the nation; the nation became a concept, picture, map and a story. Through these means the nation became conceivable to people. Nordiska museet is a representative of national institutions whose establishment aimed to mobilise the masses to revive the nation. The overall purpose of Artur Hazelius’ museum projects was to create a national memory and a national memorial, Sörlin adds (1998: 27).

These interpretations seem valuable enough yet, when looking more closely at the museum’s collections and the collecting practices that characterised the museum’s early development in the late 19th century, the strong alignment between nation-building and museum-building that is advocated, among others, by Boh-
man and Sörlin cannot be empirically supported. The perspective is oversimplifying the complexity of museum formation in 19th century Scandinavia. Rather than any straightforward nation-building, the setting for cultural museum-building in Scandinavia in the late 19th century was profoundly permeated by attracting and repelling forces of countries intricately joined together in political history. Up until 1809 Finland was part of Sweden; in 1814 Denmark and Norway parted and Norway entered into a union with Sweden. Up to the last quarter of that century Scandinavianists sought to establish a pan-Scandinavian nation-state, and celebrated the cultural unity of the Scandinavian people (Finland was often included). These political and historical circumstances formed the contexts of museum-building in the North. Also contributing to political uncertainties about the territorial definition of the nation was the contemporary re-definition of “ethnography” and changing ideas of what a cultural history museum should be and what collections they should consist of.¹

Heterogeneous Collections and Uncertain Geographical Boundaries

The Scandinavian Ethnographic Collection (Skandinavisk-etnografiska samlingen). *(Meddelanden från Nordiska museet 1898, Stockholm 1900.)*

Nordiska museet was opened under the name of the Scandinavian Ethnographic Collection (Skandinavisk-etnografiska samlingen) in 1873. The name was changed in 1880 when the museum was turned into a private foundation. Formerly, it was owned by Artur Hazelius himself. Until 1907 the museum was located in central Stockholm and later the collections were moved to a building at
Djurgården, where they still reside. The museum was originally described in newspapers as a permanent exhibition of peasant costumes, but almost immediately after that the collections expanded in various directions. They grew ever bigger and more diverse. The breadth of the collections can be illustrated by a report in the museum’s yearbook from 1898 (Hazelius 1900: 161–174). In this year, the collections were expanded, for example, by the inclusion of the following items:

**The folk culture division:**

*From Swedish provinces:* Jewellery, bridal crowns, household utensils made of wood, tin, bronze and clay, tools for handicraft, a spoon made of silver, a rich decorated sideboard possibly painted by the famous artist Per Hörberg, a sleigh from the early 19th century, several complete costumes for women and man, different kinds of old furniture, a hurdy-gurdy, an iron cross, furniture hollowed out from wooden logs typical of the Finnish people from Värmland, a child’s costume, two dishes from the 17th century, hand-made paintings with biblical subjects, and a clog almanac. *From Norway:* Richly carved sideboards and four-poster beds, household utensils made of glass, brass and bronze, silver jewellery, peculiar bottles, tapestries, and harnesses. *From Finland:* Two boats. *From Estonia:* A gift from peasants (allmogemän) close to Reval consisting of household utensils made of wood and a piece of jewellery made of bronze, probably from the Middle Ages.

**The arts and crafts and guilds division**

*From Sweden:* Eight old guild-plates made of silver, two guild-chests and numerous seal stamps.

*From Germany:* Parchment records from the 17th century, a guild-chest, 58 seal stamps, paintings and richly decorated banners.

**The history of work division**

A printing press from 1747, several woodblocks made for textile and tapestry printing, a sewing machine from the 1860s made in Sweden, a sewing machine, some harrows, and a larger collection of pewter casting forms.

**The memories of old Stockholm division**

A number of old sign boards, some lintels made of oak, glazed tiles and an iron gate, all from different houses and addresses in Stockholm.

**The hunting division**

Several bear traps and wolf spears.

**The military organisation division**

Two medieval weapons, two powder horns and military uniforms from the 18th century.

**The church division**

A decorated chandelier made of iron, a christening font, a pew from the 17th century and a poor box.
The higher classes division

Two portraits of nobility from the 16th century and other paintings once belonging to the castle of Mälsåker and donated by King Oscar II, several rich embroidered waistcoats in silk, silk embroideries, cloths with embroidery, a sewing table made of mahogany, two goblets made of glass, and two sugar bowls made of crystal.

The history division

Plaster models of statues and busts made of famous Swedish artists, a work box once belonging to Queen Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta, sheets and pillow cases bearing the monogram of Queen Josefina, various possessions from the estate of Frithiof Holmgren donated by his wife (both were close friends of Artur Hazelius), a large number of tools and other equipment including a working table from the estate of the famous Swedish engraver Lea Ahlborn, and a number of remembrances of artists, including a shoe once belonging to the celebrated Swedish-Italian danseuse Marie Taglioni.

The portraits and engravings division

Numerous Nordic portraits (engravings, lithographs and photographs) and 96 silhouettes from the second half of the 18th century.

The above inventory is only a selection of the many items that were incorporated into the collections in 1898. It is important to observe that most of these objects were gifts. In 1898, 522 people donated a total of 3500 gifts to the museum.

The wide heterogeneity of the collections appears clearly enough from just this short glimpse at the accession list. However, the museum’s many faces have been suppressed by its historians in favour of the museum being seen as a museum of folk culture with the explicit purpose of collecting and exhibiting artefacts of the Swedish pre-industrial rural culture. A strong emphasis has been given to the dioramas and panoramas that Artur Hazelius installed in the museum (e.g. Nyström 1998). This was a popular exhibition technique that grew out of the great industrial exhibitions during the latter half of the 19th century. The idea was to reconstruct the “natural” environment of the objects. The dioramas in the Scandinavian Ethnographic Collection contained house interiors, including exterior parts, from different provinces of Sweden. In order to create as lifelike as possible, wax mannequins dressed in folk costumes populated the houses. A panorama depicted a “Laplander scene”: The autumn movement of reindeers. However, most of the objects in the museum were not presented in dioramas. They were gathered in glazed cases and cupboards; they hung on walls and from ceilings, always in overcrowded rooms (Hazelius 1900: 271ff).
Among Artur Hazelius’ contemporaries, this heterogeneity of the collections was questioned from time to time and influential critics, including Hans Hildebrand, director of the state-owned Historical Museum, argued that Artur Hazelius collected everything that he could get, without any consideration of the scientific and artistic value of the objects. He was, in short, a doubtful omnivore. Even worse, he collected objects that were also collected by other museums in Stockholm, showing no respect for the principles of museum organisation. They asked for his plans, but received no answer. In fact, a single and well-articulated official meaning of the museum was never established. On the contrary, the floating meanings formed a substantial part of the achievements of Nordiska museet in terms of rapidly growing collections and of public endorsement. Artur Hazelius’ main strategy was to allow as many actors as possible to contribute to the museum. According to Artur Hazelius’ rhetoric, the museum was built by the people and in line with the people’s will, opinion and taste in terms of the items collected (Hillström 2006: 205). The museum could only be clearly distinguished from the Natural History Museum and one noticed that objects from countries outside of Europe were rare.

One of the many aspects of diversity was the indecisive geographical boundaries of the collections. From the very beginning Artur Hazelius collected objects from Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Greenland, Iceland, Estonia, Russia and Germany (and from other areas). This circumstance contributed to uncertainties among both admirers and critics of the museum. Through which lenses should the museum be viewed: Was it a museum representing Sweden and the union neighbour Norway or a Scandinavian (Danish, Norwegian, Swedish and perhaps Finnish) museum? Was it a museum of the old Swedish Empire? A museum of Northern Europe? Did Artur Hazelius collect on behalf of the Swedish/Scandinavian/Nordic people or on behalf of the Nation itself? (Hillström 2006: 219f). What kind of “nation” or “people” was assumed in the collecting and exhibiting practices?

Scandinavianism and Ortophagy

These questions could not be answered with certainty, neither then nor now. However, a clue can be found in the biography of Artur Hazelius. He was, like many of his generation, devoted to the idea of a strong affinity and community amongst the Scandinavian people (including Finland). He was a Scandinavist, similar to many intellectuals and artists of his generation. He participated in the student meetings in Uppsala in 1856, in Copenhagen in 1862 and in Kristiania in 1869, but his commitment to Scandinavian ideas can perhaps best be illustrated by his passionate engagement in an orthographical reform (Böök 1923: 45ff).
In 1869 a Nordic orthographic meeting was arranged in Stockholm. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the possibilities of harmonising the spelling of the Swedish, Norwegian and Danish languages. These efforts were based on the idea that spelling should be as phonetic as possible. Artur Hazelius played a major role at the meeting as he was responsible for reporting the suggestions and their consequences for the Swedish language. However, Johan Eric Rydqvist, a prominent member of the Swedish Academy and the leading linguist of the time, regarded the meeting as an indecent initiative and worked hard and successfully to refute Artur Hazelius, who was publicly scandalised (Böök 1923: 231ff). At the beginning of the 20th century the spelling reform Artur Hazelius had suggested was put into practice, but at that time he was no longer alive. Rydqvist’s indignation exemplifies how Scandinavists both identified themselves and were identified as rebels to the “old generation” of academics and similar types (Nilsson 2000). In arranging the orthographic meeting any involvement by the Swedish Academy was carefully avoided. It has often been argued that, when the dreams of a united Scandinavian state finally lost all political relevance in 1871, the Scandinavian movement was transformed into a non-political but cultural movement (e.g. Hemstad 2008). Yet this distinction must be questioned as it presumes that “culture” cannot be “political”. The many attacks on Artur Hazelius that originated from “the old” elite show that the Scandinavian movement was not conceived as innocent and harmless, although in terms of realist politics it might be difficult to understand what was actually on the agenda. It is also important to note that many
members of the Scandinavian student movement later constituted the new social and academic elite, as emphasised by Uffe Østergård:

The high political vision of political pan-Scandinavianism was superseded by cultural collaboration at the civil level. Interestingly, this activity was to a large extent undertaken by the self-same Scandinavianist student circles, whose members were now able to work together by virtue of the positions they held as public servants, teachers, and artists. Scientists, lawyers, engineers, educationalists, painters, and writers were all able to maintain connections at Nordic meetings and through Scandinavian journals. (Østergård 1997: 42)

Here one can add that Artur Hazelius was mobilising a well-established Scandinavian network when starting his new career as a collector and museum builder.

The fact that Hazelius named the museum the Scandinavian Ethnographic Collection and later renamed it Nordiska museet has been perceived as testimony to a lifelong commitment to Scandinavist ideals of a common Nordic history and identity. Hazelius himself never explained these names since he was generally quite reserved about his thoughts and plans.

The Various Meanings of “Nation”

The theory of a strong connection between museum-formation and nation-building is based on: a) an idea of what a nation is; and b) an idea of what a museum is. The museum is identified as being dependent on nationalist ideas. “No nationalism, no modern museums”. Ernest Gellner’s well-known definition states that nationalism is primarily “a political principle, which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent” (Gellner 1983: 1). Hobsbawm stresses that the concept of “nation” was transformed towards the end of the 19th century (Hobsbawm 1990). Although many historians agree that the modern Western state system emerged as a result of the Thirty Years’ War, the nation-state, the modern territorial state, is generally a more recent invention – perhaps more so than we usually assume – as it did not attain mass support until the 20th century (Hettne et al. 1998). The mistake of Bohman and Sörlin is that they tend to equate “nation” with “state”. Despite the obvious fact of the two names of the museum: the Scandinavian Ethnographic Collection and Nordiska museet, they are convinced that Nordiska museet encouraged a Swedish national self-consciousness and was “mapping” the territory of the Swedish nation-state. Viewed in this way, the museum appears to have been more dependent on nationalism, in Gellner’s sense, than was really the fact. The collecting and exhibiting practices were not guided by ideas of “mapping” a territory, nor did they stake out the borders of the Swedish state.

Hobsbawm observes that the concept of “nation” mostly did not have any territorial connotation in the 18th century. It signified variations in traditions and customs. Therefore, different “nations” could exist in the same territory (Hobsbawm 1990: 16f).
Much of that survived into the late 19th century. If one seeks a definition of “nation” in the first edition of the Swedish encyclopaedia Nordisk familjebok, published in 1887, the following is found.

Nation [lat. natio, people from nasci, to be born] People; unit of people with common descent, physique, mentality, fatherland, language, culture, religion, legal system, customs, forms of government and historical memories. In the Swedish language “nation” and “people” are usually used without distinction. 2

The drifting of meaning of “nation” from “people” to “state” is underlined by an article on “nation” in the authoritative Nationalencyklopedin. “Nation” is explained there as a concept that in the Swedish language is used synonymously with state. 3 The difference between the definitions of “nation” in the two encyclopaedias used here as empirical sources illustrates the historical transformations of the concept of nation, today meaning state or country.

The complex relationship between old and new linguistic usage is demonstrated in an article in Nordisk familjebok from 1887 that can be found under the heading of “The principle of nationality”. It was written by Magnus Höjer (1840–1910), a historian, geographer and liberal politician. 4 Among other things, one learns that the principle of nationality refers to the basic idea of modern political life emanating from the French Revolution, according to which the state should be grounded on nationality. The principle of nationality was superseding older ideas of the legitimacy of the state, and was revealing its power in political movements seeking unification in Italy and Germany. Bismarck had earned his greatness by being a servant of the idea of nationality, Höjer noted. Pan-Scandinavianism is mentioned as an example of the impact of the principle of nationality in the North.

Nonetheless, Höjer warned against far-reaching applications of the principle of nationality since that would pose a risk for “freedom” and “cultural development”. The principle of nationality was applied excessively when a powerful people sought to assimilate and politically incorporate a minor people of “equal nationality” (sic!) that had as much of the necessary physical and spiritual capacity to live an independent political life and to develop a valuable culture. The author exemplified “abuses” of the principle of nationality by pointing to the ideals of Grossdeutschland (Greater Germany) and Pan-Slavism.

“Nation” and Collection

One of the promoters of the Nordic Orthographic Meeting in 1869 was Ludvig Kristensen Daa (1809–1877), a controversial politician, publicist and historian. Daa was an influential leader of the Scandinavian movement. He had a special interest in the history and culture of Finland, and argued that Finland should be seen as the fourth branch of the Scandinavian tree. Daa published a book about Swedish grammar in 1837 and a Swedish-Norwegian dictionary in 1839. Like Hazelius, he supported spelling reforms and museum development, although Daa
started before Hazelius as a director of the University Museum of Ethnography in Kristiania (Oslo) from 1862 until 1877. The museum was founded in 1856. When Daa became the director the museum was in a very poor condition and Daa spent a lot of time trying to introduce some orderliness into the museum’s narrow rooms. He concluded that the objects should be arranged in accordance with geographical principles. The main reason for this, he emphasised, was the difficulties in separating items of different national origins from each other. Knowledge about an individual object was mostly limited to the country it had been collected from, for example India, Africa, North America or Russia. Even rarer it was possible to identify the nation which had used it (Nielsen 1907: 31).

Today, as already mentioned, “nation”, “state” and “country” often are used without any clear distinction. For Daa, “nation” and “country” were not overlapping concepts. For him, the “national” origin of an object was much more difficult to detect than the country of its origin; it was even tricky, he added, to distinguish between Norwegian and “Lappish” objects in terms of their “nationality” (Nielsen 1907: 31).

Daa worked hard to expand the small collection. He travelled to Amsterdam and London in order to buy or exchange objects with museums or antique dealers. He established contacts with consulates and encouraged Norwegian sailors to collect “exotic” items from distant places. He successfully searched for ethnographical objects (Scandinavian and others) in the University Museum of Northern Antiquities and the University Museum of Natural History. It was often the case that to enlarge the museum collection he received several gifts, sometimes larger private collections (Nielsen 1907: 23ff).

In an official letter to the Budget Committee of Stortinget in 1862, Daa drew at-
tention to the fact the museum of ethnography lacked objects belonging to the Norwegian people. The absence of such objects must seem very strange to a visitor from abroad, he argued (Nielsen 1907: 28). Daa tried to increase the collection of Norwegian objects and received help from a renowned collector from Hallingdal, Sander Røo, and from a clergyman in Hiterdal. In 1877 the Scandinavian (as Daa called it) collection comprised 200 accession numbers (Nielsen 1907: 77ff).

When Artur Hazelius began his new career as a collector and museum builder, he argued that the old folk culture was quickly disappearing as society was modernising. In addition, the remaining objects of folk culture were often being taken to foreign countries by collectors of antiques and antique dealers. Therefore, public attention to and the collecting of peasant objects could not wait. Soon, very soon, they would be gone, and irrevocably along with them knowledge about the peasants’ habits and customs (Hazelius 1900: 270f). In Norway Daa articulated the same opinion. The Norwegian people ran the risk of losing their “treasures” of science. If nothing was done, knowledge about the Norwegian people would in the future have to be searched for in Hazelius’ museum in Stockholm. Daa dreamed of a separate room for the Scandinavian collection in the museum, convinced that it would encourage the public appeal and growth of the collection (Nielsen 1907: 76f).

From Daa’s perspective, an ethnographic museum included all cultures, all ethnoscopes – groups of peoples – or “nations”. He considered Artur Hazelius’ ambition to create a Scandinavian ethnographic collection reasonable enough as the Scandinavian people shared common roots. He also considered it most appropriate to exhibit “nations” from all over the world in the same museum (Nielsen 1907: 77).

As I have tried to illustrate, the connection between nation-building and museum-formation in 19th century Scandinavia is much more intricate than has often been assumed. Of course, nationalism was an important component of the museum’s legitimacy in both the 19th century and the 20th century. It cannot be said that Nordiska museet was a museum exclusively in the service of Swedish nationalism, or that it chiefly contributed to the mapping of the Swedish nation-state, making it an “imagined community”, in Anderson’s terms (Anderson 1991). Most significant are the voices of the past that questioned the identity of the museum and hesitated about Artur Hazelius’ purposes. Nordiska museet was not underpinned by a firm idea of contributing solely to the Swedish people’s identification with the Swedish nation-state. The meaning of it was much more floating and the geographical borders of the collections were never defined. In Norway, Daa strived for a museum collecting and exhibiting all “nations” and human “races” in the world, hoping to develop ethnographical science. It is obvious from the examples of Daa and the Swedish encyclopaedia that “nation” primarily meant “people” and that the territorial aspects of “nation” were subordinated or not articulated at all. It is significant that in both Norway and Sweden museums of cultural history originated within the Scandinavian movement.
The stress on the unity of Scandinavia as the relevant frame of reference for Hazelius’ as well as Daa’s museums was equally a matter of museum-building and nation-building. Contributing to Swedish and Norwegian patriotism was seen as fully compatible with a concept of culture, people and nation that privileged “Scandinavia” over its individual countries. Considering the changing meanings of “nation” from “people” to “state”, it is indeed true that the pioneering cultural history museums were “nationalist”. But it must be carefully observed that the nation involved was not exclusively Sweden or Norway but also encompassed Scandinavia.

Nationalising the Museum

The founder and director of Nordiska museet, Artur Hazelius, died in 1901. Soon after his death a committee was formed. It consisted of ten members, including Artur Hazelius’ son Gunnar Hazelius (1874–1905). Before his death, Artur Hazelius expressed a strong desire for Gunnar Hazelius to succeed him as keeper of Nordiska museet and Skansen. Yet, contrary to Artur Hazelius’ wish, in 1905 he was in fact succeeded by the archaeologist Bernhard Salin. In the meantime, Gunnar Hazelius was appointed the head of Skansen, and the art historian John Böttiger the head of Nordiska museet. Gunnar Hazelius and John Böttiger played major roles in the committee. So did the chairman Oscar Montelius, a renowned archaeologist and museum curator (Hillström 2006: 259ff).

The committee’s purpose was to devise a programme for the internal design of the new museum building, including the layout of new exhibitions. The committee members disagreed in several important respects, including the meaning of the museum as a national institution. The committee’s report was published in 1902 and strongly stressed Nordiska museet as a national Swedish institution. The report underlined that Nordiska museet was founded with the aim of strengthening national feelings and patriotic values and ascribed the original intention to create a museum for the Swedish people that would illustrate the people’s history and development to Artur Hazelius. 6

Gunnar Hazelius rejected this description as radically mistaken. Contrary to the report, he ascribed a twofold aim to Artur Hazelius: The museum was:

(a) a Swedish patriotic educational institution addressing the Swedish people; and

(b) a Nordic scientific institution.

The origin and growth of the museum, Gunnar Hazelius argued, proved that it was firmly rooted in Scandinavianism and a feeling of Nordic affinity and community. The Scandinavian people had a common cultural development. The Nordic people should build their future on this basis, along with their shared history and joint characteristics and experiences. From the perspective of Scandinavian cultural history and ethnology geo-political borders played a less relevant role. They did not constitute natural cultural borders between the Nordic people. According to
Gunnar Hazelius, this fact should be clearly articulated and easily observable in the museum. Most importantly, Swedish cultural history should be displayed in ways that emphasise the Nordic context. This included, for instance, that the rich collection of German guild items should be put on display alongside guild items from other Nordic countries – obviously, Gunnar Hazelius included parts of German cultural history within the boundaries of Nordic culture.7

Gunnar Hazelius accused certain committee members of distorting his father’s vision. In opposition to the museum’s original aim, they wanted to create a Swedish national museum with Scandinavian subdivisions. Oscar Montelius rejected Gunnar Hazelius’ view. It was necessary to follow scientific principles of order and comprehensibility when arranging museum exhibitions. If not, the museum visitor would be confused. The visitor should always know in which country he or she was. Therefore, it was imperative that objects from different countries be set apart. Contrary to Gunnar Hazelius, Oscar Montelius argued that the Nordic dimension of the museum had already been subordinated to the Swedish dimension during Artur Hazelius’ lifetime.

The conflict between Gunnar Hazelius and Oscar Montelius illustrates several essential themes, some being specific to the history and development of Nordiska museet and some holding general implications for the formation of modern cultural history museums in the early 20th century.

After the death of Artur Hazelius, the various meanings of the museum and its miscellaneous collections were regarded with suspicion by many museum professionals (Hillström 2006: 259ff). Oscar Montelius’ demand for organisation and his heavy emphasis on the museum being a national Swedish museum can be understood as an effort to make the museum more homogeneous in terms of which people and nation it appealed to and represented. Stating that Nordiska museet was a museum for, above all, the Swedish people solved an important problem. Yet Gunnar Hazelius could not agree with such a simple solution. He defended the idea that Nordiska museet was a museum for the Nordic people. As a museum and scientific institution of cultural heritage it represented a Nordic nation, a Nordic people with floating geo-political boundaries. However, he agreed with Oscar Montelius that in its capacity of a public institution the museum primarily addressed the Swedish people.8

One reason for Oscar Montelius to stress the Swedishness of Nordiska museet was the crisis of the union between Sweden and Norway. From around 1890 this union had entered a period of crisis that ended with its dissolution in 1905. One main factor was the claim made by the Venstre (liberals in Stortinget, the Norwegian parliament) for separate foreign consuls. In May 1905 the Stortinget accepted the Norwegian government's proposal for Norwegian consuls. King Oscar II declared that he could not accept the decision and thereafter the ministry resigned. The Stortinget then agreed to a resolution stating that the Union had been dissolved since King Oscar II could not form a government – all in accordance with
a prearranged plan. In Sweden, the reactions to the Norwegian revolt were strong and preparations for war were made by both countries. Military forces were mobilised although it all ended peacefully. In September 1905 King Oscar II acknowledged Norway as an independent state. Prince Carl of Denmark ascended the Norwegian throne as Haakon VII in November of the same year.

Although neither Montelius nor any other committee members mentioned the union, it seems highly reasonable that Montelius tried to adjust the identity of Nordiska museet to the actual political situation. Being sensitive to the political currents of the time, not least the Norwegian claim for self-government and independence, he found it less wise to emphasise the museum’s Nordic identity, especially when the big Norwegian collection in the museum was frequently deplored in Norway. An illustration of Hazelius’ bad reputation that was prevalent within museum circles in Norway is the opinion the internationally renowned archaeologist Ingvall Undset (1853–1893) articulated in a programme to establish a National Norwegian Museum in Kristiania (Undset 1885). In the new museum (that was never actually realised) a Norwegian folk museum was to be installed and organised as a separate department with its own supervisor. Undset presented the organisation of Dansk Folkemuseum in the National Museum of Copenhagen as a model. Nordiska museet was not to be imitated, he warned. The museum contained too many heterogeneous collections and, even worse, nothing in the museum’s programme stopped Hazelius from swallowing up all the museums and collections in Scandinavia.

The efforts to “nationalise” Nordiska museet were, in view of the crisis and dissolution of the union in 1905, a step of rational adaption to the political realities. Montelius’ argument was quite understandably not a political one but one of museum orderliness – separating collections by country rather than by cultural nation. The “new” Nordiska museet was opened to the public in 1907. According to Montelius’ main principle of orderliness, all items were exhibited within a geographical framework consisting of provinces and countries. However, this was the only consequence of the endeavours to nationalise the museum. The rich Norwegian collection was exhibited in a conspicuous way and even the guild objects that had been collected in Germany were put on display (Hillström 2006).

A National Museum of Folk Culture in Norway

Parallel to the political forces that contributed to the “nationalisation” of Nordiska museet after Hazelius’ death were changes in the idea of ethnography and its application in museum practices in Norway.

When Daa died in 1877 he was succeeded by Yngvar Nielsen (1843–1916). Nielsen was a historian, publicist and politician and became a professor of geography in 1890. Nielsen played a major role in Høyre, the conservative party. He was a strong supporter of the union between Norway and Sweden, and also an
important advisor in Norway to the Swedish-Norwegian king Oscar II. Like Daa, he was particularly inspired by Scandinavianism and had participated in several student meetings (Nielsen 1912). Many of his Swedish friends were also the most important allies of Artur Hazelius.

His vision for the museum differed from Daa’s but in the spirit of Daa he found it most important to enhance the Scandinavian collection, although he resisted the name. Nielsen wanted to establish a Norwegian folk museum separate from the Ethnographic Museum and stated that the idea to include all groups of people in a single museum was entirely wrong and old-fashioned. The overall aim of an ethnographic museum was to represent the culture of “primitive” people, not European people and culture. Objects that illustrated European civilisation must be sorted out from ethnographical museums, Nielsen emphasised, although he failed to undertake such a reform in his own museum (Nielsen 1907: 77). Nielsen regarded the enriching of the Norwegian collection as his assignment. Parallel to Artur Hazelius, Nielsen told a revealing story of the source of his obligation to rescue what was left of old-time peasant objects. Similar to Hazelius (and Paulus) the conversion took place during a journey. Hazelius was travelling in Dalarna; Nielsen through the fjords (Hazelius 1900: 270; Nielsen 1881: 153). Through these stories, both Hazelius and Nielsen dramatised themselves as the chosen ones for collecting with the noblest aims. They should not be mistaken for antique dealers or private collectors – their potent rivals in the collecting field.

Nielsen travelled through Norway during the summers of 1878, 1879 and 1880. He collected costumes, jewellery, household utensils and other objects that could illuminate the oldest cultural development of Norway. He mainly paid for these
journeys himself. He wrote letters to *Morgenbladet*, eager to draw the reader’s attention to his important work. Nielsen’s vision was to establish a museum similar to and in competition with Nordiska museet and he hoped to reduce the lead of Artur Hazelius. It was, Nielsen wrote, both a national and scientific programme. However, Nielsen’s dream was left unfulfilled. In 1881 the Stortinget refused to give him a supplementary grant to develop the Norwegian collection. Nielsen added this rejection to the many critical voices that were heard at the Stortinget and in the newspapers about the value of a national Norwegian collection (Nielsen 1907: 78ff). Nielsen continued to look for new funding. During the spring of 1881 he gave five public lectures about Norwegian cultural history, aiming to inspire the audiences to support the idea of a state-owned national Norwegian museum. The lectures were later published in a book. All the resulting income was donated to the Ethnographic Museum (Nielsen 1881). However, it seems that after this Nielsen lost his fervour and turned to other duties within the museum.

From the outset the University Museum of Ethnography was a destitute museum installed in small and dark rooms with no heating during winter. The situation was much the same as for the state-owned Historical Museum in Stockholm. Money was a constant problem. Nielsen’s efforts to find new financial resources are illustrative of the conditions of many state-owned museums in Scandinavia during the 19th century. One can also observe that the Stortinget was as hesitant as the Swedish government to give more than minor financial support to museums (Hillström 2006).

When Nielsen wrote the history of the University Museum of Ethnography in 1907 he tried to distinguish between his own activities and aims and those of Daa. Replacing “Scandinavian” with “Norwegian” is one tendency. Another one is that he blamed Daa for not being conscious of the need to separate “primitive” culture from the culture of European civilisation. A third tendency was that Nielsen called special attention to those items in the museum collected by Daa that Nielsen emphasised had no place at all in an ethnographic museum. He mentioned the following:

half of a Russian time-bomb used in the Crimean War; a model of the lighthouse in Eddystone; a one-dollar bill, a ten-dollar bill, part of a bomb and a lead bullet from Sebastopol; a piece of pitcoal from Spitsbergen; and the hydrogen balloon “La ville d'Orleans”. The latter was sent from Paris but lost its course and ended up in Telemark. When the two French passengers eventually arrived in Kristiania they were celebrated as heroes. The balloon, obviously, was found and exhibited in the Ethnographic Museum (today it is in the Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology). (Nielsen 1907: 32–53).

Why did Nielsen draw the reader’s attention to items he thought had no place in the collections? To amuse the reader with the stupidities of Daa? The late 19th century and beginning of the 20th century was a period of museum-formation. This process was characterised by shifting opinions and conflicts about the most accurate principles of museum regulation. The late 19th century and beginning of
the 20th century was a period, in short, of boundary work. In this process, many of the earlier museum builders, like Hazelius and Daa, were accused by subsequent museum curators of accumulating curiosities, creating some kind of late Wunderkammern, rather than scientifically ordered and modern museums (Hillström 2006: 259ff). In the 19th century most cultural history museums, including museums of art and industrial art, comprised heterogeneous collections (The South Kensington Museum, later renamed the Victoria & Albert Museum is a very good example; see Burton 1999). Nielsen’s hopes and strivings for a separate Norwegian folk culture museum from the Ethnographic Museum, characterising his programme as both “national” and “scientific”, visibly resemble the conflicts that followed Artur Hazelius’ death. One central aspect of this was the change of reference to the concept of ethnography.

The shift of meanings ascribed to “ethnography” can be illustrated by two articles in the first and second editions of Nordisk familjebok, the Swedish encyclopaedia.

The first article was published in 1881 and written by the anatomist and pathologist Gustaf von Düben. He wrote: Ethnography is the description of man as he appears in social groups as people. Ethnography refers to both physical and mental character, environmental adjustment and relations between people, habits, customs, tools etc. The concepts of ethnography and ethnology are not demarcated, and run together with the concept of anthropology. Collections of tools, household utensils, weapons, costumes etc. belonging to different people are named museums of ethnography. As examples, he mentioned Nordiska museet, and the museums of ethnography in Stockholm and Copenhagen. 9

The author of the article “Ethnography” in the second edition of Nordisk familjebok, Edgar Reuterskiöld, remarked that “formerly” the concepts of “ethnography” and “anthropology” were not distinguished. “Nowadays”, he added, anthropology refers to the study of the physical aspects of man’s life, whereas “ethnography” refers to the cultural aspects. Anthropology observes man as a specimen of the Homo family, while ethnography regards him as a member of a certain group of people. “At the present time” ethnography is used in a more restricted sense as a descriptive science, while ethnology is a comparative science. The purpose of ethnography is to describe the cultural feature of each people. Ethnography is “today” commonly limited to the study of “primitive people”. The corresponding study of the culture of civilised people is called cultural history. 10

The following article is about ethnographic museums. The author was Erland Nordenskiöld, who became director of the ethnographic division of the Göteborg Museum in 1913. Nordenskiöld wrote that ethnographical museums were commonly associated with museums that collected objects from countries outside Europe. However, this assumption was wrong, he argued. Several European museums, including the most famous Nordiska museet, collected objects of “domestic” ethnography. 11
The inconsistencies between the two articles in the second edition of *Nordisk familjebok* are noteworthy. The first author is very clear on the point that “ethnography” refers to the study of “primitive” people. Nordenskiöld, on the other hand, insisted that Nordiska museet was an ethnographic museum. If he had followed the opinion expressed by the first author, he would have characterised Nordiska museet as a museum of cultural history. Obviously, the “new” meaning of ethnography had not been fully established.

The replacing of “Scandinavian” with “Norwegian”, that in Nielsen’s terms was part of the “national” programme, indicates that “Scandinavianism” was losing ground in Norway. After the 1860s the Union lost much of its political support in Norway and liberal politics were making progress. In 1884 parliamentarism was adopted and the liberal government of Johan Sverdrup was installed. The two opposite groups established official political parties in 1884: Venstre (Left) for the liberals who wanted to break up the union, and Høyre (Right) for conservatives who wanted to hold on to a Union of two equal states. Although Nielsen might have wanted to retain the idea of a Scandinavian collection (he travelled to Finland in order to enhance the number of Finnish objects in the museum in 1880), this was not wise from the perspective of gaining the desired political support for creating a national Norwegian folk museum. In this Nielsen showed the same political realism as Oscar Montelius. In his memoirs, Nielsen complained that his idea had been largely rejected by the Stortinget on the basis that as a conservative politician he was not regarded as a trustworthy nationalist by the liberals (Nielsen 1912).

**New Times: Norsk Folkemuseum**

The idea of a national museum of the Norwegian people was realised 1894. The weakened political support for the Swedish-Norwegian union constitutes an important background to the success of the new museum project. Indeed, in the biography *Hans Aall – mannen, visionen og verket* (1994) Tonte Hegard identifies the emblem of the new museum from 1895, representing the Norwegian heraldic lion as a proclamation of Norwegian independence in the union politics.

Parallel to Nordiska museet, Norsk Folkemuseum was a private initiative by Hans Aall and its establishment was independent of the Norwegian state. Similar to Artur Hazelius and Yngvar Nielsen, Aall told an “origin story” of how, during a journey to Hallingdal, Numedal and Telemarken, he was overwhelmed by a strong conviction that the old peasant culture was being threatened by modernisation, and that it was necessary to rescue *everything* that was left of an old, disappearing culture (Hegard 1994: 38).
Aall was born in 1869. He was a three-year-old boy when Artur Hazelius first presented his vision of a permanent exhibition of peasant costumes. Aall died in 1946; Hazelius in 1901. In comparing Nordiska museet with Norsk Folkemuseum, one must pay careful attention to both the relevance of the union crisis and the fact that Aall and Hazelius belonged to different museum generations. When Aall started his career as a museum builder the museum profession was already gradually emerging, manifested among other things by the emphasis on the proper ex-
hibiting order of things and the need to advance science through collections. Contrary to Hazelius then, Aall wrote museum manuals and paid significant attention to professional tools like standardised catalogues. Although museums were being built in much the same ways, not least through gifts of different kinds that resulted in heterogeneous collections, like many of his generation Aall marked a distance towards Hazelius’ museum projects. When Nordiska museet became the target of professional critique, Aall was one of the critics. However, it is important to note that, although Norsk Folkemuseum consisted of heterogeneous collections, the Norwegian framework was kept. In contrast, when Nordiska museet in Stockholm was nationalised according to Montelius’ principle of “countries apart” it was obviously still a museum without distinct geographical borders.

The Scandinavian movement represented a nationalism that, in retrospect, has been described as a romantic illusion of a Nordic community upheld by naive and arrack-loving students. However, in its historical context, Scandinavianism was an important cultural and political force that is difficult to grasp for subsequent historians working in the context of 20th century concepts of the “nation”. It was possible for Hazelius to mobilise the rhetoric of Swedishness and Swedish patriotism within a framework of Scandinavianist nationalism.

A Real Museum of Folk Culture

However, the Scandinavianist framing of Hazelius’ museum was losing terrain, both politically and professionally. It was neither comparable with the disruption of the union between Norway and Sweden, nor with a new generation of museum ideology that then, in the 20th century, strongly connected cultural history museums with “nations” in the modern sense. From the early 20th century the 20th century concept of “nation” also became increasingly relevant in actual museum practice.

The actuality of these questions in early 20th century museum policy can be further illustrated by a presidential address to the Museum Association at a meeting in Maidstone in 1909. The president was Henry Balfour (1863–1939). He was an anthropologist and the first curator of the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. In his talk he complained about the lack of interest in Britain in national culture, reflected in particular in the absence of a splendid collection of national artifacts. In the British Museum, Balfour argued in his address, the ethnology of most regions around the world was represented; however, there was a “reticence in dealing with our own nation which is especially noteworthy in view of the name which is applied to this great institution”. Whereas the pre- and proto-historic antiquities of Great Britain were represented by rich series in the museum,
tions in recent times will be compelled for the most part to seek his material for study far and wide and often in vain. (Balfour 1909: 253)

“What is required is a National Folk Museum, dealing exclusively and exhaustively with the history of culture of the British Nation within the historic period, and illustrating the growth of ideas and indigenous characteristics”, Balfour underlined (1909: 254). National Folk Museums could be found in most continental cities: Berlin, Budapest, Sarajevo, Moscow, Paris, Helsingfors, Copenhagen, Bergen, Christiania and Stockholm, with all of them expressing national pride. These folk museums, Balfour continued, contained objects of times long past as well as “characteristic features of the more recent culture and social economy of the peasantry, the backbone of every nation” (Balfour 1909: 254). The most important of these folk museums was, according to Balfour, Nordiska museet in Stockholm that afforded “a model worthy of imitation”. In Nordiska museet, it “may now be studied in detail the domestic and social economy, arts, industries, and amusements, ceremonies, beliefs and superstitions of the Swedish people and to a lesser extent of the other Scandinavian peoples” (Balfour 1909: 255).

Although “a model worthy of imitation”, Balfour stressed that a national museum, contrary to Nordiska museet, “should be devoted exclusively to national products and objects of national use”. If not, there was a risk that the national character of the museum would be obscured:

The exotic specimens, at first added to the collection to give additional interest and significance to the indigenous objects for which the museum was primarily designed, would be liable soon to outnumber and overwhelm them, and would rapidly obscure the original national character of the collection and tend to convert or pervert it into a museum of comparative technology. (Balfour 1909: 256)

It was wiser, Balfour stressed, to keep the two ideas separate. A national museum should be restricted exclusively to national objects. The function of dealing with “the evolution and geographical distribution of human arts and appliances of the wider basis of a broad comparative system” should be left to museums of comparative technology (Balfour 1909: 256). In defining “national objects” Balfour’s point of departure was obviously the geo-political borders of Great Britain. A national museum was a museum for and of the British people, collecting and exhibiting British cultural history. According to Balfour, the national museum should display the development of British culture in a chronological series “depicting the general life and habits of the people at successive periods” (Balfour 1909: 256). It should illustrate the environmental effects on physique, culture and national characteristics but also illuminate local peculiarities. The national museum ought to be completed by an open-air exhibition and by a permanent centre for performances of folk dances, songs and old-time ceremonies.

Balfour’s view reveals that the nationalising force in cultural history museums developed around the turn of the century. Nation, people and culture were finally united in terms of the territorial domain of the political state.
Conclusions

One important change in the museum landscape of late 19th century Europe was the rise of the museum of domestic (in contrast to exotic) folk culture. It was here that the Scandinavian countries played a pioneering role. Many museum historians have pinpointed nationalism as the basic spiritual force behind the rise of major institutions like Nordiska Museet in Sweden and Norsk Folkemuseum in Norway. This paper argues that, while in a sense this is true, it misses the vital point that Nordiska Museet and the unsuccessful predecessor of Norsk Folkemuseum, the University Museum of Ethnography in Oslo, collected and displayed a Scandinavian “folk”. The museums were certainly Swedish and Norwegian institutions of popular education and learning but their “folk” was a Scandinavian one in the “old” sense of the concept of nation as a cultural community transcending politically defined territories. They both conceived themselves as ethnographic museums at a time when ethnography meant the study of folk culture generally. The original name of Nordiska Museet was the Scandinavian Ethnographic Museum. Around the turn of the century in 1900 the concept of ethnography came to designate only the cultures of primitive peoples. At the same time, the longstanding drifting of meaning of the concept of “nation” – from “people” to “state” – was coming to an end.

Strongly contributing to the idea of Scandinavian folk culture museums in Sweden and Norway was Scandinavianism and the union between Sweden and Norway, established in 1814. Artur Hazelius, the successful founder of Nordiska Museet, Ludvig Kristensen Daa and Yngvar Nielsen, directors of the University Museum of Ethnography, were all active in the Scandinavian movement. After about 1870 “old-school” Scandinavian nationalism started losing ground to “new-school” territorial nationalism. From about 1890 the union between Sweden and Norway was hastening towards it dissolution in 1905. As a consequence, the folk culture museum movement in Norway changed paths into Hans Aall’s Norsk Folkemuseum, founded in 1894, and pressures mounted to “nationalise” Nordiska Museet in Sweden, i.e. to turn it into a proper Swedish museum of cultural history.

In this nationalising process of Nordiska Museet the political downfall of Scandinavianism ran parallel to changes in ideology of the emerging museum profession. The politically convenient “de-Scandinavisation” of Nordiska Museet after Hazelius’ death in 1901 was therefore argued in terms of scientific and museological prudence. Through the combined forces of conceptual changes to “nation”, the downfall of Scandinavianism and the rise of a museum profession Nordiska Museet transformed into a Swedish National Cultural History Museum with a big division to cover neighbouring countries.

There are many connections between nationalism, nation-building and museum development in Europe in the 19th century. Yet the formation of nation-states and the spiritual ascent of political nationalism in the 19th century may as a theory of the driving forces of museum-building be over-emphasised with regard to the ma...
tor novelty of the museum branch, the folk culture museum. As exemplified by
the development of folk culture museums in Sweden and Norway adapting collections
to nation-state borders was not a significant 19th century trait. It only developed at the very end of the century, when the original concept of “nation” as people and culture, in this case Scandinavia, was gradually being subordinated to the concept of “nation” as state and political territory.


Notes
1 The capacity of the idea of a Nordic cultural community to negotiate national tensions is the main subject of the research project National History – Nordic Culture: Negotiating identity in the museums that is also examined in Aronsson (2008).
5 The argument could easily be expanded to Denmark for the same period. See Aronsson 2008. For contemporary attempts to revitalise a Nordic dimension, see the contributions by Stuart Burch and Egle Rindzeviciute in this volume.
6 Handlingar rörande installationen i Nordiska museets byggnad, bilaga nämndens protokoll af den 24 april och 6 maj 1902 (Stockholm 1902).
7 Ibid.
8 For a more comprehensive account of these conflicts and more specific information about relevant sources, see Hillström (2006), Chapter 9.
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Articles in *Nordisk familjebok*

Acceptance and Conformity: Merging Modernity with Nationalism in the Stockholm Exhibition in 1930

By Carl Marklund & Peter Stadius

Abstract

This article takes a closer look at how interwar supporters of modernism sought to overcome the opposition they had to face. It does so by looking at the usage of history and Swedishness at the Stockholm Exhibition in 1930 and contrasting this experience with a brief excursus on the image of progress and Americanism as presented at the A Century of Progress International Exposition, held in Chicago in 1933–1934. The backers of both these exhibitions – functionalist architects and progressive businessmen, respectively – consciously sought to find ways in which to savor the propagandistic value of this “the shock of the new” while retaining a reassuring continuity between well-known and widespread self-identifications with “the idyll of the past.” They did so by forging “national” forms of modernity, attempting to bypass the political conflicts and ideological polarizations which characterized the interwar years. As such, it is argued, they also exemplify how the logic of the exhibition could be used for harnessing technology, science, and funkis (functionalism) as tools for re-identifying the nation with modernity and simultaneously de-politicizing modernism.

Keywords: Exhibitions, modernity, modernism, anti-modernism, nationalism, functionalism, progressivism
More than any other date since the industrial revolution 1930 constitutes a boundary line between old and new [in Sweden].

Göran Therborn (Therborn 1981: 25–26; Pred 1995: 97)

The utility art of every age shall be a child of its time. Novelties shall be tested, meanings confronted with each other. But the artistic inspiration must have to be rooted deeply into the own soil, in the soul of the own people, in order to grow sound and strong.

Crown Prince Gustaf Adolf (SvD, 17.5.1930)

Introduction

The Nordic, or Scandinavian, countries are often assumed to have followed a rather unique path towards “modernity.” This path has been characterized by compromise (or even consensus), cooperation (between classes and interests), and relative peacefulness, at least if compared with interwar Continental Europe (Stråth & Sørensen 1997; Glans & Almqvist 2001). While this characterization may underestimate the numerous conflicts which in fact took place there is nevertheless a powerful notion that the “project” of modernization provided a unifying vision which could bypass some of the many conflicts and fault-lines which undoubtedly existed in Nordic societies.

Indeed, the emergence of a new Nordic, modern, (social-)democratic, and welfare-based society construction, mostly in Denmark and Sweden, has for long been central when characterizing Scandinavian societies both abroad and at home during the last 80 years or so. Most notably, inter-war Scandinavia was portrayed as capable of somehow combining the past with the future, the old with the new, and the modern with the national. In July 1936, just to take one example, Tennesseee editor and historian George Fort Milton informed US President Franklin D. Roosevelt in a letter that he was crossing the Atlantic:

…to study how the Scandinavians have made such an admirable synthesis of yesterday and tomorrow [...] I am persuaded that the discoverable and usable analogies in Sweden and Denmark are substantially more than America can find in the more rigid autarkies such as Russia, Italy, and Germany [...] There has been consent as well as change. And it is extraordinarily important that we here in America find out how there can be change by consent rather than by conflict. (Woodward 1997: 302)

However, the Scandinavian countries were not the only societies struggling with the challenge of modernity – “the shock of the new,” in Robert Hughes’ famous characterization – at this time. It is therefore valuable to place the Scandinavian attempts in international comparison.

In this article, we will take a closer look at how the idea and image of a modern Nordic mass society model was kick-started during the Stockholm Exhibition in 1930. While the Stockholm Exhibition has been analyzed in some detail by previous scholars, its particular role in the Swedish attempt at joining the old with the
new has not yet been compared and contrasted with other exhibitions in other countries. Modernity is often said to form part of the national mythology of Sweden, in some ways akin to the American national identification with “progress” (Ruth 1984). We will therefore make a brief outlook to the A Century of Progress International Exposition held in Chicago in 1933 and 1934 in order to compare American and Swedish attempts to merge modernism with nationalism.¹

Both the Stockholm and the Chicago Exhibitions – as museum exhibitions, industrial expositions, and art fairs more generally – served as display cases of American and Swedish society undergoing great changes. As such, they represent attempts at freezing the liquid and potentially dangerous experience of modernity into a more controlled national framing. The idea of fairs and exhibitions was born around a mid 19th century concept of national pedagogical practice and class inclusion. At the close of the 19th century the fairs developed into more or less institutionalized forms of competition and comparison between different nations (Cornell 1952: 116–132; Wurdak 1996: 51–84). National museums also fitted into this broader movement towards national cohesion and international competition, seeking to forge a collective understanding of the history of the nation, while the task of fairs and exhibitions carried the ambition to guide the nation towards the future. Hence, exhibitions and museums have both been conditioned by current needs. In both cases, the boosting of national ego has been the rule, rather than the exception.

This need of boosting the national ego gained a more acute edge under the pressure of rising economic instability and rampant financial crisis which hit both Europe and North America at the end of the 1920s. The resulting crisis brought out conflict about the direction of the future and the tangent of the past in most industrial societies as national myths were shaken to the core. It is in this context we must see the new national narrative on display in both Stockholm in 1930 and in Chicago in 1933–1934. However, not everyone agreed to these new narratives. For example, the new and modern Sweden aggressively marketed and displayed at the Stockholm Exhibition pleased some and disgusted others, in Sweden as well as abroad. Such a bold manifestation of a new aesthetic and social program was obviously felt as a political standpoint as well.

In other words, modernity did not merely represent the shock of new forms of art and expression. It also came packed with notions of a new social order which ran against traditional understandings of the good life and “the idyll of the past.” As such, the aesthetics of modernism could hardly be separated from the political and social program of cultural radicals. So, who needed and wanted this new modern Sweden and this new America? Who were the actors? What were the arguments? These exhibitions served as a catalyst for a quite heated debate on modernity and modernism in both countries, debates which would last well until the outbreak of the Second World War. In this debate, attitudes towards national his-
tory, subject to conscious subordination to futuristic aims in the exhibition, can be studied in operation.

In order to do so, we will first map the background of the Stockholm Exhibition in 1930 and the group of functionalist architects who organized it, in particular looking at the way in which they made use of particular stories about the ethnicity, history, and tradition of the nation in order to market their modernizing ideology, but also at what kind of opposition they encountered. This Swedish experience is compared and contrasted with the attempt of American business and industry to market modernity as a benign power in the wake of the Great Depression.

It is our argument that the planners of both the Stockholm and the Chicago exhibitions consciously sought to find ways in which to retain the propagandistic value of the shock of the new and at the same time present a reassuring continuity between well-known social norms of the past by forging a new national form of modernity. We claim that this attempt in many ways ran counter to the political conflicts and ideological polarizations which characterized the interwar years, and represented a conscious attempt at harnessing modernism as a tool for national re-identification and modernistic de-politicization.

Architecture and Functionalism – The Stockholm Exhibition 1930

The Stockholm Exhibition in 1930 was a national exhibition arranged by the Municipality of Stockholm and Svenska Slöjdföreningen [“Swedish Arts and Crafts Association”], a national arts and crafts association central in the country’s national cultural policy making from late 19th century onwards. The Exhibition has often been seen as the main single event introducing functionalist architecture on a popular level in the emerging mass society in Sweden (Råberg 1970). The exhibition was a continuation of the tradition of similar art and industrial fairs arranged in Stockholm in 1851, 1866, 1897 and 1909 (Chrispinsson & Sörenson 1999). The core group behind the exhibition included architect Gunnar Asplund (1885–1940), journalist Ludvig “Lubbe” Nordström (1882–1942), and art historian Gregor Paulsson (1889–1977), who also acted as president of Svenska Slöjdföreningen (after 1976 Svensk Form).

Paulsson had first hatched the idea of an exhibition in Stockholm after his visit to the Paris World Fair in 1925. After his appointment as commissar of the Exhibition in 1928, he delivered a speech at Svenska slöjdföreningen revealing his new and bold approach for the planned exhibition, opting for a full-out acceptance of new functionalist trends. This was a signal of how the entire project was to be distanced from the arts and crafts approach and the neo-classic “Swedish grace” of the 1920s launched to international fame in Paris, which was kept as too elitist and unsatisfactory in its modernist message. With him he had a group of architects, complementing each other: the young and dogmatic ideologist Uno Åhrén (1897–1977), also nick-named Mr. Concrete, the social housing pioneer Sven
Markelius (1889–1972) and the above-mentioned Gunnar Asplund, who somewhat smoothed the break between 1920s classicism and the radical functionalism of the 1930s within the group (Sommar 2006: 123).

As Lorentz Lyttkens has pointed out the industrial revolution and its modernity had to be transformed into an equally social revolution of modernity and this, “was launched with thunder and lightning by the Stockholm Exhibition in 1930” (Lyttkens 1991: 18; Pred 1995: 97). In this sense the commissar Paulsson set the tone, opting for housing and other structurally fundamental pieces of society construction rather that just promoting beautiful design objects in everyday life, as had been the case in the 1917 Home exhibition (Hemutställningen) arranged at the Liljevalchs museum of art in Stockholm by the same arts and crafts society (Alzén 2002). The stakes were now much higher. The space for dialogue with what was conceived as the reigning bourgeoisie aesthetic ideals was often minimal, and the functionalist modernism was frequently marked by a certain unwillingness to communicate with the past. This shock of the new was the main impact of the Stockholm Exhibition. This shock treatment was aimed at overwhelming the masses and to disarm possible resistance.

In comparison with the World Exhibition held the summer and autumn 1929 in Barcelona, the emphasis on providing a uniform functionalist architectural milieu in Stockholm was indeed striking. Even if the famous German pavilion Werkbund by Ludvig Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969) in Barcelona has a prominent place in architectural history, it was about the only true functionalist statement in Barcelona. This Bauhaus School and Weimar Germany show case had to share the role of attraction on the Montjuich Hill with The Spanish village – el Poble español, a collage of picturesque and traditional Spanish architecture still standing transformed to a recreational and tourist attraction. In Stockholm, by contrast, the organizers provided a functionalist statement exhibition, where absolutely no building on the entire fair ground was allowed to deviate from the central ideology of modern, radical and minimalistic aesthetics. This was made by creating what the British architect historian J. M. Richards in 1940 credited as “the first large area with functionalist architecture on the same place” (Pred 1995: 98). Until the Stockholm Exhibition, functionalist works had mostly been presented singularly to the great public, often looking quite strange, especially in highly built-up urban environments. Now, for the first time, there was a dedicated and uniform functionalist space ready to be experienced by the masses during that summer.

And indeed, the masses came: Considering the short time the exhibition lasted, this event – part public education, part popular amusement – marked an unprecedented modern mass experience in the history of Sweden. The exhibition area on the Gärdet south sea shore facing Djurgården stretching to present day Diplomats-taden, was visited by almost four million visitors from the opening day 16 May to the closure on 29 September 1930. Even if this represented only a tenth of the estimated visitors to the Chicago Exhibition (see below) three years later, it ri-
valed the latter in terms of modernism and optimism. Indeed, the Depression had not yet hit Sweden with its full power at the time the exhibition gates opened in the beginning of this unusually hot summer.

Even if the facilities were all torn down afterwards, the memory of the exhibition would live on and constitute the symbol of how Sweden entered modernity. One often quoted manifestation of this memory culture is the young “proletarian author” Ivar Lo-Johansson’s (1901–1990) account from 1979:

The many acres of plain grass stretching from the Diplomat City to the Life Guard Dragoons had been built-up with functionalistic houses and exhibition halls of steel and glass, paved with new streets and given way for squares, towers, dams, dustbins, signposts with prohibitions, oases for rest and contemplation of a brand new city. All that could block the vision was gone, all rubbish which could have prevented the observer from gazing into the future had been removed. [---] Flags were blowing in the wind. Fountains were playing. The whole thing felt as if one were walking on a street leading right into the future. One was already in Urbs, The City of the New Human.

(Lo-Johansson 1979: 452)

Indeed, the Stockholm exhibition played an important role as a symbol of a new national self-identification of Sweden as a “modern” and “progressive” country. This national re-branding played out on two different levels: On the one hand, the exhibition signaled what may be called a “nationalization” of the long-standing concerns regarding the quality of the “good home” for the ordinary man and woman. In fact, the exhibition introduced the general public to the functionalist socio-political program for an industrial, planned, rationalized, and standardized production of housing to meet the needs of a badly-housed Swedish working class. This problem was considered to be of national importance. If functionalism claimed to be capable of solving this dividing issue, it would by inference be taken as an intervention reaching far beyond the confines of mere aestheticism, into the core of the political tension about what kind of society Sweden should be, a debate which had been running high in the wake of intensifying labor market conflict and growing political polarization in the late 1920s.

On the other hand, and far more playfully, the new Swedish nickname funkis – that diminutive of the term for the new architectural style – begun to symbolize everything new and “cool” in colloquial speech, including clothes, music, lifestyle. As such, it became almost a plague during the summer of 1930 (Pred 1995: 108–109; Chrispinsson 2007: 80). The word funkis – not used in English – was taken into Danish, Norwegian and Finnish architectural jargon soon, which shows the Nordic impact of the Stockholm exhibition. It thus marks a beginning of launching radical architecture as part of a national and specific Nordic (or also referred to as Scandinavian) form of modernity. In Denmark the functionalist ideas arrived somewhat independently, but in the other Nordic cases the Stockholm exhibition was crucial. The new trends also arrived autonomously to Norway during the late 1920s, but the importance of the Stockholm exhibition as a showcase for a larger public is also underlined by Norwegian art historians
(Brekke, Nordhagen & Lexau 2003: 318). The Stockholm exhibition was not the absolute beginning of the broader Nordic interest in the functionalist ideas and aesthetics, but perhaps the single most important event at this early stage and a starting point for a broader diffusion of the functionalist ideas (Lindh 2002: 113).

In Finland the young Alvar Aalto (1898–1976) joined the International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM), which was the main international forum for the new functionalist architecture, on the initiative of Sweden’s Sven Markelius. He was greatly inspired by the new trends when visiting the second CIAM congress in Frankfurt am Main in 1929, and upon returning from Germany he shared this new and radical vision with the Finnish press, stating that architecture had to: “[...] forward the idea of replacing the present way of building based on taste preferences and coincidences, with a complete consideration of a more scientifically established minimum norms.” (ÅU, 3.11.1929) This social awareness displayed by Aalto was undoubtedly close to the ideas of the central radical modernists in Sweden. Together with Erik Bryggman (1891–1955) he had presented the first pure functionalist buildings in Finland at the Turku 700 years anniversary fair in the summer of 1929 (Lindh 2002: 112–113).

“Accept the Given Reality – Only Thus May We Have a View to Control It...”

It was in conjunction with this newly-established self-identification of a “modern” society that the functionalist architects behind the Stockholm Exhibition could programmatically declare their motto to be acceptera (“accept”), i.e., “accept the given reality – only thus may we have a view to control it, to master it in order to change it and create culture which is a flexible tool for life.” (Asplund et al. 1931: 198) Acceptera [sic!] was also the title of a pamphlet book written collectively as a post scriptum of the exhibition and published in 1931 (hereafter referred to as: Acc). Acceptera is not just an architectural manifesto, but rather an all-embracing statement of how the life of modernity could be achieved in Sweden. The crucial point was to strive forward on the path of progress, explicitly defined as industrialism, mass production, mechanization of all sectors of production, urbanism and a rejection of old bourgeoisie aesthetic norms. Otherwise, the authors – who included Asplund, Paulsson, Markelius and Åhrén, as well as the architects Wolter Gahn (1890–1985) and Eskil Sundahl (1890–1974) – explicitly warned, Sweden would be relegated from the centre to the periphery. With simple yet powerful imagery, the authors of Acceptera showed how Sweden had become part of what they called “A-Europe,” the Europe of tractors and electricity, great cities, efficient industries, and new media entertainment. Yet, it constantly ran the risk of ending up in what they called “B-Europe,” the Europe of horse and carriage, traditions, and superstitions, as exemplified by the Balkans and Eastern Europe, as well as the south of Italy and Spanish Andalucia.
The authors operated with the terminology of present and ancient Sweden – “Nu- och forn-Sverige”. The former was B-Sweden, with a religious culture from the 16th century, a dwelling culture from the 18th century, and an education culture from the 19th century (Acc: 22–24). At the same time, Swedish industry had moved full speed ahead into the 20th century. The present day belonged to A-Sweden. Indeed, some even concluded that Sweden had entered a Second Great Power Era, as was incidentally the title of a book published two years before the Exhibition by industrialist Gerard De Geer (1928). In his book, De Geer explained that export of patented Swedish innovations would conquer the world and bring prosperity to what less than two decades earlier had still been known as det befästa fattighuset [“The Fortified Poor-House”] in the phrasing of a widely spread and read Social Democratic pamphlet.

Since the Swedish industry had clearly shown its development during the past 60–70 years, it was of utmost importance than the rest of the society would not lag behind. This lack of development, visible for many in the large emigration wave from rural Sweden to North America, was a true concern and fear scenario for many. The past would have to be aligned with the needs of the present, B would have to be upgraded to A. The authors of Acceptera and the central figures behind the Stockholm exhibition skillfully tied these larger societal questions to the question of housing, town planning and radical minimalistic design. This was the still missing piece that would make Sweden a great place to live in. The finger was pointing at each individual of the nation: “The one who does not want to accept, he desists from cooperating in the development of culture. He will recline into a meaningless pose of bitter heroism or worldly skepticism.” (Acc: 198)

This intriguing oscillation between the individual and the collective is omnipresent in Acceptera: The first page in the book portrays a photo montage of a young man standing in front of a vast sea of an anonymous crowd, and the text asks: “The individual and the masses... the personal or the general?” (Acc: 3) The imagery illustrates a central tension in the Acceptera discourse: On the one hand it is about creating a certain type of mass society where the rate of class inclusion, and hence social leveling, would be greater than ever before. On the other hand the text speaks directly to the reader, to the individual. There is no doubt that the pamphlet was aimed at reforming the individual, let it be that this time the group of individuals was very large. This constant interplay between individual and collective is in the end aimed at the individual, who is given the responsibility to elevate him- or herself to the level of modernity. The figure of thought bears a resemblance with how religious ideas and practices have been promoted in different societies. All instructions, explanations and motivations are given by the experts – the self-ordained high priests of modernist revivalism (Gullberg 2001: 127) – i.e., from above. It is just to follow the sign-posted path and to accept the objective reality. This is at least the textual strategy build up by the authors, and was ob-
viously also the central idea behind the huge public event that the exposition constituted.

The stated aim of the Exhibition and the authors of *Acceptera* was to promote the image of irreversible progress and to, “shape a visual and emotional identity for a new human being that can take the step from ‘B-Europe’ to ‘A-Europe’.” (Mattson & Wallensten 2009: 16) Thus it is no surprise that the main focus of the exhibition, apart from the steady focus on the new and brave modern future, is to describe and make the Swedes aware of the giant leap in wealth and prosperity that Sweden had achieved during the past 60 years. The grand narrative was focused on the blessing brought to this country by industrial development, and consequently rural culture and tradition was impossible to integrate into this vision of future Sweden. The contrast to the Scandinavian Arts and Industry exhibition held in Stockholm 1897 and featuring the then recently opened *Skansen* is striking. Rural culture was a thing of the past as was also the central role of the parish priest in society. Now, scientifically competent experts, who contemporary Americans called “social engineers,” were to guide society according to good political morals and scientific competence.

Much has been said about the explicit message of modernity and how this was imposed from above on the Swedes by a certain interest group that seemed to have some kind of semi-official blessing by authorities. This was a time when “the expert”, possessing scientific knowledge, was highly esteemed and respected in an intellectual environment where science would aim at providing a new universal objectivity. This was the content of the so-called social engineering ideals present not only the radical left and movements like Clarté, but more and more also accepted over the ideological borderlines. Even if many within the left claimed monopoly on radical modernism, it is clear that leading industrial actors had a great interest in these ideas as part of their own strategies of earning profit. This becomes apparent when looking at the Chicago exhibition 1933 later in this article.

This observation also makes it important to ask to what extent and in which respect was the exhibition and the practical implementation of the functionalist program in Sweden a specific Nordic phenomenon? Functionalism as such was a European movement, centered in Germany and France and with multiple early influence channels over the continent. Later it was implemented globally as a form of modern architecture. Yet, we feel that functionalism has had a comparatively greater and over-reaching impact on society in the Nordic countries. Firstly, there was an articulated attempt to present radical functionalism as closely connected to traditional folk architecture. This was a way of claiming the new radical ideas as part of national cultural heritage, which differed radically from how the heavily future-oriented functionalism was perceived in other parts of the world. Journalist and cultural historian Gustaf Näsström (1899–1979) published a popularized book *Svensk funktionalism* [Swedish functionalism] in the fall of 1930,
simultaneously with *Acceptera*. His message is explicit, when he claims that, “many tendencies in today’s radical architecture have deep roots in old Swedish building tradition and history.” (Näsström 1930: Foreword) This was in line with the authors of *Acceptera*. The connection of aesthetic minimalism with rural culture, closeness to nature and the Lutheran value of thrift can be noted also in other Nordic countries. Secondly, the practically goal-oriented implementation and the strong focus on centralized planning can be seen as a typical feature of the comparatively homogeneous Nordic societies with a traditionally high degree of trust in authorities. This consensual societal and political culture of trust in authorities and law obedience, potentially explains the easy acceptance of the shock of the new, given “from above” by authorities that the majority recognizes.

This to a certain extent programmatic strategy of implementing modernity from above invites us to consider the analysis made by historian Henrik Stenius on tolerance and modernity in Nordic societies. Stenius sees a connection between the uniform rural Lutheran culture that united political culture in both Scandinavian kingdoms during the early modern era (circa 1520–1800) and the Enlightenment project of modernity during the 20th century. The actors are just given different roles in the same play. Stenius sketches the outlines of a deeply-rooted culture of conformity in Scandinavian societies leaning on, “the peasant-as-citizen [...] determined to figure out the common good, to reach consensus, because it is the mark of true democracy to have everybody thinking alike” (Stenius 1997: 168). The idea of tolerance is not, as in some other regions were Protestantism is dominantly present, a matter of tolerating diversity and accepting subcultures, but rather a question of “patience” in the “strive to draw everybody into the world of modernity” (Stenius 1997: 169).

This suggests that the entire exhibition can be seen as a one and only option presented to the Swedish people: “Accept, or otherwise…” Otherwise, the argument implied, the future of both the individual and the nation would be imperiled. Refusal to accept the given reality would result the continuation of misery and injustices for the poorer classes. As such, it would be a betrayal of not only the concrete achievements of Swedish industry but also of more long-held values of the Swedish nation. The organizers apparently believed strongly in their cause, and a certain amount of sectarian conviction and dogmatism can be detected in their attitudes (Gullberg 2001: 127). Somehow it was inevitable that new and modern times had arrived and this had to be accepted, but exactly which kind of modernity was still up for debate as was the question of how radical this consensually accepted modernity would be.

It is therefore perhaps significant to note that the debate on modernity and modernism in Sweden as set off by the 1930 Exhibition was primarily about…houses. It was not primarily about non-figurative art, stream of consciousness literature, machine romantics, cult of the future, or about a new political program, but, indeed, about houses. This pragmatic connection between modernity and ordinary
people’s homes, housing, and living standards, accentuated the practical and comparatively low key intellectual touch of Swedish modernism (Mattson & Wallenstein 2009: 16; Eriksson 2010: 7). It is also the essence of the Swedish national interpretation of the new and radical modernist manifesto. The simple, ordinary, folksish, pragmatic and practical were on the agenda, in contrast to the metaphysical, revolutionary, and often overtly intellectual and speculative dimension which dominated much of radical modernism elsewhere in the 1920s and 1930s. The strategy was to forward the program as containing universal and rational values, thus making it difficult to challenge with any “serious” arguments and thereby forcing the opponents to revert to the rhetorical arsenal of tradition, aesthetics, and style.

It is therefore of some interest to look at whether the Swedes so readily did accept the one and only option presented at the Stockholm Exhibition and whether the opponents went into the trap set up by the functionalists. A closer look at the way in which the Exhibition was received in the press and in the public opinion – support as well as opposition – might therefore be relevant here.

The Opposition

The early reporting in the press was unanimously positive and a general enthusiasm about that summer’s great event sparked an initial atmosphere of consensus. This was underlined by the presence of the King Gustav V and the Crown Prince at the inauguration ceremonies on the 16th of May 1930. There was an established tradition, both in Sweden and other monarchies, that the monarch as a unifying symbol of the nation would sanction grand exhibitions by inaugurating them. In his speech King Gustav V was diplomatic to say the least, declaring that:

Even if one can have diverging opinions about some of the most modern schools and ambitions to shape something new in terms of aesthetic value, I am, however convinced that the core of the exhibition in a joyful way will show that our art industry takes a most prominent place not only here at home but also on the world market. (SvD, 17.5.1930)

The role of the King was to be the symbol of Sweden, not to take part in a cultural debate. The existing tensions within Swedish art and architectural circles would surface on the pages of the daily press quite soon as the summer advanced. It was a debate that had an elitist and expert oriented dimension on the one hand and a popular dimension on the other hand. It is obvious that there was no unanimous acceptance of the new functionalist program, and the apologists and propagators of these ideas were acutely aware of this.

The opposition within the art and architectural field clearly manifested itself within the public debate. Many in the older generation could not accept the exhibition, and the popular author and artist Albert Engström (1869–1940) is credited for having said that this all reminded him of things he had seen in Moscow in the early twenties (Pred 1995: 111). While Engström represented a cultural and intel-
lectual past that was now fading in Stockholm, the perhaps most prominent and persistent domestic critic was the furniture designer Carl Malmsten, also a member of Svenska slöjdföreningen. Malmsten (1888–1972) was primarily critical about the promotion of industrially produced goods at the expense of handicraft tradition. He was of the same generation as Paulsson and Asplund – while many of his fellow combatants, such as sculptors Carl Milles (1875–1955) and Carl Eldh (1873–1954), as well as architect Ragnar Östberg (1866–1945), belonged to an older cohort – so there was no generational gap to explain this divergence in opinion.

For Malmsten, the sell-out of Swedish handicraft tradition in the name of industrialism, functionalism and internationalism was not the right path to take. The exhibition organizers met Malmsten’s complains at the planning stage by stating that everything that could be qualified as good quality Swedish handicraft would be at display, “only copies and apparent pastisch works would be excluded. No specific artistic style is to be favoured.” (Råberg 1970: 175; Rudberg 1999: 197) This promise on behalf of the organizers was not kept and concessions to the “elitist” arts and crafts movement were minimal. The rumors of programmatic supervision and control of everything from large buildings to small details as merchandise in the vending booths, was apparently more than just rumors and during the summer the conservative daily Svenska Dagbladet started a campaign of trying to find as many kitsch objects as possible and giving them publicity in the press. They apparently succeeded in their provocations, since the organizers as a consequence of this publicity even sanctioned raids on the fair grounds.

The critique of functionalist architecture continued during the thirties and it is apparent that the exhibition 1930 angered many opponents. The grand revenge of the opponents was symbolically erected on the very same plains of Gärdet in 1938, when Sjöhistoriska museet [“The Maritime Museum”] was inaugurated. The building designed by Ragnar Östberg, the architect of the Stockholm City Hall, represented a neo-classical style that had been prevalent in the 1920’s. The building even flirted with the late 18th century Gustavian style, since the stern piece of Amphion, the pleasure and command vessel of Gustavus III was to have a central place in the building. The museum project was only possible with the generous donation by the Knut and Alice Wallenberg Foundation. The only conditions the donors set for the Swedish state was that the building was not to be designed in a functionalistic style, which obviously caused a great uproar among the leading functionalist architects (Cornell 1965: 24).

**Svea Rike: Past, Present and Future Tense**

However, despite the shock value of Acceptera and the funkis modernity on display at the Stockholm Exhibition, the organizers did make an attempt to bridge the rift between the past and the present, between new and old: The Svea Rike exposi-
tion gives us an insight into how modernity coped with history when aggressively forging a new ideology in Sweden in 1930. This exhibition section has been thoroughly examined by both Annika Alzén (2002) and Petter Tistedt (2005) and the idea of dealing with *Svea Rike* here is to examine it as the only historical element in the Exhibition.

Even though the organizers frequently underlined the unofficial character of *Svea Rike*, it is clear that it had an undoubtedly official character bearing the name of the realm and posing the official coat of arms at the entrance (Tistedt 2005: 26). The Crown Prince was honorary president of the Exhibition Committee and as mentioned earlier the entire event had been opened by the King, who seemed especially pleased with this part of the Exhibition, according to the conservative press (SvD, 17.5.1930). *Svea Rike* (hereafter referred to as: SR) combined history with current statistics and racial anthropology, and a grand teleological interpretation of the current state of affairs and the potential of future Sweden was thus given historical depth. The section was predominantly thus a presentation of current statistics, a kind of learn-to-love-your-country’s-statistic exposition in the name of scientific rationality that was so much a part of the dominating modernity discourse at the exhibition.

The separate, obviously functionalist style, building hosted a section were great efforts had been made to visualize statistics on Sweden in an appealing manner for the great public. However, history had its role in this setting, more precisely in the entrance hall where a set of posters visualized the great past of the Swedes. It started with, “how Sweden arose from the cold and darkness of the Ice Age more than 10 000 years ago […] that was the beginning of the Swedish Realm’s drama.” (*SR*: 7) A little bit further a chronological exposé of high visual ambitions, presented historical persons, buildings, documents etc. from medieval time onwards. This was a more traditional way of packing historical knowledge as part of national education. The great kings from Gustavus Vasa and Gustavus II Adolphus to the scientists Carl Linnaeus and Olof Rudbeck were present in this quite conventional presentation.

The initial text for the *Svea Rike* exhibition, written by journalist Ludvig “Lubbe” Nordström, is very explicit in its objectifying of Sweden’s past as a tool for future direction. These 10 000 years had been a process leading to a national unit that had strived and fought for its existence. As a northern European country it possessed the tradition of antiquity and, “250 years ago it was the leading power between The Arctic Ocean, the Atlantic Ocean, the great Russian-Siberian tundra belt and Europe, the centre of culture.” (*SR*: 7) However, the drama was still continuing, something Nordström wanted to be sure that the spectator understood and took to his and her heart: “And now? The Swedish Realm as a great power ended 200 years ago, but during the last 100 years its economical power has slowly gained. Sweden is a leading industrial country.” (*SR*: 7) History had proven that Sweden could not just survive, but also achieve a great position internationally.
This was the challenge now facing the Swedes. The Swedish Realm was now in a process of change. This process of industrialization, urbanization and internationalization – in short modernization – put new demands on society and its members. What was needed in this new era was an “intellectually trained and morally mature people” as “the main capital of the Swedish Realm. School will be the steady foundation of the factory Sweden.” (SR: 7) Nordström’s rhetoric is ambiguous. He speaks about the “factory Sweden” in the purest Accepera style, but at the same time as the exposition itself is called Svea Rike – The Swedish Realm. The first term is extreme in its futuristic proclamation, while the latter embodies all the traditions that the coat of arms Tre Kronor stood for as it embellished the functionalist façade of the Svea Rike building. Certainly, however, it was Nordström’s as well as the Exhibition organizers overall aim to bridge the apparent opposition between exactly these two symbolic worlds by showing how the pride of past glory on the battlefield could be sublimated into belief in a new, modern and productive Sweden.

In many provincial newspapers this section attracted the most unanimous praise. Maybe it was the section easiest to grasp, and thus the most nationalistic in a traditional and “understandable” sense (Pred 1995; Tistedt 2005: 56–57). Obviously this enthusiasm can be read as a subtle articulation of an ambiguity towards the massive functionalist shock that the rest of the Exhibition constituted. However, the presence of a history section to our mind had a role to play in the modernist shock treatment: The great moments and persons in Swedish history tied together old and new, and helped to nationalize the next step that was now to be taken in “the drama of the Swedish Realm”. Those who wanted the series of successful events in Sweden’s national history to continue had to accept the new functionalist program for the sake of the nation and for the sake of him- or herself. Only through accepting modernity could Sweden become great again. Nationalism hence equaled modernism, and vice versa.

Interestingly, this initial part of Svea Rike, was a combination of history and racial anthropology – Historiska fotomontaget och rasbiologiska avdelningen [“Historical Photographical Montage and the Race Biology Section”]. (SR: 6) This accentuates – besides the obvious sign of the times – once again the focus on the nation as a collective through the individuals, each important for the total quality of the nation. The entire exposition was a message to the individual Swede, and here again the rhetoric is quite straightforward. A set of “six Swedish S” was presented as typical of the Swedish character: “självständighet [“independence”], skarpsynhet [“sharp-sightedness”], storsynthet [“generosity”], sparsamhet [“thriftiness”], stolthet [“pride”] and ståndskänsla inför världen [“sovereignty against the world”]” (Alzén 2002: 3). All statistics presented served the purpose of showing how Sweden was developing and becoming part of, “A-Europe or the industrial Europe, the nucleus of the world.”5 This could be explained by history, where “war had given him [the Swede] organization, science given him tools, and
from these industry evolved, that finally brought him out in the sun among the great nations of culture.” (SR: 7–8) Nordström used a metaphor of how ice was part of the soul of the Swede, thus explaining why the Swedish striving towards the warmth of the sun had always been the objective. History is described as a continuing progression, a constant drive for reaching the highest level of civilisation and wealth. And what else would have been more natural for a country that possessed such a high degree of pure Nordic-Germanic race types among its population.

The section for race biology was produced by Herman Lundborg, head of the Swedish Institute for racial biology founded in Uppsala 1921, Rasbiologiska insti-
tutet [“Institute of Race Biology’]. Here a map of Sweden was sectioned showing the predominance of the “Nordic” (Aryan) racial type in the country. The differ-
ing types presented as constituting part of the Swedish racial blend were the “Swedish Vallons, the East-Baltic Race (‘Finns’) and Lapps.” (SR: 21) The people was indeed seen as “the main capital” in the quest for national success, or as Lundborg had written some years earlier: “A populace material of good racial faculties is the highest asset of a country.” (Lundborg 1925: 8) Even though it is not expressed, it becomes quite clear that the ideal Swede would be of Nordic race.

**Medelson: Modernity as Bodily Exercise**

However, this serene and nationalistic pathos together with the seriousness of presenting scientific data needed some lighter touch in order not to bore the public. Homo ludens was thus also let in, but even in the playful presentation of Medelson – the average middle-aged Swedish man – there was an underlying serious mes-
sage. The reshaping of both body and mind was the underlying purpose of this seemingly humorous part of Svea Rike. The rotund and jovial figure of Medelson is somewhat awkwardly placed on a pedestal. Behind him a chart of his true char-
acter and opinions is presented as a circular diagram. He is a man who is content and do not want change. He likes the way things are, does not particularly fancy doing too much sports, eats and drinks a little bit too much, but generally he is a nice chap. On both sides of the diagram two sporting figures, a track runner and a cross country skier respectively, hint at how a modern and new human being was to look like. At the most extreme is additionally added two images of two small carved wood figures by the popular and famous folk artist Döderhultarn. These were rural archetype men, here symbolizing the past and undeveloped B-Europe.

Set between the scruffy figures of forn-Sverige, and the high-performance sportsmen-citizens of nu-Sverige, Medelson is a not yet fulfilled version of the cultural (r-)evolution. An individual too content and unwilling to stretch his ca-
pacities to the full, is not a vital part of the collective work towards the fulfillment of a trimmed nation. Medelson must change, but he must also understand why he
has to conform for the sake on the Swedish Realm, that is now taking a giant leap in order to become a beacon for modernity in the world. A-Sweden in A-Europe cannot afford Medelson, who probably liked his old fluffy armchair just as much as the later Archie Bunker did in the 1970s American sitcom, to be too comfortable in his lifestyle. Medelson has to get in shape, do sports, eat less, drink less, and become a better citizen in order to fulfill his part of the deal.

As we can see, not only the those who did not conform to statistical norms – whichever “race” they belonged to – would need to conform to a new reality and accept a stricter regime in order to improve themselves in the interest of the Swedish Realm. Also, the statistically speaking “normal” Swedish man had to do his part of the job. He could not rely upon his very normalcy to make him exempt from the future drive of national/rational modern project as outlined at the Stockholm Exhibition and the path of the past as illustrated in the Svea Rike exhibit.

This “ideology” of functionalism relied upon two basic concepts, as Björn Linn has pointed out: The whole functionalist system of a typologization of the dimensions, demands, and needs of individual human life hinged upon the concept of “the average human,” l’homme moyen, as formulated by Belgian statistician Adolphe Quételet (1796–1874). The other concept concerned optimal efficiency in industrial production processes, as pioneered by Frederick W. Taylor (1856–1915). From these two sources, Linn argues, the idea that housing and living should be reorganized as the frames around a rationalized process of household work, rather than around social customs and practices of the past. In a parallel development, architects increasingly redefined themselves as engineers, becoming technicians rather than artists (Sandström 1989: 55; Zunz 1998).
But this reformulation also allowed for another very important step. The functionalist could also begin to take the step from collecting and analyzing facts about society, to begin to actively try to change and shape that society. Functionalism, in the national Swedish rendition as put on display in the Exhibition and in *Acceptera* presented two fix points for such a change: First, there was the idea of the average human – Medelson – which could be used to identify similarity as well as difference in a population and hence be used to inculcate a need for change. Second, there was the idea of a close connection between an unstoppable modernity which goes across all lands and from which there is no escape on the one hand, and a national community which cannot be denied, on the other.

Previously, modernity and modernism had largely been presented in Sweden as international in origin and alien in temperament. Numerous relatively negative accounts of modernity had dominated the public opinion up to this point, not the least since modernity was closely connected with the “cutthroat capitalism” and cultural leveling primarily symbolized by the great melting pot on the other side of the Atlantic where so many Swedes had gone (Alm 2002). Now, however, through the careful presentation of their arguments at the Stockholm Exhibition, the functionalist architects and their supporters among the cultural radicals across the political spectrum could launch modernity as not only the only way forward for Sweden, but also as the only truly Swedish way forward. Three years later, they would have the opportunity to present this image abroad, at the World’s Fair in Chicago in 1933–1934.

**Business and Progressivism – The Chicago Exhibition 1933–1934**

A little while ago this site was placid lake. Now, shimmering beside the water, a dream city is risen. It lights the sky with splendor, yet soon will disappear and be merely memory. […] As two partners might clasp hands, Chicago’s growth and the growth of science and industry have been united during this most amazing century.

*(Chicago. A Century of Progress [CCP], 1934)*

Since its founding in 1833 as a frontier outpost, Chicago had developed into one of North America’s biggest urban and industrial centers by the early 20th century. Chicago had become the archetypical modern metropolis, often depicted in films and books. To Americans and Europeans alike, Chicago embodied the promise and the peril of American life perhaps more than any other city at the time. Apart from celebrating the century which had passed since Chicago’s founding, the more wide-ranging goal of this massive investment in the midst of the Great Depression can be gauged from the theme of the fair: technical innovation and progress.

Progress had long been part of American identity. As such, it had been closely connected to the other core values of American civilization, such as competition, creativity, and individualism, especially in the field of business and entrepreneurship.
In the mid-1930s, however, this identification appeared questionable. Not only had the Great Depression brought progress to halt. It had also spawned a seed of doubt as to whether capitalism, liberalism, and individualism – core American values – were up to the test as the USA had reached its geographical limit and no longer seemed able to buy off its growing social problems by expansion to the west. Furthermore, modern industry and advanced technology, which had for some time been positively coded as part of American self-identification, appeared more nefarious as capitalism swung to an all-time low while highly technology-dependent sectors of the economy laid off workers in masses. Anti-modernism, anti-capitalism, and technology critique – since long predominantly European specialties, which played a mostly aesthetic role in American intellectual debate – begun to spread as Americans found themselves increasingly confused as to who they were and what kind of society they lived in (Pells 1973).

The organizers of the Chicago’s Centennial celebration – mostly business interests and industrialists – stated that the World’s Fair should largely in response to this sense of disorientation “help the American people to understand themselves, and to make clear to the coming generation the forces which have built this nation.” (CCP) In other words, the backers of the exposition sought to defend the existing order despite its many recent failures with references to the history of American progress, pointing to how American industry and “American civilization” had overcome adverse situations before.

In order to bring this point across, the organizers commissioned noted progressive historian Charles A. Beard (1874–1948) to write a piece on the concept of progress in light of the contemporary calamities and to connect it to the theme of the exposition (Beard 1932). Beard championed a rather unsentimental view of history (and history-writing) as a sociopolitical instrument for the change of the present in the service of the future (Beard & Beard 1927). For example, the Bolsheviks had shown, Beard told Raymond Fosdick already in 1922:

...that you can have the power of government – the symbols of sovereignty – and have nothing but dust and ashes. The sword won’t do the job any more. The social engineer is the fellow. The old talk about sovereignty, rights of man, dictatorship of the proletariat, triumphant democracy and the like is pure bunk. It will not run trains or weave cloth or hold society together.

(Hofstadter 1968; Nore 1983: 93)

Technology would be the only way forward towards the future, Beard concluded in his commissioned work for the World’s Fair. By subscribing to this view and making it the official ideology of the World’s Fair, the organizers not only sought to attract business interests. They also vied for support among the academic community (where Beard was a respected name) for a rallying cry to save traditional American values of thrift, industry, and innovation at a time when the nation turned against its past identity of modernity and progress.

The purpose of American business interests organizing the great Chicago Exposition was – among other things – to show that business could operate the econo-
my just as efficiently during the present crisis as it had managed to do earlier. The crucial task was therefore to repair the broken links between technology and industry and between science and capitalism in order to rekindle the belief in progress in a time of crisis (Marklund 2008). However, words alone would hardly suffice in convincing the American public about the inherent value of capitalism in the midst of the Great Depression. Action and example would be required.

“Science Finds, Industry Applies, Man Conforms”

Action and example is exactly what the Chicago exposition would put on offer to the 40 million or so visitors who gathered at the gay fairgrounds next to Lake Michigan for two summers in a row during the otherwise somber 1930s (Rydell 1993; Rydell & Schiavo 2010).

The motto of the Exposition was summarized in the sentence “Science Finds, Industry Applies, Man Conforms.” This motto clearly outlined the role of these three elements, and requires little interpretation: Science would ask the crucial questions about “know what,” industry would provide the “know how” while citizens would be happy to tag along as consumers.

The so-called “Hall of Science” was at the heart of A Century of Progress. The building itself contained the message of modernity as the official program encouraged visitors to consider that it had been erected on “man-made land – a creation of engineering science.” (CCP: 26–27) The architectural commission in charge of the Exposition stated that it would be unfitting for the World’s Fair celebrating the progress of the past century “to hark back to antique times and house itself in the traditional manner in buildings copied from ancient Greek temples and the Roman Forum.” This temple of science did not “seek to veil itself in the aroma of ancient history,” as “the beauty of the new architecture is peculiar to itself,” as the Official Guidebook of the World’s Fair declared (CCP: 27).

In conjunction with the Hall of Science visitors also could find the “Hall of Social Science,” exhibiting a wide variety of topics as described in the official guidebook to the exposition (CCP: 93). All these seemingly diverse exhibits were subjected to one overarching theme: “The struggle of knowledge to bring order to social life.” (CCP: 91) Order was apparently an undisputed good in this rendition of modernity. Again and again, the theme of knowledge and order was interwoven with the message that, despite the current setback, social life had made great progress during the past century, not the least if the visitor cared to study the comparison between “old inhuman laws” of the past with the social legislation and “community-planning” of the present on display at the World’s Fair (CCP: 91).

The diversity and inequality of American life presented a difficult problem for the planners of A Century of Progress. They solved it by directing attention to the progress of social welfare and philanthropy and obscuring its exclusions. African-
Americans, for example, were largely excluded from the fairgrounds, except as functionaries, which makes the “Special research at the World’s Fair to establish standards of the American type” an interesting example of racial coding of modern America. The organizers of the fair had contacted the Harvard Anthropometric Laboratory to set up a measuring station where, according to the Official Guidebook, “many thousands of visitors to the exhibit have been weighed, measured, tested and questioned,” turning cheerfully to the reader and suggesting that “You may stop and have your record taken.” (CCP: 94) The results of this research would naturally conclude that the “American type” was predominantly white.

Originally, the intention had been to include a far more ambitious social science exhibit. Sociologist Howard W. Odum (1884–1954) of University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, had been contacted by the fair organizers to demonstrate the capacity of modern American social science to provide guidance and control in an era of crisis, just as objectively and efficiently as any natural science. However, despite Odum’s network of contacts, the North Carolina professor failed to secure the necessary funds from American business and research foundations. These investors were generally skeptical of the link between social science and social reform. They remained more convinced by the more material achievements of “pure science,” e.g., mathematics, chemistry, and physics – especially as demonstrated by industry through its production of consumer goods (Jordan 1994: 89).

Perhaps this connection between material advance, modern science, and technological prowess was nowhere as clear as in the presentation of “modern homes” as markers of progress. The organizers did not balk at drawing explicit comparisons with Native American dwellings or African huts in order to make their point (CCP: 16). Here, it was easy to demonstrate in concrete and practical terms the advantages of modern science in providing cheaper, cleaner, and more comfortable housing than in the past. While not available to all just yet, the Home and Industrial Arts Group presented an impressive view into the modern way of life in the modern home (CCP: 127).

In the so-called Home Planning Hall, the visitors could experience how these ideas could be brought to “direct application to the problems and wishes of modern home planners.” (CCP: 133) This is also where the Swedish contribution would make its mark on the Chicago World’s Fair. In the words of the Official Guidebook for 1933, the Swedish pavilion exemplified not only an “unique architecture” – “just two boxes,” someone called it – but also “the revival of home industries under the lash of economic necessity.” The next year, in 1934, the Swedish contribution – with an extensive exhibit prepared by the Swedish Arts and Crafts Association, which had been instrumental in the Stockholm Exhibition four years ago – had not changed substantially. Yet, the American reception of the Swedish exhibit contained a new twist, noting both the practicality and the “distinctive” Swedishness of the Swedish designer objects (CCP: 22).
The Swedish exhibit at the World’s Fair placed the emphasis upon the Swedish manufacturing industry and its products rather than upon any particular Swedish social legislation or political reform when promoting the vision of Sweden as a modern nation. Due to the close collaboration between artists, industry, and labor, Swedish manufacturers could show that modern technology did not necessarily have to imperil either the artistry or the quality of the products. Thus, modernity and nationality could be merged in and through everyday objects.

In the case of American industry, “the science exhibits were intended to exemplify ‘the idea of scientific and industrial unity’ and to inject ‘system and order’ into the exposition and, by extension, into American culture as a whole” as noted by historian Robert W. Rydell (1993; see also Jordan 1994: 89). While the Swedish backers of modernism came up against the challenge of marrying nationalism with rationalism in order to make modern aesthetics palatable to a traditionalistic majority, the American proponents were more concerned with the task of combining industry with science in order to defend modern capitalism in the eyes of a more radicalized American working class.

This tension came to the fore a few years later, in 1938, as the ten-mile-long preview parade of the 1939–1940 New York World’s Fair, was forced to obey traffic signals at the intersection of Thirteenth Street and Seventh Avenue in downtown Manhattan while one hundred thousand participants in the May Day parade cut across its path. The May Day parade highlighted what the world’s fair organizers – many of whom had been instrumental in arranging the Chicago Exposition a few years earlier – already knew, namely that they could not assume mass support for their vision of the world of tomorrow. In fact, as Rydell has keenly observed, the parade was part of the job of “selling the Fair,” and this job was bound up, with “the task of selling Americans on the idea that the vision of the future projected at the fairs was worth pursuing” (Rydell 1993: 116).

Conclusion

Coming to an end, it is time to summarize the (dis)similarities between the experience of combining a modern self-identity with a national self-identity in the Stockholm and Chicago exhibitions, respectively. The differences are considerable, and serve to bring important characteristics of both these events and the times they reflect into the light: In Chicago, for example, both business interests and progressives within social science participated, but business interests clearly dominated and consumerism prevailed above any overt calls for social reform. In Stockholm, by contrast, architects and cultural radicals forged a tight-knit community whose political message could be neatly packaged in harmless propagation of new styles of housing. Perhaps this may have been a contributing factor to why the modernistic style in itself became so central in the critique of the opponents.
Indeed, in Stockholm, the opposition to modernism seems to have been primarily based on the grounds of tradition and conservatism among established social elites, yet it was directed at modernism because of its aesthetic, rather than political radicalism. In Chicago, by contrast, the skepticism towards modernism rather emanated from public opinion on the grounds of economical and moral issues, due to the strong association between modernity on the one hand and capitalism and industrialism on the other. The Chicago Exposition in fact amounted to an attempt by business and capital to take back the good will generated by the popularity of machinery and engineering triumphs, successes which stood in glaring contrast to the dismal prospects of American economy.

While the World’s Fair in Chicago sought to reestablish the traditional American association between the American nation and modernity, the Stockholm Exhibition, by contrast, strove to recast the Swedish past in a modernist form, thus establishing a rather new link between modernity and nationhood. Here, however, the Swedish modernists could draw upon long-standing, widely shared, and safe associations between “Nordicity” and various modernist virtues, such as order, pragmatism, and thrift. Indeed, this type of merging Nordic nationhood with modernism was not unique to Sweden, but it took different forms in different Nordic countries, as Kazimierz Musial has shown (Musial 2002).

There are several similarities as well. Despite the optimistic tone set in the promotional texts produced in support of both these exhibitions, there is a worry uniting the optimists: Both Lubbe Nordström and Charles Beard come across as convinced that the world of tomorrow would become a better place than the world of yesterday. Yet, both agree that this would not happen automatically. Effort, on the part of business, citizenry, and government would be required if modernity would not self-combust. “Man” – whether the average “American type” or the jovial Medelson, to say nothing about the Roma and Sami of Sweden or the African-Americans or Native Americans of the USA – would not only have to “accept” the world of tomorrow as a given fact already today. They would also have to conform to modern “normalcy” as identified and promoted by Swedish functionalist architects just as well as by American progressive industrialists – all in their own interest, of course.

The planners of the Stockholm Exhibition went to great lengths to emphasize the continuity between the Swedishness of the past with the Swedish community of the future, by using a narrative which compared past achievements on the European battlefield with present day victories on the global market – and hopefully future ones, too. Here, the backers of modernism could rely upon the strong notion of consensus as identified by Stenius (1997) above about reaching modernity together – i.e., Medelson had to get fit and leave his semi-decadent bourgeoisie habits behind him.

Similarly, the backers of the Chicago Exposition signaled economically determined path towards the American community of the future. Rather than promising
some emotional or political bond or community for the future (even though the ideals of Americanization of the immigrant and the identification of the American type may indicate otherwise) their message was firmly based in the promise of future consumerism: American science would find the means, American industry would implement the findings, and Americans would end up enjoying the fruit of both – as consumers – if they only remained true to American values of individualism, innovation, and perseverance. In other words, consumerism would provide Americans with community, rather than any program of political or social reform. This presupposition was of course put at risk when prosperity came under threat. This is where science and technology – as proverbially American values and virtues – could be harnessed in the interest of American civilization.

To some extent, statistics and race could be used as a point of reference for modernity and normalcy in Sweden with its homogeneous population. In the USA, the planners of the World Fair rather used the desire of prosperity and higher living standards – which could be assumed to be largely similar across a very wide spectrum of people – primarily due to its more heterogeneous demography. Swedes could easier accept the notion of a modernistic future through references with the perceived community of a familiar past, while Americans could easier accept the notion of a capitalist present through references to a prosperous future of consumerism.

We have here tried to point to the role of exhibitions in showcasing society and promoting visions of the past, present, and future in an accessible way through the museum, the exposition, and the observatory gaze. For all their differences, we hope that this brief survey of the Stockholm Exhibition in 1930 and A Century of Progress International Exposition in Chicago in 1933–1934 can serve to illustrate the power of the modern exhibition – with its dioramas, its statistics, its cult of science, and its usage of visual presentation – in bringing home the quintessentially modern paradox in conforming to the norm in the interest of liberty and in accepting the given for the sake of change.

**Carl Marklund** (born 1974) holds a PhD in history, assistant professor (adiunkt) at the Department of Political Science and Contemporary History at AGH University of Science and Technology, Kraków, and is a researcher at the Network for European Studies at University of Helsinki. He is a member of the Nordic Openness project within the programme framework Europe’s Cultural Diversity. E-mail: carl.marklund@helsinki.fi.

**Peter Stadius** (born 1970) holds a PhD in history, adjunct professor (docent) in Nordic Studies, and is acting University lecturer in Nordic Studies at University of Helsinki. He is a member of the National History – Nordic Culture project within the Nordic spaces research programme. E-mail: peter.stadius@helsinki.fi.
Notes


2 Naturally, many visitors made repeated visits. Nevertheless, 4 million visitors is a quite impressive figure considering that the total population of Sweden in December 31, 1930 reached a mere 6,142,191 (SCB, 1992). It should also be mentioned that the Exhibition attracted some minor numbers of foreign visitors; from Finland came 18 000; from Poland 3000; from Estonia and Lithuania 2000–3000, and from the rest of Europe 1000 visitors. See also Eva Rudberg (1999): *The Stockholm Exhibition 1930. Modernism’s Breakthrough in Sweden*, Stockholm: Stockholmia förlag, p. 191.


4 Nordström was instrumental in combining rural traditions and modernity in Swedish intellectual life during the 1920’s and 1930’s. He embodied a belief in Sweden’s future, even if his journalistic reports also exposed misery and problems especially in rural Sweden. He is best known for his series of radio programs in 1938 on social misery, which were later published as a book, *Lort-Sverige* (1938). His ability to combine simple and practical questions of dwelling and comfort with bigger national issues of politics, made him central in the Swedish “modernity project”.

5 Here, we can directly observe how the worldview of the Acceptera authors influenced the drafters of the Svea Rike exhibition. *SR*, p. 8.

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*Abo Underrättelser (ÅU)*.
Swedish Military Bases of the Cold War: The Making of a New Cultural Heritage

By Per Strömberg

Abstract
The fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union completely transformed the military-political situation in the Nordic countries. The movement from invasion defence to input defence in Sweden has made many of the subterranean modern fortresses and permanent defence systems of the Cold War unnecessary. The current problem is what the administration authorities will do with the superfluous military buildings: let them fall into decay, preserve or reuse them – and for what purpose?

The aim of this article is to describe and analyze the cultural as well as spatial foundation of a new genre of heritage industry in Sweden – the cultural heritage of the Cold War – whose value is negotiated through a range of processes by the different stakeholders involved – emotional, social and cultural processes as well as legal and economic processes. The subterranean fortresses of Hemsö and Aspö are used as empirical case studies in the article. They both describe the making of a cultural heritage and illustrate the problems related to the ambitions of converting cultural heritage into tourist attractions.

One of the conclusions is that the previous making of the industrial cultural heritage in the 1980s and 1990s has many things in common with the one of the Cold War. The “post-military” landscape of bunkers and rusting barbed wires is regarded with the same romanticism and with similar preservation ideologies and economic interests as the post-industrial landscape was earlier. Similar negotiation issues appear, and these negotiations are carried out by similar stakeholders. The difference is that the military culture heritage of the Cold War was developed through a deeply centralized selection process directed by administration authorities, but was also influenced by certain persuasion campaigns and preservation actions made by local stakeholders such as retired officers and municipality administrations.

Keywords: The Cold War, cultural heritage, tourist attractions, military bases, post-military society, regional development, Sweden

Introduction

The fall of the Berlin wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union totally changed the military-strategic situation in the Nordic countries during the beginning of the 1990s. The military threat has been substantially revised. Today, defence systems such as that in Sweden require a large degree of unpredictability and mobility. Subsequently, the reorganization from invasion defence to input defence has made many of the modern subterranean fortresses and fixed defence systems of the Cold War era obsolete. Nevertheless, military bases are historical monuments and important keys to understanding the development of society during the 20th century. The question is what the armed forces and the state administration will do with this diversity of superfluous military buildings – will they allow them to lapse into complete disuse, or, preserve and reuse them, and if so, to what purpose and for what purposes?

This paper attempts to describe and analyze the foundation of an entirely new genre of cultural heritage in Sweden, the cultural heritage of the Cold War, with its value negotiated and regulated through a range of processes in practice by the different stakeholders involved, including emotional, social and cultural processes as well as legal and economic processes. The study is based on two case studies, one on the coastal artillery fortresses at Hemsö (Härnösand), and the other on Aspö (Karlskrona). Both cases study the making of a cultural heritage and illustrate the problems related to the ambitions of converting the cultural heritage into tourist attractions.

The study shows that the development of a tourist attraction both demands a blessing from culture heritage institutions, and from supportive local initiatives. Regarding the heritage of the Cold War, there is a common two-step-change based on an authorized heritage discourse; first, from military building to heritage – a conversion process which implies identification, selection and declaration – and secondly, from heritage to attraction – a valorization process which requires a local support both from authorities and private initiatives.

I argue that the preceding and analogous making of the industrial culture heritage in the 1980s and 1990s has many things in common with that of the Cold War. The “post-military” landscape of bunkers and rusting barbed wires is regarded with the same romanticism and with similar preservation ideologies and interests as the post-industrial landscape earlier was. Similar negotiation issues appear, and these negotiations are put forth by similar stakeholders. The main difference is that the military culture heritage of the Cold War was developed through a deeply centralized process directed by administration authorities, but it was also influenced by preservation campaigns on the part of local stakeholders.

The military landscape and the material culture of the Cold War could be a valuable contribution to cultural heritage tourism in terms of education and experiences. But why should one tell the story about the war that never came, repre-
sented with military structures that were never supposed to be seen, of which many have already been dismantled in silence?

**Research on the Cold War**

The *Cold War* is the name of the conflict between Western powers, mainly the U.S. and former communist countries, primarily the Soviet Union, during the post-war period from 1946/47 to 1989/91. The research focus in this article is, however, the post-Cold War period. Research on the Cold War has recently included new perspectives and foci. Historical analysis of military strategies and foreign policy between the great powers still dominate the research field on the Cold War. On the international level, there is a coordination project based in Zürich, the *Parallel History Project*, which gathers researchers from various countries in primarily North America and Europe, who study different aspects of the Cold War with a main focus on NATO and the Warsaw Pact. In the Scandinavian countries, there are several ongoing research projects which aim to record and analyze how small European countries politically navigated on this political field during the Cold War; for example, the Swedish research program is *Defence and the Cold War* (FOKK) at the National Defence College, of which Thomas Roth's *Försvar för folkhem och fosterland* (2007) are one publication related to this program.

To some extent, the ending of the Cold War marked a complementary turn to cultural studies in Cold War research with a greater focus on ideas, norms and cultures (See: Boym 1995; Cronqvist 2004; Salomon, Larsson & Arvidsson 2004; Miyoshi Jager & Mittner 2007). Interestingly, the cultural perspective was adopted early on by the discipline of archaeology, especially concerning the material culture of the Cold War. The anthology *Matériel Culture: The Archaeology of Twentieth-century Conflict* (Beck, Johnson & Schofield 2002) and *A Fearsome Heritage* (ed. Schofield & Cocroft 2007) are two important examples of this tendency. The contributors of the latter book focus on the material culture of the Cold War. They emphasize the challenges of interpretation, from the Berlin Wall to the remains of an abandoned launch ramp for nuclear missiles in the UK. A similar investigation on former Soviet nuclear missile sites in Cuba was carried out by a Swedish-Cuban research team, lead by Mats Burström (Burström et al. 2009).

There are also examples of ethnographic contributions which highlight the transition processes in post-Cold War society, such as the ongoing PhD-project of Beate Feldmann on the transformation and remembrance of garrison towns in the Baltic Sea Area. However, there are few scholars who have described the institutional founding of the Cold War heritage in a retro-perspective. One example is *Modern Military Matters* (2006), in which the archaeologist John Schofield discusses the issue and gives a short summary of the making of the Cold War heri-
tage in Britain. Another example from the Swedish context is a short review of the heritage process written by Ingela Andersson & Anders Bodin (2008).

In sum, while there is an extensive research on the Cold War, there is still a lack of retro-perspective and reflexive studies of cultural analysis on the post-Cold War period. Therefore, this paper is intended to be a contribution to the international discussion. It is based on the author’s research report carried out in 2009, *Kalla krigets försvarsanläggningar* which describes the transformation process of Swedish Defence holdings into cultural heritage and tourist attractions. This comparative case study was empirically based on observations and interviews with the different stakeholders, but also, literature and archive studies.

**Theoretical Approach**

Cultural analysis is the main method applied in this paper in order to understand the transformation process from operative defence building to cultural heritage and tourist attraction. I will focus on the different conceptualization processes – cultural, emotional and social processes as well as legal and economic processes – which define and redefine the various functions of military structures. In this paper, the word *process* is not just considered to be a period of time in which something substantially changes. A process also requires stability. I choose to regard processes as *negotiations* in which change stands in relation to a continuum, i.e. conditions that are stable, conceived of as persistent and taken for granted.

This theoretical and somewhat postmodern point of view coincides with other scholars in the field of cultural heritage (Harvey 2001; Smith 2006). Laurajane Smith, for example, suggests heritage is a cultural process that “engages with acts of remembering that work to create ways to understand and engage with the present, and the sites themselves are tools that can facilitate, but are not necessary vital for, this process” (Smith 2006: 44). Smith not only considers heritage as a process, but also as a set of practices which form an *authorized heritage discourse*. These practices, as well as the meaning of the material “things” of heritage, are constituted by the discourses that simultaneously reflect these practices while also constructing them (Smith 2006: 12-3, 29). Basically, it is through such discourse that the Cold War is formed and regulated as a heritage by experts and institutions. This study more or less confirms the structuring theory suggested by Smith.

An additional theoretical problem is how to consider spatiality in view of this transformation process. The French sociologist Henri Lefebvre has analyzed the relation between space and social life. His thesis is that *(social) space is a (social) production*. This theoretical relation is also appropriate for this study. For example, I believe that the shift of function of military facilities is a shift in people’s (social) relation to and within that space. Social space can be considered to be a result of a social practice that is manifested at three levels and related to one an-
other, (1) how people experience space by involving collective symbols, bodily perceptions, and resistance to dominant practices (lived space), (2) how people consider space, perform, create routines, possess it and divide it into (social) zones (perceived space), and (3) how the stakeholders – such as architects and urban planners – articulate and intellectually conceptualise space as an abstract notion (conceived space) (Lefebvre 1991: 26, 33, 38-9).

In view of the theories of Lefebvre, there are two aspects of the term conceptualization which are relevant to this study. They are related to the way space and locations are taken into possession. One aspect refers to the legal framework that defines the use of a military building. When a building is redefined as a cultural heritage, it implies a legal shift which changes the overall conditions of using the building. The second aspect concerns the social and cultural relations within the former military facilities, for example, how people act as social and cultural individuals on site.

**Transition Processes**

The end of the Cold War caused a fundamental revision of Swedish foreign and military defence policy. Resolution of national states, democratization processes, national identity crises, and regional and ethnic conflicts all characterized the political situation in Europe during this time. The military threat during the Cold War – potential nuclear attacks and invasion wars between nations – was no longer a reality. As a result of the political détente in northern Europe, Swedish armed forces began an intensive and, for many employees, painful conversion process, known as the LEMO process. The number of units and recruits were more than halved in a period of few years. At the same time, international operations became increasingly important. The earlier invasion defence was replaced by a so-called “network-based input defence” according to new defence decisions.

All European countries were involved in such a transition process after the dissolution of the Warszawa pact. In former communist countries in Central-Eastern Europe, there has been a two-part process: the creation of a national army with a new agenda, and diminishing of its quantity. Its nuclear capacity has been phased out. In the path of this change, there have been limited ambitions to preserve the post-military landscape or to make use of the deserted military bases of the Red Army. Generally, it is considered to be a “negative heritage” in view of its negative connotations, which evoke the repression, militarism and the environmental destruction of the former Soviet domination. In the Baltic States, for example, there are very few examples of preservation actions with focus on the Cold War heritage. The military structures have either been destroyed or deserted, or reused for other purposes or regimes. However, the “Military heritage based tourism”-project in Latvia co-financed by EU (European Green Belt program) is one exception.
In contrast, the heritage process has been less problematic for the West European countries, which were either members of NATO or neutral. In the UK, several research and inventory projects began recording twentieth-century military remains in the 1990s, including the Cold War period. Alongside a greater awareness of twentieth-century military remains, the National Monument Records and locally held Sites and Monuments Records now typically incorporate these sites, embedding them further as a part of Britain’s cultural heritage (Schofield 2004: 3-4). Additionally, other European countries have conducted single studies on selected structures, such as the Ijsselline in the Netherlands.

The Cold War heritage is also a heritage of alliances. Therefore, the international connection is as important as the national one. However, the question of ownership might appear to be a problem. Since 1991, the Department of Defence in the US has been engaged in what they call the Legacy Resource Management Program, the stated purpose of which is to “inventory, protect, and conserve the Department of Defence’s physical and literary property and relics associated with the origins and development of the Cold War at home and abroad” (Cocroft 2003: 264). The American ambitions to protect their interests abroad have sometimes resulted in disagreements of ownership in foreign countries. For example, in Berlin, the preservation of Cold War icons such as Checkpoint Charlie and the Berlin wall have been disputed (Franzmann 2008: 3).

The Scandinavian countries undertook a comparable heritage process concerning their Cold War heritage. The conversion process had a major impact on the fixed fortifications along the extended Scandinavian coastline, basically the coastal artillery, including subterranean bomb shelters, artillery and other weapon systems, lodging barracks, service structures, training establishments, and coastal reconnaissance stations. They were particularly important for the invasion defence during the Cold War. Cocroft suggest a broad definition of Cold War “monuments” which is useful for this article, that is, “structures built, or adapted, to carry out nuclear war between the end of the Second World War and 1989” (Cocroft 2003: 3).

In a Swedish context, the Swedish Fortifications Agency (FORTV) was commissioned to identify which military bases were valuable enough for preservation, early in the 1990s. The aim was to: “from a national perspective, ensure the preservation of representative buildings that are able to demonstrate the development of the art of fortification”. The outcome of this commission was a report which had fundamental importance to the next step in the process. The authors note that modern fortifications from the late 1800s to modern times have not received any interest. They stress that these are a forgotten and hidden cultural treasure that must be saved from perishing (Från Oscar-Fredriksborg till Ersta 1994: 6).

This investigation formed the basis of the National Heritage Board’s (RAÄ) proposal that followed in 1996. The National Heritage Board made a selection of forty items that they felt should be listed as historic buildings, with most of them
from the 1900s. Since then, the government has declared fifteen of these to be of national interest.

Parallel to the phasing-out of fortifications, another institutional restructuring process took place between the Armed Forces and cultural heritage institutions. A workgroup was commissioned to prepare a proposal for a general preservation of the Swedish military heritage, and to find new forms of collaboration. The proposal also included deposited military material. A large number of local military-historical museums were finally reduced to a handful of representative museums as a consequence of the investigation made by the workgroup, which also suggested that the Cold War should be the main theme (Försvar i förvar 2005: 5). A network named the Swedish Military Heritage (SMHA) was founded in 2008, and was a joint project of the National Museums of Military History (SFHM) and the National Maritime Museums (SMM).

Map representing the network of military-historical museums facilitated by the Swedish Military Heritage. Source: SMHA.
Hence, the streamlining of the armed forces in the 1990s not only implied a phasing-out of military bases, but also an identity-rated rationalization of the Swedish Defence. The decommissioning of military units led to the dissolution of military regiments, but also, to the dissolution of local military-historical museums. Before the restructuring, local military museums – often associated with military units – were primarily museums for the military. Since then, they have undergone an “evolutionary process of military-historical museums” of which only a few have been upgraded to professional museums. After this streamlining, the remaining military museums changed character, and became more professionalized and more focused on cultural history (Försvar i förvar 2005: 6, 15-20).

After a series of enquiries, the National Property Board was finally commissioned to investigate the conditions for the preservation and valorization of the seventeen major military bases that were built during the 1900s. The investigations were carried out in collaboration with several other related culture heritage institutions. The final report from the National Property Board was presented in 2007, with cost estimates and assessments of the task of preserving and managing these buildings. It is now the principal document for the ongoing heritage process to convert some of the structures into museums.

The rationalization of the armed forces in Sweden and elsewhere nevertheless had consequences on a purely individual level. The armed forces and the defence industry lost many jobs through rationalization, when military units closed. Dismissals were followed by a renegotiation of both identity and professions. In the middle of their careers, many officers were suddenly forced to change their livelihood.

The book Solen skiner alltid på en kustartillerist is perhaps the best depiction of the process of dismantling the coastal artillery in Sweden. It describes the changeover process at an individual and personal level. The photographer Martin Nauclér and journalist Jan-Ivar Askelin made a series of visits to secret caves of the coastal artillery which have now been disarmed and closed. They followed the persons who once built and managed the coastal artillery structures, but also those who finally were tasked to dismantle them.

The title of the book means “the sun always shines on the coastal artillerist”, that is, the sun always shone on those who had been selected to manage the coastal artillery, despite how difficult it might be to remain underground. The expression still exists even though the military is gone. The Swedish Coastal Artillery was built up in stages during the 1900s. It was a huge project; built in great secrecy during the Cold War and then dissolved into oblivion: “We were secret and now it is all gone and no one has seen it”, says Leif Cimrell, who is one of several personal portraits in the book and the one who received the directive to organize the dismantling of the coastal artillery guns. When precision weapons were mentioned during the Gulf War in the early 1990s, many coastal artillerists realised that an era had come to an end. But the death blow came with the Defence deci-
sion in 2000, and the major dismantling was then carried out (Askelin & Nauclér 2007: 129-30, 157, 163).

**Mouldering Processes: The Aesthetics of Decay**

Nauclér & Askelin’s neatly packaged narrative of dismantlement, depicted by images of rusting cannons and humid rock shelters, is very similar to the narratives of the industrial heritage which have been explored since the 1980s. From an aesthetic point of view, Nauclér and Askelin’s book follows the same visual formula of how industrial ruins of dirt and rust and emotional moods of transience are usually depicted in photography, such as Bernd and Hilla Becher’s pioneering documentation of the disappearing industries in the 1960s. Paul Virilio, contemporary of the Becher’s, included similar aesthetic contemplations on the remains of Hitler’s Atlantic Wall in France. The geometric harshness of the bunker form merges with melancholy and dreamlike bitter sweetness. Later, he gathered his photos and thoughts in the book *Bunker Archaeology*, which was groundbreaking in the way in which it re-valuated the modernist military-historical landscape of WWII (Virilio 1975).

Robert Willim has described the rediscovery of industrial society and the popularization of it. In *Industrial Cool*, he creates a post-industrial exposé which goes from the Bechers’ photographic depictions to today’s recycling of obsolete factories (Willim 2008: 92-7). There is an aura over abandoned sites such as factories and bunkers in dilapidation which evokes feelings of nostalgia, declination and mutability, similar to the ruin-aesthetics of the late 1700s. There is an excitement in digging in “the dustbin of history”, as seen in the book *Övergivna platser* (Abandoned places) by Jan Jörnmark (2007). The text is a personal reflection on recent Swedish de-industrialization, illustrated with pictures of decay which encourage a contemplative mood.

A similar depiction of ruins romanticism and nostalgia is given by the Swedish journalist Peter Handberg, who traced the locations of the nuclear bases in the Baltic States using GPS. He ended up with a series of reports based on interviews with the locals and former Soviet officers (Handberg 2007). Most of the military bases such as Forst Zinna in former GDR (Boulton 2007: 181), are either being totally dismantled or left to decay, while others are being reused. Literature like Jörnmark’s and Handberg’s, and film documentaries such as Angus Boulton’s *Cood Bay Forst Zinna* (2001) are all important depictions used to popularize the heritage, and thus, are an integrated part of the heritage process.

It is not unusual that abandoned environments like these ones work as free zones and hideaways – found spaces – where youngsters can express their creativity or destructiveness: secret parties, spontaneous grilling, rock climbing, and graffiti. Bunkers are popular places for subculture groups looking for vanished environments that are cordoned off and abandoned, so-called *urban exploration*. 
The aesthetics of decay. Mouldering processes at the abandoned battery of Jutudden, Aspö, Sweden. Photo: Per Strömberg.

These types of activities are often radically opposed to the view of the authorities as to how cultural heritage should be used and operated. The decommissioning of military structures creates a historic landscape in which many of these become ruins and relics of a bygone era. It is a military-historical landscape which is basically a cultural landscape: shaped by the human influence of military activities but adapted to the geo-topographical conditions of place (Roll 2000: 142). The ruins are considered authentic evidence of military activity in the past. They may be perceived as an antithesis to preservation. But the ruins are not left alone without intervention. The Armed Forces and the heritage institutions are required to make the military-historical landscape harmless to people by the preservation law. In many cases, barbed wires and destructive vegetation have been removed so that they do not harm people, or the structure itself. According to Andersson & Bodin, a few years without dehumidification will obliterate all chances to preserve modern subterranean fortresses. Hence, the mouldering process of the Cold War heritage is fast and aggressive in comparison to similar elder monuments (Andersson & Bodin 2008: 94).

A common strategy of the Norwegian antiquarian authorities is to avoid human impact on the remains of Regelbau, the Atlantic Wall. Lisen Roll states: "[military buildings] are beautiful in the way they are dissolved into dust. But they will for a foreseeable future remain as interesting traces in the landscape, both as a source of knowledge and experience" (Roll 2000: 142). This approach implies a sort of "fossilization" which is culturally productive. Decay does not signify an antithesis
to preservation; it can instead imply a lower degree of preservation which offers a secure and aesthetically considered decay. Thus, processes of wearing and tearing are culturally productive in that they are able to appeal to nostalgia (Löfgren 2006: 53).

Nauclér & Askelin’s coffee-table-like book on the transition process and the dismantling of the coastal artillery is very much seen through the contemplative mood of nostalgia. Not only in this case, but also in general, nostalgia has always been an unspoken and culturally productive undertone in the heritage process.

Defining the Cold War Heritage

The Cold War heritage, including closed batteries and fortresses, abandoned areas for military shooting exercises and ramparts, involves visible remnants in the military-historical landscape. Some military buildings have become ruins, others museums. During the past fifteen years, an entirely new genre of cultural heritage has emerged as a consequence of the restructuring of the national defences. It raises two main questions.

First, what kind of knowledge does this heritage possess? Why is it important to tell the story about “the war that never came”? Of course, there are different national agendas involved in defining a Cold War heritage; nationalism is one of them. The Cold War formed a backdrop to many spheres of national life – political, economic, scientific and cultural – rising to the fore in times of tension between the superpowers. Hence, it is important in order to understand the historical conditions of the today’s society. This is one of the main arguments outspoken for preserving a Cold War heritage (See Fairclough 2007: 30).

The first Swedish heritage report from 1994 speaks about “a neglected heritage”, which the authors believe the public should be introduced to. Even follow-up investigations consider the Cold War era to be an important culture-historical starting point in depicting a larger narrative of the Cold War and its importance to the emergence of the Swedish welfare state in the course of the 20th century. One common argument – i.e. used by the stakeholders of Hemsö fortress – is the value of understanding the breadth of the efforts of war preparation, but more important, to inform the tax-paying citizens as to what their money finally was spent on and how it affected the landscape in some places.

There are more arguments in favour of bringing out this heritage. Samuel Palmblad calls attention to the value of understanding the complexity which characterizes the military structures and how the total defence system worked in practice. He states that the artifacts are important in a historical perspective as they highlight a willingness to defend national independence. At the same time, the artifacts revitalize a historical period which was characterized by nuclear doomsday prophecies at times (Palmblad 2005: 8-10). All of these arguments are reasonable, but there are also counter-arguments which bring out the problems of
prioritizing assets and the discourse of negative heritage. For the Baltic people for example – unless one takes into account the Russian minority – the heritage of the Cold War is not a primary object of remembering, but of forgetting, or, of locating pro-Soviet counter-histories (Hackman 2003: 88-9).

Secondly, in what way was the cultural-historical value of the modern military facilities created, and how has it been deployed? The institutional procedure of identifying, selecting and declaring the cultural heritage are important parts of the upgrading process, but it is not the only basis for value creation. The culture heritage of the Cold War was developed through a deeply centralized and selective process directed by heritage institutions. In Scandinavia, as in the UK, a series of valuating investigations were crucial to the foundation of the cultural heritage.

My study has shown that the military bases in Sweden have been upgraded to historical buildings and developed into tourist destinations at different rates and levels. Before the transition process started, there were few modern military structures considered to be historical. The reason why the heritage process started as late as in the 1990s was because of military confidentiality and inaccessibility. Obviously, many of these structures were still in use. But there might be other reasons as well. They are not as monumental and visible in the terrain as older fortifications, and, perhaps they were not considered to have any aesthetical values.

The selection process has implied a range of institutional negotiations focusing on historical value, responsibility and costs: on the one hand, national institutions such as FORTV, SFV and RAÄ, and on the other hand, regional cultural heritage institutions and private initiatives. The valuation basis generally applied in cultural heritage institutions (rarity, representative, originality, continuity and architectural value) was adjusted in the initial report. An important basis for selection was to protect at least one of all common types. Geographical distribution, proximity to valuable natural areas and established tourist destinations have also been indicative, while architectural importance was toned down in the selection process because of the motivation that aesthetic matters were rarely considered when the modern fortresses were constructed. SFV’s follow-up investigation had a somehow pragmatic approach to the selection process. The authors balance criteria of quality with costs in order to sort out objects in good condition to make preservation a realistic alternative (Kostnader för att bevara och levandegöra försvarsanläggningar 2007: 17-22).

A fundamentally important part of this maturation process is the formalization procedure, i.e. when the buildings are formulated in legal terms as a cultural heritage by administration authorities and cultural heritage institutions. However, the selection process was influenced by certain persuasion campaigns and preservation actions initiated by local stakeholders such as retired officers and local authorities. In many cases, it was the officers – retired or still active – who initiated the rescuing campaigns of spare parts and furnishings. Their actions helped to
generate a cultural and historical value as much as the heritage institutions did. In my view, they functioned as a catalyst in the heritage process. There are cases – such as Hemsö fortress or Arholma battery outside Stockholm – where local driving forces and the municipality influenced the cultural heritage institutions to finally recommend a heritage declaration. In this way, other parties are deeply engaged in the process of formulating the culture-historical value before it finally was formalized.

There are several examples of spontaneous rescue actions. When the coastal artillery unit of KA2 on Aspö was shut down, a group of historically interested officers managed to rescue military material and spare parts for the mobile coastal artillery museum on the island of Aspö. The retired officer Olle Melin is one of the driving forces behind a group of enthusiasts who are interested in the military history of Aspö. He tells the following story about the coastal reconnaissance station on Aspö:

With the help of the retired officer at KA5 who was appointed to deliver the used material to Estonia and Latvia, we got out with enough spare parts. So that we can run the station and show: this is reconnaissance; get the magnetron out so that we do not interfere with current Navy reconnaissance frequency. [...] We can go down with a guided group and start the station. We can, with radar screens and everything, show how we looked for enemies during the Cold War in the 1950s; like today, but with a little bit more sophisticated equipment. I think that would be an aha-experience. (Interview with Olle Melin, 06-10-2008)

In secret and against all odds, driving forces have sought to rescue the cultural heritage of the Cold War from vanishing. In this way, each preserved screw nut holds a symbolic meaning: Is there a feeling of existential security in knowing that the station actually can be started up again? On an imaginary plane, the control lamps have never gone out. At the same time, this is an expression of resistance and counter-powers in the struggle against the course of history, but also, against the authorities – their defining power – and the structural dismantling of the defence systems. Psychologically and metaphorically speaking, the battle is not lost, because there are still enough spare parts. The coastal defence is still intact and nothing is in vain.

Behind these preservation actions there is a strong interest in history, but also emotional ties and personal relations to the environments which were the place of work for many of the enthusiasts for many years. Melin continues:

I have a passion for Aspö as a preserved object. There is an emotional connection. Furthermore, I consider it this way; you can preserve the citadel of Drottningskär, dating from the 1600s; everyone regards it as history. But in a hundred years, at that moment, all modern buildings have become history. Therefore, there must be something left to remind us about this époque. The longer you wait, the harder it becomes to document. People who have worked here, they are gradually disappearing. We, the enthusiasts, who work at the museum on Aspö, are really worried, not for the museum, but for the competence of the military material. So, today, we are a group of five to ten persons. The youngest one is about 58 years. No one has thought of engaging new people. What shall we do then, in ten years? (Interview with Olle Melin, 06-10-2008)
Cultural heritage is usually a result of crises and structural changes in society (Aronsson 2005: 20). At the same time, it is a reflection of the same. Times of rapid modernization and structural shifts often evoke feelings of loss and create a need to freeze the state of things, as in the quoted conversation. Memory is an important part of this mental conversion process. Memory is a cultural process of both remembering and forgetting, which is fundamental to our ability to conceive of the world (Misztal 2003: 1).

In line with this description of rescue actions, Smith argues that there are subaltern and dissenting heritage discourses complementary to the authorized one which critiques the nature, meaning and use of heritage. But, she adds, such initiatives tend to be assimilated by the institutional top-down structure (Smith 2006: 29, 35-7). Likewise, Peter Aronsson argues that the formation of a cultural heritage does not always undergo the same formalization process. He observes at least three fundamental perspectives in the establishment of a cultural heritage. First, there is a pragmatic perspective which includes what people generally regard as their heritage, without any interference from the government or cultural heritage institutions. Second, there is a scientific perspective, which identifies cultural heritage through an academic discussion. And third, a normative perspective in which cultural heritage is directional for the future. In this case, political and economic functions in society, such as rural politics and regional-economic development, play a greater role in the foundation of a cultural heritage than what actually happened (Aronsson 2005: 25).
Considering the cases of Aspö and Hemsön, all of these three perspectives interact with each other, albeit with different emphases and timetables. The fortress of Hemsö was proposed as an object for preservation early in the process by the Swedish Fortifications Agency. Pending the decision of preservation, the Ministry of Culture in Sweden was called on by a group of representatives from the regional county council, the municipality of Härnösand, the Northern Naval Command, and the local friendship association of the fortress lead by a former officer. The group presented a request in which Hemsö fortress is suggested to be recognized as a historic building (Interview with Hemsö Skärgårdsförening 01-09-2008). This local initiative placed the pressure on the decision-makers. Consequently, it resulted in a national heritage declaration of Hemsö fortress in 1998. It has been of great importance for the subsequent process. In comparison, a couple of the military facilities on Aspö were also mentioned in the initial report from 1994, but they were finally upgraded to national historical monuments much later, in 2003. By taking rapid action, Hemsö fortress had a five-year head start in attraction and destination development compared to Aspö because of the meeting with the Minister of Culture.

Redefining Military Space: Displaying the Cold War

The creation of museums is a fundamental part of the definition process. It is the ultimate affirmation of the value of a heritage in the authorized heritage discourse. As Hodgin & Radstone (2003: 12-3) state, “memorials and museums represent public statements about what the past has been, and how the present should acknowledge it; who should be remembered, who should be forgotten; which acts or events are functional, which marginal.” The artifacts on display give material form to the past and anchor authorized and official collective memory (Davison 2005: 186).

Cold War museums have become a new genre of museums around the world, from national Cold War museums to local military-historical museums related to specific sites. In Sweden, 25 museums are included in the military-historical museum network of SMHA, which was a result of national rationalizations. At least 22 of them have a Cold War-connection in one way or another, and half of them have the Cold War as their main focus. Thus, there is a remarkable emphasis on the Cold War.

In the UK, preservation and museum display have so far largely been through private initiative, such as at Anstruther in Fife. In Canada, the Diefenbunker near Ottawa is nowadays a Cold War museum of national interest, and in the US, preservation has focused on saving and interpreting a number of monuments, i.e. the Nike missile site near the Golden Gate Bridge. Within the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, protocols did allow for the preservation of a limited number of sites, such as the South Dakota Minuteman II missile launch facility. Additionally, for
Stevnsfort was Denmark’s only subterranean fortress during the Cold War. Nowadays, it is a popular tourist attraction and a Cold War museum.

Photo: Per Strömberg.

the nuclear powers such as the US and Russia, there are historical nuclear testing sites which are commemorated with somewhat simplified narratives of heroism and national pride (Cocroft 2003: 267-8).

For the united Germany, the Cold War monuments seem to be of great importance. Not less than 26 museums have been established along the German East-West Iron curtain. Berlin has a special focus, even though the cityscape has been transformed since the end of the Cold War. The Stasi headquarters and a small part of the wall still remain, while the security bunker of Erich Honecker has been sealed. In Nemenčinė, Lithuania, there is a rare and somehow odd example from the cultural heritage industry, where a Cold War drama of oppression is acted out in a Soviet bunker. Otherwise, there are very few military-historical museums with a Cold War focus in the Baltic States, apart from the national museums of occupation.³

So, what happens when buildings shift and lose their original functions, for example, becoming museums? The closing of military bases after the end of the Cold War and the succeeding national declaration of historical buildings have implied a spatial, social and cultural redefinition of space. People’s attitudes towards the buildings and their spatial behaviour have radically changed. Previously, military barriers, roped-off areas, safety regulations all structured the social practices of both soldiers and civilians, inside and outside of the fence. Foreigners were prohibited to stay in military security zones, and photography was generally forbidden. Today, everyone can visit these same areas.
The former roped-off areas of secret military activities also had a symbolic meaning during the Cold War. Secrecy was part of the Cold War image, propaganda and the protection-culture in Sweden. The former ideology of representation was based on invisibility and secrecy, but also marked boundaries. Historian Magnus Rodell believes that bunkers and fortresses also work as mental instruments to define limitations and borders by their locations and physical presence, which also tells us about times past, political agendas and power (Rodell 2007: 72-3).

There is a contradiction within these sites. Once, they were roped-off by fences, and now they function as attractions for tourists whose main tool of processing the tourist site is the camera. However, the hush-hush atmosphere that surrounded military activities during the Cold War is also used in marketing the attraction. Hemsö fortress was earlier promoted by the catchy slogan: “Visit the Cold War secret”. It is an example of how associations, nostalgia and collective images of secrecy can be turned into an argument for visiting the site.

Since the County Museum became the principle of Hemsö fortress in 2009, the concept of being a museum has been strengthened. What once was a workplace has now been turned into a tourist attraction. The County museum introduced a new museum concept by installing barriers and pedagogical tools such as film projectors, loudspeakers and other kinds of museum equipment. The intention was
to let visitors to stroll on their own inside the building, not to experience the fortress with the help of guided tours.

But by installing this entire museum apparatus, the historical building has shifted function and spatial conception in such a way that it affects its user identity as a military building. At the same time, this encroachment challenges its fundamental cultural value, which once was the basis for the declaration of cultural heritage. In my view, the county museum of Murberget has adapted the subterranean fortress to the museum function, and not the reverse, adapting the museum function to the building and its former user value. This is a common practical problem for military structures whose spaces are complex and specific, and therefore, difficult to adapt to the museum function.

Preservation principles and safety regulations might to some extent inhibit use. According to law, a building which is declared as historically valuable shall not be “demolished, filled, corrupted or transformed”, and all the furnishings shall be preserved on site (Framställning om byggnadsminnesförklaring 1998). When the military bases were in service, servicemen and military personnel were not included in normal safety regulations. Bases are usually extra-legal jurisdictions not subject to civil law. One of the enthusiasts at Aspö states in an interview on the possibilities of re-opening an old coastal radar station, Gruvan, as a tourist site: “If you have to adapt Gruvan to disabled people. Well, then we can forget this.” (Interview with Olle Melin 06-10-2008) Regulations of historically valuable buildings as well as accessibility, fire and safety regulations all limit the possibilities of reutilization.

The redefinition of space is also a production of space in a new social context. The way space is divided into and defined as a social zone has been described by Henri Lefebvre in his analysis of the relationship between spatiality and social life. There is a change in meaning – a conceptualization – but also a change in spatial performance, when space acquires new values of representation through the process of becoming a cultural heritage. Visitors activate learned schemas of watching, touching and moving whilst they enter the fortress of Hemsön. It occur new social zones when the fortress suddenly represents history rather then national defence. Today, the batteries protect memories, not borders.

The main entrance to Hemsö fortress, in service 1957-1989.
Photo: Per Strömberg.
Destination Development, EU-projects and Archipelago Politics: The Islands of Aspö and Hemsön in Comparison

Castles and fortresses have always fuelled local tourist industries. The valorization of cultural heritage through attraction and destination development is an important aspect of the heritage process; it’s where the heritage is performed, stated and made in practice. The term “valorization” is defined as any activity that aims to improve the knowledge and conservation of cultural and environmental heritage, and which will increase its fruition. To only identify and preserve military structures are not enough to establish a heritage. These structures also must be conceived and perceived as a heritage. As Birgitta Svensson claims, it’s not the traditional institutions of heritage preservation which primarily create the experience values which today attract people to the Swedish heritage sites, but the tourism industry (Svensson 1999: 110).

As the Cold War heritage is a recent genre, there is not really any acknowledgment among people that this is a heritage worthy of preservation, Palmblad argues. It is difficult to engage people and politicians, and to emphasize the incentive of identity creation, as the heritage is highly unknown and still invisible and unreachable (Palmblad 2005: 12). Nevertheless, Svensson states that it is in rural areas and economically disadvantaged parts of the country, for example Härnösand municipality, where regional developers are the most eager to take advantage of the heritage for the purpose of regional tourism development. These projects are of course most important in places with high levels of unemployment, or when residents have lost their previous employment (Svensson 2005: 158-9).

The past military presence on the islands of Aspö and Hemsö was a part of everyday life and the local context. Today, the bunkers still exist, like emotional reminders of a bygone era. However, their symbolic significance for the islanders of Aspö and Hemsö has not been reduced because the military base was closed down. Especially the entrepreneurs see the chances to take advantage of the symbolic value: bike and kayak renters, restaurant- and youth hostel keepers. For them, the closing of the military base appears to be a symbol of optimism and new opportunities. But what role do the local administration and regional heritage institutions actually play regarding destination development in these two cases?

In recent decades, the archipelago outside Karlskrona, including Aspö, has undergone a structural change which has caused the disappearance of three primary industries: the coastal fisheries, agriculture and the Defence. In an attempt to stimulate new industries, the municipality of Karlskrona carried out an IT-venture in the archipelago area, but with a mediocre outcome. The former cultural manager in Karlskrona, Ivar Wenster, considers the “Stavanger-model” to be an ideal model for community planning in areas of stagnation. The model primary uses available resources in order to develop new industries.

Nonetheless, Wenster is not convinced that tourism is the only, or the best, solution for islands like Aspö, or the Karlskrona archipelago. “Karlskrona is great at
cultural heritage”, Wenster says. In 1998, Karlskrona was upgraded to UNESCO’s world heritage list with the name *The Naval Port of Karlskrona*. The world heritage list consists of many cultural objects of international interests. In this way, Karlskrona is “great at heritage”. However, Wenster argues that the city does not have the experience necessary to become really good at tourist hospitality. The world heritage is geographically limited to the area close to Karlskrona, but is also limited in time to the period before 1870s, which excludes Aspö from the world heritage. He doubts whether the modern military facilities on Aspö really are valuable enough to belong to this group (Interview with Ivan Wenster 7-10-2008). Wenster’s opinion is significant for the local administration’s attitude towards the Cold War structures located outside the city.

Investigations carried out by SFV point to Aspö’s proximity to the world heritage as a major success factor in order to revitalize the heritage on the island (*Kostnader för att bevara och levandegöra försvarsanläggningar* 2008). However, it would legally be difficult to extend a world heritage site. Among the public institutions, it is rather the Swedish Property Board (SFV) than the city of Karlskrona and the main heritage institutions (SMM, SFHM, SMHA) that has run the development of preservation and revitalization of the military history on Aspö. For example, SFV has invested quite a bit in the restoration of the old citadel of Drottningkär, on which SFV created a small exhibition on Aspö’s military heritage during the summer of 2008. According to one of the driving forces involved in the Aspö-process, there are nearly no initiatives coming from the municipality; “It is a priority issue”, Wenster declares. Karlskrona municipality geographically includes thousands of similar facilities on both a large and small scale, together with the world heritage. From that point of view, the proximity to the world heritage is rather a disadvantage.

Since there is no permanent connection to the mainland, Aspö can finance their projects with structural funds from the EU: “Objective 2 Islands 2000-2006”. The development projects on Aspö have had – directly or indirectly – a connection to tourism, but not especially to the military-historical heritage: the construction of a marina, the preparation of bike paths, a tourist guide for mobile phones, and the formation of women’s network for entrepreneurs (*Genomförda projekt* 03-09-2009).

Hemsön is also covered by EU-support for rural archipelago areas because the inhabitants must take the ferry to the island. Structural funds did have a major role in the development of Hemsö fortress as a tourist attraction. Since the fortress successfully was opened to the public, the archipelago association of Hemsön, together with the municipality of Härnösand, have successively in a period of 1998-2008 applied for and received money for this purpose. The projects included construction of parking places, signage, guide teaching, inventory care, and exhibition production on a basic level.
The Rural Development Agency is responsible for the EU-programs directed towards the Swedish archipelago. They have identified three success factors for a positive use of the archipelago’s natural and cultural assets. First, collaboration and support are important to development processes. Ideas and commitment
comes from the islanders themselves. The best results occur when the islanders organize themselves in associations. Second, a focus on long term commercial projects in which stakeholders also take charge of what is offered. And finally, the municipality plays an important role as a supporter of projects and a promoter for regional actions (Normark & Lindgren 2008: 35).

Both Aspö and Hemsön have elements of the Rural Development Agency’s recipe for success. For example, both have groups of active islanders who are involved in long-term projects. The projects related to Hemsön tend to be more or less related to the fortress, while the Aspö-projects are characterized by more general projects which indirectly may benefit the hospitality industry.

In conclusion, an active role of the local authorities and support from the regional heritage institutions may result in heritage declarations and generate EU-funding which are crucial for destination development. The local support from the municipality and the regional heritage institutions as well as the well organized friendship association has also been very important for Hemsön. Aspö, in comparison, lacks support from the local authorities and central heritage institutions, even though there are local entrepreneurs and groups of driving forces who are willing to explore the possibilities of the new heritage. As it seems to be a question of priority, the world heritage essentially drains local initiatives in the archipelago, both morally and economically.

![Restaurant Örnäset (Eagle’s Nest) at the exit of Hemsö fortress. The new entrepreneur of the restaurant has taken over the service of the museum from the County museum. He is an important stakeholder for destination development at Hemsön. Photo: Per Strömberg.](image-url)
Post-societies

One essential conclusion of this study is the fact that the making of Cold War heritage is similar to industrial heritage in view of the heritage process. However, in Sweden, the Cold War heritage has emerged through a more centralized process than the industrial one, principally because the military structures are a matter of national property. Focusing on the similarities, there are many interesting parallels between the industrial and military rationalizations made in the last few decades. What’s more, there are resemblances on the structural level in society.

Since the 1960s, a major part of industry (i.e. shipyard, textile, and mining industries) has been moved from Western countries to low-wage countries, which produce goods more effectively and geographically closer at lower costs, while harbour functions have been relocated to the outskirts of major cities. Western industries have changed and become more knowledge-intense and demand high-technology. Due to these structural changes, many industries have closed, been destroyed, moved or have been converted into new functions.

This stage in industrial development in the West has earlier been studied by Daniel Bell in his book *The Coming of the Post-Industrial Society* (1973). The notion of *post-industrial society* was coined in order to describe economic changes in society, in which Bell saw an occurring economic transition from a manufacturing-based economy to a service-based economy, a diffusion of national and global capital, and mass privatization (Bell 1973: 14). Globalization, digitalization and technological development as well as urbanization, are important key words that have appeared in the past few decades to describe these structural changes.

There are many remarkable similarities between the *post-industrial society* and that of the *post-military society*, which is an equivalent notion coined by Martin Shaw (1991). During the last decades, political and economical developments have led to a general and consistent industrial and military structural change which has many things in common. Sometimes, the two areas even converge in mutual dependence as a powerful *military-industrial complex*, to quote President Eisenhower’s famously warning in his farewell address in 1961.

Post-militarism, much like post-industrialism and post-modernism, is a defining characteristic of the end of the 20th century, a structural transition from the Cold War era, Shaw argues. But just as post-industrialism does not abolish industry, or post-modernism modernity, so, too, post-militarism, while it transforms the military and militarism, does not remove them from central positions in the social structure. Shaw describes post-military society as having two faces. The first is about the new national Defences which are to a large degree professionalized, smaller, with high-tech armaments of unprecedented destructive power. The other face of post-military society is the growing space for non-militarized life which has been opening since the end of the Cold War (Shaw 1991: 184-5). These structural changes also concern the military objectives of European countries with a
greater focus on international conflicts than on national defence. Thus, the national defence seeks new tasks abroad. From that point of view, globalization is another face of the post-military society.

Another important characteristic is technological development. More rational and cheaper production methods have made many Swedish industries superfluous in the same way as many military bases are today. For instance, precision bombing has made subterranean fortresses useless, and the new political and military strategic situations have made officers unemployed. Digitalization and advanced technology have replaced human labour and soldiers in military operations – such as American war drones – in a similar way as in traditional manufacturing industry.

The consequences of these structural changes in post-societies are astonishingly analogous even at the cultural level. One consequence is the large quantity of buildings which have become “vacant” after the former activities have been shut down, and relocated to other geographic areas in the world. These industrial leftover spaces in the outskirts of city-centres command high prices of land, while former military facilities often are located at places in the nature landscape which are low-populated and inaccessible but astonishingly attractive with a low level of exploitation.

This vanishing process creates a mental distance from the former activities. Robert Willim argues that industries are more invisible and anonymous today for ordinary people, even though they do exist, but are distant, or have become “clean” and transparent. Noisy and dirty industrial environments have disappeared. What is left are the traces of an industrial past which is now looked upon with distance and nostalgia. These processes imply a kind of cultural sorting which selects and extracts positive aspects out of context (Willim 2008: 123-4).

The industrial materiality embraces a lot of connotations which are today aesthetically explored and exploited in new different contexts: factories become galleries in the same way as military bunkers become design hotels such as the fortress of Fårösund. The materiality of leftover spaces functions as a scenography for new cultural activities, urban lifestyles and businesses. It is a form of a Steti-si-tation, that is, whenever former activities and spaces are being redefined, considered from a mental distance and related to consumption, entertainment, excitement, joy and recreation. But for others, the expressions of the post-societies are equal to economic decline and alienation in society, or, to negative memories.

This mental distance is also a condition for the creation of new cultural heritages. In Sweden, the interest in industrial society emerged in the 1970s. It was later absorbed by the heritage institutions in the late 1990s through a series of cultural projects (such as the ISKA-project) and scholarly conferences (Alzén & Burrell 2005: 11). A growing number of industrial environments have been inventoried and upgraded as historical buildings since then (Dahlström Rittsél 2005: 68-72). The equivalent remains of the Cold War have gone through the same process.
from the beginning of the 1990s. The table summarizes the similarities between these two types of post-societies in the West.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The post-industrial society</th>
<th>The post-military society</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1) Political-economical changes: de-industrialization</strong></td>
<td><strong>1) Political-economical changes: demilitarization</strong></td>
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<td>A straightforward decline in the output of manufactured goods or in employment in the manufacturing sector; a shift from manufacturing to the service sectors. New strategic demands of mobility and flexibility (for companies).</td>
<td>End of war preparation in large scale; reduction of nation's army, weapons, and military vehicles to an agreed minimum of weapons and troop forces; professionalization and end of conscription. New strategic demands of mobility and flexibility (for the Defence).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2) Globalization: economic &amp; geographic expansion</strong></td>
<td><strong>2) Globalization: economic &amp; geographic expansion</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Industrial outsourcing and move to low-wage countries; expansion of a global market; multinational companies.</td>
<td>Global warfare; move from invasion defence to an internationally engaged input defence; enterprises of national rebuilding after conflicts.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3a) General technological development</strong></td>
<td><strong>3a) General technological development</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Better industrial production and process methods.</td>
<td>Better industrial production and process methods; development of weapons with more fire power and more precision.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3b) Digitalization: the digital revolution</strong></td>
<td><strong>3b) Digitalization: the digital revolution</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Digital technology replaces human labour.</td>
<td>Digital technology replaces soldiers; development of digital precision weapons, remote-controlled weapons, drones; development of a “digital fortress”, a defence against cyber attacks.</td>
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<td><strong>4) Consequences</strong></td>
<td><strong>4) Consequences</strong></td>
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<td>The appearance of mental distance and alienation; creation of a new culture heritage; aestheticization, valorization and regeneration processes; appearance of “vacant spaces”.</td>
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The table summarizes the similarities between these two types of post-societies.

**Conclusion**

The Cold War heritage with its redundant military facilities is an expression of a post-military society. It is a heritage born out of crisis. Simultaneously, it’s a reflection of structural change in society, like its analogous twin heritage of the industrial society. It is also the heritage of secrecy, invisibility and silence; built in great secrecy during the Cold War, mostly invisible to its citizens, and dissolved into oblivion. Also, it is a heritage of reassurance, or oppression, depending on who you are asking.

The aim of this paper was to describe the making of the Cold War heritage through a range of processes which imply a shift of function (spatially, legally and socially), a shift of representation (culturally and emotionally), and finally, a shift of management (administratively and economically). With the industrial heritage
process in mind, the case studies have shown that the making of the Cold War heritage depends on an analogous authorized heritage discourse, to employ the notion of Laurajane Smith. The “post-military” landscape of bunkers and rusting barbed wires is regarded with the same romanticism and with similar preservation ideology and economical interests as the post-industrial landscape earlier was. Similar negotiation issues appear, and the negotiations are made by similar stakeholders.

The discourse includes heritage grammar based on a series of repeated notions and practices based on a common two-step-change: First, from military building to heritage – a conversion process which implies practices of identification and selection (investigations by cultural heritage institutions and researchers); declaration (up-grading decision-making by the authorities); salvation (emotional preservation actions by private initiatives and driving forces); depiction (nostalgic and popularized presentations by artists, authors and directors) – and secondly, from heritage to attraction: preservation (protection and management by cultural heritage institutions); valorization (implied by regional planners, museums and tourism entrepreneurs); and finally, education, sensation and socialization (activities by visitors on the site).

All these practices are directly related to the spatial transformation of the military buildings, more precisely, how the representational space of the military base – with its former collective symbols of national defence power, masculinity, reassurance, resistance, etc. – is transformed into a tourist site with new meanings for visitors and former officers. This does also entail a change of spatial practices, namely, how newly founded military-historical museums re-consider military space and divide it into (social) zones for exhibitions and guided tours, and how visitors finally perform and take it into possession. The foundation of a new heritage does as well imply new representations of space which are implemented by the heritage institutions when space is intellectually conceptualised as the abstract notion of a heritage.

What actually differs is that the heritage of the Cold War was developed through a deeply centralized selection process directed by administration authorities. One of the reasons is that the military heritage was, and still is in many cases, a state property, while industrial buildings for the most part are privately owned without institutional control. Retired officers and local driving forces are an essential but not decisive factor in defining military bases as a heritage. Persuasion campaigns and preservation actions are the means by which the heritage and its cultural value are negotiated. Together with support from the municipality and local, the driving forces form lobby groups that place pressure on politicians and heritage institutions. The making of a cultural heritage is ultimately not only an institutional but also an individual matter.

Finally, why should one tell the story about the war that never came? It’s difficulty to recognize a cultural heritage that was scarcely experienced by the public.
But as Andersson & Bodin states, it’s an essential key to understand contemporary society. Other large civilian building projects in the Swedish society at the time, such as the nuclear plants and the housing programs, are not possible to understand if you don’t relate them to the large military projects. The Cold War narrative is both extensive and complex – and international. A narrative about the subterranean fortresses in Sweden must include the supposed “enemy”, the threat from the Baltic nuclear silos of the USSR (Andersson & Bodin 2008: 93-4). But for the new entrepreneur at Hemsö fortress, who wants sell the secrets of the Cold War, the narrative of the past is just a way to create a new future.

PhD Per Strömberg, art historian, defended his thesis *Upplevelseindustrins turistmiljöer* in 2007 on the spatial connection and symbiotic processes between business and aesthetics through narratives in today’s tourism industry. He is now a post doctor at the Centre of Experience Economy, BI Norwegian School of Management. The pd-project focuses on the reuse of buildings as a cultural innovation strategy in tourism, event and retailing. E-mail: per.stromberg@bi.no

Notes
1 The project was financed by Stiftelsen för kunskapsfrämjande inom turism, Sweden, in 2008.
2 The recognition of the concept “negative heritage” is connected to the inscription in 1979 by UNESCO of Auschwitz Concentration Camp as a World Heritage Site (Dolff-Bonekämper 2002; Roth & Salas 2001).
3 Gruta Park and Museum of Genocide in Lithuania are among the exceptions.

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Soviet Lithuanians, Amber and the “New Balts”:
Historical Narratives of National and Regional Identities in Lithuanian Museums, 1940–2009

By Eglė Rindzevičiūtė

Abstract

In the twentieth century Lithuania emerged from the crumbling Russian Empire as a post-colonial nationalising state. Its short-lived independence (1918–1940) featured attempts to assemble the material foundations for an imagined community of Lithuanians, however in 1940 this nationalist project was disrupted by Soviet occupation. However, this article argues that regardless of the measures taken against political nationalism by the Soviets, the material work of assembling the Lithuanians as a historical and ethnic nation was not abandoned. The study analyses the ways in which Northern and Baltic categories were used to regionally situate the ethnic identification of the Lithuanian population in Soviet and post-Soviet Lithuanian museums. The cases of the Historical-Ethnographic Museum and the Museum of Amber reveal that Northern and Baltic dimensions had to be reconciled with the Soviet version of the Lithuanian past. The resulting assemblage of Lithuania as a synchronic and diachronic community of inhabitants who defined themselves through shared Baltic ancestors and centuries-old uses of amber was transmitted to the post-Soviet museums. The most salient post-Soviet changes were, first, the rewriting of the relations between Lithuanians and the Nordic countries in positive terms and in this way reversing the Soviet narrative of Lithuania as a victim of aggression from the North. Second, the Soviet construction of amber as a material mediator which enabled Lithuanians to connect with each other as a synchronic and diachronic imagined community was somewhat pushed aside in favour of the understanding of amber as a medium of social and cultural distinction for the ancient Balts and contemporary Lithuanian elites.

Keywords: Baltic identity, Lithuania, amber, national museums, Soviet material culture

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Introduction

During the 1990s the idea of a Baltic identity came to play an increasingly important role in official and public discourses in Lithuania. In 1993 the Lithuanian government programme declared that one of the goals of state cultural policy was “to ensure historical continuity of Lithuania’s culture” and “to guard the Baltic identity of Lithuania’s culture” (Lietuvos Respublikos... 1993). The year 2009 saw something of an apotheosis of Baltic-centred expressions of Lithuanian national identity as Lithuania celebrated the millennium of her name. Countless exhibitions, publications and events sought to historicize and otherwise articulate the meanings of Lithuanianness. For instance, the catalogue for a widely advertised international travelling exhibition, *Lithuania: Culture and History*, placed Baltic identity at the centre of Lithuania’s history. The history of Lithuania was narrated as a teleological process during which a centralized Lithuanian state emerged from the ancient Baltic tribes. The world of the Balts was contrasted with both the world of Christianity and the Slavonic, proto-Russian tribes (see Daujotytė 2009: 8). Although “Baltic” identity was claimed on linguistic grounds, it was rarely mentioned that the term “Baltic” originally emerged to describe Baltic Germans.2

Belonging to a family of supra-national categories, which are used to strengthen and amplify national identities, such as Slavs and Scandinavians, the development of a notion of Baltic identity as an amplified Lithuanian national identity presents a fascinating puzzle for historians. First of all, production of a Baltic identity, unlike Lithuanian national identity, remains underexplored. Often described as a quintessential case of ethnic nationalism, which is based on a myth of common descent, language and culture, Lithuanian national identity has been analyzed as a centripetal mechanism which was effectively mobilized to build a strong sense of distinction among the local population (Balkelis 2009). It was thanks to the ethnic identity of Lithuanians as a synchronic and diachronic community united by their unique language and folk culture, it was argued, that the people of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR) maintained a vision of independence from the Soviet regime (Hiden & Salmon 1991; Vardys & Sedaitis 1997; Misiunas & Taugepera 2006). More sinister sides of Lithuanian national identity were also pointed out as the ethnic Lithuanian version of a history of the country failed to recognize its heterogeneity, particularly the contribution of Jews, Poles and even Russians.3

However, there is lack of knowledge about the ways in which constructions of an exclusive Lithuanian national identity were positioned in relation to broader regional categories. This is particularly true in the case of the Baltic component of Lithuanian national identity. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Baltic, and occasionally Northern, categories came to occupy strong positions in Lithuanian foreign and domestic policy discourses. Interest in the history of the Baltic and
Northern dimensions of Lithuanian national identity is therefore first and foremost driven by recent geopolitical developments, such as the establishment of the Baltic Development Forum in 1998, and most recently the formulation of the European Union strategy for the Baltic Sea Region in 2009. To be sure, one must remain aware of the dangers of retrospective projections in history writing. Nevertheless, the recent rise of the importance of the Baltic and Northern dimensions is a good stimulus to revise the history of the conceptual and material construction of Lithuanian national identity in relation to these broader regional categories.

In doing so, this article aims to contribute to the expanding field of historical studies of region-building, which seek to transcend the prevailing nation-state centred historiographies. Kristian Gerner and Sven Tägil (1999) and Timothy Snyder (2003) attempted at writing a history of East Central Europe by incorporating the territories of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (henceforth GDL), Poland and Ukraine in one narrative. David Kirby analysed international relations, trade and cultural exchanges as region-building forces in the Baltic Sea area (Kirby 1995; Kirby 2000). Comparative studies of national historiographies, both globally and in European countries, including the Baltic and Northern European areas, have been recently undertaken in order to understand meaning-making mechanisms in the formation of states and regions (Berger 2007; Knell, Aronsson & Amundsen 2010). Other scholars, mainly political scientists, inspired by the geopolitical orientation of the governments of the Baltic states in the early 1990s, scrutinized the history and politics of the idea of a Baltic region, which encompassed Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (Loeber 1987; Motieka 1997; Žalimas 1998; Miniotaite 2003; Laurinavičius, Motieka & Statkus 2005) or focused on changes brought about by European integration (Lehti & Smith 2003; Smith 2005). Some went as far as treating the notion of Baltic identity as a given phenomenon and used it as an independent variable in their analyses of political processes in the area (Clemens 1994).

This study adds to the existing body of knowledge by highlighting pragmatic and material aspects of the formation of the Baltic Sea region through distribution of historical narratives to inhabitants of this area. Today history narratives reach populations through a variety of means which range from school textbooks to tourist guides and digital media. Nevertheless, an old institution of enlightenment, the national museum, can still be regarded as a particularly important mediator in this field of distribution (Bennett 1995; Aronsson 2010). Sanctioned and funded by the state, national museums are important agents in the public uses of history. It has been argued that nation-states actively create their nations or imagined communities. The imagination of the nation relies upon complex material conditions, such as technical publishing networks or material objects, which can be used as proofs of identity (Anderson 1991; Hobsbawm & Ranger 1992). As they are dedicated to the collection, storage, preservation and investigation of material objects which provide foundations for historical facts (Pearce 1992; Bennett
national museums arguably embody and materially perform the existence of the nation-state.\(^5\)

The history of Lithuanian national museums is particularly instructive as a case of the construction of statehood as a process, one which relies upon historical narratives that both draw upon and actualize material objects. The case of Lithuanian nationalism clearly demonstrates the relational character of national identity: construction of the Lithuanians had to explicitly address both national and international dimensions. The relation between Lithuanian and wider regional identifications was revised as political regimes changed, and there was no shortage of such changes. Soon after Lithuania’s declaration of independence in 1918, in 1920 Poland annexed Vilnius, the historical capital of the GDL. Vilnius was returned to Lithuania in 1939, but at the cost of incorporation of the country into the Soviet Union in 1940. In 1990 Lithuania seceded from the Soviet Union, but to a large extent maintained the same borders as the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR). These shifting political regimes did not only seek to create the country anew by redrawing maps and rewriting historical narratives, but also, as the case of amber demonstrates, attempted to ensure a sense of the continuity of the national community.

Focusing on the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, this article explores the ways in which the categories of Balticness and the North were connected with Lithuanian identity in two of the most important LSSR museums. The Lithuanian SSR Historical and Ethnographic Museum (henceforth HEM), the largest and arguably the most important museum in the LSSR, was established by uniting several collections shortly after the Second World War. Renamed as the National Museum in 1992, HEM should be understood as no less than a sensitive litmus case which reveals the work of political negotiation about the past. The organization of HEM’s displays inevitably oscillated between meeting political demands, the material conditions of museum work, and the norms of professional historiography. The second case study concerns The Museum of Amber, which was founded in the 1960s, a period of economic growth and increasing interest in the welfare of the population. The Museum of Amber had actively contributed to establishing amber as a material medium which tied in the natural history of the territories of contemporary Lithuania, the Soviet Lithuanians and the ancient Baltic tribes into both a synchronic and diachronic national community.
The Lithuanian National Museum, Vilnius. © Photo: Eglė Rindzevičiūtė

Printed museum catalogues and guides constitute the main primary sources for the analysis of narrative explanations of exhibits at HEM and the Museum of Amber. The conclusions drawn, to be sure, should not be considered as representative of all Soviet Lithuanian museums. The Soviet museum scene was quite heterogeneous and it can not be excluded that other museums produced different narratives of the Balts, Lithuanians and the North. A study of the reception of museum displays, surely a very important aspect of the distribution of historical narratives, was beyond the scope of this article. Despite these limitations, the cases analysed demonstrate that there were several different narrative and material techniques which, depending on the profile of the museum, were used to construct national and regional identifications under the Soviet regime and which did not lose their power during the post-Soviet transformation.

The Making of Authoritarian Museums

The introduction of the Soviet museum system in Lithuania is inseparable from the story of occupation and the building of an authoritarian regime (see Bagušauskas & Streikus 2005). It has to be recalled that Soviet cultural policy was not limited to censorship and control. Lenin’s government espoused a strong belief that a cultural revolution, which involved both fine arts and culture as a way of life, was an intrinsic part of the building of communist society (Fitzpatrick 1970). Heritage, first and foremost the royal palaces and noble estates, were nationalized; all cultural organisations were transferred to the People’s Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkompros), headed by Anatolii Lunacharsky (Gardanov 1957:12, 14–15). Echoing political rationales of the French Revolution which contributed to the opening of the Louvre as a national gallery in 1793 (Duncan 1995), the Communist Party programme described the nationalisation of art collections and heritage as an act of social justice. Museums were to play an important part in this cultural revolution:

Besides natural treasures, working people inherited large cultural treasures: buildings of distinctive beauty, museums, full of rare and beautiful things, which are educational and uplift the soul, libraries, which store great spiritual valuables etc. All of these now genuinely belong to the people. All of these will help the poor man and his children to quickly exceed the former ruling classes in their education, will help him to become a new man, an owner of the old culture and a creator of a yet unseen new culture. Comrades, it is necessary to be alert and protect this heritage of our people! (Narkompros, “To Workers, Peasants, Soldiers, Sailors and All Citizens of Russia” (3 November 1917), cf Gardanov 1957:10)

The Soviet occupation of Lithuania in 1940 brought an already quite settled system of centralized museums. Existing Lithuanian museums were “nationalized” or centralized under the new communist government, a process which entailed looting, destruction, firing or executing the staff, and placement under the direct administration of the Agency for Art Affairs and, since March 1953 of the All-
Putting violence aside, centralization came as a shock to local museum workers who had been relatively independent of both national and local governments (Mačiulis 2005). Perceived as instruments for popular education and ideological instruction, the Sovietized museums had little choice but to drastically revise interwar narratives about the geopolitical orientation of Lithuania. Any positive references to the interwar statehood and cultural forms that were classified as Western capitalist, such as the modernist style in the fine arts, or abstract painting, were carefully eliminated. Although this censorship constituted a strong blow to professional artists, it has to be remembered that professional arts were not perceived by the interwar government as an especially important instrument in nation-building. In the context of the decline of the world economy and the complicated local geopolitical situation, the Lithuanian government made little commitment to heritage protection. At the same time, many interwar professional Lithuanian artists found their inspiration in folk culture and folk culture objects were chosen to represent Lithuania internationally, for example, in the world fairs. (Mulevičiūtė 2001; Jankevičiūtė 2003; Mačiulis 2005).

This traditional emphasis on Lithuanian folk culture resonated with the Soviet encouragement of expressions of ethnic cultures. The Soviet definition of ethnicity was limited to language and folk culture, which was “national in form, socialist in content” (Suny 1991). Conceived in such a way, ethnicity was not perceived by Soviet ideologues as politically dangerous. The Soviet approach to ethnicity as a cultural and strictly non-political phenomenon allowed museum workers to continue the assembling of Lithuanian identity on linguistic and archaeological grounds. For example, even in the politically uncertain 1950s, the hard-line communist historian Juozas Žiugžda criticized the former Vytautas the Great Military Museum in Kaunas because they integrated a section “The formation of the Baltic tribes” into the department of ideological and social relations. The Baltic tribes, wrote Žiugžda, actually belonged to the narrative of ethnic development (“čia yra aiškiai etnogenezės klausimas”). Moreover, he further advised the museum to organize a separate section called “The Balts” (“Atsiliepimas...” 1953).

Beginning with the temporary relaxation of ideological control in the 1960s the interest in the pre-modern Baltic past of Lithuania started to gain momentum (Rindzevičiūtė 2008: 187). Regional historical studies started to appear; for example, a collaborative book The Routes of the Development of Capitalism: Caucasus, Central Asia, Russia and the Baltic Sea Region (in Russian, Pribaltika) was published in Russian in 1972. In 1977 the first conference for the study of Baltic ethnic history was organized in Riga; the 1980s saw an explosion in studies of the pre-history of Baltic tribes from the Mesolithic period to the tenth century A.D. These explorations of pagan culture were tolerated by the Soviet ideologues, probably as part of their anti-Catholic policies. On the other hand, a cautious writer could rather easily combine the history of pre-Christian cultures with
the Soviet historical narrative of the Germans as historical enemies by emphasising that “pagan Lithuanians” fought “German” crusaders (Weiner 2001; also Wendland 2008; Rindzeviciute 2011). Similarly, explorations of Lithuanian folk culture were integrated with a Marxist approach as historical studies of the working class. Articulations of relationships with the North, however, remained difficult, because now Northern countries lay beyond the Iron Curtain and belonged to the hostile capitalist West.

This, to be sure, is not to suggest that Baltic studies thrived in Soviet Lithuania, because this was clearly not the case (see, for example Švedas & Gudavičius 2008), but rather to point out that the Baltic component could be retained and cultivated as part of officially legitimate expressions of Lithuanian ethnicity. Nevertheless, as the case of HEM details below, the choice of whether to articulate the Baltic and Northern dimensions strongly depended on the situation in a particular museum.

**Soviet Lithuania at the Mercy of Foreign Powers: the Case of HEM**

In 1941 and just before the outbreak of the Second World War, a newly established LSSR Academy of Sciences (LAS) organized a historical museum under its history department. Collections from the Vilnius Museum of Antiquities (est. 1855) were joined with collections accumulated by Vilnius’s societies of Lithuanian Science (1907–1938) and the Friends of Science (1907–1941). At the same time the LAS ethnography department organized an ethnographic museum. In 1952 the Museum of Ethnography was merged with the Museum of History and renamed the LSSR Museum of History and Ethnography (henceforth HEM). A cultural historian, Vincas Žilėnas, was appointed as director and, typically of Soviet leadership, remained in this position for more than two decades as he retired only in 1973. Organized in archaeological, ethnographic, history, iconography and numismatic sections, in 1963 HEM was transferred from LAS to the LSSR Ministry of Culture.

Both HEM’s physical location and self-identification in narratives of its origin aptly spoke about the national significance of this institution. Situated at a complex of buildings called the New and the Old Gunpowder Houses (these buildings dated to the 1500s–1700s and were also known as the Arsenal), HEM found itself at the foot of Gediminas Hill, near the castle and the Cathedral at the heart of Vilnius Old Town. Although first established in the early 1940s, HEM celebrated its 125th anniversary in 1980 and in this way affirmed its genealogy from the Vilnius Museum of Antiquities (1855). Indeed, the word “national” (in Lithuanian tautinis, nacionalinis) had already been carefully introduced into the notion of HEM in 1970:
The Lithuanian SSR Historical and Ethnographic Museum (HEM) is a “national museum” because it is first and foremost concerned with collecting, storing and displaying those cultural monuments which are directly and indirectly related to the past and present of our nation. (Bernotienė, Mažeikienė and Tautavičienė 1970: 7, original emphasis – E.R.)

HEM’s curators described the museum as the key site for assembling the history of the Lithuanian nation. The curators acknowledged that this was not an easy task and complained that it was “close to impossible” to organize HEM’s permanent display in such a way that it would be able “to speak the history of our nation to our visitor”. This actually was a hint at the crucial importance of written commentaries, the key instrument of propaganda.

In the Soviet Union geopolitical narratives intended for public distribution were formulated in the disciplinary frameworks of political economy and history. Although universities played an important role in dissemination of these narratives, the key producers were ideological secretaries at the All-Union and Republic Central Committees and their departments (Bumblauskas & Šepetys 1999; Bagušauskas & Streikus 2005). By way of the Ministry of Culture these secretaries provided museum workers with methodological guidelines which, often in minute detail, specified which historical periods and narratives to include in museum exhibitions (“Dėl respublikos...” 1952). Being clearly top-down, this process of ideological regulation of public history did not run smoothly. Indeed, there was little agreement and often quite a lot of friction between the ideological requirements channelled from Moscow and local historians (see Bumblauskas & Šepetys 1999; Švedas 2009). The centrally shaped Soviet ideological version of history was often translated, modified and subverted by local actors.

Local translation was a risky project, especially from 1944 to the early 1950s, which were marked with anti-Soviet resistance fights in Lithuania (see Statiev 2010) and, following the death of Stalin in 1953, political destabilisation. Soviet Lithuanian historians were understandably careful to avoid any ideological errors. Although the first conference about the periodization of the history of Lithuania was organized in 1952, it seems that Lithuanian historians opted to wait for political stabilisation and clarification of ideological guidelines: the first official history The History of the Lithuanian SSR was published only in 1957. Museum workers were similarly cautious. HEM opened its first permanent exhibition surprisingly late: on the threshold of the end of the Thaw, November 1968. Although this exhibition was retrospectively described as a “non-ideological” display (Būčys 2008:44–45), obligatory dues were paid to the Marxist-Leninist narrative and political risks were carefully balanced.

The first permanent HEM exhibition was cautiously limited to a period between the settlement of Lithuania’s territory, 10 000 BC, and the October revolution in 1917. This display was located in seven halls; the eighth hall was reserved for temporary exhibitions. The first hall was dedicated to 10 000 BC-1300 AD, at the end of which the first Lithuanian state was formed. Besides the dominant narra-
tive about economic and political progress from the natural to the feudal system, and from the capitalist to the communist system, the exhibition guide featured a narrative about Nordic and Baltic connections.\(^\text{12}\)

The northern dimension was introduced into the history of Soviet Lithuania through accounts about natural history, material exchange and, most predominantly, military conflict. According to the guide, the geological history of “Lithuania” began with the ice age when glaciers came from “Scandinavia”.\(^\text{13}\) Featuring the modern names of cities and rivers, the ice age map directly connected pre-history with the post-1944 territory of the LSSR. This diachronic connection eliminated all the sweeping changes that the territory inhabited by historical and modern Lithuanians underwent.\(^\text{14}\) Besides moving glaciers, the LSSR’s connection with “Scandinavia” was assembled through the medium of archaeological findings. Although the majority of archaeological exhibits were used to emphasize Lithuania’s trade relations with the Roman Empire, from the eighth century the name “Scandinavia” started to appear in the material history of Lithuania. The objects of Scandinavian origin were military in function, such as swords, spurs, spearheads, sheaths, and decoration (brooches) (Bernotienė, Mažeikiienė & Tautavičienė 1970: 18, 22, 25). These Scandinavian findings were interpreted as proof of material exchange between Nordic people and “Lithuani ans”. No attempt, however, was made to compare Lithuanians with Scandinavian or Viking people. Indeed, the exhibition catalogue did not specify the ancestor population as “Baltic tribes”. The pre-modern inhabitants of the Lithuanian SSR were simply referred to as “the people living on the Baltic shores”.

Besides archaeological findings, a manuscript was displayed to illustrate the difficult connections with the Nordic countries. As very few written sources from 10 000 BC-1300 AD had survived it is quite significant that one of these rare sources referred to the aggression of “Sweden” against “Lithuania”. In the mid-ninth century the Swedish king Olaf attacked and took power over the Curonian castle Apuolė (in Latin Apulia) (Bernotienė, Mažeikiienė & Tautavičienė 1970: 8). This hostility, according to the guide, was an example of the Northern peoples as a negative factor in Lithuania’s history.

The concessions to pro-Russian ideology were made in the HEM guide’s account of Lithuania’s regional position in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In the interwar historiography this period was defined as the peak of Lithuanian statehood and power, as the GDL stretched quite far into Muscovy and encompassed the Western part of Ukraine. The guide, however, was very laconic about this period during which Russia was weak. Much more information was provided about Lithuanian and Russian relations in the sixteenth century when Russia started to emerge as a significant military power. At the same time, this was the period of Lithuania’s decline. The guide described the Vasa rule (1587-1648) of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (PLC) as “the most miserable for Lithuania”, because Lithuania was entangled in war with Sweden and Russia. The Swed-
ish occupation was described in emotionally charged terms: “a marching army of foreigners” which “looted and destroyed the country” swarmed through Lithuania. In relation to these events the exhibition displayed a picture depicting the 1656 Lithuanian-Swedish battle and Swedish money.

The anti-Nordic stance was further articulated in an account of the Northern War (1700–1721) and the partition of the PLC, presented together in one display “The Period of the Northern War and Partition” (Bernotienė, Mažeikiienė & Tautavičienė 1970: 42–43). Explanation of the partition, which ended the GDL’s statehood, was a difficult puzzle for Soviet historians and museum workers. Partition was described as the most negative event in interwar historiography, however, Soviet ideologues required that incorporation of the GDL into the Russian Empire be presented as a “progressive event”. This, as Mečislovas Jučas retrospectively noted, was resisted by Lithuanian historians. Instead of openly glorifying the incorporation of the GDL into Russia, historians used intentionally vague phrases to narrate the partition such as “Lithuanian and Russian feudalism found some points of agreement” or that “Lithuanian people joined the all-Russian fight against imperialism” (Jučas 1999: 18–19).

By the early 1970s a consensus about the official narrative of modern Soviet Lithuanian history was already established and could be institutionalized in the museums. In 1972 HEM reorganized the display of Lithuania’s history to reflect changes in the historical interpretation of socialism introduced by Leonid Brezhnev’s doctrine of “mature socialism”. A new display “The History of the Soviet Society, 1940 to the present” was opened later in 1976 and included several themes: “The Victory of the Revolution and the Beginning of the Creation of Socialism in the LSSR (1940–1941)”, “Lithuania during the Great Patriotic War (1941–1945)”, “Creation of the Basis of Socialism and Completion of Socialism (1945–1961)” and “LSSR National Economy and Culture under Mature Socialism (1961–1975)” (Žilėnas 1980).

The reformed HEM systematically Lithuanian-ized the history of the LSSR and in this way resembled the 1940s’ strategy of Sovietization, as it exclusively focused on Soviet Lithuanians and minimized visibility of non-Lithuanian ethnic groups, such as Poles and Jews (Weeks 2008). The new exhibition catalogue strikes the reader with the absence of any regional categories in relation to Lithuanians. The term “Baltic” appeared to be abandoned and the guide only made reference “Lithuanians” and “Lithuanian tribes”. Spatial categories were abandoned in favour of a narrative of economic growth illustrated with new types of material objects, such as high-tech Soviet Lithuanian produce (television Temp-6 and Elfa tape recorders) (Žilėnas 1980:23). This universalising discourse of modernisation as economic growth did not replace the emphasis on linguistic and cultural ethnicity. Rather, it continued to assert the diachronic unity of Soviet Lithuanians with their past, faced with dangers from the North.
The Rise of Baltic Ancestors and Post-Soviet Revisions of the Northern Dimension

From 1992, after achieving independence from the Soviet Union, HEM was renamed the National Museum of Lithuania (LNM). Shortly before the millennium celebration of the name (and perhaps the state) of Lithuania, the LNM arranged an exhibition about Baltic archaeology entitled Curonians: the Vikings of the Balts (Kuršiai – Baltų vikingai, Vilnius, 19 November 2008-15 March 2009). The curators sought to “inscribe the Baltic tribes on a map of civilizations, on which the territories inhabited by the ancient Balts are not yet marked” (“Britų...” 2009). The exhibition Curonians perpetuated the notion of the Balts as a people whose identity was uncontested and strongly supported by material evidence. The historical presence of the Balts was not to be doubted, but highlighted. The Balts were not presented as “rough barbarians” or people without history who lived at the impassable, swampy and forested edge of Europe, but as a tribe able to produce “jewellery, which demonstrates wealth, power, a great sense of aesthetics” and their weapons revealed their “military force and power” (“Pristatoma...” 2008).

This conjecture of the unquestionable historical presence and high cultural status of the Balts-Curonians was accompanied with revision of the relation between the Balts-Lithuanians and Northern Europe. Focusing on the period 500–1200 AD, the exhibition featured archaeological findings, such as artefacts from bronze, stone and amber, and black and white photographs of archaeological sites, mainly castle mounds. A map outlined the Curonians’ territory which stretched from the Eastern coast of the Baltic Sea and extended across the current border between Lithuania and Latvia. The exhibition text emphasized trade relations between Curonians and “Scandinavians”, the story of which went as following. Between
500 and 850 Scandinavian merchants settled in Curonian lands and bought local jewellery and weapons. This period of peaceful trade was disrupted in the second half of the 800s, when Scandinavians mounted war campaigns against Curonian and other lands on the Eastern shore. In turn, Curonians started their own military campaigns in Scandinavia and their power peaked in 900–1100s. However, in 1422 Curonian lands were divided between Lithuania and Livonia. Curonians became assimilated with Samogitians, a West Lithuanian group. By 1600s the Curonian language became extinct. This story of the rise and fall of the Curonian tribes was framed by the exhibition text as a case of interaction and cultural exchange between Scandinavian and Baltic tribes, a process that was most evidently revealed in styles of jewellery and the production of miniatures.

The exhibition Curonians mobilized history in order to construct a three-fold relation between contemporary Lithuania and the Nordic countries. First, the exhibition drew attention to material cultural exchange by means of trade and stylistic influences. Second, the exhibition emphasized that the tribe of Curonians/Balts was an active agent and considerable military power in the Baltic Sea, because this tribe was able to loot and instil fear on the Swedish coast. It was not Olaf, who burned Apuolė, but Curonians who looted the Öland islands who were the focus. Thirdly, to frame the exhibition, the organisers used the widely recognisable brand of “the Vikings”, a concept which is widely used to brand Norway, Denmark and Sweden. This reference to Vikings, consequently, suggested that the Baltic identity contained a “Scandinavian” dimension or, at least, that the history of Baltic tribes was comparable to that of the Vikings. Indeed, in 1991 Griciute had already applied the analytical framework developed within Scandinavian studies to analyse and display a history of the Baltic tribes. The exhibition In Search of the Baltic Ornament aimed to identify a unitary visual culture which would enable the Baltic tribes to be distinguished in a manner similar to the way Celtic ornaments enabled Nordic peoples to be distinguished.

HEM eventually redefined Curonians as metonymically related with both the Baltic tribes and contemporary Lithuanians. In the post-Soviet context of the revised Northern orientation of Lithuania, the story of the Curonians turned out to be quite useful for constructing new narratives of Lithuania as a country of militarily assertive and civilized people. A few decades earlier, amber was performing a similar role, acting as material proof of the territorial presence and diligence in international trade of the Baltic tribes.

The Community of “Northern Gold”: The Case of the Museum of Amber

The organisation of the Museum of Amber is a fascinating case of the material construction of the Lithuanian people which was possible within the framework of Soviet ethnic and cultural policies. The initiative to organize the Museum of
Amber belonged to the director of the Lithuanian Art Museum, Pranas Gudynas, assisted by his deputy director Romualdas Budrys (Jakelaitis 1998: 11). Opened in 1963, the Museum of Amber was established at the premises of count Feliks Tyszkiwycz’s (Feliksas Tiškevičius, 1870–1932) neo-baroque summer palace. Built by the German architect Franz Schwechten in 1897, the palace was situated in gardens designed by the French landscape architect Edouard Francois Andre. It was thanks to the Tyshkiewycz family’s efforts that the sleepy fishing village of Palanga emerged as a sea resort in the 1870s–1880s (Striougaitis 2008). The count himself was a passionate collector of archaeological findings and his collections included valuable prehistoric amber artefacts (Tranyzas 1998).

The opening of the Museum of Amber coincided with changes in Soviet economic policy. In 1957 Nikita Khrushchev started economic decentralisation, delegating the administration of many sectors to territorial and not branch organs. This reform entitled LSSR authorities to more autonomy in management of republican industries and especially allocation of resources in the civil sector. It is therefore not surprising that the late 1950s and 1960s saw the construction of many new museums.

Another interesting coincidence was that in 1963 the Lithuanian SSR Economic Council took charge of the world’s largest amber producer, the Kaliningrad Lanterny Amber Mines. Capitalising on this expansion of the Lithuanian amber industry, the Museum of Amber skilfully combined its goals as a natural scientific laboratory and a disseminator of ethnic nationalist values.19 In doing so the Museum was particularly successful in mobilising popular tales and lending its scientific authority to legitimise existing and widespread popular practices of gathering and using amber in the everyday life of Lithuanians. Being an elegant, but also entertaining and reasonably quirky place to visit (think of a tractor made with amber and magnified prehistoric insects stuck in amber), the Museum of Amber perfectly fulfilled the economic rationale of Soviet cultural policy, according to which cultural organisations had to provide workers with enlightened recreation during their holidays (White 1990).
Baltic Amber, ca 50 million years old. © Photo: Antanas Lukšėnas. Courtesy of the Lithuanian Art Museum.

The identification of amber with Lithuanian territory and its inhabitants is a rather new phenomenon. It was only in 1923 that Lithuania gained the Klaipėda (Memel) region and access to the amber rich coastal area of the Baltic Sea. Besides this new geopolitical situation, there emerged influential literary discourses which established a connection between Lithuania and amber. The most salient example is the poem “Free Lithuania” (Lietuva laisva, part of Bolševiko kelias, 1940) written by a prominent pro-Soviet poetess Salomėja Nėris (1904–1945). Included in all Soviet school textbooks (Mažeikis 2007: 257), this poem did not lose its canonical status after the collapse of the Soviet Union and was still used in lectures dedicated to patriotic upbringing, particularly in primary school teaching (see, for example Strelčenko 2003). A recipient of Stalin’s prize for literature, Nėris described the LSSR in line with the Soviet discourse of “the little homeland” (in Russian, malaia rođina, see Sandomirskaja 2001). The poem emphasized the smallness of the country and cosiness of local identification, which was secured by membership of the Soviet Union. The name of Lithuania was coupled with amber through the metaphor of a tiny object which could be easily handed to “a friend” (the poetess meant Stalin):

How beautiful our small country is!
Like a drop of pure amber.
Since long ago I admired my home-country in textile patterns
And in songs from my native village.

I am bringing to you a little piece of amber,
Which is a pale drop of the Baltic Sea –
And the gentle name of Lithuania
I am bringing to you as the sun in my hands.
(Nėris 1940/1984: 30)

“Free Lithuania” was cited in the Museum of Amber’s guide, written by eminent Lithuanian museum worker and heritage preservation specialist Pranas Gudynas and an art historian, Stasys Pinkus (Gudynas & Pinkus 1964:42). According to the guide, the Baltic Sea shore (including Kaliningrad, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia) contained “the best kind of amber” or succinite, known by scientists as Baltic amber (Gudynas & Pinkus 1964:19). Called “the northern gold” Baltic amber was described as being at the heart of Lithuanian national identity:

Amber is found in many countries in the world but nowhere is amber so deeply rooted in people’s everyday life, folklore, literature and the arts as it is in Lithuania. Since ancient times amber was used to create beautiful artefacts and works of art. It is not by mistake that Lithuania is called an amber country and the Baltic Sea shore [is called] an amber shore. (…)
The fact that Lithuanian people foster love for amber is not a contingent phenomenon, but a tradition, which is cherished by the people who lived on the amber rich shores of the Baltic Sea and who related their joy and sadness with amber. This is eloquently exemplified by archaeological burial sites, containing amber jewellery for men and women and also weapons and horses, which are found in the territory of the republic. For a Lithuanian person, a piece of amber or a pretty artefact made of amber is not just a beautiful thing, but also part of the country’s cultural history.
Amber wrote the name of Lithuania in books from antiquity. The fame of its beauty and value attracted ships of antiquity traders to the Eastern coasts of the Baltic Sea, inhabited by Lithuanian tribes. (Gudynas & Pinkus 1964:2-3)

This quote reveals the Museum of Amber’s ambition to insert amber into the historical narrative of the Lithuanian population. Amber, it was suggested, was material proof of the presence of Baltic tribes in the territory of the LSSR. Consequently, it was inferred that the connections between the Balts-Lithuanians and the outside world could be traced through locations where amber artefacts were found.

Amber, in other words, made Baltic-Lithuanian people visible. For example, the guide insisted that that the first mentioning of the “ancestors of Lithuanians” was found in Tacitus *Germania* (98 AD). Tacitus, according to the guide, described the *aestii* tribe (in Lithuanian “aistai”) as “good farmers”, who collected amber in shallow parts of the Baltic Sea and transported it to faraway lands to sell it (Gudynas & Pinkus 1964: 9). This was, however, largely a creative adaptation of Tacitus for a retrospective construction of Lithuanians. In his *Germania* Tacitus wrote:

> To the right-hand shore of the Suebic Sea: here it washes the tribes of the Aestii; their customs and appearance are Suebic, but their language is nearer British (...) they ransack the sea also, and are the only German people who gather in the shallows and on the shore itself the amber, which they call in their tongue “glaesum”. Nor have they, being barbarians, inquired or learned what substance or process produces it; nay, it lay there long among the rest of the flotsam and jetsam of the sea until Roman luxury gave it fame. To the natives it is useless: it is gathered crude; is forwarded to Rome unshaped: they are astonished to be paid for it. (Tacitus 45, cf Bojtár 1999:30)

In *Germania* Tacitus did not mention either the Baltic Sea (although it is agreed that by Suebia he meant the Baltic Sea); he called the *aestii* “Germans”, who spoke “British”. Furthermore, Tacitus did not describe the assumed Lithuanian “ancestors” as “good farmers”, but rather as crude barbarians. Finally, he actually did not specify in which way amber reached Rome.

The image of the Lithuanians-Aestii as far-travelling merchants, therefore, was a fictitious construction. Historians do not agree whether one can establish a certain connection between Tacitus’s *aestii* and the Balts-Lithuanians. Some suggested that *aestii* referred to the Prussians, others thought that *aestii* described the Estonians or even Slavs (see Bojtár 1999: 104–107). The guide, however, did not offer any hint about the questionable interpretation of which ethnic group *aestii* referred to. Instead, it asserted the roots of Lithuanians as Baltic people who traded amber. The guide referred to amber interchangeably as “Northern gold” and “Lithuanian gold”.
Baltic amber materialized natural and social exchanges. For instance, the formation of Baltic amber was explained by the leak of tar from forests which grew on the contemporary territory of Sweden in the Paleogenic period, which lasted for forty-two million years (Baltrūnas 2003: 21). The guide also emphasized that Neolithic amber artefacts from what is now Lithuanian territory were found in Denmark, Sweden and Great Britain (Gudynas & Pinkus 1964: 39). The latter was interpreted as proof of the international activities of Balts-Lithuanians:

> The amber trade and its routes witness not only to the extraction, processing and use of amber in the current territory of the Lithuanian SSR, but also speaks about the relations of this country with other far-away lands, with which not only amber, but also other mutually valuable goods were traded. What was lacked at home was imported, and, on the other hand, a significant input was made into the treasury of world culture by establishing amber trade relations with centres of civilization and culture at that time. (Gudynas & Pinkus 1964:41)
These narratives produced by the Museum of Amber should be understood as part of the nationalizing process (Brubaker 2004) in the LSSR. As Bojtár insightfully pointed out, the construction of “Baltic amber” as a marker of “the Baltic people” was not supported by chemical evidence: not only Baltic amber contains succinic acid. Therefore the reconstructions of “amber routes”, proudly displayed in the Museum, were little more than hypotheses of settlements, travels and relations of the Baltic people (Bojtár 1999:26–27).

In nationalising amber as the Northern-Lithuanian gold, the Museum of Amber actively downplayed the role of Baltic Germans in the economic and cultural histories of amber. The history of amber in East Prussia stretched back centuries: since the thirteenth century amber collection was increasingly regulated by the Livonian order, which held exclusive rights for mining and trading with amber. From the seventeenth to the early twentieth century Königsberg, East Prussia, was the centre of both the amber industry and scientific research. The first book about amber, A Aurifaber: Succini Historia, was published in Königsberg in 1551 (Bojtár 1999:29). True, the guide did mention the role of German scholars, but only in passing. It seemed that the guide was so keen to find Lithuanians in the history of amber, that it discussed at some length the contribution of a Lithuanian writer, V. Kalvaitis, which was hardly an example of great scholarship. In 1910 Kalvaitis published A Granary with a Lithuanian Name, a collection of essays about amber as told by fishermen and a description of one amber mining company. However, it is possible that the guide gave scant information about the German amber industry in order make the “progressive development” achieved by Soviet industries more plausible. The German contribution to the amber industry was quite tellingly described as involving cruel oppression of the working class (Gudynas & Pinkus 1964: 47).

Besides making historical narratives to fit Soviet, but also ethnocentric constructions of Lithuania, the Museum of Amber performed an important role in constructing a banal nationalism (Billig 1995). Located in Palanga, the most popular summer resort seaside town, the museum was frequented by holiday makers. About 600 000 visitors visited the museum during the first five years (Palangytė 2008). The location of the museum in a seaside resort enabled active visitors to engage with amber: the museum was located on a route through the park which lead straight to the beach where pieces of amber could be collected. The Museum elevated the banal object of amber, a common possession of every woman in the shape of earrings, rings and necklaces, to the status of a marker of participation in the history of amber and ancient Lithuanian people. The Museum constructed amber both as an object of natural history, which informed a visitor about the geology and biology of the current territory of the republic, and as an object of cultural history and part of folk culture (see Gudynas & Pinkus 1964:6–7). The guide contained several folk tales which featured amber. In 1968 the Museum opened a
permanent exhibition of Lithuanian folk art in addition to the amber collections (Palangytė 2008).

The prominent American archaeologist of Lithuanian origin Marija Gimbutas was particularly optimistic about the power of amber to establish connections. In her letter of congratulation, Gimbutas encouraged the newly opened Museum of Amber to “take care, love and use the most precious treasure of your land, because with its help we can travel all over the world” (“Kalba muzieju...”: 1966: 107). In 1969 the Museum mounted a new, enlarged permanent exhibition which contained three thousand pieces of amber. The notion of an amber route was further developed in an edited collection of archaeological research about the trade relations of “Lithuania’s inhabitants” in the pre-modern period, 100–1200s. The Museum display was expanded in 1986 to exhibit 4500 exhibits in fifteen halls which narrated the natural and cultural history of amber, stretching from pre-history to the present day (Palangytė 2008).

Amber during the Post-Soviet Transformation: Making the “New Balts”

After the collapse of the Soviet Union both amber and the Museum of Amber were repeatedly placed on the government’s agenda. In 1998-1999 the destiny of the Museum of Amber suddenly was uncertain because a descendent of Tyszkiewycz’s family reclaimed the palace as it was illegally nationalized by the communist government. However, an agreement was reached that the palace was a state protected monument and that the inheritor would withdraw his claims. The public importance of the Museum of Amber was asserted. Another eloquent example of the closure of amber as the material core of Lithuanian ethnic identity was revealed in a parliamentary debate about an official definition of precious metals and stones. In 1998 the government presented a revision of the definition passed in 1995, according to which amber and pearls were defined as precious stones. The new suggestion that amber should not be classified as a precious stone stirred a heated (and somewhat amusing) debate among members of parliament, which is worth quoting at a greater length:

MP: Honorable members of Parliament, I strongly doubt the suggestion that amber does not have the qualities of precious stones. I am really sorry to see that amber is made equal with clay, sand, dolomite, water and any other geological body. Nevertheless from an aesthetic point of view, from a cultural point of view, amber has always been the pride of Lithuania: “The Amber Lithuania”, “The Amber Baltic Sea”, and “The Amber Tuba”. I could mention many other examples of uses of our amber, such as myths and cultural events. Honorable Sirs, of course, one can laugh at these things, but I do not find it funny when the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania makes amber equal with clay, sand and water and in this way creates the possibility of exporting amber just like a lump of soil from Lithuania. This is why I think that my suggestion is absolutely serious and that we do not need to remove amber from
the list of precious stones, but instead we should leave it on the list as perhaps the only precious stone found in Lithuania.

Parliament Speaker: Honorable colleague, if you think that I am laughing at you, please note that I am actually laughing at your colleagues’ comments, which I happened to hear. This has nothing to do with my lack of respect for amber whatsoever. (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas 1998)

Another MP suggested creating a new, special classification of precious stones, which would enable Lithuanians to appropriately evaluate “their most valuable natural resource” (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas 1998). Although the Parliament removed amber from the official list of precious stones, amber remained a valuable resource in the material and discursive production of Lithuanian national identity. Similarly, the earlier cited passage from Tacitus’ *Germania* retained its role as a vehicle which brought together amber, *aestiis*, the Balts and the modern, now post-Soviet, Lithuanians together.

In summer 2009 the Museum of Applied Art (a branch of the Lithuanian Art Museum, which is one of four national museums) in Vilnius mounted an exhibition *The Art of the Balts* (Baltų menas, 5 July 2009 – 20 April 2010), which immersed the visitor in a multimedia experience of sounds, moving images and archaeological objects. The exhibition was explicitly related to the celebration of Lithuanian sovereignty: the opening of the exhibition was scheduled to take place on the eve of the Coronation day of Mindaugas, celebrated on the 6th of July. *The Art of the Balts* was scheduled to travel in the national museums abroad and visit Warsaw, Gdansk, Tallinn, Riga, Berlin, Copenhagen and Stockholm in 2010–2011.

Organized by the Vilnius Academy of the Arts and curated by a historian, Adomas Butrimas, the exhibition contained a section “Tradition of Amber in the Baltic Lands”. Here the Baltic lands were mapped on the basis of linguistic groups and included the contemporary territories of Lithuania, Latvia, Kaliningrad and North Eastern Poland. The architecture of the display featured two corridors formed from black coloured stands. In line with the fashionable trend of “black baroque”, the exhibition colour scheme was monochromic: the display stands featured black-painted matt and glossy surfaces, dimmed lights and black chandeliers decorating vaulted ceilings. In this dark and expensive-looking space spotlights highlighted archaeological exhibits, which were made of amber, silver, bronze and copper. The display also featured the section “Baltic motifs in the contemporary art”, which included a video installation showing re-enactment of Baltic cultural rituals, such as Midsummer’s Day: bonfires, light night in a forested countryside, white-dressed people singing folk songs. As it appealed to almost all senses, *The Art of the Balts* continued the path of defining the Balts as amber trading tribes, and presented them as an undisputed source of Lithuanian identity.

The Soviet narrative, which constructed amber as both a metaphor of the Lithuanian state and a banal object of everyday life which made visible the diachronic and synchronous imagined community of Lithuanians, was strongly modi-
fied. *The Art of the Balts* constructed amber not as a universal marker of all Lithuanians, but as a marker of a particular social group, the military and social elite. As the exhibition architecture brought to mind a high-fashion store, it can be suggested that the organizers wanted to remove amber from the banal context of the everyday life of Lithuanians, who use amber as inexpensive jewellery. Instead, the exhibition framed amber as a genuine Northern gold: a valuable stone which hints at luxury and an item of refined aesthetic contemplation.


The exhibition did feature the famous Tacitus quote. However, Tacitus’s quote was explained in a way that was different from the 1960s version. Tacitus described *aestiis* as a “savages, who were not interested in the nature of amber”. The exhibition curators translated this lack of intellectual interest and craftsmanship into a positive statement. The exhibition website described the raw “Baltic amber artefacts” in line with contemporary “eco-friendly” discourse. According to this view, raw amber was the result of a conscious effort and a choice based on a particular taste: “the Balts tried to keep the shape of amber as natural as possible” (“Gintaro...” 2009). An art historian clearly articulated the aesthetic value of “Baltic amber”:

One of the themes [of the exhibition] is dedicated to amber, a material which is associated with Balticness, both in professional and popular cultures. Although our ancestors chose to export amber to faraway lands and not to polish it themselves, these amber necklaces which shine in black display windows suggest that these may be examples of a more subtle understanding of the beauty of amber and the level of its processing than the understanding that we have today. (Iršėnas 2009: 24)

Crude amber artefacts, according to this exhibition, showed that the Balts were not savages, but rather a developed civilisation. Furthermore, *The Art of the Balts* did not stop with pre-history, but went on to establish a diachronic link between the Baltic tribes and Lithuanian sovereign statehood: it described the GDL elite as a “Baltic aristocracy”. “The Baltic elites which created the state of Lithuania”, emphasized the exhibition organizers, “accumulated massive wealth”.24 Heirs not
of savages, but civilized Baltic tribes, modern Lithuanians were constructed as the “New Balts”, a historical community and rightful members of the Northern part of Europe. Here it has to be noted that this museum discourse about the Balts was significantly different from the approach advanced by some professional Lithuanian historians, who emphasized the “uncivilized” and “savage” character of the Baltic tribes in their work (see Manvydas 2006).

Conclusion

It is not a paradox that although Lithuanian ethnic nationalism first emerged at the end of the nineteenth century its institutional and cultural expressions finally developed under the Soviet regime. It was under Soviet government that a fully fledged system of Soviet Republic (or national) museums was created in Lithuania. Although highly restrictive, Soviet encouragement of the expression of apolitical ethnic cultures enabled LSSR museums to further articulate Lithuanianness and Balticness within a conceptual and material framework, which was rooted in the nineteenth century and the interwar period (Misiunas and Taagepera 2006; Rindzevičiūtė 2009). The exhibitions Curonians: the Vikings of the Balts and The Art of the Balts can be understood as statements which summarized a century-long negotiation of regional location and the material performance of Lithuanian national identity.

HEM and the Museum of Amber adopted two different strategies to situate the history of Lithuanian nation-building regionally. The Museum of Amber actively combined natural history with historiography and literary discourses to construct the Soviet Lithuanians as heirs of the imagined ancient Balts. As it principally dealt with the history of political events, HEM was in a more difficult situation than the Museum of Amber. During the Soviet period the history of Lithuania’s regional ties with the Baltic Sea Area and Nordic countries was a political minefield and HEM therefore preferred to wholly abandon regional categories in favour of a Lithuania-centred story. To invoke any connections between Balticness and the area beyond the Iron Curtain was politically too dangerous, unless the museum could rely on natural history, such as glacial shifts or the formation and distribution of amber.

The Northern dimension did not play an especially important role in the Soviet museum version of Lithuanian history. Those few connections between Lithuania and the North were mainly articulated through negative events. HEM integrated the Northern dimension into Lithuanian history through the narrative of external enemies that threatened the sovereignty of Lithuania. Consequently, Russia, and later the Soviet Union, was described as a guardian of Lithuania’s security. The biggest challenge for Soviet narratives was to explain centuries-long military conflicts between Lithuania and Russia. This was achieved by downplaying these events and instead focusing on other conflicts, such as the Northern Wars.
On the other hand, in the Soviet period the positive dimension of the North was mobilized in attempts to articulate Lithuania as a Northern country. This was achieved by the Museum of Amber, which used the natural and cultural histories of amber in order to canonize this stone as the core material of Lithuanian ethnic identity. Through amber Lithuania defined itself as a country of Baltic people who were seen as Northerners, at least by Tacitus. The Museum of Amber suggested that it was amber which made Lithuania visible in the age of pre-recorded history, both for contemporaries of the Balts and for modern Lithuanians. Here the Museum of Amber stood in stark contrast with HEM, which did not articulate clear connections between modern Soviet Lithuanians and the Baltic tribes.25

The Museum of Amber, it seems, succeeded in developing a powerful and lasting nationalist narrative. This narrative relied on the notion of Lithuania as a Baltic country, defined geographically (by the Baltic Sea), linguistically (Baltic languages) and by confession (Baltic pagan religion). Amber was nominated as the substance which materialized the existence of Baltic tribes and, later, Lithuania and Lithuanians. The function of amber as a bridge, conceptualized earlier by Marija Gimbutas, was used to bring together the two “European Capitals of Culture 2009”, Vilnius and Linz: the Museum of Amber exhibited parts of its collection at Biologiezentrum, an institution of the Upper Austrian Museums, and affirmed once again that “Lithuania” was “a country near the amber Baltic Sea” (see Makauskienė 2009: 35). The narrative of the amber-rich Balts was further reinforced by a revised narrative of Lithuanian-Northern connections. The Soviet narrative which defined both West and Northern Europe as historical enemies of Lithuania was softened or, as in The Art of the Balts, wholly abandoned.

These constructions of a history of “the New Balts” demonstrated a good deal of reflexivity. Curators were explicitly open about their goal to come up with new narrative nodes which would revise the traditional narrative of a victimized Lithuania, which was at the mercy of foreign powers. The short-lived military prevalence of the Balts-Curonians in the Baltic Sea area was mobilized to underpin the new pride in Lithuanian national identity.26 However, in doing that curators were less explicitly aware that they also revised a working-class centred Soviet approach. Together with this approach a democratic articulation of Lithuanian-Baltic nationalism as something which was shared by any member of the nation was disassembled. The narrative of The Art of the Balts was based on modernist bourgeois values: it made the rough amber works perform the disinterested aesthetical gaze of the Balts. In addition, both exhibitions explicitly promoted social and political distinction. Little irony could be detected in the way in which Curonians boasted about the wealth and military might of the prehistoric “Baltic elites”: “Violent people who are pagans, have a lot of wealth and the best horses live in Curonia” (Griciuvienė 2008:28).

Having charted the trajectory of the Baltic component of Lithuanian national identity and its situation in relation to the North during the Soviet occupation and
after, this article cannot do full justice to the centuries-long history of the discursive and material production of Balts-Lithuanians. Further studies are needed of the economy and politics of the Baltic identity as a meaning-making project, which draws both on natural scientific and literary discourses. Particularly instructive would be a comparative study of articulations of Balticness-Northerness as they are revealed in different institutional and geographical contexts, such as formal education in Lithuania, but also Latvia and Germany, and, last but not least, Lithuanian émigré communities. Just like the imagined Baltic amber, the production of Baltic-Lithuanians has to be treated as a multifaceted project which, on the one hand, appears as an amplification of ethno-centric nationalism, but also, on the other hand, contains possibilities for opening multiple connections and revisions of Lithuanian national identity as an ever changing relational constellation.

**Eglė Rindzevičiūtė** has a PhD in Culture Studies and is a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at the Department for Studies of Social Change and Culture, Linköping University, Sweden. She is also affiliated as a researcher with Gothenburg Research Institute, University of Gothenburg. Her research interests involve the theory and history of state cultural policy and modern knowledge-based governance, particularly the role of organisational theories and electronic technologies in governing large sectors. E-mail: egle.rindzeviciute@liu.se.

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**Notes**

1. One thousand years ago the word “Litua” was written in the Quedlinburg Annals (1009): “Litua” referred to the lands in which a monk on a Christianising mission, St. Bruno (Boniface), was killed.
2. The identification of the Baltic with the Baltic Germans was widespread in the history of art and applied arts. For example, a catalogue of silver artefacts, published by the Victoria and Albert Museum in London emphasized that it was necessary to interpret Scandinavian silver in the context of Baltic artefacts. It meant silverware made by Riga-based Baltic Germans (Lightbrow 1975).
Due to limited space, it is impossible to do justice to the richness of the meaning of the term “Baltic” here. It suffices to note, that according Endre Bojtár, the origins of the term “Baltic” is not entirely clear. As Bojtár put it, “the term of mare Balticum is an artificial construction. None of the peoples who lived in the region in historic times called themselves ‘Baltic’, nor did they refer to the sea by that name”. Indeed it was German nobles, settled in Livland, Estland and Kurland, who first started to use the term to describe themselves in around 1600. Only after the Paris peace negotiations in 1919 did “the Baltic” come to be used to refer to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. This coincided with the rise of Baltic philological studies (Bojtár 1999: 6, 10–11).

For performative theories of identification as a meaning-making practice see Butler (1997) and MacKenzie (2009).

All translations are the author’s unless indicated otherwise.

The year 1946 saw increasingly anti-Western policies in the Soviet Union: such Western sciences as sociology were banned and pre-war sociological museum theory suffered as well. In the mid-1950s the first studies about the history of Soviet museums were published, but sociology was not rehabilitated until the early 1960s. In the LSSR the field of museum studies started to emerge by the mid-1960s: publications about the history of museums appeared and social surveys of museum visitors were initiated.

Many of those narratives positioned Lithuania as either a bridge between East and West or proposed a self-centred and isolationist view of the nation. For more see Leonidas Donskis (1999; 2002) and Egle Rindzeviciute (2003).

See the anthology Ethnogenesis of Lithuanians which summarized the results of ten years’ research on Baltic pre-history, published in Vilnius, 1987 (Šimėnas 2008). The conference on Baltic studies could be compared with the foundational ethno-linguistic congress of Germanists in Frankfurt (1846) or the Pan-Slavic Congress in Prague (1848). The Baltic movement in the Soviet republics was probably inspired by systematic efforts to render visible the autonomous history of “Baltic nations”, undertaken by Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian exile intellectuals. The Association for Advancement of Baltic Studies, for instance, was founded in the United States in 1968.

The first director was J. Petrulis.


The guide authors were the heads of: the ethnography section (Stasė Bernotienė, 1926-2001), the history section (Ona Mažeikienė) and the archaeology section (Bronė Tautavičienė).

For an attempt to archaeologically construct the Baltic Sea and East European areas see the classical study by Marija Gimbutas (1956). Gimbutas’s all-inclusive approach, however, was later criticized by Lithuanian archaeologists.

Similarly the museum’s guide used the modern Estonian names of cities: Tartu not Dorpat, Tallinn not Reval.

The exhibition Curonians was organized by archaeologists Eglė Griciuvienė, Gytis Grižas and Zane Bruža in collaboration with the Latvian National Museum (LvNM).

It has to be noted that the accompanying text mentioned Ugro-Finnic tribes only very briefly, as northern neighbours of the Curonians, with whom “Baltic Vikings” sometimes engaged in fights.

In 2009 a review of an exhibition The Art of the Balts cited Polish archaeologist Ludwik Krzywicki (1859–1941) who famously stated that “we can talk about the culture of Lithuanians in the same way as we talk about Celtic or Scandinavian culture” (Iršėnas 2009: 25).

In Lithuanian “amber” is gintaras, in Latvian is dzintars, and in the now extinct East Prussian it is gentars.
19 Although the initiators of the Museum were not particularly interested in the industrial side. Budrys, for example, applied to the V. Muchina Applied Arts Institute in Leningrad to write a doctoral dissertation about Baltic amber workshops. The Institute turned down Budrys’s application stating that it concerned an unimportant subject and proposed he write about the amber industry instead. Budrys chose not pursue this research career (Jakelaitis 1998: 11).

20 Gimbutas traced the Lithuanian and East Prussian amber trade with Northern Finland and Russia, mainly conic amber beads, to the Neolithic Age (Gimbutas 1956:180–181). However, the notion of amber trade routes was criticized by Katinas (1983) and Bojtár (1999).


22 A good summary of the Soviet Lithuanian version of ethnocentrism was retrospectively made by the Lithuanian historian Edvardas Gudavičius, who pointed out several normative statements around which Lithuanian history-writing was organized: “First and foremost, ‘Lithuania which stretches from one sea to another sea with Vytautas the Great’. On the other hand, ‘Two wonderful decades of Lithuanian independence’. This ‘image’ did not capture the gentry and the culture of noble estates, because these were understood as ‘Polish’. Meanwhile peasants were seen as ‘very good and beautiful, because they spoke Lithuanian and fostered our culture’. These contexts defined a search for Lithuanianness” (Švedas & Gudavičius 2008: 135)

23 See Mykolas Michelbertas (1972).

24 See http://www.baltumenas.lt

25 In 2005 the exhibition of the period between the Middle Ages and 1795 was reorganized in the following way: the chronological principle was dismantled in favour of thematic organisation of the display. Two themes were selected: the political development of the state of Lithuania and the “ethnic-confessional diversity” of the GDL. Interestingly, the Vasa dynasty was again presented mainly as part of the military history section. Nevertheless, some objects from the Vasa period were used to illustrate the everyday life of the royals. It is interesting that a written presentation of the reorganized exhibition did not contain any references to “Baltic” tribes or regions. It seems that the new display continues the project of Lithuanisation of the history of Lithuania. See Vidas Poškus (2005).

26 It is interesting to note that amber was selected as a mascot of the national Lithuanian basketball team for Eurobasket 2011. The chant goes like this: “Amber is basketball, Lithuania’s precious stone” (In Lithuanian: “amberis – tai krepšinis, Lietuvos brangakmenis”).

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Dressed in a Present from the Past: 
The Transfers and Transformations of a Swedish Bridal Crown in the United States

By Lizette Gradén

Abstract

Ever since the emigration from the Nordic countries the Old world and the New world have maintained an exchange of ideas, customs, and material culture. This cultural heritage consists of more than remnants of the past. Drawing on theories of material culture and performance this article highlights the role of gifts in materializing relationships between individuals, families and organizations in the wake of migration. First, I build on a suggested coinage of the term heritage gifts as a way of materializing relationships. Thereafter, I map out the numerous roles which a Swedish bridal crown play in the United States: as museum object, object of display and loaned to families for wedding ceremonies in America. The transfers and transformations of the bridal crown enhances a drama of a migration heritage. This dynamic drama brings together kin in Sweden and America and maps specific locations into a flexible space via the trajectory of crown-clad female bodies.

Keywords: Gift-giving, heritage gift, performance, the dressed body, Swedish-America
Introduction

In April, 2002, at the age of 82, Marie Ylinen (born 1920) took center stage as bride at the American Swedish Institute (ASI) in Minneapolis for the second time in her life. On her head she wore the same Swedish bridal crown that she wore when she married Arthur Ylinen in this historic house and cultural center in 1952. While the crown was the same, the 2002 event was a symbolic wedding, a staged ceremony dealing with a different sort of marriage; the matrimony between the province of Värmland in Sweden and Swedish America. In 2002, the governor of the Värmland province, Ingemar Eliasson, crowned Marie Ylinen (nee Olsson) as “the Värmland Gift Bride”. The ceremony marked the highlight of the ASI’s fiftieth anniversary celebration of Värmlandsgåvan, a collection of 3000 greetings, 200 volumes of books and 300 artifacts, all selected by the parishes of Värmland to represent both the typical and spectacular of present and past parish life. A replica of the bridal crown in Karlstad Cathedral was selected a gift from the entire province in addition to the individual parish gifts of textiles, paintings, ceramics, glass, photo albums, miniature houses and birch bark items. The Värmland Historical Association (Värmlands Hembygdsförbund) presented this collection of gifts to the American Swedish Institute at a ceremony in Minneapolis in 1952, a gift-giving act in which Marie Olsson’s wearing of the bridal crown played a key role.

The ceremony in 2002 was a restaging of the gift-giving performance in 1952, which can be said to centre around one star actor—the bridal crown. This particular artefact was presented by the gift-givers in 1952 as “an emblem of a desire that the ties between American and Swedish citizens of the same tribe shall be joined generation after generation”1 Since its arrival in Minneapolis in 1952, the bridal crown has been displayed at ASI as part of several exhibitions. It has also been loaned to families of Värmland descent to use for wedding ceremonies in America: rituals where the crowned body becomes a performance of connectivity. The crown enhances a drama of migration heritage that brings together kin in Sweden and America and maps specific locations and ties them into a flexible space via the trajectory of crown-clad female bodies.

Ever since the emigration from the Nordic countries the Old world and the New world have maintained an exchange of ideas, customs and material culture. Even though the relationships between the individual nation states have been frosty at times, the Nordic countries have remained for numerous descendants of emigrants from there the standard bearer of culture. This cultural heritage consists of more than remnants of the past. It can be described as culture selected in the present and projected into the past, and simultaneously, the past congealed into present culture (Comaroff 2009: 10; cf. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 149). Moreover, such culture is often materialized and involve our senses by being for example touched, worn, and viewed. These materializations may be are understood as stylized expressions of who we are (Küchler & Miller 2005; Miller 2005, 2009; Damsholt 2009) and
effects of previous materializations (cf. Latour 2005). Hence, heritage solidifies contemporary perceptions of our past into material culture and such material heritage is apt to reconfigure perceptions of inclusion and exclusion, our senses of belonging.

Museums and exhibitions are by definition selective and material. They are also theatrical, observed American folklorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998: 3), and the theme of this special issue of Culture Unbound is the ways in which museums, events and objects are made to perform Nordic spaces. As part of such discussion, I will explore how a Swedish bridal crown gives rise to multiple performances in the United States and generates a sense of history that differs from that of museums, exhibitions, monuments and archives. By following one single object, I explore how its role changes over time, and illustrate how it fosters a long-term dynamic relationship between “geographical Sweden” and “imaginary Sweden” and their counterparts in North America. The study will show how the bridal crown enables an emotionalized kind of cultural performance where heritage rests on the heads of brides, creating magic bonds with the local and regional, pre-national past.2

Marie Ylinen crowned as the Värmland Gift bride 2002.
Photoalbum in Ylinen’s private collection; Photo: Lizette Gradén
Heritage Gifts and Migration

Gifts hold the promise of furthering relationships, and the giving of gifts to museums may be seen as a plea for a presence in the future. Gifts played a major role in the founding of cabinets of curiosities and many collections in art and cultural history museums in Sweden were originally gifts (cf. Svanberg). The same gesture of gift-giving that creates cultural connectivity among people and institutions in a particular nation or region also strengthens ties between emigrants and their homeland. Many of the Nordic immigrant historic houses and museums in the United States can be described as gifts. The Turnblad mansion, later named American Swedish Institute, was a gift to the “Swedish people in Minnesota and their descendants” from Småland immigrant and newspaper publicist Swan J. Turnblad. The mansion, originally Turnblad’s home, was intended as a space where Swedish literature, art, crafts and music could be developed and material culture of Swedish immigrants could be collected, preserved, and displayed. Today a thriving cultural institution, the ASI describes itself as a historic house with a collection. By this donation, he envisioned his former home as a monument of Swedish culture in Minneapolis. Implicitly he called for a space where his deed and dedication could be reciprocated by being performed over and over again.

The idea of gift-giving as means to further relationships is not new. Particularly the idea of reciprocity has its own heritage. In the Nordic realm, the principle for generating relationships through reciprocity appears for example in the Poetic Edda. It says "with weapons and weed should friends be won, as one can see in themselves, those who give to each other will be friends once they meet half way" (The Poetic Edda: 40). In a similar vein, anthropologist Marcel Mauss’s analysis demonstrates that reciprocated gifts further relationships and build community (Mauss 1990). In other words, he pays attention to what the gift is capable of doing, how the gift-giving as performance is an effect of a previous performance. Building on Marcel Mauss’s concept of the gift as something that can bind people together, along with the assumption that objects increase in cultural value through their appropriation and socialization (Appadurai 1986; Miller 2001), I use the term “heritage gift” to describe a gift which biography builds cultural relationships over time. Like diplomatic gifts, heritage gifts require specific cultural competence which includes detailed uses of the past. The uses of past in this case can be defined as a performance intended to amplify cultural recognition, connectivity and collaboration. Corresponding to the quite similar restitution process, however, the heritage gift is less oriented towards the juridical rights to the object. The heritage gift refers to an object selected to recognize human beings, objects or events with a specific emphasis on the past. The gift-giving act refers to a method of negotiating future recognition and cultural connectivity.
Performing Gifts

Performance is an efficient way of communicating ideas and values related to heritage and history. Drawing on the works of Richard Schechner, I understand performance as an activity that is framed, presented, high-lighted, and displayed before an audience (Schechner 2006: 2, 28). According to Schechner, who borrows his view from Erving Goffman, any behavior, event or action can be studied “as” performance (Schechner 2006: 40; Goffman 1990) so also the crowning ceremony, as it contains and enacts multiple performances presented in various places, at various times and in various situations. As Schechner points out, the boundaries between performance and daily life can be unclear. What takes place in performance effects life outside the actual performance (Schechner 1985: 125, 2006) According to Schechner, objects and spaces also “perform” as part of their interaction with human beings. He writes:

They are regarded as practices, events, and behaviours, not as “objects” or “things”. [...] Performance studies inquires about the “behaviour” of, for example, a painting: the ways it interacts with those who view it, thus evoking different reactions and meanings, and how it changes meaning over time and in different contexts; under what circumstances it was created and exhibited; and how the gallery or building displaying it shapes its presentations. (Schechner 2002: x, cf. Latour 2005)

Framed as performance, in Schechner’s sense of the concept, the bridal crown when on display, handled, or used in weddings performs on people who come into contact with it. It performs history in action and invokes a drama of loss and re-connection, a hands-on sensory and emotionalized kind of cultural performance. Deliberately or not, the crown put to use performs who we are or want to be, that is here Swedes and Americans with a flexible past, including both pre-national and migration heritage.

Performance is thus understood in this context to mean stylized communication that takes place front stage, following Goffman (1990), i.e. in rooms that are accessible to the public to a greater or lesser extent. Gift-giving performances such as the handing over of the bridal crown at the ASI in 1952 with the Olsson Ylinen wedding, as well as the crowning ceremony in 2002, are part of the front stage. Some of these performances also take place in other areas where the objects are handled and thereby framed – rooms considered backstage for the museum visitor. In the case of the crown, these spaces include storage, offices and places outside of the museum such as family’s homes. Moreover, I suggest that both participants in the study and the researcher when dealing with the crown take on roles as collaborating actors performing on stages, adding yet another dimension to the drama studied.
A Swedish Bridal Crown as Heritage Gift in America

Taking into consideration the strained relationship between Sweden and America during the Second World War, the choice among the gift-givers to “perform” the province of Värmland rather than Sweden as a whole probably contributed to the bridal crown’s success at the ASI at this time. The strong emphasis on family values in both Sweden and the U.S at the time may have contributed as well. In hindsight, the bridal crown was granted a diplomatic status in both official and private settings.

Even today, the bridal crown plays a key role when the history of the American Swedish Institute is communicated. Early on in my fieldwork at ASI the curator and volunteers presented the Värmland gift collection as the most important part of the ASI collection and the crown as the key object of this particular collection. These verbal performances most typically took place in back-stage areas such as during coffee breaks at the kaffestuga before museum opening hours, in the curator’s office, or when we were working in storage. These performances transformed these spaces from back-stage to front-stage; profession-specific stages on which staff which handled and cared for the bridal crown could act. These verbal performances brought forth several actors. Highlighted was the province of Värmland where the crown was made by local artists. Similar to the second act in a play, it was not until later on in my fieldwork process that the museum staff presented the crown as a paradoxical object in the museum.

The bridal crown as accessioned into the museum collection. Photo: Lizette Gradén.
The crown, like other objects that arrive at the American Swedish Institute, or any other museum for that matter, is moved through the rite of passage of accessioning. This ritual performance, when the museum registrar inscribes a newly arrived object with a number-combination and notes it as part of the collection is not just a transaction between donor and recipient: it is a performance of ownership that separates a museum object from objects outside the museum sphere. This act explicitly performs how objects are transformed into heritage —how this particular object is worth being part of a collection from the past, cared for and carried into the future. Unlike most museum objects, however, the bridal crown was also circulated outside the museum sphere. The circulation can be seen as an effect of a written performance from 1952. In the official gift letter that accompanied the bridal crown to the United States, the gift-givers in Värmland performed their intended aim with the crown as follows:

Folk of kinship in the province of Värmland send to the people of Värmland heritage in the United States a greeting with a gift from the old ancestral home. The gift is a reproduction of the bridal crown from Karlstad Cathedral. It is an emblem of a desire that the ties between American and Swedish citizens of the same tribe shall be joined generation after generation.8

The letter of intent may be interpreted as the gift-givers performance of fear to be left in oblivion by relatives, friends and their descendants who had created a new life for themselves in America. It can also be understood as a wish to reproduce a piece of material culture from Värmland in America. Moreover, and perhaps most important here, it may be seen as a performance of connectivity based on kin (Mauss 1990; Easterson 1992: 3–4). After all, Värmland had lost one-fourth of its population to emigration between 1869 and 1930, an emigration which separated numerous families and households. In this context the bridal crown takes on a role as a potential unifier.

In Sweden (as well as in America) folklore archives, ethnological literature, and museum exhibitions have lavishly described weddings in the past, some which include ornaments of the body and the dressing of the bride. In recent years a growing interest in materializations of culture has spurred a renewed interest in the bread and butter of weddings. As ethnologist Eva Knuts points out, a woman does not need a ring or a dress in order to be legally married; her choices to materialize the event are culturally governed (Knuts 2006). Similarly, there is no need for a bride in Sweden or America to wear a silver crown to be legally married.

Instead of taking the wedding as my vantage point and explore what materials and actors such event requires, I being with the single material object. As a symbol of status and virtue the bridal crown has a heritage of its own dating back at least to the 16th century and the writings of Olaus Magnus (Resare 1988:77). These previous acts have an effect when the crown takes center stage as cultural heritage also in the present. In ethnological literature the bridal crown is put forth as a distinctively Scandinavian or Nordic custom (Resare 1988:77–95; Noss 1990; Knuts 2006) which parallels the idea of a crown in the Swedish-American setting.
The replica of the bridal crown in Minneapolis refers to the bridal crown in the Karlstad Cathedral, where it was received as a gift from a local family and inaugurated in 1931. Like any other congregation at the time, this practice of offering a specific crown can be understood as the Karlstad Cathedral’s congregation’s performance of themselves as an honorable community. As an object, writes Anna-Maja Nylén, the silver bridal crown is regarded as the strongest symbol of virginity, and of all the ornaments for the body, the silver bridal crown was worn only during weddings, as a badge of honor. Nylén (1962, 1971) points out how churches in Sweden in the early twentieth century increasingly loaned or rented out their bridal crowns made of precious materials. Karlstad Cathedral was one of these churches to receive a crown as a gift to transform women in the congregation to honorable brides and wives.

But the crown as a symbol of purity and virginity has also been challenged in performances where the American Midwest has served as center stage. A silver bridal crown plays a key role when author Vilhelm Moberg in his novel Nybyggnarna: Sista brevet till Sverige, first published in 1959, resurrects the honor of Ulrika of Västergöhl, who was regarded a whore in her home parish in Sweden. First, Moberg transforms Ulrika into a crown bride in America and thereafter to a donor of a “gift from North America to Ljüder church”, a bridal crown of silver and precious stones to be loaned to “those brides who are known for their virtue, honor and good manners” (1984/1959: 242–249), a return-gift by a woman of transformation to women back home. The transformations may be interpreted as Moberg’s performance of America as the land of possibilities and the potential for women to re-stage themselves outside their parish, region, or nation, here in a Swedish-American setting.

In the same way as previous ethnological studies demonstrate the silver crown’s transformative force, the crown becomes a vehicle for the transforming women’s view of themselves. If its transformative capacity makes body ornamentation perhaps the richest category of material culture (Eicher 1995; Baumgarten 2002; Küchler & Miller 2005; Shukla 2008), this richness is reinforced when the object of adornment is a heritage gift. Keeping in mind that many emigrants from Värmland after 1890 were single women (Måwe 1971; cf. Lintelman 2005), it is likely that the women in the province were familiar with the impact of the tradition and possibly considered the social consequences for women whose families did not have access to their own silver crown. When worn in the American context, the bridal crown performs the bride’s past as honorable all the way from Scandinavia.
A Contested Object

The bridal crown was not without controversy at the outset. People involved in having it made and donating it, of course, appreciated the gift. Among these were John Bryntesson of Svaneholm’s manor and Axel Westling, the Värmland governor. Museum representatives in Sweden, however, reacted strongly to the initiative of the Värmlanders to provide their relatives and friends in the United States with a bridal crown linked to the province. The bridal crown brought forth high levels of emotions.

Albin Widén, Swedish author, curator, and scholar of Swedish-America wrote:

It has been mentioned that a bridal crown is the main item in the Värmland Gift. In recent years, several bridal crowns have been donated to Swedish-America and one of the donors is a female member of the Institute’s Board. Should girls of Swedish ancestry in Minneapolis wish to borrow a Swedish bridal crown, they already have access to one. […] Export art and handicrafts, but leave Swedish peasant culture at home! (DN 6 April 1952)

Carl A. Boberg, a Värmlander and returnee from Chicago, replied:

According to Dr. Widén there is already a bridal crown in Minneapolis, to be used by Swedish descendants who want to marry. Who cares? It is not from Värmland! The crown to be sent is meant for the girls from Värmland. That is the great difference. Värmland is the crown among Svearikes länder! Bryntesson from Svaneholm, who has donated the crown, is a Swedish-American and he knows what he is doing. (NWT 8 April 1952)

The Governor of Värmland, Axel Westling, responded:

Our goal with the Värmland Gift to the US has been to provide expression of a personal connection through traditions and community history. […] Doctor Widén is seething over the fact that they are sending an expensive bridal crown, when Swedish-America is already in disposition of several such crowns. He seems not to have understood that what is intended here is to convey an idealistic connection with Värmland, to provide a breath of their native home. It is none other than the bridal crown from Karlstad Cathedral that they wish to send over. (NWT 10 April 1952)

These men play both official and private roles, and their altercation over the bridal crown expresses high levels of emotion and different perceptions of heritage. Albin Widén, scholar at the Nordic Museum in Stockholm and at the time head of the Swedish Information Bureau in Minneapolis (hosted by the ASI), takes on a role of Swede with cultural competence about the Swedish museum sphere as well as the Swedish American ditto. Does he really find the crown to be unfit for export to America because of its provincial origin? So it may be. More likely, Widén’s objection stems from his official role to promote Sweden as a modern society in America, marked by high culture, technical innovation and social progression rather than family traditions and peasant heritage. The governor, on the other hand, is the official spokesperson for a region, and takes on the role of the gift-giver and promoter of community, beyond the nation state. Carl Boberg, an immigrant and returnee, embodies the emigrant/immigrant role and performs the role of the culture broker. The debate over the suitability of the bridal crown as a
gift appears to perform a region’s challenging and increasingly centralized view of the modern nation state.

**Performed and Embodied Heritage**

Since the 1970s, the ASI has struck a balance between the museum’s task of caring for and displaying the crown and the intention of the donors to provide women from Värmland in the US with their own bridal headpiece. Keeping the crown in storage has become a way to balance between preserving and providing access to the crown, without marketing the object. Storing it in a locker outside of public view but accessible for those who know about its existence, the bridal crown appears more precious than when put on display for the public in the exhibition area at the museum. In this sense the museum has transferred the bridal crown from an object of display to a semi-public object.

When studied as performance, the activities that frame the bridal crown reflect the cultural order of the museum, the gaze of people who can perform in this space. Judging from the object’s present careful placement in a locker, in its original transportation box and in relation to other objects on adjacent shelves, the bridal crown still plays a key role to the ASI. The careful placing of the object, of giving it space, communicates care in a historic house with a collection, a building that lacks the facilities of a museum crafted to care for collections. Although away from public view, the crown becomes a display for selected view such as curators and visiting researchers like me. Following Goffman, the showcasing of the bridal crown in the storage area transforms this part of the museum from backstage to front stage (Goffman 1990), from storage to a semi-public space, where museum staff and researchers can act. In this area, during one of my visits, the curator carefully pulled down the paper box from the 1950s, opened it and lifted out the crown in a manner that demonstrated familiarity – and great respect. The curator Curt Pederson declared:

> As you know [referring to my learning about the object through archival material, photos and its placement in storage at the ASI] this beautiful headpiece is very different from other bridal crowns in our collections. It is unique! It is a gift from the people of Värmland, ordinary people to the people from Värmland living over here. The crown stands 3½ inches high and measures 3 inches in diameter. It is made of gold filigree over silver and is inset with rubies and rhinestones. It was designed by artist Oscar Jonsson and made by goldsmith Thure Ahlgren, both from Värmland.

While setting and performance are crafted to attract an audience, the back stage belongs to those working to prepare the public performance (Goffman 1990: 107–112), hence the objects’ display, exhibitions and programs. Places such as the storage area that are back stage in daily life at the museum become transformed into front stage when curator and researcher venture into the Värmland Gift collection. This shift appears most clearly in explicit performance. The curator’s verbal presentation of the bridal crown reinforces the crown’s preeminent status. As a
researcher I take the role of the listener, the audience and apprentice. Through this collaborative act, Curt Pederson and I, the curator and the researcher, further strengthen the notion of the object’s importance as heritage gift, an act which makes us both actors in the drama of heritage preservation.

The curator hands the crown over to me. The silver feels cold as the crown rests heavy in the palm of my hand. The crown and the stories about it perform on me, the mere touch makes the past feel eerily present, perhaps in a similar way as an archeologist holding his still soil-covered find from a dig. When holding the crown, its mere materiality in hand makes me think about how the crown now connects me with women who have previously handled it, imagining myself into yet another phase in its long, complex biography: a biography spanning its making in Värmland, rite-de-passage and inclusion in the museum collections, display in the museum, circulation among brides across the United States and return to museum storage and to performances and exhibits there. As a learner of things through touch I am convinced that objects have close to magical power to generate emotions and imaginary spaces. In the next moment and because of the crown’s weight I spontaneously exclaim: “It’s so heavy – how on earth could a bride keep it on her head?” a statement that brought yet another actor on stage in the storage room. One of the volunteers let us know that in the 1950s and 1960s, when the crown was frequently used in weddings, the American Swedish Institute referred brides-to-be to the beauty salon at Dayton’s department store, whose hairdressers had learned how to use “doughnuts”, rings padded with flax or horse hair to fasten the crown. In this case, the bridal crown itself becomes an actor (Schechner 2002: x) with a biography which also influences the hairdresser’s performance, i.e. how the bride’s body is dressed. It also connects the American Swedish Institute with Dayton’s department store in a relationship of business exchange where heritage takes front stage.

Like a costume in a play, the bridal crown and the presented details of it dramatize the story. Along with its careful placing in metal storage, away from public view, the curator’s presentation of the crown’s biography (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986) to the listening researcher and her response to the materiality of the crown, all contribute to its aura of being different from other bridal crowns in ASI’s collections and therefore unique. By stating the exact measurements of the crown and describing its surface and luster, proportions and specific workmanship, the curator demonstrates his curatorial expertise, including the in-depth knowledge about the object. His presentation conjures up the crown’s past as values that performs regional space down to the soil where it was made and where its makers lived, connecting people from Värmland within the United States with Värmlanders in Sweden. In addition to verbal presentations, the crown takes front stage also in written and visual performances.
Doubling and Parting as Strategies for Unified Heritage

The ways in which the bridal crown becomes a key actor is also apparent in written wedding announcements. The following example is found in the Minneapolis paper The Tribune. In this particular announcement, the crown is carefully combined with another transatlantic object, namely one half of a table cloth made in Norway and brought to the United States. While the crown materializes culture, it is also an important instance of its embodiment. The crown as heritage gift allows heritage to be embodied, the word to become flesh.

Like a press release or written review for a theatre production, the wedding announcement communicates and legitimizes that the production actually took place. The wedding announcement articulates exclusivity tied to the crown, as the museum applies particular rules for its usage. As stated in the quotation, the bride is “entitled” to wear the crown because of her maternal grandfather’s coming from Värmland, a concept of heritage that brings to mind inheritance of reigns among royalty in Sweden as well as festival royalty in Scandinavian America.

But mostly the description offers insights into how doubling (not duplicating) of objects, through parting or replication, increases symbolic value. The meaning invested here in the bridal crown challenges a common perception of museum objects as unique and intact, while it also challenges the logic of collections, where each piece ought to be unique (Stewart 1993: 161). I would like to suggest, using the bridal crown, that the doubling of the object through replication is crucial to how people in the new land value it. The doubled object, of which one remains in the homeland, performs a particular pre- eminent connection between the individuals that come into contact with it. The replica or clone increases rather than decreases the value of the earlier versions, because it shows that the first object is worth replicating and in this case that both are performances of culture in the same vein, created by the same artists, formed by the same hands. Whereas the first version is kept at the Karlstad Cathedral and used only in weddings held there, the replica moves across space more freely than the previous version, while literally allowing it to perform on a larger number of people as well as being touched by them. While the bridal crown as gift to the Karlstad Cathedral becomes an instrument for embodying gender and kin, the replica becomes a return gift embodying lineage overseas, an act of ritual performance that puts descendants’ heritage into place.
The ways in which the bridal crown performs heritage also echo in photographs. In the visual documentation of the 1952 Värmland Gift exhibition at the ASI, the bridal crown appears time and again. In one of the photographs from the gift-giving performance in 1952, the bridal crown is literally elevated when handed over from the county governor Axel Westling to the president of the Värmland association Ragnar Olsson. Thus the bridal crown was granted a special position, even photographically. The photo resembles how successful political agreements or business deals are performed – two individuals, both holding onto a symbolic document, book or object (Becker 2000), here two men holding onto the bridal crown. But this photo also has a sense of intimacy more characteristic to wedding photos. Just as a wedding photograph plays a crucial part in the wedding ceremony in the western world (Eicher & Ling 2006; cf. Kjerström 1993: 145–167; Knuts 2006: 100–103), the photograph with the governor handing over the bridal crown to the president of the Värmlandsförbundet plays an important role in confirming to future generations that the official marriage ceremony took place, that the Värmland descendants and receivers of the crown said, “I do!”
Heritage Renewed – Performing Patriarchal Heritage

In the early 2000s, several young women in the Midwest showed an interest in wearing the Värmland bridal crown for their weddings. According to ASI staff, these requests (phone calls) came from women whose mothers or grandmothers had worn the crown at their weddings. Besides pointing out family relations, the bridal crown seemed attractive for future brides who wished to have what they described as “all-Swedish weddings”, or to make their weddings “totally Swedish”. These young women seemed to follow the trend for large, costly weddings as well as an interest in theme weddings, much popular among brides in the Midwest where clothing, table settings and choice of party facility all articulate relationships to fairytales, music and specific eras (Winge & Eicher 2003: 207–218), or in the case of the bridal crown, that something Swedish is taking place.11

As I have shown in my analysis of the Värmland Gift the provincial connotation of the entire collection means it being both uniquely Swedish, and of an area of authentic heritage, at the same time an apolitical, non-nationalistic or partisan. This connotation frees the collection for broad and inclusive cultural uses (Gradén 2010). The bridal crown, being the object selected as the gift from the entire province, epitomizes this process. In Sweden the province of Värmland along with Dalarna and Småland are used more often than other provinces (see Aronsson 1995; Häggström 2000). When Värmland is highlighted in America such performances may be interpreted as mirroring the activities in Sweden. The situation is, however, not certainly so. The transfer of the bridal crown from Sweden to the United States, from Värmland to Minnesota, from exhibit to storage and further to private homes and individual bodies, demonstrates how the bridal crown is a force in the performance of heritage. In the Värmland example it is the migration heritage which is emphasized, the connectivity between emigrants and family back home. The bridal crown draws in and touch people on both sides of the Atlantic, also today. Perhaps therefore the bridal crown performs a different job than many other heritage gifts. It is a very hands-on and emotionalized kind of performance where history rests on the head of brides, creating a magic bond with Värmland, but also with a family past rooted in Värmland with branches both in Sweden and America. It shows that history can be embodied as heritage gifts, the heritage gift as heritage – how the word can become flesh.

On one level, the bridal crown from Värmland becomes attractive to young women in Minnesota because a theme wedding offers a playful, creative and carnivalesque alternative to a traditional wedding that is often perceived as serious, conformist, and ritualized. However, just as a traditional wedding communicates who the bride and groom wish to be, the Swedish theme wedding in the United States stages the wedding couple’s values and ideals.

Although the term “theme wedding” may be new, weddings have long been a venue for women’s performances of heritage. Among women living in the United States, the desire to wear the Värmland bridal crown is not new. It has been popu-
lar in the past, also during times when bridal crowns were considered out of fashion. In the summers of 2006 and 2009, I interviewed women who had worn the crown, whereupon new performances involving the crown emerged. When Marie Ylinen (nee Olsson), at aged 82 was crowned "Värmland Gift Bride" by the county governor Ingemar Eliasson in 2002, that performance contained a series of performances from the past.

Marie Ylinen presented the crowning in 2002 as follows:

I was honored and it was very festive with a nice dinner, toasts and the whole bit. Being re-crowned was like being confirmed – like I have lived the Swedish-American life I was expected to live…that my father expected me to live (laughs). For this rich life, my heart is overflowing with thankfulness for God’s protection, His provision and the promise of His love.12

While the story Marie shared with me is rich in narratives and dramatic turns and deserves an analysis in itself, what is important for this study is how crucial it was to her and her father that she be the first. Marie reflected:

In 1952, when the Värmland Gift was on its way to Minnesota, my father was the director of Värmlandsförbundet and I was about to get married. As it was John Bryntesson of Svaneholm, who had enabled my father to emigrate from Värmland, who also had paid for having the crown replicated, the crown meant a lot to my father. To him, it was a direct connection to the man whom my father throughout his life credited his courage to leave Sweden and succeed in America. I met him, a very nice man, when I spent the summer in Värmland, at 19. My wedding took place right here (she makes a large, sweeping gesture towards the floor before the fireplace where Marie had chosen we’d sit during the interview, that is in the ASI Grand Hall), and opera singer Helga Görlin, who was the first woman to wear the bridal crown of Karlstad Cathedral in Sweden, sang Swedish hymns at my wedding.13

A crowning, a confirmation, a renewal of heritage – the bridal crown continues to be a performative force for revitalized connection between Värmland and the United States. In her recollection of the crowning ceremony in 2002, Marie Ylinen presents the event as a confirmation. On another level, the re-crowning demonstrates features similar to the performance of heritage as staged in the election of the festival queen in Lindsborg, Kansas. There, a senior citizen reconfirms heritage by blood/lineage in combination with long-term commitment to and involvement in activities perceived as Swedish (Gradén 2003; cf. Larsen 2009). The re-staging in 2002 of the gift-giving performance in 1952 can be seen as a contractual return gift (Mauss 1990: 6–8), which recognizes both the givers, the Historical Association in Värmland (Värmlands hembygdsförbund) and the people of Värmland who presented the gift in 1952 and the recipients. Moreover the re-crowning further strengthens the crown’s role as inalienable object (Miller 2002), making possible the exchange needed to create the mutual relationship referred to as a shared heritage.

The re-staging of the gift-giving performance enable social mobility and elevated status in the Swedish American community. As such, the re-crowning can be seen as the institution’s return gift to Marie Olsson Ylinen, a compensation for
the Swedish-American life she has performed for herself, her father and others, a performance enhanced by her wearing the crown for her wedding, held at the American Swedish Institute in 1952 and the re-crowning carried out by Governor Ingemar Eliasson at the American Swedish Institute in 2002. Finally, the renewal of ties in the re-staging the gift-giving performance unites Varmlanders in Sweden and the U.S. in symbolic matrimony, just as the original performance did in 1952. The re-crowning of Marie may therefore be understood as a renewal of vows – a performance of revitalized connection between Värmland and Minnesota, and Sweden and the United States, performing the transformation of two separate places marked by migration into one transatlantic space, through the body of a woman.

Unlike the curator’s performance, where the bridal crown is presented as unique and one of a kind, Marie emphasizes the doubling effect; that the crown she wore was indeed the replica of the crown from Karlstad Cathedral. She makes the point that Helga Görlin, the opera singer at her wedding, was the first woman to wear the crown of Karlstad Cathedral in 1931, and that she was the first to wear its replica. Marie Ylinen’s wearing of the replica makes the connection between the two crowns. The value she grants the replica is inextricably linked to the fact that its twin is located in the Karlstad Cathedral and used by Helga Görlin, both of them being “the first” and subsequently followed by women in Värmland and the Midwest.

Because Ragnar E. Olsson, Marie’s father, was a founding member of Värmlandsförbundet and a man of status in the Swedish-American community, his daughter was able to be the first bride in America to wear the crown for her wedding in the ASI’s Grand Hall. In her story about the wedding she emphasized that she had musicians play “Finlandia” by Sibelius to honor Arthur Ylinen, her husband-to-be, who identified himself as a “Finn from the Iron Range”. Apart from that, she explained, the entire wedding was “Swedish-to-the-max”, including a color scheme of blue and yellow. In the words of Marie, she said “yes to her future husband and to her Swedish background”. The framing of Marie’s wedding was a performance of Swedishness, the crown expressed the second-generation immigrant bride’s regional connection and gave her heritage a definite place of origin. Other women have followed in the footsteps of Marie Ylinen’s heritage performance. Marcia Linnér Swanson, who wore the crown in the late 1950s, emphasized that the choice to wear the crown at her wedding was more important to her father than anything. Her father, who held a prominent position in the Swedish-American business community in the Midwest, insisted she should wear the Värmland bridal crown. She felt, however, wearing a crown was out of fashion, and that the crown in particular did not fit with her wedding dress. She said:

The privilege [of wearing the crown] was extended to me because my father’s grandparents were born in Sweden. When requesting the crown we presented my father’s family tree. We brought in all the papers we had, and I don’t know for sure
that all my relatives came from Värmland. We were kindly granted the loan of the crown and I wore the crown to honor my father and his family background – it was much more important to him than it was to me. 15

According to Goffman (1990), we always prepare ourselves for the stages we are to act on, and Marcia’s dress and body ornaments can be seen as strategies for performance to ensure success. This is not unique. Like people of all times, places, and social milieus, Marcia Linnér Swanson and her fellow women of Swedish descent dress for the stage in the United States on which they are to act, modifying or supplementing the body in specific ways. The selecting of clothing and accessories are ways of creating a cultured body. As an ornament supplementing young women’s bodies, the Swedish bridal crown articulates a wedding celebration and a new stage of life. Marcia makes a particular decision on what to wear – a white long-sleeved dress with a narrow waist and wide skirt – a dress seemingly inspired by the New Look, launched in 1947 by Dior.

Marcia Linnér Swanson had to dress for two stages. While she describes the crown as being out of fashion, she also speaks of the wearing of the crown as a privilege, extended to her by her father’s family, whose family tree they had brought to the museum to get access to the crown. Although the Värmland heritage here is embodied by Marcia Linnér Swanson wearing the crown, the wearing takes place by the agency of her father and his grandfather’s parents.

Marcia Linnér Swanson was dressed for two stages, and has saved images from these events. Photo: Lizette Gradén Lizette
A father’s actions and values are prevalent also in a man’s story about the bridal crown. Nils Hasselmo, who was born in Sweden and emigrated to the United States in the 1950s, presents how he and his wife selected the crown for their 1950s wedding in the Midwest in the following manner:

As I remember this selection it was the memory of my father’s work to assemble the Värmland Gift which made us think about using it. A friend of ours who traveled from Minneapolis brought it along for the wedding. To borrow the crown was an easy procedure at the time! I also believe the crown had received a lot of publicity. For me, the crown provided an interesting link to Värmland, now when I was to marry in Diaspora. As you know, my wife was interested in her Swedish background too.16

The stories show that, although the bridal crown is worn by women, there is also a strong patriarchal connection, where the words of the fathers are materialized and embodied in the bride’s wearing of the crown. Like Marie Ylinen’s, Marcia Linnér Swanson’s recollections of the crown present how they as brides in their respective weddings acceded to their fathers’ wishes and to his sense of heritage in Värmland. In Nils Hasselmo’s recollection, however, the father of the groom is at the center of the request for the crown, and it is because of Nils Hasselmo’s background, and not hers, that he and his wife are granted the crown. The regional connection is emphasized when Nils Hasselmo describes his marriage to a spouse of Swedish background as one in the Diaspora, implicitly suggesting that the bridal crown has the power to transform her into a woman of Värmland heritage.

The bridal crown can be seen as materializing or invoking the Swedish woman as embodied transatlantic life. The women’s similar relationship to the crown is closely connected to their relationship to their father, as an authority, and in turn to their fathers’ relationship to the native country. Wearing the bridal crown, the woman becomes the bearer of an imagined heritage that includes location and heritage by blood.17 When the ASI required documented blood relations to Värmland as a premise for lending the crown, heritage performed as blood relations is made a powerful force in defining heritage as parish, town, province and country and maps a dynamic transatlantic relationship.

Approved loans from the 1950s and 1960s illuminate this relationship. The bridal crown was lent to daughters of men who have sat on the Board of ASI, been ASI sponsors, and held prominent positions in Swedish-American cultural and business life. In cases where families have failed to demonstrate their relationship to Värmland, loans have not been approved.18 The bridal crown and people’s handling of it thus connect generations of women of Värmland descent—families with Swedish backgrounds—with the museum and its interested parties and donors. Evident in the wearing of the bridal crown is a sense of care and pride and a sense of understanding family as a unit that bridges the living and the dead and spans several locations.
Embodied Migration Heritage in Real and Imagined Spaces

In this article I have shown how women and men choose a bridal crown to perform their Swedish or Värmland heritage in public and private settings in the United States. By following the crown in and out of these performances makes it possible for us to observe some of the forces that create community in a Swedish-American society. It also helps us understand the ways in which the Old World and the New World have created and recreated cultural connectivity through their exchange of performances where close attention to the givers performance and to material culture play key roles. The article shows that as an actor, the bridal crown has the capacity to influence people to act in particular way. Understood as a heritage gift from a province in Sweden to kin in the United States, the bridal crown reinforces the wedding act as ritual performance – the father giving away his daughter to become the bride of a future husband, and the governor giving away the bride to become the embodiment of the diplomatic Värmland Gift. The Värmland bridal crown not only connects women of Värmland with women of future generations through a patriarchal relationship; the crown also has an impact on how these women (and men) view themselves. The crown as heritage gift and lead actor in the drama of migration transforms unmarried girls into brides and married women embodying a heritage of both countries.

The bridal crown shows how a particular heritage gift, now in the hands of the gift-givers’ successors, create transatlantic spaces based on kin in both Sweden and America. It presents the provincial heritage as apolitical, non-nationalistic or partisan, hence flexible and fluid in America when performed in institutional and private settings. At ASI the crown plays a lead role in the museum collections. Like a remount of a classic show; the old in renewed and once again made relevant. By drawing in actors such as the spouse of Marie Ylinen and the table cloth from Norway the crown also includes Finland and Norway in performing the past. Taken together the many uses of the bridal crown brings to the fore migration heritage as a shared Nordic experience and illuminate historical process from the individual actors’ point of view.

The connections that the bridal crown maps out create a transatlantic space in which crucial meanings related to migration are embodied, acted out, integrated with the present, and made accessible for interpretation by members of the community and others (Schechner 2006). By being used at weddings across the United States, the bridal crown ties together generations of people and places, of emigrants and immigrants, of old and new lands in a drama about connectivity – all in the body of a woman but through the agency of a father. The crown, thereby, makes what at first seems to be a dramatized performance about migration heritage carried forth by women. On closer look, however, the crown proves to validated by a patriarchal relationship, and performs a relationship between embodiment and place making. It is an emotionalized kind of performance, a history in action where heritage rests, literally and symbolically, on the head of brides,
creating a magic bond with Värmland, and also with a family past with deep roots and branches both in Sweden and America. The uses of the bridal crown in institutional and private settings over more than fifty years show how history is embodied as heritage, heritage as heritage gifts – how the word become flesh.

Dress and ornaments are objects that make the body visible, perhaps more so when selected deliberately in the wake of migration. Based on this study I would suggest on one hand that embodiment, here of migration heritage in the United States, can be seen as a form of creating space. Embodiment creates a trajectory through space, thus connecting locations and making a coherent transatlantic space, which negotiates territorial boundaries such as those of nation states. On the other hand, one may say that the bridal crown creates space for embodiment.

Whereas transnational labels such as Nordic, Scandinavian, and Swedish-American by immigrants from Sweden and their descendants illustrates the flexibility of these framings in different political settings, and demonstrates that ideas of Norden, Scandinavia and Sweden expand beyond the territorial borders of the Nordic nation states to include numerous cultural spaces (cf. Gradén & Larsen 2009: 1–7),19 this article shows that heritage gifts worn on the body play a significant role in negotiating and materializing such cultural spaces. Real Värmland and imaginary Värmland are not easily separated. The stuff of a place is not only material, it is imaginary as well. Imaginary spaces, like the ones which have the crown as gate keeper, are not a turning one’s back on real spaces, but a way of coming into contact with them.

Dr. Lizette Gradén is a Researcher at the Department of Design, Craft and Textile Art at Konstfack, Sweden. Gradén is author of prizewinning dissertation On Parade: Making Heritage in Lindsborg, Kansas (2003), co-editor of Modets Metamorforser: den klädda kroppens identiteter och förvandlingar (2009). Her research interests include the roles of material culture in ritual and performance of heritage. She currently leads the project Nordic Spaces in the North and North America: Heritage Preservation in Real and Imagined Nordic Places (2008–2011) E-mail: lizette.graden@konstfack.se.

Notes

1 "Den är en sinnebild av en önskan att banden mellan amerikanska och svenska medborgare av samma stam måtte förbliva fasta släktled efter släktled” (official gift letter, ASI archives)
2 The example of the bridal crown as heritage gift and performance dealt with in this article are taken from my ongoing research on heritage gift exchange at sites for heritage preservation in Sweden and America. To read more about the project Nordic Spaces in the North and North America: Heritage Preservation in Real and Imagined Nordic Places, please visit www.nordicspaces.com.
3  Fataburen, for example, lists gifts received by the museum until the 1970s.
4  Artur Hazelius, founder of the Nordic Museum and Skansen in Stockholm in Sweden, presented the collections as a gift to the “people of Sweden” (Medelius, Nyström, Stavenow-Hidemark 1998).
5  As I have discussed elsewhere (Gradén 2010) in this view at the time, the gift stands in opposition to the commodity, which aim is to create monetary profit. This oppositional view has been questioned in recent scholarship. French Philosopher Jacques Derrida claims there is no such thing as a free gift (1992: 14) and criticises Mauss by saying “Mauss does not worry enough about the incompatibility between gift and exchange or about the fact that an exchanged gift is only a tit for tat, that is, an annulment of the gift” (Derrida 1992: 37). Derrida, however, writes about giving from his own culture’s context where gifts and exchange is not conflated whereas Mauss is trying to understand giving and receiving from a perspective in which gifts and exchange are not separated.
6  As highlighted by Byron Nordström in the American Swedish Institute’s 80th anniversary exhibition in 2009: Between 1941 and 1945, the Institute’s ability to interact with Sweden was made difficult by the war. Its image was complicated by the reactions of some to Sweden’s (so-called) neutrality. Many Americans and Swedish-Americans alike could not understand how the country could stand outside the struggle against the Nazis.
7  During my fieldwork period which started in 2006 I have worked primarily with curator Curt Pederson and volunteers Phyllis Waggoner and Elsa Petersson. Elsa Petersson, who passed away in May 2009 at the age of 89, had been responsible for the care of the Värmland Gift Collection for 25 years. In addition to fieldwork, I am indebted to archivist Marita Karlisch for excellent guidance in printed material on the Värmland Gift as well as to the collection of some 200 books which was part of the gift.
8  The Värmland gift letter of intent. Gåvoboken. ASI archives.
9  It is possible that Moberg had heard about the Bridal crown, as the arrival of the Värmland gift received a lot of publicity both in Sweden and Minnesota at the time.
10  Fieldnotes taken during work on the Värmland gift with volunteers and curator Curt Pederson, ASI.
11  In a similar manner, old-fashioned Finnish-Swedish weddings were popular among couples of Finnish-Swedish background living in Sweden in the late 1990s (Larsen 1998).
12  Author’s interview with Marie Ylinen, June 2009
13  Author’s interview with Marie Ylinen, July 2006, June 2009
14  Author’s interview with Marie Ylinen July 2006, June 2009.
15  Author’s interview with Marcia Linnér Swanson, July 2006
16  Author’s interview with Nils Hasselmo, August 2006
17  Following Regina Bendix, I understand authenticity as representing an experience, not as something objective or factual. (Bendix 1997: 13)
18  Interviews with Sandra Schwamb, former secretary to the ASI directors and staff member who administered the lending of the crown at the ASI in the 1950-1970s, July 2006, June 2009.
19  The Norden Association was established in 1919 to stimulate cultural cooperation between the Nordic countries and has since established a gift-exchange in the form of cultural houses in Iceland, the Faroes, Greenland, Åland, and Finland.

References
Fieldwork carried out at the American Swedish Institute, Minneapolis and the Swedish American Center in Karlstad. A pilot study was made in June-August 2006, with subsequent fieldwork in
February and June in 2009. This fieldwork contains observation, participant observation, and interviews. Archival studies have been used to add historical depth to the study.


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"Svensk-amerikan tillbakavisar kritiken mot värmlandsgåvan", Nya Wermlandstidningen, 8 April 1952.

Interviews and Recorded Discussions
Marie Ylinen, July 2006, June 2009
Marcia Linnér Swanson, July 2006
Nils Hasselmo, August 2006
Curt Pederson, July 2006, June 2009

Archival Material
Gåvoboken, Värmlandsgåvan. The American Swedish Institute archives.
Värmlandsgåvan, The ASI archives.
Värmlandsgåvan, arkivet. Sverige Amerika centret (tidigare emigrantregistret), Karlstad.
Captives of Narrative: Scandinavian Museum Exhibits and Polar Ambitions

By Anders Houltz

Abstract

This article compares the histories of two museums of polar exploration, both founded in the 1930s but based on well-known expeditions dating back to the decades around 1900. The first is the Fram Museum in Oslo, centered around the famous Norwegian polar ship, the second is the Andrée Museum in Gränna, combining accounts of the ill-fated balloon expedition with a polar centre reflecting more recent polar research activities.

The aim of the article is to analyze the relationship between museum and narrative. Museums are shapers of narrative but at the same time shaped by the narratives they relate. The article explores the symbolic and medialized dimensions of polar research, expressed in museums, as well as the way in which museums interrelate with national identities and self-images.

What does it mean to be a modern polar nation? And how is such an identity expressed in cultural terms? In which ways can museum institutions and exhibitions be used as means for such expressions? And how do “the grand narratives” of Sweden and Norway relate to the epic representations of polar activities, presented by the museums?

Keywords: Polar museums, polar history, narrative, nationalism, The Andrée Expedition 1897, The Fram Expedition 1893–96, Oslo, Gränna
Introduction

In March 2009, the search for a pyromaniac was headline news in Norwegian media. A series of fire incidents had occurred on the museum-dense peninsula of Bygdøy, close to central Oslo. The main target appeared to be the Fram Museum, one of Norway’s foremost tourist attractions. Four times in five weeks, night-time attempts were made to set fire to the conspicuous building, containing the world famous polar ship, commissioned by Fridtjof Nansen and used on three legendary Norwegian polar expeditions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Aftenposten 2009-03-11).

While the police investigation proceeded, an animated debate stirred over the national cultural values at stake, had the fire not been put out in time. Papers described the Fram Museum as a "National treasure" and the director-general of the National heritage board, Nils Marstein, stated in a press-communiqué that “The Fram Museum contains national gems representing Norway as a coastal nation. The Fram is a national icon connected to the Norwegian discoveries and scientific expeditions in the polar areas.”(http://www.riksantikvaren.no, 2009-03-11).

The affair reached its outcome some weeks later, when a remorseful teenager admitted the deeds. As it turned out, the attempt to set fire to the Fram had not primarily been politically or ideologically motivated. Considering the choice of target, however, it was nevertheless a highly symbolic action. The deed, in combination with the various heated sentiments it triggered, can be understood as a confirmation of the strong symbolic position that this museum item retains in modern Norwegian culture. Other examples point in the same direction. When the daily newspaper Aftenposten organized a major public vote among its readers about "The Norwegian of the 20th century", Fridtjof Nansen ended up in the first place, regardless that his greatest feats as an explorer were all achieved during the previous century (Aftenposten 1999-11–13). The narratives conveyed by Nansen and the ship Fram remain forceful and seem to stay in remarkable harmony with the modern Norwegian self-image. In other words, the Fram Museum is a Norwegian national monument.

The closest Swedish equivalent to the Fram Museum is not located in the capital, but in the provincial town of Gränna, on the eastern shores of Lake Vättern, in the county of Jönköping. Around the findings from the Gränna-born engineer Salomon August Andrée’s ill-fated balloon expedition to the North Pole in 1897, a museum and polar research centre has been created, which constitutes the most prominent public manifestation to be found anywhere over Swedish research activities in the Arctic and Antarctic. If the Fram Museum enjoys a more or less unchallenged position in Norway, the Andrée Museum (officially the Gränna Museums with Polar Centre and the Andrée Expedition) is contested both in terms
of its purpose, its content and even its existence. What is the reason for this difference?

The international literature on polar research history is extensive; early heroic portraits have gradually been complemented by critical reevaluation and studies aiming at broader socio-cultural contextualization (for instance Wråkberg 1999; Bravo & Sörlin 2002; Avango 2005; Drivenes, Jølle et al. 2005; Friedman 2010). Public museums displaying and commenting polar research and exploration have not, however, to any significant extent been subjected to scholarly analysis (Wheeler & Young 2000, compare Aronsson 2008). Such museums, and the way they materialize and express the narratives generated by polar travel, rather than polar journeys and exploration as such, is the issue at hand in this article.

To be able to present a strong narrative is often described as the foundation for a successful museum display. Both the Fram Museum and the Andrée Museum are indeed each moulded around such strong – and in fact interrelated – narratives. Why, then, are their positions and status so different in a national context? The aim of this article is to analyze the relationship between museum and narrative, based on a comparison between these two museums. It explores the symbolic dimensions of polar research and its museums, as well as the way in which museums interrelate with national identities and self-images. How do museum institutions and exhibitions express what it means to be a modern polar nation?

Polar exploration and explorers must largely be understood as cultural phenomena. As shown by polar historian Michael F Robinson, the most important aid of polar travelers was neither dog sledges, nor sea vessels or other kinds of equipment, but the domestic audience which followed, admired and ultimately financed the adventures of their heroes (Robinson 2006). Robinson stresses that the exploration of the polar areas depended on cultural and political preconditions on a domestic arena. The “Arctic fever” of the late 19th and early 20th centuries was fuelled by home audiences and venture capitalists of the industrialized countries. The Arctic was a distant stage, but its dramas both mirrored and interfered with issues more closely at hand. The “discovered” Arctic was created in the interplay between explorers and their audiences – both before the departure and after the return. In this process, I suggest, museums and their exhibitions were soon included beside other media as active creators of meaning. When the polar expeditions had long-since ceased to be headline news, museums continued to formulate, give shape to and communicate the narratives of the exploration of the world’s most inaccessible places. This process went on, and still does, through the assembling, classification and presentation of collections, through the publication of catalogues and texts, and through exhibitions.

On a general level, museums serve an important role as national showcases, where more or less common identities based on selected knowledge are being negotiated and presented. In Peter Aronsson’s words, “national museums do present an institution where knowledge is transformed, negotiated, materialized,
visualized and communicated with national identity politics, hence producing a legitimate synthesis answering the question of what the nation was, is and ought to be.” (Aronsson 2010: 48) To understand the similarities and differences of museums in the construction of nationalisms, Aronsson proposes an international comparative approach. This article can be described as an attempt in that direction.

In their role as creators of meaning and coherence, museums of polar exploration have actively participated in the shaping of the narratives of polar discovery and their incorporation in the grand narratives of different nations. The discursive character of museum displays has been described by the narratologist Mieke Bal in the following manner:

Exposing an agent, or subject, puts “things” on display, which creates a subject/object dichotomy. This dichotomy enables the subject to make a statement about the object. The object is there to substantiate the statement. It is put there within a frame that enables the statement to come across. There is an addressee for the statement: the visitor, viewer, or reader. The discourse surrounding the exposition, or, more precisely, the discourse that is the exposition, is “constative”: informative and affirmative. (Bal 1996: 3)

In other words, the institutionalized setting of the museum implies strong truth claims. While the object supporting the statement is visible, sometimes even tangible, the subject making the statement is usually not, and the same goes for the underlying motives or agenda behind the statement. To this I would like to add another intriguing relationship to consider in order to fully understand an exhibition. Museums are not only shapers of narrative – as this article will show, they are themselves simultaneously shaped, at times even captivated, by the narratives they display.

Two Strong Narratives

The two museums at issue here each have a basic storyline, to which more or less everything that the visitors experience relates. These storylines are founded in the popular interest in polar exploration of the late 19th century and the hero worship of the explorers as individuals that went along with it (Wråkberg 1999). They are also parts of the larger stories about the international race towards the North Pole and about the formation of the modern nations of Sweden and Norway before and after their 1905 secession (Aronsson 2005; Sejersted 2005).

The defining narrative of the Fram Museum is that of the ship’s first voyage. The Fram was used in another two important expeditions in the history of polar exploration – Otto Sverdrup’s extensive mapping of the areas north-west of Greenland 1898–1902, and Roald Amundsen’s successful race against Robert Falcon Scott towards the South Pole in 1910–12 – but more than anything else it is the story of Fridtjof Nansen’s North-Pole expedition 1893–96, that sets its mark on the museum. It was for this purpose, and in accordance with Nansen’s speci-
fied requirements, that the ship was constructed by the shipbuilder Colin Archer in 1892. It is an adventurous success story which connects polar exploration with Norwegian self-esteem (Nansen 1897; Christensen 1996; Huntford & Christensen 1996; Huntford 1997).

Nansen’s plan was based on at the time unproved theories about Arctic sea-currents. The idea was to travel as far east as possible through the North-East Passage along the northern coast of Siberia, and then, deliberately, let the ship get caught by the pack ice, in order to slowly drift towards the North Pole by means of the motions of the icecap. If necessary, the last stretch would be covered on skis and dog sledge.

With a crew of eleven, the Fram sailed out from Tromsø in northern Norway in August 1893. In September the ship was fixed by the ice, as planned, in the East Siberian Sea. However, after eighteen months of ice drift, it stood clear that the ship was passing too far to the south to reach the Pole. Together with one of the crew members, Hjalmar Johansen, Nansen decided to leave the Fram in order to reach the goal on their own. After a few weeks they had reached a record-breaking north latitude 86° 14', but were forced to give up the try and return south. Meanwhile, the rest of the crew had drifted ahead onboard the Fram, and were finally, after nearly three years, relieved from the grip of the ice north of Svalbard. For Nansen and Johansen, the return was extremely difficult. They spent the winter of 1895–1896 on an island of Franz Josef Land, before being miraculously saved by a British expedition.

The Fram Expedition was reunited in Tromsø, and started a triumphant return tour from harbor to harbor along the Norwegian coast, with a splendid public reception in Oslo (then Kristiania) as grande finale. Even though the goals of the expedition had not actually been reached, it was the return of a victor, and Nansen’s position as a national hero was established. Fram, the strongest wooden sea vessel ever built, had proved its ability to withstand the forces of the ice, and was portrayed as a modern equivalent to “Ormen Lange”, the legendary ship of the Viking king Olav Tryggvason. Nansen himself was not entirely alien to such associations. In a speech at the festivities in Oslo on September 1896, he described Fram as the embodiment of Norwegian national character: “The ship that carried us was sent by Norway – and it was an image of Norway”. Just like Fram, he maintained, the Norwegian national character was “timbered out of faithfulness” (Arnesen 1942: 164).
The North Pole-race between Fridtjof Nansen and S.A. Andrée was frequently commented by Swedish and Norwegian press. Here in the version of the Swedish comic magazine Söndags-Nisse (1895-02-24).

The basic narrative of the Andrée Museum is that of the engineer S. A. Andrée’s fatal balloon expedition, which, just like the Fram Expedition, aspired to be the first human beings to reach the North Pole. Not unlike the Fram narrative, this drama was largely played out in front of a public audience, commencing long before the actual departure. Still, the differences are striking – in this case the story evolves around a failure, be it a grand one, and the outcome of the affair reaches the public long after the actual events took place (Andrée, Frænkel et al. 1930; Wråkberg 1998).

Late in the summer of 1896, Andrée and his collaborators were stranded on Danes Island, Svalbard, waiting in vain for favorable winds (Andrée 1896). Here they encountered the happily returning crew of the Fram, and were forced to congratulate the Norwegians to their feat. While the Fram came home in triumph, the Swedes had to return in early autumn with their tail between their legs. Still, Andrée was determined to try again – no doubt further provoked by Nansen’s success, and the fact that the final goal still remained to be reached. The next summer Andrée was back at Danes Island, this time more fortunate with the winds. The expedition, consisting of three men, took off to the north. Signs of life
in the shape of a few buoys and letter pigeons from the balloon were followed by prolonged silence and numerous speculations.

Finally, thirty-three years later, on the 6 of August 1930, the crew of a Norwegian whaler incidentally came across the remains of the Andrée Expedition, on White Island, northeast of Svalbard. The discovery included considerable amounts of equipment, but also exposed rolls of photographic film, and diaries. “The White Island Findings”, as they were named, became an immediate world-wide sensation, and the long-hidden course of events became public knowledge. The diaries revealed that the balloon trip had lasted only three days, at first above open water but rapidly losing height over the ice. The expedition members finally decided to leave the balloon and start out on foot, dragging heavy loads on sledges, trying to reach solid ground, first on Franz Josef Land to the south-east, then on Svalbard to the south-west. After three months of walking they had reached White Island, where they set camp. Shortly after arrival, the three men died due to exhaustion and disease. The exact death-cause has never been fully proved. The three coffins were received in Stockholm in a ceremony that equaled Nansen’s reception in Oslo in terms of solemnity, if not high spirits (Sörlin 1999).

The main character of this narrative is the expedition leader Andrée. His two comrades, Knut Frænkel and Nils Strindberg, play important side roles; their voices are articulated through notebooks and diary entries, not to mention the expedition photographer Strindberg’s images, but they are still only visible in relation to their leader (for an alternative perspective, see Martinsson 2006). The intended main role of the expedition’s vessel, the balloon Örnen (The Eagle), is complicated by the misfortune of the endeavor. Its premature miscarriage and abandonment makes it a metaphor over the futile tragedy of the whole expedition, but since it was never recovered by any of the search-parties, the balloon remains a shadow. In the Fram narrative, the main characters are two – Nansen himself and his ship. The human individual and the physical object are portrayed as carriers of complementary, sometimes overlapping qualities and traits, while crew members and even Hjalmar Johansen, the man who joined Nansen on the final attempt towards the Pole, are clearly subordinated. Both narratives are firmly tied to notions about masculine qualities and bravery, in line with the predominant explorer-ideal of the late 19th century (Moland 1999).

The stories of Nansen and Andrée are involuntarily tied together, just like Norway and Sweden were caught in a union without affinity (Nilsson & Sørensen 2005). Full of differences as the two stories are, they are both heavily framed by a nationalist discourse. The common goal, to be the first to reach the North Pole, was a task where many had failed before. Both chose unconventional methods to reach it. The Norwegian’s plan was to willfully let his ship get stuck in the ice – a nightmare for seamen in Arctic waters – and then use skis and dog sledges for the finish. The Swede, engineer as he was, put his faith in the aeronautic high-technology of the time – the hydrogen balloon. Both methods were met with skep-
ticism by many if not all experts. In retrospect, the very methods have been fitted into a national pattern for each country. This is most evident in the case of Nansen, and also clearly articulated by himself in writing and speech. The Fram represented Norway as a seafaring nation with reference back to the Viking Age, and its exceptionally sturdy construction was a useful metaphor for the nation in its strife for independency (Nansen 1905). Even the name of the ship – meaning “forward” in Norwegian – added to its potential as a national symbol. Skiing was yet another mode of transport loaded with symbolic connotations, cherished by Nansen for reasons both practical and ideological. At the time, skiing was becoming the national sport of Norway, a process in which Nansen was actively engaged. It was no coincidence that his public break-through a few years earlier had been a ski tour – the successful crossing of Greenland on skies in 1888.2

Andrée, on his side, was an ardent advocate of a rationalist standpoint in scientific, social and political matters. To him, reason and engineering could overcome all imaginable obstacles, and the balloon voyage was meant as an ultimate proof for this assumption. Trying to reach the goal by air, when many had failed to do so by crossing the icecap, was to trust the new technology with one’s life at stake. If successful, the achievement would doubtless have been seen as a confirmation not only of Andrée as an engineer, but of Sweden as a modern, technological nation.

Museum Plans in Sweden and Norway

Although there had been earlier plans to make museums about both Fram and the Andrée Expedition, it took a number of publicly noticed events around 1930 to trigger their actual implementation. In June 1928, Roald Amundsen, the discoverer of the South Pole, died in a plane accident close to Bear Island, in the attempt to rescue the Italian Umberto Mobile and his wrecked airship expedition. Two years later, Fridtjof Nansen died and was honored as the national hero that he then was, with a grandiose funeral in Oslo on May 17, the National Day, in 1930. On November 26 the same year, Otto Sverdrup, commander of the second Fram Expedition and mate on the first one, also passed away. Within three years, the most prominent Norwegian explorers in history and all three of Fram’s commanders had died. In August, 1930, finally, the sensational discovery of the White Island findings was cabled to newspaper offices around the world. All of these events were covered in detail by an international press. Biographies, homages and recollections were published in several languages. Both Sweden and Norway were taken by a sudden revival of old sentiments. But how were the polar heroes’ memories to be honored and preserved? What monuments would be the most fitting, and where were they to be located?

The Norwegian debate soon focused on Fram itself. The ship was owned by the Norwegian state, and ever since Amundsen’s South Pole expedition, it had been
left with a minimum of maintenance. Preservation initiatives were taken on several occasions, but meanwhile the decay was proceeding at such a rate that the demasted vessel was close to sinking. A committee had been formed already in 1925, headed by Otto Sverdrup himself, but the fund-raising went slowly. After Sverdrup’s death, the chairmanship was taken over by first the whaling shipowner and shipbuilder Lars Christensen and later the brewer Knud Ringnes. Together with other influential businessmen and industrialists, they managed to give new impetus to the work. The Ringnes Brewery, once one of the sponsors of Nansen’s Fram Expedition, donated considerable capital. In 1931, the state assigned the formal ownership and responsibility for Fram to the committee. A renewed campaign was started, aiming for preservation but also for creating a specific aura around the ship. Newspapers were enrolled, fundraising among the public and a “Fram-lottery” contributed to strengthen the image of the Fram as a concern for all Norwegians, a uniting symbol for the young nation and its people (Arnesen 1942).

The fact that the initiative came from private actors was significant. While the state had neglected the ship, private citizens now seized responsibility for its preservation. The leaflet Fram-Avisen urged every nation-minded Norwegian to support the Fram-lottery. The Viking rhetoric from the celebrations back in 1896 was wiped off and given a new lease of life. Fram became the symbolic link between a past Norway, in the shape of the mythical Viking ship Ormen Lange, and a modern nation, illustrated by contemporary Norwegian tank ships. “If we mention the name Fram, Norway with all its thousands of homes arises before our eyes. For it was in that ship that we rediscovered ourselves, to new deeds after our fairytale sleep.” (Fram-Avisen 1935).

The Norwegian efforts to raise money for a museum and to reconstruct Fram as a national symbol, became a lengthy process. The Swedish issue of a museum over Andrée evolved more rapidly, at least to begin with. Already the day after the news about the White Island Findings reached the headlines, the newspaper Svenska Dagbladet roused the question of a museum. The retrieved artifacts were immediately labeled relics, and as such they clearly deserved a fitting repository. The question was where, and under whose responsibility (Svenska Dagbladet 1930-08-24).

Many felt summoned. Andreas Lindblom, director of the Nordic Museum (Nordiska museet), Sweden’s central institution for cultural history, immediately offered the Main Hall of his museum for an exhibition. He asserted that the impressive room, dominated by a statue of the nation-building king Gustav Vasa, would be appropriate for the purpose: “With its Gustav Vasa statue, it is, after all, meant to be a national monument. An Andrée exhibition, honoring the memory of a great Swede, would be in its proper place in such a surrounding.” (Svenska Dagbladet 1930-08-24) In the longer term, however, he suggested that the Museum of Natural History would be the most logical hosting institution. There, the
expedition’s scientific material could be connected to scientific collections and in time provide the foundation for a major display over polar research.

The director of the Museum of Science and Technology, Torsten Althin, in turn, declared that his museum already possessed some eighty items related to Andrée. In its projected, permanent museum building, he hoped to include a special “Andrée Room”, at once “a valuable source of study material for engineers and scientists, and a lasting memory over Andrée and his achievements.” (Svenska Dagbladet 1930-08-25) Others yet proposed an entirely new Andrée Museum in the capital, to serve as a national monument commemorating both the expedition and Swedish polar science in general. Finally, voices were heard from Andrée’s birth-town of Gränna, stating that no other site could be more natural than the native place of the unfortunate expedition leader himself. In such a provincial setting, the advocates declared, the museum would be more to its profit than in the museum-crammed capital. The issue was mainly pursued by the locally powerful A E Bolling, known as “the King of Gränna”, among other things chairman of both the Municipal Council and the Folklore Society. He recognized the potential in underlining Andrée’s double identity as a native of Gränna and polar hero. In the local newspaper Grenna Nya Tidning, he stated that a museum would bring considerable economic effects: “The placing of the Andrée Museum in our town would mean much to the whole community, due to the stream of tourists it would attract.” (Grenna Nya Tidning 1930-09-02)

The location and presentation of the findings was a question ultimately related to how the “relics” and the Andrée expedition as such were to be defined and evaluated. An exhibition in the Great Hall of the Nordic Museum would be to define Andrée and his comrades as first and foremost national heroes, to move the collection to the Museum of Natural History would be to emphasize their character as scientists and polar researchers, while locating it at the Museum of Science and Technology would stress Andrée’s identity as an engineer and the voyage as technological achievement. A museum in Gränna, finally, would put focus on Andrée’s local roots, and thus in all probability either hazard his status as a national concern or undermine the capital as the obvious location for such concerns. The final decision was in the hands of the Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography, SSAG, which had been appointed the official trustee of the findings.

The short-term solution finally chosen by SSAG, was to meet the acute public interest through a hastily organized exhibition on relatively neutral grounds, in the Liljevalchs Art Gallery in Stockholm, during spring 1931. Through this compromise, the heroic, scientific and technological aspects of the Andrée Expedition were all subjected to its value as a sensational news item. Furthermore, national status was prioritized at the expense of local by placing the exhibition in the capital.
A Temple on Bygdøy

In May 1935, the Fram was towed on its last journey, from the harbor of Horten to Bygdøy in Oslo (Aftenposten 1935-05-06). There, a modern styled museum building was erected around the stranded ship. In spite of its functionalist vocabulary, the architecture showed references to both Viking houses and medieval cathedrals with pointed vaults; all constructed in concrete, glass and wood. The steep, sloping roof-sides were coated with copper from ridge to base. The building was designed by the Norwegian architect Bjarne Tøien, who had won the architectural competition with his entry, “Saga”. The inauguration was planned to take place on National Day, May 17, 1936, but was delayed until three days later.

The Fram Museum stands on Bygdøy like a modern temple over Norway as a polar nation (postcard).

The conflicts had been numerous. Most parties agreed that a museum should be built, but the choice of location was a matter of controversy, as was whether the new museum should be incorporated into the existing Maritime Museum or form an individual institution, threatening to over-shadow the older museum (Dagbladet 1934-05-24). Influential property owners on Bygdøy objected to having a large modernistic building and a tourist attraction as a neighbor and managed to delay the process considerably (Tidens Tegen 1934-10-03). Some critics, however, questioned the content of the museum on a more principal level. In Dagbladet, the journalist Johan Borgen questioned the reasons for "worshiping dead symbols" when modern Norwegian research on Svalbard was in need of financial support in order not to be pushed aside by Russian initiatives (Dagbladet 1934-08-11). “Why is the Fram holy” asked the signature “Rasle” in a critical article: “All ice-covered sea is by now discovered, and we do not need such symbols an-
ymore. We have no room for more of this polar manliness.” (Morgonbladet 1934-10-20) The critical voices gradually silenced, however, and by the time of World War II, the Fram Museum was an established institution in the museum landscape of Oslo, yearly attracting some 20 000 visitors.

The museum was entirely adapted to accentuating its central artifact. The entrance was centered right before the ship-stern. A bust of Fridtjof Nansen and a full-figure statue of Roald Amundsen (both later replaced by a single full-figure of Nansen) greeted visitors in front of the ship, thus establishing the main characters right from the start. The floor was lowered, so that the Fram could be observed from below, and side-galleries along the walls followed the waterline and ship deck levels. Another two galleries allowed the ship to be viewed from above. The dimensions, the massiveness and the sheer strength of the construction were clearly brought to the light. An essential factor was that visitors were allowed to actually enter the ship and move about more or less freely above and below deck. Objects and scientific equipment from the polar voyages were displayed in the saloon, but also in the corridors and cabins, along with personal belongings from the different expedition members. Small brass plates by the cabin doors named the respective inhabitants during each of the three Fram expeditions. Framed photos and paintings showed scenery and episodes from the trips. The exceptionally strong diesel engine, which had been kept at the Technical University of Norway, was renovated and returned to its proper place, where it could be observed in the machine room below. By moving about on the confined space of the ship, the visitors could form at least some notion of life on board.

Early versions of the museum plans included a small commemorative chapel, supposed among other things to house the urn containing Fridtjof Nansen’s ashes (Dagbladet 1934-08-12). Although the chapel was never actually carried into effect, the very idea strongly underlines both the sacral quality of the museum and its close symbolic ties to Nansen as a person.

The exhibition mediated a condensed polar history, in which Norway, Norwegian explorers and of course the Fram were in total focus. Manly exploit and resolution, personified by the three expedition leaders, combined with the strength and endurance embodied by the Fram, implicitly depicted Norway as a nation. The rest of the world – be it other countries as polar nations or the Arctic and Antarctic as physical environments – were reduced to background roles and stage settings.

Also during the war and the German occupation, the museum was mostly kept open. In these years, a new dimension was added to the symbolic content of the Fram. As during the 1905 dissolution of the union between Norway and Sweden, the Fram was again used to personify the Norwegian will to independence and ability to endure hardships. This is evident in the journalist Odd Arnesen’s book from 1942 about Fram and its history, typically titled ”Fram: A ship for the whole of Norway” (Fram: Hele Norges skute, Arnesen 1942). In the final sentences of the book, Arnesen implicitly ties the national crisis
and independence movement around the turn of the century to the current situation in occupied Norway: "Fram and the spirit that emerged from that ship, created a greater Norway. It gave us the strength to carry on during the struggle for separation in 1905 – when the gathering call once more sounded – Fram!…/ Therefore the Fram stands today in its house of steel and concrete and glass, urging us towards new deeds, south and north, where Norwegians have left their mark for centuries, new deeds, showing that we will never surrender in the peaceful struggle between nations." (Arnesen 1942: 290–291) The words appear to be carefully chosen; a more overt appeal for resistance would hardly have passed the censorship of Quisling’s Norway.

The White Island Findings on Their Way to Gränna

The Andrée Exhibition arranged by SSAG at Liljevalchs in Stockholm the spring of 1931 was just as successful as could be expected. To meet the public response, the museum extended opening hours to include evenings throughout the week, but still the queues were long (Svenska Dagbladet 1931-01-11). Curiosity seemed insatiable about the unique images, developed after 33 years in the ice, the contents of the diaries and, not least, the many objects that had been retrieved (the commented catalogue includes 550 item numbers).
One of the rooms was filled with maps and designs over the finding location on White Island, accompanied by a skiopticon projector showing a number of the expedition’s photographs. The largest room contained the majority of the physical objects, with the expedition’s canvas boat and three sledges placed at the centre. A plain-looking boathook engraved "Andrées polarexp. 1896" had been prominently placed, since it was this small object that first called attention to the ice and snow covered spot on White Island. The other rooms displayed scientific instruments, clothes, personal belongings, the remains of food supplies and travel pharmacy. The objects were presented in simple display cases, organized as far as possible in accordance with the relative positions in which they had been found. The time focus was clearly set on the moment of rediscovery in 1930, rather than the tragedy in 1897. In other words, it can reasonably be argued that the exhibition was first and foremost dealing with the current sensation, the findings, and only secondly with the Andrée Balloon Expedition (*Svenska Dagbladet* 1931-01-05).

The exhibition at Liljevalchs by no means made Gränna officials give up hope about an Andrée Museum in their city. Already in autumn 1930, weeks after the findings, the municipal council decided to create a small museum in the local community centre (hembygdsgård), incidentally located right across the street from Andrée’s house of birth. In May 1931 the Andrée Museum in Gränna was inaugurated, receiving considerable media attention. Regardless its local setting, the ceremony was shaped as a national manifestation and was broadcasted directly on national radio and covered by the national newspapers.

The museum itself was a relatively modest arrangement, in marked contrast to the high pitch of the opening ceremonies. The hopes of accessing the White Island Findings after the termination of the exhibition at Liljevalchs had not been fulfilled. Many of the photographs were certainly reproduced in the exhibition, but in terms of physical objects, the museum had to make do with Andrée-related items from the dispersed childhood home, hastily collected by the Folklore Society. With the exception of one of the three sledges, lent out to the Gränna museum for a couple of months, the artifacts of the White Island Findings, which would have made up the obvious main attractions of the museum, were indeed conspicuous by their absence. In spite of persistent requests from Gränna, they remained stored in Stockholm localities awaiting a permanent institutional solution (Törnvall 2002).

The opening of the museum was one in a row of actions aiming to posthumously anchor Andrée and his balloon to his native town, which he had permanently left in his early teens. The first initiatives in this direction had been taken long before the destiny of the expedition was revealed. In connection to the thirty years-anniversary in 1927, for instance, a metal memorial plate was placed on the façade of Andrée’s childhood home. With the White Island Findings, efforts to reconstruct Andrée as a local persona were intensified. The municipal council immediately but unsuccessfully requested that the expedition members should be buried in Gränna instead of in the capital (*Grenna Nya Tidning* 1930-09-16).
local press took all opportunities to emphasize the hometown connection, publishing detailed articles with headlines like “From the cradle in Gränna to the polar ice grave” and “Son of Gränna – National hero.” (Grenna Nya Tidning 1930-08-26; 1930-09-19) Even the roots of Andrée’s interest in balloon-flying were sought in Gränna: “Flying and the higher regions had always appealed to him: it is said that he started his expeditions already as a child, by climbing the pipe drains of his parents house.” (Grenna Nya Tidning 1930-08-26) The strings to his native town that Andrée had cut off as a schoolboy were energetically retied.

The Folklore Society, headed by the tireless A E Bolling, was the key agent in this process. A central activity was to create an Andrée collection as quickly as possible. Calls and appeals for objects connected to the balloon flyer and his family were published in the local press. Acquisitions of ever so far-fetched relevance, such as ”a unique original photograph of Andrée from his school years in Jönköping” or ”an old medicine cabinet belonging to the late pharmacist Andrée” were noticed and commented on in the newspaper in terms of relics (Grenna Nya Tidning 1930-11-07; 1930-10-24).

Through the years, Gränna continued to contend for the White Island Findings. When the Folklore Society in autumn of 1931 simply refused to return the borrowed sledge to SSAG in Stockholm, the controversy even became a legal case. In 1938, a special, purpose-built museum building was inaugurated in connection to the existing museum, but to no use. Instead the Folklore Society had to arrange a more or less provisional ”Lake Vättern Museum” in the new building. During the Second World War, the White Island Findings were stored on different locations in Stockholm. Then in 1945, in the final stage of the war, Gränna made a renewed request, calling attention to the bad storage conditions. This time, the persistent endeavors were finally crowned successful.

It is reasonable to ask why it was so important for Gränna to have its Andrée Museum. It is equally justified to ask why the resistance in Stockholm was so firm, even though the artifacts mostly were kept in store, to little use for anyone. A final question to be answered is why this resistance gave way all of a sudden, when it did.

One answer to the first question is that Gränna was and is a tourist town, where a museum with unique content could provide a valuable attraction. But other aspects are also important: in the small town community, Andrée and his achievement represented something unfamiliar, detached from everything local and familiar. The Andrée Museum was a window to the big world outside, through which Gränna, known mostly for its production of a special kind of peppermint candy – “polkagris”, could connect to events that had become history.

The resistance in Stockholm was officially motivated by research issues; the material and specimens collected by the expedition was valuable for Arctic scientific research, it was stated – although few scientists seem to have actually used them. Furthermore, the ability of the Folklore Society to take care of the collec-
tion in a proper and professional way was questioned. Finally, plans were still entertained about creating a future Swedish museum of polar research in Stockholm. Maybe the most important thing was that the Andrée Expedition had been defined once and for all as a national concern – moving the collection from the capital would imply a reevaluation in this aspect. That the change occurred when it did may have to do with the fact that the kind of polar research that Andrée represented was becoming more and more out-of-date after half a century. Neither symbolically, nor in its content did it have very much in common with Swedish post-war research ambitions. The White Island Findings had become a matter of prestige, but they were also gradually becoming a burden, from which the SSAG was not unwilling to be relieved.

On May 3, 1946, the renamed White Island Museum (Vitömuseet) was inaugurated in Gränna. The official changing of the name from the Andrée Museum to the White Island Museum was done to mark the fact that the much longed-for collection now finally was present. A new building had been added hastily to the museum complex, in order to house the additions. A short notice in the national daily newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* characterized the event as the end of a prolonged battle: “After fifteen years of stubborn fight against Stockholm over the findings made on White Island, E A Bolling, the energetic chairman of Gränna Folklore Society, has finally gained victory.” (*Svenska Dagbladet* 1946-07-18)

Compared to the commotion caused by the much smaller museum in 1931, general interest in the White Island Museum opening 1946 was modest. None of the major papers, not to mention radio, reported from the opening ceremony. Although the local paper reported extensively, the tone was somewhat more distanced this time: “The opening of the White Island Museum last Sunday was a memorable occasion, and even if it did not turn out to be a public event of any larger proportions, many well-known and esteemed persons attended, thus adding a certain lustre to the celebration, and proving the significance attached in high places to the fact that the White Island Findings have finally received a worthy location.” (*Gränna Tidning* 1946-07-23)

The first, 1930s version of the Andrée Museum in Gränna was a memorial room, a place for sorrow and contemplation over the town’s great son. In this character it contrasted to the temporary exhibition at Liljevalchs in Stockholm, which was a tactful but still parade of the sensational findings. Including the White Island Findings in Gränna in 1946 did not essentially change the general character of the museum. It remained a mausoleum with a combined local and national discourse where the wreath-ribbons from the funeral were still displayed; the solemn mood aptly captured by the motto over the entrance: "Relics brought to the mother land, inducing reverence and devotion."
Ageing Institutions and Modern Relevance

The Fram Museum is located on Bygdøy, splendidly overlooking the sea-approach and central parts of Oslo. Visitors can choose between two ways of access: by boat from the City Hall Quay on the opposite side of the Oslo Fiord, or the land-route by car or by bus. Both approaches provide a fitting framing of the visit. The short sea-trip is a reminder of the Norwegian sea-faring tradition and the natural preconditions that made for its emergence. Visitors choosing to arrive by land pass by a number of nationally charged cultural institutions along the wandering road across Bygdøy, ending with a turning space right in front of the Fram Museum. The Norsk Folkemuseum, one of the world’s first open-air museums, with a medieval stave church as a highly visible centerpiece, is followed by the Viking Ship Museum, containing the uniquely well-preserved 9th century ships from Gokstad and Oseberg. Finally, in the direct vicinity of the Fram Museum, are the Museum of Naval History and Thor Heyerdal’s Kon-Tiki Museum. As the Norwegian cultural historian Anne Eriksen has pointed out, the Fram thereby becomes part of a network of significance, made up by these memorial institutions taken together. None of them is locally focused or related to Bygdøy. They all speak to, and about, Norway and the Norwegians as a nation (Eriksen 2005; see also Eriksen 2009).

The Fram Museum has remained remarkably intact along the years. To a large extent, this can be explained by the building itself; shaped as it is around its central artifact, it leaves little option for radical alterations. Exhibitions have been added, improved or updated without changing the central themes or main narratives. The most thorough transformation was carried out for the centennial of Nansen’s 1893 departure towards the North Pole. That was when Per Ung’s full-figure sculpture of Nansen was added in front of the ship’s stern. Faded maps and photographs were replaced by back-lighted blow-ups. While most of the older pictures had showed the welcoming festivities after the Fram’s three expeditions, added images portrayed the encounter with the polar areas in different ways. Stuffed penguins on rocks and ice-flakes against painted backgrounds represented the Antarctic nature. Polar bears – the obligatory feature of every polar museum – together with seabirds similarly illustrated the Arctic. Exhibition texts were translated to no less than seven languages to meet the requirements of the large numbers of foreign visitors. Sound effects like engine noise from the machine room and sledge-dogs howling from the store rooms added to a more realistic effect (Aftenposten 1993-06-21).

Still, the face-lift did not include any radical revisions of the museum’s basic narratives of manly heroic exploits and Norway as a glorious polar nation. If anything, the storyline was further accentuated by the imposing statue of Nansen in front of the ship. The Fram Museum was, and remains, a national shrine, a place narrating a condensed story of Norway and Norwegianism to school classes and
foreign visitors. In this sense, it can be categorized as what the museologist Ragnar Pedersen terms a Memorial museum (Pedersen: 41). These institutions, usually based on historically significant events, phenomena or individuals, represent and mediate a society’s central values in a concrete form. The symbolic significance attached to them grant them strong powers of communication. Pedersen’s Norwegian examples are the Eidsvoll Museum (commemorating the constitution) and the Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim. Both are essential to Norwegian self-understanding, and so is the Fram Museum. In addition to its prominent position in the capital’s urban landscape and on its tourist track, it holds a key place in the Norwegian national consciousness.

In comparison, today’s Andrée Museum appears peripheral from several aspects. The geographical location is no less peripheral in a national perspective today than it was in the 1930s, and the polar centre is strange in its local/regional setting. Even more disturbing: the major storyline, although still retaining its potential to move and its metaphorical qualities, is hardly in tune with the grand narrative of modern Sweden, as a cultural, political or scientific project.

In contrast to the Fram Museum, the Andrée Museum has kept strong local ties though the years – strong but not unproblematic. For many years the fight for the museum remained a unifying but at times also dividing task for the Folklore Society. It was a question about priorities and allocation of resources, but also about local identity, self-image and recognition. How was the Andrée material to be fitted into the local history of Gränna; how was the “balloon-town” to be combined with the “candy-town”? As former museum director Sven Lundström pointed out, the early Andrée Museum depended largely on the personal recollections, accounts and sentiments of the visitors themselves concerning the events of 1897 and 1930 (Lundström 1991). To many, the museum was a place where personal, individual experiences could be connected to common, shared experiences. For a long time, no further justification was needed. As the part of the audience with personal memories of the events diminished over the years, however, these points of reference inevitably faded and lost their relevance. The museum needed to find new roles to play.

In the late 1960s, novelist Per Olof Sundman’s acknowledged book *The Flight of the Eagle (Ingenjör Andrées luftfärd*, 1967, Oscar-nominee film version by Jan Troell in 1982) initiated a critical reevaluation of S A Andrée as national hero, which had hardly been possible earlier. Rather than personal courage, Sundman stressed irresponsible self-delusion, blind faith in technology and hubris as central to Andrée and his actions. In this version, the main character of the story was turned into a modern version of the mythical Icarus (Rydén 2003). Partly influenced by the revised image, some critical perspectives on Andrée’s motives were included in a new exhibition at the Andrée Museum in 1979. At the same time, the wreath-ribbons from the 1930 funeral were finally removed from the exhibits (Lundström 1991; Joriksson 2002).
The considerable attention received by Sundman’s novel and Troell’s motion picture did not alter the fact that the Andrée Museum was in increasing need of conceptual renewal, not to mention new facilities, to avoid being marginalized. In 1990, a seminar, aptly titled “The Andrée Museum in 1997: A future for the past”, was arranged to formulate a new vision for the museum at the prospect of the coming centennial celebration of the expedition (Lundström 1991). Designs for a new building were presented, but the aim was more ambitious than that; the objective was to find new meanings for a strong but largely out-dated story. The seminar made clear that the only possible way forward was to firmly place Andrée in a historical context, but at the same time make room for other, more modern, kinds of polar research than the one represented by the Andrée expedition. This double ambition, condensed into the vision of a polar research centre of a national and even international scope, characterized much of the renewal work that was carried out under the following decade (Göteborgs-Posten 1993-03-28).

It was a matter of course to the scholars and museum curators of the seminar that Andrée and polar history was to be the main focus of the museum also in the future. That this view was not shared by all became clear in a debate in the newspaper Jönköpings-Posten some ten years later, when the projecting of the new museum was finally moving towards completion. A published letter to the editor stated that many locals felt Andrée and what he represented had been allowed to take up too much space and attention, at the expense of more regionally anchored exhibitions:

What we want is a living, exciting museum, not a house for the dead, shaped by a foolish deed that had no relevance to anyone but the parties directly concerned and their competitors.// When we see the grand plans for a new polar centre, we ask ourselves: is this really what the people of Gränna would want? (Jönköpings-Posten 2000-07-25)

In its answer, the museum direction asserted that Andrée indeed was a relevant part of the local history, and that the Andrée material, still carrying considerable attraction, could be a means to create a modern cultural centre that would benefit also the (rest of the) local history. Nevertheless, the direction firmly stated that “We will never produce a permanent local historical exhibition.” Recurrent temporary exhibitions of such content, however, could be arranged in connection to the new polar centre. (Jönköpings-Posten 2000-08-03)

When the new museum opened in 2002, in a new building on the same location as its predecessor, the ambivalence between local values and polar aspects was immediately visible. Together with tourist information, public library and auditorium, the museum comprised The Grenna Cultural Centre (Grenna kulturgård). In this new complex, the Andrée exposition and the Polar centre were placed on the basement level, while a substantial local historical display met the visitors on the main, entrance level (although somewhat confusingly preceded by a stuffed polar bear in the entrance, serving as a teaser for the basement exhibits). In a vast cen-
entral opening between the two levels, a life-sized copy of the balloon “Örnen” (used in the motion picture from 1982) served to symbolically underscore the connection between the two parts of the museum.


Jan Troell’s film version copy of the balloon Örnen, strikingly placed in the centre of the museum exhibition space (photo: Anders Houltz).
The museum direction’s declarations two years earlier about a museum without permanent local historical exhibitions had obviously been given up. The history and heritage of the region were in fact a prominent theme of the new museum. Still, many of the ideas from the seminar in 1990 had been carried through, be it in a smaller scale than initially envisioned. The basement contained a contextu- lizing Andrée exhibition, aiming to make both the expedition and its failure understandable in relation to the historical situation in which it was played out. A majority of the artifacts from the White Island findings were on display and a wide-screen, 360° projection of contemporary photos of the 1930 finding site related to the recovered photos from the expedition. Another section was devoted to more recent polar research in the Arctic and the Antarctic, especially but not exclusively displaying Swedish activities. Research from the recurring International Polar Years, the most recent in 2007–2008, was emphasized. Together with databases, archives and interactive workstations, this comprised the polar centre of Gränna. The museum as a whole can be viewed as a compromise. It was a local museum, but also a display over the grandest failure of Swedish polar research, and a centre for communicating modern science. At once local, national and international, at once historical and contemporary, but none of these ambitions carried out to its full potential. The unifying link between the different focuses was still the Andrée narrative, stretched to the limit but essential to the totality.

Summing up, the Andrée Museum has gradually changed from a memorial site into a theme museum, fitted into a diverse cultural centre, in an attempt to remain relevant both locally and nationally. Along the way, the early efforts to fit the town of Gränna into the Andrée narrative have been replaced by efforts to justify Andrée’s position in the local context. In contrast, the Fram Museum is still a memorial museum, disengaged from local ties and presenting narratives that are largely unaltered but nevertheless nationally relevant.

**Museum, Narrative and Nation**

With all the public support and attention attached to their expeditions, explorers like Andrée and Nansen, balancing on the thin line between science and spectacle, became trapped in the stories they had constructed around their own persons. There was no turning back, no alternatives but to succeed or die while trying. Similarly, the museums erected around their performances and persons have become entrapped by the strong narratives that they relate. These captives of narrative are dealing in different ways with their situation.

What has been uncovered by this comparison is not mainly a case of institutions that are either modern or outdated. Instead it could be argued that both museums quite clearly express what it means to be a modern polar nation, but they do it in different ways. Sweden and Norway both claim active roles in present polar science and especially Norway retains commercial, industrial and geo-political
interests in the regions. In the Norwegian case, however, there has been a remarkable continuity in these ambitions, from the times of the Fram expeditions to the present. While Norway’s polar efforts have developed and its scientific ventures have unfolded, the link to the Nansen tradition has been kept intact. This is not least a question of rhetoric and framing – recent exploits and the actors behind them refer explicitly to the distant past. For Sweden’s part, a more distinctive breach can be discerned, essentially taking place during the decades of the Andrée expedition’s absence. From necessity rather than out of free will, Sweden’s strategic claims were revised on several points during these important years. The industrial and geo-political claims of the 19th century were abandoned, and a new scientific ideal, distanced from the individual explorer-hero, was introduced (Sörlin 1994). With the unexpected reappearance of the White Island Findings, these changes became apparent, and they have made the museum display problematic ever since.

Since 1993, Fridtjof Nansen welcomes visitors to the Fram Museum in the shape of a statue by Per Ung (photo: Anders Houltz).
The breach has further implications than that. During the inter-war years, the foundation for a revised national identity was laid both politically and culturally; the development of a modern Sweden of large-scale solutions in society as in industry, of rationality and progress rather than history. In this revised grand narrative, to which S A Andrée most likely would have had few personal objections, the symbolic figure which he had become ironically enough fitted badly. In Norway it can be argued that the significant breach with history came earlier and was due to quite different factors. The crucial point seems to be connected to the nationalist awakening of the late 19th century and the subsequent creation of a common national identity, culminating with the dissolved union with Sweden and independence in 1905. The Fram and all it represents was a part of this grand narrative right from the start, and still is.

With the intention to contribute to the largely uncovered research field of polar museums and their narratives, I have here focused on two institutions and two nations. A further analysis would certainly gain from a widened scope, including other nations and other museums, both in the Nordic countries and, for instance Russia, USA and Great Britain. Already the present comparison is, however, sufficient to point out the relation between museum and narrative, as well as the relation between individual museums and the grand narratives of nations. Indeed museums, and polar museums not least, offer efficient arenas for conveying national self-images. Giving prominence to historical individuals and their narratives as either metaphors or examples has proved a useful method for museums as nation building institutions, and in this sense polar explorers with their heroic aura appear well-suited, at least historically. The museums provided the distant events of polar explorers with a home-setting, more or less firmly tied to, and gradually revised in relation to, contemporary issues. This ability to contextualize and re-contextualize essential narratives without loss of credibility and with unchallenged truth claims is one of the distinctive features of the museum as a medium, compared to for instance newspapers. This asset can, however, turn into a hazard when museums become entrapped by the narratives they depend upon.

The two museums compared in this article are both in different ways captives of their own narratives. In the Norwegian case the museum is permeated by a story that seems nearly impossible to revise. What makes revision so difficult (and even perhaps appear unnecessary) is the fact that the narrative is tightly interlaced with the grand narrative of modern Norway. In the Swedish case, the entrapment works the other way. The narrative is a foundation, but its national and local relevance is no longer evident. The ambivalence is apparent in the exhibitions, and in the continuous efforts to revise them. In relation to the grand narrative of modern Sweden, the story of S A Andrée and his expedition is, at most, a counter-narrative.
Anders Houltz, PhD, is a researcher at the Division for the History of Science and Technology, KTH, Stockholm. Research interests: The cultural history of technology and industry, museums, exhibitions and medialization, material and visual culture. E-mail: houltz@kth.se.

Notes

1 Nansen’s later engagements, both as a leading force in the abolishment of the Swedish-Norwegian union and as a humanitarian activist and diplomat (earning him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1922), are most likely important additional reasons for his long-lived national popularity. It is worth noticing that no less than three out of top 10 on the list were explorers (Nansen, Roald Amundsen and Thor Heyerdahl). In a comparable Swedish vote for the “Swede of the century”, the writer Astrid Lindgren ended up in first place and no explorers were among the top 20 (Aftonbladet, 1999-12-31).


3 Correspondence between A E Bolling and Prof. Hans W:son Ahlmann, SSAG, 1932-11-10; Correspondence between A E Bolling and Birger Barre Advokatkontor, Stockholm 1933-02-09. Gränna museers arkiv.

4 Letter from Per Geijer, chairman of SSAG, to the board of Stockholm University, 1945-02-12. Royal Academy of Sciences Archive.

5 On the other hand, scholars of other disciplines than the anticipated natural scientists have showed considerable interest – historians of photography and literature as well as conservation scientists etc have all from their different perspectives extracted new knowledge from the White Island Findings (Martinsson 2003).


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Using Different Pasts in a Similar Way: 
Museum Representations of National History 
in Norway and China

By Marzia Varutti

Abstract
This article explores how national histories are constructed in the museums of Norway. It does so through a comparative perspective, whereby museum displays of national past in Norway are being compared to museum displays of national past in the People’s Republic of China. This will involve comparing narratives, museological approaches, rationale and purposes of museum displays in the two countries.

Fieldwork research in museums in Norway and China suggests that if national pasts are obviously unique to the historical trajectories of each country, their museum renditions are structured in an intriguingly similar way. Museum displays of national pasts in Norway develop around a set of themes including myths of ancestry and descent; epics of resistance leading the embryonic nation through a dark era and towards a “Golden Age”; a core of moral and aesthetic values; notions of national modernity; and selective amnesia. I will show how similar topics can be found in museum displays of the past in Chinese museums.

The comparative perspective of the analysis enables me to assess the uniqueness of museum representations of the past in Norway and at the same time to explore analogies in the museum construction of national narratives beyond the European context, through the case study of China. This will lead me to put forward the hypothesis of the coagulation, at international level, of a canon for the museum representation of national history.

Keywords: Museums, Norway, China, national history, representation.
**Introduction**

Whilst there is little doubt that the manipulation of the past is crucial to the making and remaking of national identities, the ways in which the past is being edited in the specific context of museums, and the implications of this, remain partially opaque. In addition, little is known about these processes in an international comparative perspective.

This chapter explores how national histories are constructed in the museums of Norway by means of a comparative approach, whereby museum displays of the national past in Norway are compared to museum displays of the national past in the People’s Republic of China.

Whilst shunning a direct comparison between the two countries, the analysis aims to elucidate the characteristics of national representations of the past in Norwegian museums by displacing them from the “familiar” national and European contexts, and setting them against a radically different case study, such as China. This approach might appear hazardous given the obvious differences between the two countries – differences of size, geo-cultural position, historical trajectories, democratic traditions, state apparatuses, demographic profiles and ideological influences, to name but a few. Yet precisely by virtue of the differences between the two countries, the existence of similarities in the way national pasts are represented and narrated raises a number of research questions: is it possible to identify recurrent themes and approaches in the way the nation is depicted in museums around the world? Are national narratives – their form of expression, if not their content – to some degree similar at international and global level? If so, what can be inferred from such a finding?

The analysis builds on fieldwork research conducted in Norway and China. In particular, in Norway, the study focuses on the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History, the Museum of the City of Oslo, the Museum of Cultural History Oslo, the Museum of the Viking Burial Ships, and to a lesser extent, the Maihaugen Museum in Lillehammer. In China, the museums examined include the Museum of National History, the Military Museum, the Site of the First Congress of the Communist Party, the Shanghai Museum, the Shanghai History Museum, and the Sanxingdui Museum. These museums have been selected since they include displays that present national cultural features and historical events, and they enjoy a national status – addressing national and non-national audiences, receiving relatively high numbers of visitors, benefiting from public funds, and featuring highly in the circuits of national and international tourism.

Research methods included interviews with museum curators, as well as direct observation and discourse analysis of displays. The analysis of exhibitions focused on the comparative examination of narratives, museological approaches, rationale and purposes. Discourse analysis of displays involved approaching museum objects, texts and the overall museum environment as components of a
single composite narrative (Bal 1996) about the national past and national identity. Using China as a backdrop for the discussion of the ways in which the national past is represented in Norway contributes to clarify the extent to which specific modes of representation are unique to Norway, and conversely, the extent to which these are shared with other country contexts. This situates Norway within a broader spectrum of approaches to national pasts at European and global level, ultimately providing a platform to explore the hypothesis that a canon for the representation of national history is gradually coagulating at international level.

**The Past Made Into Heritage**

Notions of the past and of heritage are often juxtaposed to complement and support each other: the past is interpreted in such ways that aim to provide a cohesive narrative and a context for the heritage, whilst the latter materializes an otherwise abstract past. Yet it is important to stress the distinction between the two. If we define the past as an account of historical events, heritage can be understood as those elements of the past that are retained and celebrated and, as a result, exert an influence on the present (Blundell 2006: 39). In other words, the past is transformed into heritage through processes of selection, interpretation, and memorialisation. These processes require a degree of creativity (Varutti 2010b) and imagination (Anderson 2006) in the way memories are acted upon, edited and reassembled in order to be transformed into powerful bonds among individuals and collectivities. The link between the past, the heritage and the nation is ideally synthesized by Stuart Hall (1999: 5) “we should think of the heritage as a discursive practice. It is one of the ways in which the nation slowly constructs for itself a sort of collective social memory.” Thus, when we examine how the past is being recollected and re-presented, we are not simply dealing with past events, but also with the series of choices, selections, and transformations that have been operated along the way and that produce real effects in the present.

Museums are key sites where such selective and transformative processes take place and are validated. If history, as the historian Bo Stråth (2005: 256) puts it, “is a translation of the past into our time, an act of interpretation”, then museum representations of history add yet another layer of interpretation, and can be understood as sites of meta-translation. From a corpus of historical data and objects, some elements are expunged, others are emphasized, yet others are altered and re-assembled to form a coherent visual and narrative ensemble. Museum objects are deployed as discrete pieces of evidence, materialized snapshots of the “authentic moment” (Clavir 2002: 32) variously interpreted by an interpolating linear narrative.

Museum displays are especially powerful memory sites since they enable the connection between individual and cultural memory. This process is particularly salient in the case of displays unfolding narratives of the nation and its past. The
anthropologist and museum professional Anthony Alan Shelton (2006: 484) noted “exhibitions […] structure objects spatially to reactivate or create memory anew”. In the context of the display, visitors' individual memories and understandings are confronted with the memory constructed (as cultural and authoritative) by the museum. The visitor is brought to situate him or herself vis-à-vis the narrative of the display through processes of recognition and self-identification, or distancing and rejection. In this sense, museums are extraordinary laboratories where the notions of cultural heritage and cultural memory are being constantly reconfigured and re-invented.

These observations are so inherent in museums’ institutional, political and intellectual remits that they defy cultural and temporal distance and can be, for instance, equally applied to museums in Norway and China. In other words, museum displays – the objects on view, the texts that “explain” them, the environment that contextualizes them – constitute a system of interpretation that can be read critically to reveal the tenets that inform it. Casting light on these aspects of museum displays and narratives in a cross-cultural perspective bears the potential to bring to the fore not only national uniqueness but also intriguing similarities and convergences at international level.

Stefan Berger’s (2008: 13) argument that “inventions of the modern nation originated in North America and Europe, but colonialism exported the narrative strategies and hierarchies of European national narratives across the globe”, as well as Krijn Thijs’ (2008: 71) note that “narratives of different nations can be compared on their narrative structures and on the transnational import and export of specific narrative elements”, encourage the search for analogies between countries within and beyond Europe. In the light of these considerations, it seems pertinent to contrast national narratives in a European country such as Norway, with those of an extra-European country such as China. It is worth emphasising however, that the aim of the analysis is not so much to compare Norwegian and Chinese museums as to use examples from museums in China as a counterpoint to the analysis of museums in Norway.

The question of the relations that may exist between the modes of representation and narratives of the nation traceable in museums in Norway (and for that matter, in Europe) and China is far too broad and complex to be tackled in the framework of this paper; nevertheless, the assessment of the range and quality of analogies existing between narrative structures and genres seems a pertinent starting point for such investigations. It is also important to remain alert to the risk of Eurocentric derives that such question might involve. In this respect, historian Jie-Hyun Lim (2008: 291) appropriately notes “the Eurocentric national history paradigm consigned the less developed nations to ‘an imaginary waiting room of history’ […]. They saw their indigenous history as a history of ‘lack’ in comparison with Europe”. In the light of this observation, the juxtaposition of Norway and China does not aim to provide evidence of the transfer of European
models of national histories outside of Europe, but rather to move away from such Eurocentric understandings of national pasts by enlarging the scope of the analysis and by setting it in new analytical frameworks.

In a first instance, it might seem that museum displays of the national past in Norway and China would have little in common. Yet at a closer examination, Norway can be profitably set against China by virtue of some basic similarities between the two countries.

Firstly, likewise Norway, China was not a major colonial power. Neither country conducted major colonial campaigns during the 18th and 19th centuries; rather, they have been the object of colonization. Norway was subject to the Danish Crown until 1814 and then, following to the Treaty of Kiel, it was “transferred” to the Kingdom of Sweden from which it gained independence in 1905. A few decades earlier, on the other end of the Euro-Asiatic continent, French and British armies were forcing their way into Chinese ports imposing to the Emperor the Nanjing Treaty in 1842. However, whilst in Norway the long-term Danish presence left a profound cultural imprint, the colonial presence in China remained contained in time and space, concentrating mainly on key commercial harbours on the east coast.

Secondly, Norway became a fully independent country only in 1905; likewise, the process of formation of a Chinese national identity is relatively recent (Dittmer & Kim 1993). It could be argued that – at least over the 20th century – the nation in both Norway and China has been conceived in modernist terms, that is, as an entity characterized by territorial unity, legal enforcement, community participation, homogeneous culture, sovereignty, international recognition and a unifying nationalist ideology (Smith 2004: 15). Both Norway and China had to face the challenge to create a nation out of an ethnically diverse population, yet with a weighty ethnic majority. At their inception, both nations had to govern territories in parts still unmapped and deprived of infrastructures, services and administrative structures, and whose populations had to be “unified” in a national mould. These challenges were met through a range of strategies including relocation of population, educational, linguistic and religious policies. For instance in Norway, in the late 18th and 19th centuries, the establishment of local municipalities implementing the redistributive policies of the Welfare-state significantly contributed to nation-building. Similarly, the nationalisation of religion and the spread of Lutheran Protestantism since the 16th century, instilled and cemented a sense of shared cultural identity that would have later provided a platform for the development of Norwegian national identity (Bærenholdt 2007: 184, 206ff). With similar purposes of nation-making, in Communist China the massive resettlement of Han Chinese in the South-Western provinces mostly inhabited by ethnic minorities, bore such proportions that it has been described as a “civilizing mission” and paralleled to a form of “internal colonization” (Harrell 1996).
Thirdly, and as a result of the above, in Norway as in China museums of history tend to emphasise specific historical periods (the Viking period and 19th century Norway, and Ancient and early imperial China) which are being idealized and constructed as central to contemporary definitions of national identity. In what follows, I consider how this is done.

The Folk and the National Past in Norwegian Museums

Quite intriguingly, Norway has no museum of national history. The Maihaugen open air Museum in Lillehammer, which includes reconstructions of 200 historical and contemporary buildings, together with the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History in Oslo are probably the two sites that best approximate the idea of a Norwegian national museum of history.

Nationalist narratives in Norway develop around a set of values and concepts that can be loosely identified with the notion of folk. These values find an ideal manifestation at the Maihaugen open air Museum and the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History, where the Norwegian nation is displayed in its popular, peasant dimensions. The emphasis on the folk was the result of the 19th century Romantic interpretation of national identity framing the peasant as the primordial, authentic and uncorrupted essence of the nation (Stoklund 2003: 23ff).1 The folk culture approach in the Maihaugen open air Museum and the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History is translated through an emphasis on rural and peasant life, with its corollary of wholesome food, open air activities, and communion with the natural environment – all pervaded by a hint of nostalgia.
The Norwegian Museum of Cultural History was founded in 1894. The Museum’s remit as a showcase of the incipient Norwegian nation is apparent since its establishment, at “a time marked by strong national fervor and a desire for a more independent position in the union with Sweden”.

Although there is no obvious narrative line informing visitors’ path, the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History offers a series of images and artefacts that materialise the artistic, architectural, functional, technical achievements and peculiarities of the communities inhabiting what has come to be called Norway. The visitor walks in the natural and built landscape, experiencing the historical depth (from the 13\textsuperscript{th} century Stave Church to the 20\textsuperscript{th} century Pakistani flat down-town Oslo), and geographical breadth of the nation (moving from the southern coastal huts to the northern inland Sami dwellings). The prominence of the cultivated fields, the orchards, the botanic garden, and the forest in the premises of the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History are telling indications of the centrality of the natural environment in Norwegian national imagery. Folk museums such as the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History are elected sites for popular education, family outings and leisure activities. Overall, this kind of venues contributes to children’s familiarization with the natural, artistic, architectural, historical, cultural and ethnic features of the nation – thus ultimately contributing to the formation of Norwegian citizenry.

The encounter with the national past in Norway is not bounded to museums. Open air staged historical representations where local actors impersonate historical figures and re-enact historical events, are very popular during the Summer months. The popularity of these historical representations might be explained by an increasing interest in local history (Gullestad 2006: 111). In most cases, these historical re-evocations propose idealized versions of the past where only the positive aspects are being re-evoked (see also Gullestad 2006: 111). These historical representations contribute to re-actualize the past and renew its links with the present; they bring history into the nucleus of society, transforming it into a family gathering and an occasion for socialization. They also contribute to the territorialisation of the past, whereby feelings of belonging to a local community are being strengthened by the commemoration of a shared past. In this sense, the accuracy of the historical representation is secondary to its bonding effect.

Nevertheless, the re-evocation of an idealized past is not without dangers in a country such as Norway that is experiencing rapid socio-cultural changes. In the turn of one generation, from the 1960s to today, Norwegian society has been radically transformed as a result of important waves of migration from South Asia, the middle-East, Eastern Africa and Latin America. Although Norway’s multicultural policies aim to integrate the new immigrants into Norwegian society, inter-ethnic social relations are not always thoroughly harmonious. In this situation, the celebration of national and local traditions, myths, festivities and events may turn into instances of exclusion rather than cohesion, as they may
heighten the divide between ethnic Norwegians and newly arrived communities (see also Gullestad 2006: 119-120). Museum professionals seem to be well aware of this risk. Following the adoption of multicultural governmental policies over the last decade, museums in Norway have made considerable changes to museum practices, displays and national narratives in order to include ethnic communities and to better reflect the cultural pluralism of contemporary Norwegian society (Rekdal 2001). To summarize, it could be said that museums in Norway are key loci not only for imagining, but also for experiencing the Norwegian nation. Museum displays have actively contributed to the definition of Norwegian national identity and to its transformation from its folk, peasant, roots, to its current multicultural dimension.

These features set Norway in stark contrast with China. Here, museums have historically performed the roles of political indoctrination, patriotic education and dissemination of Communist ideology. National history in China is highly institutionalized, embedded in the formal remit of cultural institutions such as museums. Since 1949, museums have provided a unified, government-approved vision of Chinese identity, culture and history (notably of revolutionary history). Providing political legitimation, instilling a sense of belonging and loyalty, and incorporating ethnic minorities into the Han majority, have been the priorities of Chinese museums over the last decades. Political concerns continue to permeate contemporary museum representations of the national past, especially in the ideological uncertainty of the post Tian An Men, the protest and massacres in 1989. However, today Chinese museums have also become full agents in the implementation of cultural nationalist policies, as well as in the economies of culture, tourism and international prestige (Varutti 2008).

It could thus be said that in Norway as in China, museum representations of national past are in line with the respective national political projects. In Norway museums show concern with using the national past to build a shared platform from which to negotiate the changes affecting contemporary Norwegian society. Conversely, in China public museums formally adhere to the government official nationalist discourse, and thus continue to enforce predefined visions of the Chinese nation and its past. Beyond the diverse functions that museums are performing in Norway and China, it is possible to discern a pattern of similarities in the way they pursue such functions, and notably in the narrative strategies deployed in the representations of the respective national pasts.

**Norwegian National Narratives as Seen From China**

Historian Peter Aronsson (2010) has developed a theoretical model for the comparative analysis of national museums in which national museums’ narratives and approaches are linked to the process of nation-building. On these premises, Aronsson identifies a series of criteria upon which a comparative analysis of
museum settings might be based, these include the historical establishment of an independent state; the relation between state and nation(s), the role of civil society and the public sphere; and the degree of social segmentation or cohesion. Juxtaposing Norway and China in the light of these criteria evidences that in both countries the late nationalisation of cultural heritage and the relatively late establishment of national museums were the product of the recent establishment of the nation. Significant differences, however, set the two cases apart. Whilst at its inception Norway lacked a long established tradition of royal collections, which might have acted as a core for the development of national collections, in China, the Communist Party greatly benefited from the existence of imperial collections, which were appropriated and turned into the very emblem of Chinese national heritage and of national identity. Also, in Norway one cannot find a network of national museums comparable to the one existing in China. This might be understood as a reflection of different levels of political legitimacy, whereby the relatively weak legitimacy of the Chinese government needs to be enforced through authoritative and cohesive historical narratives and representations, whereas this need is less acute in the more politically stable Norway. This point lends support to Aronsson’s (2010: 49) argument that “national museums are easier to promote at the state level in a centralised state than in a more democratic and pluralistic state”.

To proceed further in the comparative exercise, I borrow the methodological approach adopted by historians Stephan Berger and Chris Lorenz (2008: 4ff). Berger and Lorenz selected a series of key topics – myths of origin, “golden ages”, national heroes, continuity and discontinuities in national narratives, the nation’s Others and historical exclusions – which are explored in a European comparative perspective. These topics are grounded in major theoretical insights on the theories of nationalism. More in detail, the scholar of nationalism Anthony Smith (2004:17) noted that there are specific kinds of resources that can be mobilized in order to strengthen national identity and feelings of national belonging, “these include myths of origin and election, the territorialization of memories to form sacred landscapes, the shared memories of communal ‘golden ages’, and the ideal of struggle and sacrifice to fulfil a national destiny”. It seems telling that the main similarities in the museum representations of the national past in Norway and China are precisely centred on the basic national “resources” identified by Anthony Smith. In particular, it is possible to identify analogies between Norway and China in the processes of construction of a common ancestry, and its deployment as basis for a national mythology; the formulation of an epic of national resistance to the oppressor and of final victory in the re-establishment of a national integrity, or national essence; the crystallization of a core of moral and aesthetic values inextricably associated to the nation; a tradition of “salvaging” the past from oblivion, of retrieval of valuable memories and of obviation of others; the framing of some historical events and personas through an
idealized, romantic and nostalgic perspective. In short, in Norway as in China, museum displays of the national past provide a core of cultural, historical and moral values on which discourses and enactments about national identity can be grounded. Below, I take a closer look at the main analogies in the representation of national history in Norway and China.

National Mythologies

The construction of a shared past (historical or mythical) is crucial in so far as the past becomes the purporter of the moral, social and aesthetic values of the nation. But how can the past be re-actualized and inserted in national narratives? One of the most powerful ways to deploy the past and make it effective for present nation-building purposes is to re- evoke a “Golden Age” which is depicted as a high point of civilisation and a model of moral virtue, illuminated politics, scientific advancement, and artistic creativity (Smith 1997: 40). As Armstrong (1982) has argued, the practice of selectively recalling evocative elements of the past – such as myths and symbols that have the power to heighten the awareness of belonging to the same community – is one that inscribes in the long term, thus suggesting that nations develop in the longue durée as a result of persistent processes of ethnic identification. Museums can actively contribute to these dynamics by re-actualizing and celebrating national myths and symbols.

Another way through which national authority legitimises itself through the past is by establishing a genealogical link with the symbolic figures or events associated with the origins of the community – that is, a founding myth (Fowler 1987: 230). As a number of historians, including Duncan Bell (2003) and Bo Stråth (2005) have pointed out, myths and traditions – even if transformed or invented (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1992) – are crucially important as discursive practices that bind together collective national identities. As Bell explains (2003:75) a nationalist myth can be understood “as a story that simplifies, dramatizes and selectively narrates the story of a nation’s past [...] they subsume all of the various events, personalities, traditions, artefacts and social practices that (self) define the nation and its relation to the past, present and future”.

Museum displays – all the more if illustrating national features and historical events – are an ideal ground for the development, crystallization and dissemination of national mythologies. Norwegian national mythologies for instance, weave together romantic notions of the natural landscape with the tough, frugal heroism of seafarers, travellers and explorers (see Aronsson et al. 2008) – the Vikings being the most accomplished expression of this archetype. However, since as mentioned, Norway does not have a designated museum of national history, its national historical narratives are scattered across diverse institutions. For instance, the exhibition We won the land at the Maihaugen Museum in Lillehammer, locates the origins of the Norwegian nation and the inception of a “Norwegian history” in the end of the ice age. In the exhibition’s narrative, the
melting of the glaciers and the ensuing transformation of the natural landscape are the preconditions for “history” to begin. In the narrative of the Maihaugen Museum, the Norwegian nation is fully entangled in the natural landscape, understood as an ideal conflation of Nature and (Norwegian) culture.

The Viking period (800–1066 AD) constitutes a pillar of Norwegian national narratives. It figures most prominently in the Museum of the Viking Burial Ships, at the outskirts of Oslo, where visitors may closely observe three magnificently preserved Viking wooden burial ships. Here, the artefacts on display are not interpolated by an explicit national narrative; rather it is the materiality of the burial ships – their majestic dimensions, technical masterpiece, and elegant shapes – that are made to speak for the seafaring culture and boat-making skills of Norwegian ancestry.

Christianity is another important page in Norway’s national history. Middle Ages, Christian Norway is recalled at the Museum of Cultural History of the University of Oslo in a gallery displaying religious paintings on wood and painted wooden sculptures. The emphasis is here on the aesthetic features of wooden sculptures. These are presented as tokens of the devotion to Christianity of rural communities in South-Western Norway since the 11th century. The subject matter of religious wooden sculptures (of which the stave churches can be considered an extraordinary extension) points at the bonds between Christianity and the Kingdom, between religious and political power, whilst sanctioning the victory over Norse paganism.

Christianity “arrives” to Norway, diorama at the Museum of the City of Oslo.
The national narrative centred on the notion of the folk that unfolds at the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History provides a corollary to the narratives emphasising the bond with Nature at the Maihaugen Museum, the seafaring exploits on display at the Museum of the Viking Burial Ships, and the Christian rural Norway celebrated at the Museum of Cultural History. Taken together, these museums map a constellation of national sites and national narratives that, although not expressively interconnected, compose a grand narrative of the Norwegian Nation. Peter Aronsson (2008: 206) brings this argument further suggesting that the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History, together with the Museum of the Viking Burial Ships and the National Maritime Museum constitute a complex linking the ancient Viking past and the modern present of the Norwegian nation. In other words, the heritage of the Vikings is being inscribed in the framework of a Norwegian ethos conflating peasant culture and a modernity defined in terms of scientific discovery and advanced technology applied, among other, to oil exploration, telecommunications, and the fishing industry.

If one juxtaposes the museum representations of the nation in Norway and China, one of the main shared elements that emerges is the centrality of national mythologies. However, whilst in Norway such mythologies unfold in museums through a sequence of foundational turning points such as the Viking era, the advent of Christianity, independence, the oil discovery etc. in Chinese museums national narratives are primarily concerned with communicating a sense of historical continuity. The notion of continuity in the history of Chinese civilisation is central in the political discourse on the national past. For instance, the question of the origins of the Chinese civilisation is an especially debated and politicized one. Until the late 1970s the dominant interpretative model suggested the idea of a unique settlement of civilisation – identified as “Huaxia” – situated along the Yellow River, from which populations would have later spread across the rest of China. “Huaxia” has come to indicate the ancestors of the Han, but also more broadly, Han Chinese civilisation. The concept of Huaxia has been instrumental to the discourses on the alleged superiority of the Han Chinese majority (Dikötter 1992). Since the 1980s the theory of the Yellow River has been abandoned by historians and archaeologists to the benefit of an alternative interpretation – known as theory of the “interaction sphere” (Falkenhausen 1995) – based on a plurality of settlements that, through interaction, would have lead to the spread of the population over the territory. In 1986, archaeological excavations in Sichuan Province, South-West China, brought to light cultural relics attributed to the Shu culture, estimated to date back to the XII century BC. These bronze artefacts of arresting beauty are the tokens of an advanced and culturally refined civilisation in the South West of China, independent from the Northern settlements. This represented a turnaround in the interpretation of the origins of Chinese civilisation, since it discarded the theory of the Yellow River, according to which the settlements in Northern China were the “cradle” of Chinese civilisation. The
Sanxingdui Museum, in Sichuan, celebrates the cultural and technological refinement of the Shu civilisation and firmly inscribes it in the history of the Chinese nation. Yet, the Museum of Chinese National History in Beijing – currently being revamped – continued to embrace the theory of a unique settlement, focusing on Huaxia and its alleged superiority, and presenting the history of the Chinese nation as an uninterrupted line of development from the Peking Man to the funding of the People’s Republic. Conversely, one can find very little note of the Shu civilization, which is dismissed as a marginal, minor local culture. This example shows how different museums are taking advantage of historical uncertainty to unfold different and competing narratives on the origins of the nation. In spite of archaeological evidence of the contrary, the Museum of Chinese National History preferred to emphasise the aspect of continuity in Chinese history. These inconsistencies are revelatory of the ongoing process of history writing, but also of the malleability of museum representations vis-à-vis the need to disseminate powerful narratives of national unity and cohesion.

National Epics
National mythologies extend in national epics where the endurance of the embryonic nation-state is being put at hard test by natural calamities and disasters, plagues, economic crisis, and wars. From these, the narrative goes, the nation will emerge stronger than ever. It is possible to retrace such epics of resistance in both Norwegian and Chinese museums.

The exhibition *We won the Land* at the Maihaugen Museum in Lillehammer, for instance, deploys a narrative alternating lights and shadows. The representations of the Black Death in the 12th century and the subsequent Danish occupation are followed by a more positive narrative centred on the process of nation-building since the independence from Denmark in 1814 and over the course of the 19th century. Museum displays and narratives turn again to dramatic tones to describe the Nazi occupation of Norway between 1940–45, and finally they resume a positive stance to celebrate the modern, affluent and stable Norwegian welfare state in the second half of the 20th century.

A similar narrative line is also present – albeit more subtle – in the reconstructed *Apartment building, Wessels Gate 15* from down town Oslo on display at the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History. The building is composed of eight apartment units. Through details of the lifestyles of their occupants, the apartments provide an overview of what life was like in different periods in the history of Norway, from the late 19th to the 21st century. Thus displays juxtapose the wit and lightness of the 1920s with the hardship of everyday life in the economic crisis of the 1930s, the approaching threats of Nazism and Fascism with the renovated hope for the future of the pop 1960s, the social protests of the 1970s with the multiculturalism of the new millennium. Implicitly, the presence of electronic devices in the apartments and the quality of home decoration become
indicators of prosperity and modernity. In spite of the modernist narrative underlying the display, this succeeds in drawing a vivid portrait of Norwegian citizenry over the 20th century.

In contrast to the linearity of national narratives in Norway, museum representations of national epics in China focus on the mid-20th century and are strictly linked to the rise of the Communist Party and the establishment of the People’s Republic in 1949. The development of the Communist Party, from its inception in Shanghai in 1921 (celebrated in the Site of the First Congress of the Communist Party) to the epic of the Long March, are vividly and romantically illustrated in the museums established during the Maoist era (from 1949 to 1976). For instance, the exhibition cases in the Military Museum are replete with such items as binoculars, lanterns, water flasks, and soldiers’ uniforms. Similarly, the exhibition at the Site of the First Congress of the Communist Party presents as historical evidence personal belonging of the attendants to the congress, such as typewriters, wall clocks, badges, uniforms, tea sets, and even lamp switches. By illustrating the spirit of sacrifice of the Red Army soldiers and by celebrating the martyrdom of patriotic heroes, these displays are meant to provide models of citizenry, whilst instilling feelings of pride and national belonging. The dark, pre-1949 past is contrasted with the glory of the post-unification and the brightness of the Communist future. As it is the case in Norway, these national narratives emphasise the endurance of the national bond through difficult times and close on a call for the retrieval and preservation of a “national essence”.

Selective Amnesia

In a museum setting, forgetting is as consequential as remembering (Varutti 2010b). Some pages of history are voluntarily omitted as part of a “strategy of forgetfulness” (Lundahl 2006: 2) that enables unpleasant historical events to be “edited out” from the main national narrative.

For instance in China the writing of official history was (and in part, still is) achieved by imposing national heroes and events for remembrance, and conversely by neglecting or ignoring others (see Varutti 2008). Historical narratives are purged from disturbing elements (events or characters) and historical or mythical figures are adapted to suit present needs. The instance of the recent surge in popularity of Qin Shi Huangdi, the emperor that unified China around 221BC and the commissioner of the impressive Terracotta Army, shows how an historical or mythical character is salvaged from collective amnesia, re-interpreted and cast as a national hero to support contingent narratives on the longevity, continuity, and unity of the Chinese nation (Duara 1988: 780). Significantly, such narratives are successfully exported through museums, as illustrates the popularity of the temporary exhibition The First Emperor: China Terracotta Army opened at the British Museum in 2007 and subsequently touring the world major museums. In spite of a renewal of interest towards the ancient
past, China’s recent history is still to be written. The decade of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), when artistic production and cultural expressions that were not of propagandistic nature were considered obsolete and unproductive, remains largely inaccessible to historians and is still considered taboo in public museum representations. The prospect of a public museum of the Cultural Revolution is still far from becoming reality; this would require, in the first instance, the coagulation of a collective and government-approved willingness to remember. For the time being, amnesia is the strategy chosen to deal with personal, collective and national loss.

Historical omissions and selective amnesia are not a prerogative of Chinese museums, they also occur in other countries, including Norway. For instance, museum displays of Norway’s national past rarely explore the unexpected wealth produced by the discovery of oil resources in the late 1960s, nor do they tackle the deep impacts that this exerted on the articulation of national priorities in the political, economical, social and cultural realms. Museum representations seem to privilege a more distant, indefinite, romanticized past. Similarly, the discriminatory practices that the Norwegian government conducted vis-à-vis the Sami and some ethnic minority groups such as the Travellers until well into the 20th century, have only recently started to be addressed in museum displays. Mostly they are raised in the framework of displays dedicated to a specific ethnic or indigenous group, such as the Sami gallery in the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History, or the Latjo Drom permanent exhibition on Travellers at the Glomdal Museum in Elverum. Even more delicate, because more recent, is the question of the “German children” (tyske barne), the children born of relationships between German soldiers and Norwegian women during the Nazi occupation (1940-45). The discrimination to which these children have been subject is largely absent from museum exhibitions. Similarly, museums fail to engage with the racist policies implemented during the Nazi occupation aiming to select an ideal Norwegian “racial type”. This thorny issue has been exceptionally – if indirectly – acknowledged in the temporary photographic exhibition Visions of Purity held at the Gallery Sverdrup, University of Oslo, in Autumn 2009. Aside from these isolated instances, these difficult historical pages are only rarely and marginally referred to in museum representations of Norwegian history; definitely, they are not (yet) part of the Norwegian national master narrative.

Read against the grain, museum displays of historical events reveal a constellation of silences and omissions. Events, periods, characters are edited out from national narratives when they are difficult to come to terms with, contested, or traumatic, and would therefore jeopardize the cohesion and persuasive potency of national narratives. Interestingly, in both Chinese and Norwegian museums the instances of historical omissions mostly pertain to the recent national past – a past that has not yet been fully crystallized into history, memorialised or embedded into the cultural heritage, and thus is “difficult” to depict and narrate in museums.
It might be argued that it is a general prerogative of (national) museums to shun engagement with such recent past or, alternatively, to tackle it through tactful and ad hoc strategies – of which historical amnesia and selective remembrance are examples – that whilst not imperilling the homogeneity of national narratives, also reveal the political nature of museum displays of the past.

**National Ethics, Values and Aesthetics**

The construction of a national ethos is pursued by associating the nation with a set of values, moral codes and aesthetic canons.

In Norway, framing the nation through the folk perspective has involved the mobilization of moral values such as egalitarianism, individualism, spontaneity and integrity (the latter are often associated to childhood), as well as ideals of tradition, authenticity, cultural continuity, and love for the natural environment (Gullestad 1992; Sørensen & Stråth 1997; Garvey 2005; Bærenholdt 2007). These constitute a core of recurring themes in museum displays of Norwegian national identity. For instance, the Folk Dress permanent exhibition at the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History chose to focus on the artist Adolph Tidemand emphasizing the fact that he indistinctly portrayed “wealthy farmers that were member of the Parliament [...] [and] ordinary Norwegian farmers. [...] His models were drawn from all social levels”. Similarly, the curators of the temporary exhibition *Where is Mr Siboni?* make a point of specifying that “From the foundation of the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History in 1894, the collection of artefacts has been focused equally on urban and rural cultures. The whole life of the nation shall be represented, not only particular social classes and environments”.

The importance of a high ethical profile is also apparent in the description of the occupants of the reconstructed Apartment building, *Wessels Gate 15* at the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History. Despite the differences in historical period, gender, social class and background, museum panels emphasize that the tenants’ common feature was to be “nice persons and good people” (*pene mennesker og bra folk*). In a similar vein, the Museum of the City of Oslo displays a number of portraits of individuals and family groups from the Middle Ages to the 19th century. These stern, austere portraits contribute to the definition of a “Norwegian” ethos in the arts and in real life. Tamed colour tones, composed body gestures, rigorous accoutrements suggest an aesthetics of the essential, the contained, the modest and the measured. Witoszek (1997: 87) argues that there is an historical continuity in Norwegian political culture based on the individualist and egalitarian ethos which lead to national independence.
Celebrating Norwegian national independence and its heroes at the Museum of the City of Oslo.

National independence is itself a cherished national value – in part instantiated by Norway’s reluctance to join supra-national organizations such as the EU. This can be better appreciated at the light of the interpretation of the successive unions with Denmark and Sweden as colonization, and the trauma of WWII, leading to the invasion of Norway by the Nazi army. These events left an imprint on national consciousness to the effect that national independence is perceived as something that needs to be protected. The projected moral integrity of Norway is also the result of museum narratives emphasizing the fact that Norway was not a colonial power, but rather a victim of Danish and Swedish imperialism (this can be seen for instance at the Mainhaugen Museum, the Oslo City Museum and the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History). This image is being maintained and re-actualized at the Nobel Peace Center, extolling the key role of Norway as mediator in international peace negotiations and in international cooperation and development aid. As a corollary, the annual endowment of the Nobel Peace Price by the King of Norway contributes to update Norway’s moral authority and international status of a “righteous” nation.

The crystallization and institutionalization of “Norwegian” values and moral codes appear as relatively recent processes when juxtaposed to their correspondent in China. Here, Confucian principles have historically provided a source of moral values and codes of social conduct. Today, they continue to be strongly associated to Chinese civilisation, and by extension to the Chinese nation
Confucian principles have deeply informed social relationships by means of an emphasis on the concept of filial piety, declined in the respect for the parents, the elderly, the ancestors, the superior, and ultimately the State. The notion of filial piety finds particular application in the domain of the political relationship between the citizen and the sovereign (Bell & Ham 2003). It follows that the State is constructed as a superseding, almost paternal entity. The image of Mao Zhedong in museums (notably in the Museum of the Revolution, the Military Museum and the National Art Museum, in Beijing, and the Site of the First Congress of the Communist Party, in Shanghai) is deeply imprinted by these principles. More broadly Confucianism has significantly contributed to shape Chinese attitudes towards the past and its material manifestations by emphasizing the importance of remembrance (cfr Zhang 2003), valuing the respect for elderly and the ancestors, and the need to learn moral lessons from the mistakes of the past.

In terms of aesthetics, contemporary Chinese museums appear fully involved in a process of redefinition of “Chinese aesthetics”. The ideological transition from Communist ideology to cultural nationalism initiated in the early 1990s has found expression in museum displays in a gradual distancing from Marxist-Leninist approaches to history and the turn to the sublimation of the aesthetics of cultural relics. In contemporary exhibitions, the most salient artefacts illustrating Chinese national history are being presented through aestheticizing display techniques that invite a contemplative gaze, emphasise the formal characteristics of objects thus ultimately celebrating, and in the process canonizing, a “Chinese national style” (Varutti 2010a).

Creating a “Modern” Nation

At the Museum of the city of Oslo, historical artefacts, landscape paintings, urban miniature models, dioramas and historical photographic material celebrate the metamorphosis of Christiania from a large village into a capital over the course of the 19th century. The establishment of “national” institutions – such as the Royal Palace, the University, the Stock Exchange, the Theatre, the Bank of Norway, and the national transport, telecommunication and postal services – together with demographic increase, social stratification, urban development and a thriving economy, are the elements supporting the discourse on the modernity of the nation in the making. Similarly, at the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History the visitor can walk in a reconstructed 19th century bank office in Christiania. The exhibition, financed by DnB NOR, Norway's largest financial services group, retraces the development of the banking system in Norway in parallel with the making of the Norwegian nation. In a similar vein, the Museum of the City of Oslo deploys a series of dioramas reconstructing in fine detail housing interiors from the early 19th century to today. Interior decoration becomes here an index of the transformation of the urban landscape and living units (through the appearance of...
concrete housing blocks), and of families’ customs and lifestyles. Similarly, the reform of the school system and the institution of a penitentiary are presented as salient facets of the modernization of Norwegian society in the Museum of the City of Oslo. Interestingly, the transformation of Norwegian society into a multicultural society is also perceived as a sign of the times, as exemplified by a diorama entitled *City Landscape* (Byskap) displaying a multicultural crowd in a central square in Oslo, and chosen to close the permanent exhibition about the history of city at the Museum of the City of Oslo.

Writing about Sweden, Peter Aronsson (2010: 42) notes that “the absence of a single, central narrator reinforces the contemporary multicultural discourse of equal individual and historical value”. It could be argued that, similarly, in Norway the absence of a single, clearly defined and powerful narrative of the nation leaves room for more open definitions of what constitutes the Norwegian national heritage and national identity, leading to the development of museum national narratives that take into account recent phenomena of migration, mobility and cultural hybridity. This is ultimately conducive to a flexible, open-ended definition of the profiles of the national body, in line with the multicultural complexity of contemporary Norway.

Conversely, in Chinese museums the multicultural character of China’s citizenry – including a large Han Chinese majority and 55 ethnic minority groups – is framed as a “remnant of the past” due to fade out as Chinese society “modernizes” (Varutti 2010b). The main narratives of modernity of the Chinese nation unfolded by museum displays are linked to the celebration of the accomplishments of the Han Chinese majority, with a special emphasis on the achievements of the Communist government since its establishment in 1949. For instance, the Museum of Public Security in Shanghai depicts the history of the police service, its social function and the moral values that inform it. The efficiency of the police service is presented as the condition to build a safe, modern society based on the rule of law. The Bank Museum in Shanghai, illustrating the development of financial activities in China, provides another example of how a public service may be inscribed in narratives about the modernity of the Chinese nation. The images reproduced on the banknotes are particularly revelatory of the narratives of progress disseminated by the Communist Party. Depicting workers and peasants labouring for the nation, banknote images celebrate national achievements in the domains of mechanization, technology, scientific research etc. In the same vein, the Post Museum in Shanghai presents the development of the postal and telecommunication services as tokens of the country’s modernity.

Modernisation is then celebrated in the national narratives of both Norway and China. Indeed, with the exception of multiculturalism, museum displays of the nation in Norway and China emphasise similar aspects of modernization, such as increased efficiency of public services and expansion of the possibilities of
production and consumption. However, in the two instances modernization is linked to different acting forces: in Norway, it is presented as a civic-national project, whereas in China the narratives put more emphasis on the role of the state in the modernization of the country. These examples show how modernity, understood as an intellectual tool that helps to integrate innovation and make sense of social change, can be variously framed in museum narratives to support different kinds of nation-building projects.

Conclusions

Stephan Berger and the research group working on the project *Representations of the Past: The Writing of National Histories in Europe* have authoritatively documented the parallels that can be traced among European countries in the uses of the past for nation-building purposes. In line with Berger’s (2007) opening of the analysis to a global perspective, this paper has extended the comparative methodology further, to include a non-European country, such as China. The focus of the analysis was narrowed to museum representations of the nation and the examples from China were used to highlight specificities and generalizable features of national narratives in the museums of Norway. The analysis of museum representations of national past in Norway and China suggests that if national pasts are obviously unique to the historical trajectories of each country, their museum renditions point at a set of intriguing analogies in structures and strategies of historical representation. In Norway, as in China, national narratives of the past present what Anthony Smith (2004: 227) defined as the three requisites of a past that is useful to nation-building processes: authenticity, inspiration, and the capacity for reinterpretation. Museums play a key role in this respect, as displays contribute to validate the authenticity of national mythologies, to amplify and renew their inspirational potential, and to constantly reinterpret, reframe and make anew the past to fulfil present needs.

Museum displays of the nation in Norway convey a range of national mythologies, including the romantic folklorized rural past, the idealized relation with Nature, Vikings’ heritage, and the salvaging role of Christianity. This suggests that national narratives are not monolithic, but segmented and composite. In China too, museum displays of the nation unfold segmented national narratives – at times these even underpin different and incongruous perspectives on the nation. In both countries, despite a stress on historical continuity, the selective amnesia applied by museums to specific historical periods and events reveals historical hiatuses and discontinuities, whilst also casting light on the engineering of collective memory at work in displays. In the museums of both Norway and China, national narratives of the past find their counterpart in narratives of modernity. In both instances, modernity is formulated in terms of the (mostly technological) modernity of national structures and services.
In sum, coherence, continuity, longevity, civilisation and modernity emerge as the foundational endowments of the nation. In particular, these may be understood as structural components of national narratives in the museums of both Norway and China – significantly, both newly established nations in need to ground their present legitimacy in a long, uninterrupted and glorious past. In both Norway and China museums (and all the more national museums) appear to have developed a comparable répertoire of concepts, symbols, metaphors, images, narrative modes and visual strategies that are systematically used in representations of the nation. These elements are the building blocks of national master narratives, understood in the sense of Krijn Thijis (2008: 69ff) that is, as systems of abstract structures which are variously combined in narrative templates, which are then “filled” with specific historical narratives. Such structural analogies between Norway and China lend support to the hypothesis that an international canon is in place for the representation of the nation in museums. This does not, however, affect the contents of representations and narratives, which are context dependent and bound to specific national features (modes of nation-building, political ideology, current socio-economic context etc.). This discrepancy between structures and content reveals how an established set of modes of representation of the nation in museums is variously deployed in the framework of different political agendas. Whilst no country is so cohesive as to do without the unifying and legitimizing power of master narratives of the past, the perceived need to do so, and the strategies to implement it may vary significantly from a country to another. Analogies and divergences in these processes are valuable indicators of broader historical and global dynamics of social and political change. In particular, detailing and qualifying differences and analogies in museum representations of the nation in a cross-country perspective opens the ground of enquiry to new questions. What historical and contemporary political, social and cultural factors determine convergences and divergences in the master narratives developed by different nations? If an international canon for the museum representation of the nation exists, how can this be defined? What kind of museological and nationalistic considerations inform it? How did it come into being, through which historical processes? Answering these questions bears the potential to lead to more refined understandings of the roles that museums play in contemporary societies, the various ways in which similar roles are fulfilled, their historical roots and future implications.
Based at the School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester (UK), Marzia Varutti has conducted research on museums in China, Taiwan and Norway. Dr Varutti's research interests focus on the issues of cultural representation in European museums and the formulation of narratives of ethnic, national and European identity. In East-Asia, her research focuses on collaborative projects between museums and indigenous groups and the exploration of indigenous epistemologies of the museum.

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Notes
1 Although the concept of folk lied at the core of Norwegian nationalism, the concept initially implied a reference to “the Norwegian people” as opposed to the State (Aronsson et al. 2008: 258).
3 The exhibition We won the land opened in 1994, when the city of Lillehammer hosted the Winter Olympic Games. Maihaugen Museum website: http://www.maihaugen.no/en/. A multimedia presentation of the main sections of the exhibition is available here: http://www.randistoraas.no/eng/index.php?Side=1&counter=2. I wish to thank Dr. Line Esborg, at the Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS), University of Oslo, for the insights she provided about this exhibition in occasion of a seminar presentation she gave at the IKOS in November 2009.
5 Site of the First Congress of the Communist Party, Shanghai. Last visited in April 2006.
6 All quotations in this paragraph are from exhibition panels at the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History. Last visited, January 2010.
7 In the winter 2009-10, the Museum of the City of Oslo hosted the temporary exhibition In the spotlight. The theatre history of Oslo and its performing arts. The exhibition explored the development of theatre performances in Norway as part of the nation-building process – from the creation of the Christiania Norwegian Theatre in 1854 devoted to the presentation of Norwegian plays in the new national language (the new Norwegian based on rural dialects), up to contemporary performances revisiting classics such as Ibsen in a cross-cultural, creative fresh perspectives.
8 See http://www.uni-leipzig.de/zhsesf/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1
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Whose Raoul Wallenberg is it?  
The Man and the Myth: Between Memory, History and Popularity  

By Tanja Schult

Abstract

Raoul Wallenberg is widely remembered for his humanitarian activity on behalf of the Hungarian Jews in Budapest at the end of World War II, and is known as the Swedish diplomat who disappeared into the Soviet Gulag in 1945. While he successfully combated Nazi racial extermination politics, he fell victim to Stalinist communism – yet another barbaric, totalitarian regime of the 20th century.

Given Wallenberg’s biography, his mission and his unresolved fate it is no wonder that Wallenberg became a figure of mythic dimensions. It is the mixture of heroics and victimhood, as well as the seemingly endless potential of possible adaptations that secures this historic figure and his mythic after-narratives its longevity. While it is without doubt the man behind the myth who deserves credit – first the man’s realness gives the myth credibility – it is the myth that secures the man’s popularity. The man and his myth depend on each other.

In this article, I will give an overview of how Wallenberg was perceived and described by survivors, in popular scholarly literature, how he has been researched by historians, and how he has been presented in different media. It will become apparent that the narrators have sought to satisfy different needs, e.g. psychological, political, and commercial ones. The narrators’ intention and attitude towards the historic person and the myth which surrounds him is of primary importance. I will show how different approaches to, and uses of, the myth exist side by side and nourish one another. And yet they can all simultaneously claim existence in their own right. By providing examples from different times and places, I like to illustrate that the popular images of Wallenberg are far less one-sided, stereotypical and homogeneous than they are often portrayed and hope to draw attention to the great potential that the Wallenberg narrative has today, as his 100th anniversary approaches in 2012.

Keywords: Raoul Wallenberg, hero, myth, Holocaust memory, popular memory culture, uses of history.
Introduction

Raoul Wallenberg was born in 1912 into the prominent Wallenberg family, which for generations had played an important role in Sweden’s economic, political and cultural life. Wallenberg studied architecture at Ann Arbor, Michigan, but was expected to complete his education with formal training as a businessman. He spent months abroad in South Africa and Palestine after which, thanks to his godfather Jacob Wallenberg, he acquired a position at a food-trading enterprise in Stockholm. At the recommendation of his boss Kálmán Lauer, a native Hungarian Jew, Wallenberg was sent to Budapest by the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs in 1944. He was assigned to help the overworked members of the Swedish Legation in their rescue mission on behalf of the Hungarian Jews. The mission had been initiated by the American War Refugee Board, which also funded the undertaking together with JOINT. When Wallenberg came to Budapest, the majority of the Hungarian Jews had however already been deported; most of them were killed in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Wallenberg came just a few days after Regent Miklós Horthy had suspended the deportations.

Wallenberg and the other members of the Swedish Legation did their utmost to help the remaining Jews of Budapest. Following the Arrow Cross Coup on the 15th of October 1944 the situation became chaotic, and it became increasingly anarchic as the Red Army closed in on the city. Due to the combined rescue missions of the Red Cross, the Jewish resistance groups, and the neutral legations, and, finally, by mere virtue of the war nearing its end, around 120 000 Jews survived the Holocaust in Budapest. This was Europe’s largest Jewish community after the war.

The trained architect and businessman Raoul Wallenberg was no career diplomat when he joined the humanitarian rescue mission. During his six months in Budapest, he distinguished himself from the other accredited diplomats through his unconventional methods, and in popular memory he became a symbol for the success of the combined rescue actions. In contrast to his colleagues, Wallenberg was arrested (for unknown reasons) and spent the rest of his life in Soviet captivity. What exactly happened to Wallenberg after his imprisonment remains unknown until this day. Naturally, his tragic and unresolved fate had significant impact on how posterity remembered this rescuer. It also determined how, from an early state, myth-making – including simplifications, exaggerations and conspiracy theories – became part of the Wallenberg story.

Moreover it is fascinating that not only Wallenberg’s tragic fate but also his life, from its very beginning, provides many components that allow his story to be told in the form of a hero’s tale (Cp. Schult 2009: 51–68). The basic narrative is ideal for retelling. Like many heroes, this protagonist’s origin provides the stuff of mythic narratives. Before his son was even born, Raoul’s father died from cancer
at the age of 23, leaving a young widowed mother behind. Wallenberg himself was born on a Sunday with a caul about his head, something which in popular belief is considered a sign of luck; an omen that the child is distinguished by greatness of mind and even equipped with supernatural powers.² It is this kind of dialectic narrative, promising the potential of the Wallenberg story to provide either a tragic story or a heroic one – or, indeed, both at once – which makes it so suitable for re-telling. In each case, the narrative is told as a hero’s story with characteristic qualities; the call to adventure brings Wallenberg to Budapest, the challenge, especially after the Arrow Cross Coup, allows him to become a legend, and the tragic, unsettled fate secures an eternal life through narrative.

Consequently, it is no wonder that Wallenberg became a figure of such mythic dimensions. His biography, his mission and his unresolved fate, along with the fact that his own nation Sweden did not initially claim him exclusively for its own national cultural memory, makes this cosmopolite especially suitable for generalizations and commemorative uses in countries worldwide. The basic narrative is at once complex and flexible. Simplified, we can summarize its dual character by presenting Wallenberg as someone who successfully combated Nazi racial extermination politics, but fell victim to Stalinist communism – that other barbaric, totalitarian regime of the 20th century. It is this mixture of heroics and victimhood, as well as the seemingly endless potential of possible adaptations that secures this myth’s longevity – not only during the Cold War or when the memory of the Holocaust receives attention, but because it is adaptable to different needs. This is something that this article aims to demonstrate.

Man and Myth

When I refer to the Wallenberg epic I am following Aleida Assmann’s analysis of how narratives become myths in collective memory. These myths’ most important characteristic is their power to convince and affect. These myths are not bound to specific historic conditions, but are timeless narratives that are meant to be told and retold from one generation to the next. Ultimately, they are intended to offer orientation and moral guidance (Cp Assmann 2006: 40). Thus in my definition of myth in the context of Raoul Wallenberg and the posthumous images created of him, the concept is basically a symbolic narrative of a person who is considered extraordinary and whose narrative is seen to provide answers to timeless questions that are relevant in every human life.3

In my approach I follow Claude Lévi-Strauss, who underlined the importance of myths for satisfying needs which cannot find their answers in science or academic research (Lévi-Strauss 1978). Like Lévi-Strauss, I argue that we therefore must take myths seriously because they convey something important. Even myths established around a historic person are significant. Although they presumably most often are not reliable accounts of how in our case Raoul Wallenberg acted in Budapest, they certainly tell us something about the symbolic function his narrative has played in the period following his death. By thus taking the myths that have been established around a historic person seriously, it follows that my approach is anthropological in nature, attempting as it does to better understand humankind and its fascination with, and attraction to, mythic tales (Schlesier 1985: 10–11).

Without doubt, Raoul Wallenberg was a historic figure, not a hero of mythology. However, today the Wallenberg narrative consists of both historical facts as well as mythical dimensions – and these components are hard to separate. Given this, one way to tell the Wallenberg story is to present the secured facts of his life along with the more mythical narratives established around the man and his mission, and the images posterity has created of him. This is what we did in the exhibition RaoulWallenbergBilder (RaoulWallenbergImages), which I curated for The Swedish National Archive of Recorded Sound and Moving Images (today operating under the National Library of Sweden) in the spring of 2008. The many existing images of Wallenberg, as mediated by newscasts, documentaries, interviews, books, theatre plays, musicals, operas, symphonies, film and fiction were presented side by side, and also interwoven with each other. Our attempt was characterized by the insight, or belief, that the Raoul Wallenberg story today consists of this kind of patchwork of historic facts and mythical narratives.

Without doubt, it is the man behind the myth who deserves credit. And it is that man’s realness which gives the myth credibility. But it is the myth that secures the man’s popularity. The man and his myth depend on each other. In this article, I will give an overview of how Wallenberg was perceived and described by survi-
vors, in popular scholarly literature, how he has been researched by historians, and how he has been presented in different media. It will become apparent that the narrators have sought to satisfy different needs, e.g. psychological, political, and commercial ones. The narrators’ attitude towards the historic person and the myth which surrounds him is of primary importance, along with the intention of the storyteller’s narrative. I will show how different approaches to, and uses of, the myth exist side by side and nourish one another. And yet they can all simultaneously claim existence in their own right. By providing examples from different times and places, I hope to draw attention to the great potential that the Raoul Wallenberg narrative has today, as his 100th anniversary approaches in 2012.

**Raoul Wallenberg in the Memory of Survivors**

As early as 1945, Budapest survivors wanted to honour the man who they regarded as a symbol of their successful rescue. After the war, the survivors formulated three goals they wanted to achieve: the naming of a street in Budapest after Wallenberg, the erection of a monument, and the publishing of a book. Already in 1945, the first goal was achieved: the former Phönix utca (street), close to the former International ghetto where the Swedish safe-houses were located, was renamed Wallenberg utca (and in 1946 Raoul Wallenberg utca) (Schult 2009: 87).

In 1948, the book by Hungarian journalist and Holocaust scholar Jenő Lévai, *Raoul Wallenberg: His Remarkable Life, Heroic Battles and the Secret of his Mysterious Disappearance*, was published. Lévai himself was a Holocaust survivor. Lévai’s book was one of the earliest publications on the subject, and it was based on official and private documents, testimonies and interviews. It was first published in Hungarian, a slightly shorter version following in Swedish the same year. The English translation however, verbatim to the Hungarian original, did not appear until 1989 (Lévai 1989). Significantly, this book – commissioned by the Hungarian survivors – had a lasting impact on how Wallenberg was commemorated, as well as on how history was written. Every historian who so far has researched Wallenberg – from Randolph L. Braham, commonly regarded as the leading expert on the Hungarian Holocaust, to Paul A. Levine in the most recently published Wallenberg study from 2010 – refer to Lévai (Schult 2009: 33).

The survivors managed also to see to it that a monument was created, but on the day of its planned inauguration it was retracted. The approaching Cold War put a stop to this early attempt to honour Raoul Wallenberg in public.

In the three following decades Wallenberg was not entirely forgotten, but it was not until the late 1970s and especially the 1980s that the Wallenberg case received attention in several countries throughout the world. This was not least due to emerging witness reports from the late 1970s claiming that Wallenberg was still alive. In the wake of this, survivors became more and more active. Depending on in which country they lived, some survivors had long believed that Wallenberg
was dead, some thought he was safe at home, others who were living behind the iron curtain sensed it a delicate subject and did not inquire about it. Like most Holocaust survivors, especially those who fled their native home countries, these people had established a new life and somehow managed to displace their experiences of World War II. Since the 1980s however, predominately starting in the USA, the memory of Wallenberg has received uninterrupted attention until today. It was in the 1980s that the topic gained the attention of political leaders also in countries outside Sweden. Countless articles and books were written and the first permanent memorials were built.

Street sign in Trenton, New Jersey, USA © Tanja Schult.

Jewish survivors played an important role in this development, partially because it was their narratives upon which many journalists constructed their Wallenberg stories, partially also because they actively began mobilising political and public awareness. Given that many survivors had fled after the Hungarian uprising in 1956 to a series of different countries, their dispersal contributed to the Wallenberg case receiving attention in different parts of the world. This is also a reason why Wallenberg received hero-status in so many different national contexts.

Undoubtedly, hero-worship became a part of the Wallenberg story from a very early stage. During the weeks that followed the Arrow Cross Coup in October 1944, when the situation for the Jews worsened, Wallenberg was much more visible in the streets than other diplomats. These weeks became the “Heroic Period” which turned Wallenberg into “a legendary figure” (Yahil 1983: 36). This hero-status was perceived and expressed by survivors almost directly after the war, as
illustrated by the quote below. It is taken from the prologue to a gala concert in memory of Wallenberg which took place in Budapest as early as June 26, 1946. The text was written by Paul Forgács, the son of one of Wallenberg’s closest co-rescuers (Schult 2009: 57).

He was a wandering knight, pure and unafraid, a reincarnation of the dragon-killer of old who unhesitatingly went to battle for superhuman ideals, the true, irreproachable idealist. … He was a crusade but of a new kind, for he loved everyone. He feared danger but despised it and overcame his fear because he wanted to defeat danger. He was more of a hero than the heroes of old, more like a worthy successor to the apostles. He did good for the sake of good … because he considered it his duty to fight for someone else’s cause, fight for an idea, which he possibly wasn’t aware of but only felt in his heart. An idea which perhaps was embodied in only one person in the whole city, Raoul Wallenberg (Forgács 1946).

Interestingly, the memories retold during the 1980s in various documentaries do not differ much from the early depictions of Wallenberg from the immediate post-war years. Despite more than 30 years of near silence in between the first witness reports and those from the 1980s, we find the same ingredients in the narratives.

It is striking that the survivors clearly are aware that his or her story sounds rather unlikely, almost like a fairy-tale. He or she confirms that Wallenberg encountered high expectations – rumours of his success preceding his actual achievements – but in the most dangerous situation, Wallenberg always prevailed. The survivors’ stories emphasise that there was very little to hold on to during the fall of 1944 and that Wallenberg – as a symbol and as the real man – became the straw they grasped for. This act of faith was not in vain. So while the survivors show an awareness of the unlikeliness of the story they are relating, and they indeed also display scepticism towards an over-dimensioned hero-story, they can nonetheless not resist believing in the power of this individual, given their own rescue and the survival of their loved ones. The reputation of Wallenberg’s actions, which may actually have been less numerous or glorious than thought, only grew over time. And even Holocaust survivors who later have learned that a family member was killed despite having a Schutzpass, remain loyal to Wallenberg. The aura of trust that Raoul Wallenberg invoked among many survivors is remarkable (Schult 2009: 63).

Raoul Wallenberg is described by survivors and colleagues alike as someone who was inventive, charismatic, linguistically talented, intelligent and well-organized, and above all as someone with a great capacity for negotiation. Despite being described as a cultivated person, as shy or even weak, he seemed at the same time also to have had a natural authority; people obeyed him. Depending on their age and position, some experienced him as a messiah – as a divine character – while others as arrogant but nonetheless a revelation. However, they were all struck by the fact that he had come from secure Sweden to war-time Budapest to work for their survival.
Being aware of the problems of oral history, I am not summarising the survivors’ descriptions so as to provide the “real” or “true” portrait of Wallenberg. It is not the question here if these testimonies are exaggerated or untrustworthy, but rather it is important to realize that these narratives in themselves fulfilled particular needs. Moreover these narratives, which rested on survivors’ memories, had an enormous impact on the way that the Wallenberg story was retold by journalists, in documentaries, films and exhibitions. To a great extent, these survivors’ memories shaped the basic narrative.

Two further aspects are relevant here. First of all, those who survived as children are still alive and continue to be personally involved in the Wallenberg case. They predominately aspire to two goals: to learn the truth about Wallenberg’s fate and, because of their age, to secure that his memory will be kept alive even after they have passed away. A second point that should be made about the survivors’ narratives is that despite the fact that Wallenberg occupies an exclusive place in survivors’ memory, the concern sometimes expressed that the symbolic status of Wallenberg overshadows the efforts of all the other rescuers active in Budapest 1944 is not particularly well-grounded. Those who have been active in keeping Wallenberg’s memory alive have most often also contributed to the commemoration of other rescuers too, such as Wallenberg’s co-helpers, or other diplomats from neutral legations or the Vatican.9 The interest that the myth of Wallenberg attracts may well call for studies of the man himself as well as of other rescuers, their antagonists, or the Holocaust more generally.
The impact that the survivors’ memories had on how posterity remembers Wallenberg cannot be underestimated. It would therefore be possible to argue that Wallenberg belongs to the survivors, if not for any other reason than that he can only belong to us because of them – due to their experiences and thanks to their testimonies and memoirs. Wallenberg belongs to us because these people survived and conveyed what had happened to them. Although we may not know if it really was Wallenberg who in all the individual cases was responsible for a rescue, we must acknowledge that the survivors themselves consider Raoul Wallenberg to be directly or indirectly responsible for it. Their judgement gained importance and authority precisely because of their survival. The role they understood him to have played, whether fact or fiction, and the symbol he became, had an enormous impact on their lives and on the narratives they told, and so on the image attributed to Raoul Wallenberg in collective memory.

**Raoul Wallenberg in Popular Literature**

The survivor’s memories became important for the early authors who wrote about Wallenberg. Many of these, such as John Bierman, Harvey Rosenfeld and Elenore Lester, were British or American journalists. They based their books on the survivors’ narratives. Historian Paul A. Levine is highly critical of these authors, whom he calls “hagiographers” throughout his book from 2010. However, as I argued in my dissertation (Schult 2009: 41ff), many have misunderstood these, who I prefer to call early “authors of popular scholarly literature”. A fair assessment of these authors demands that we not only understand that they were no academic scholars, but also that they did not have any adequate historic studies to rely on. Not even Jenő Lévai’s book was translated into English, and most of them were unable to read Hungarian or Swedish.

Equally important is the fact that due to the witness reports from the late 1970s, these authors seriously believed that Wallenberg might be alive, and understood their books as instruments for the raising of public and political awareness. They hoped this would contribute to Wallenberg’s release, or at least to a clarification of his fate. It was not their intention to create a myth around Wallenberg or, as hagiographers do, write a biography over a saint. They wanted to present the facts to which they had access at the time. Given their goal – the rescue of a former rescuer – it is hardly surprising that they took the opportunity to tell Wallenberg’s story in the style of a hero’s tale. Even exaggerations and oversimplifications demand contextualization.

Anyone who carefully reads this popular literature discovers that, in contrast to hagiographers, these books do not deliberately include only good things about Wallenberg. Nevertheless, there indeed is a similarity between popular historical literature about Wallenberg and the early storytelling styles of the Middle Ages. Such stories were meant to celebrate outstanding people so that the community
could “participate in their magic”. These storytellers, not unlike early Wallenberg biographers such as Philipp or Lévai – or later works by his former colleagues and journalists such as Berg, Anger, Lester or Bierman – attempted to “give an authentic account of the story (at least as it was assumed to be)” while ensuring “that none of the power of the hero would be lost.” (Bloomfield 1975: 30) Their accounts could at times be critical or reveal the protagonist’s negative sides or failures, as it made their narratives more credible. In their accounts, Lévai, Anger, and Berg, like the medieval storytellers, displayed both “a remarkable honesty and a slightly ambiguous attitude towards the hero,” (Ibid.) which made their stories seem all the more authentic. However, that which was most important for these storytellers was to relate the magic of heroes, by mere virtue of them having lived. They were not heroes of legend, but had actually existed. It was important to the authors of these stories that the power of the hero was maintained, and that the audience was inspired by the example that the hero set (Schult 2009: 46ff).

The books by these early authors doubtlessly had significant impact on Wallenberg commemorations. Each new book was reviewed and discussed at length (not only in Swedish newspapers) and in turn they often functioned as starting points for other forms of commemoration. For instance, it was Frederick E. Werbell’s and Thurston B. Clarke’s Lost hero: The Mystery of Raoul Wallenberg (written in 1982) that the popular American TV-series Wallenberg – A Hero's Story from 1985 was based on. And it was the portrait of Wallenberg on the cover of John Bierman's Righteous Gentile, on display in a bookstore in New York in 1983, that moved sculptor Lotte Stavisky so much that she researched Wallenberg extensively in libraries and bookstores before executing a bust in admiration of the man. The bust itself became a “transmitter” of the Wallenberg story. Nane Annan, together with her husband Kofi Annan, saw it at an exhibition in 1984. It was consequently presented to Nane Annan as a gift; a gift which she, in her turn, passed on to her mother Nina Lagergren – Raoul Wallenberg's sister – thereby spreading the news of Wallenberg’s popularity in the US (and predominately in New York). Perhaps more importantly, since 1987 the bust is on public display in the New York Public Library, which has a collection of copies of Wallenberg-related documents. Since 1987, a copy of the original mold is also presented to the winner of the The Raoul Wallenberg Hero For Our Time Award and The Raoul Wallenberg Civic Courage Award given by The Raoul Wallenberg Committee of the United States of America (Schult 2009: 311). These two examples illustrate how influential these popular scholarly books were for Wallenberg commemorations and the collective memory to which they contributed.
Raoul Wallenberg in Historiography

In contrast to the heroes of mythology, Raoul Wallenberg was a historic figure, who turned out to be a real-life hero (Cp Levine 2004). Wallenberg was not the saint of a legend from a magical time long ago, but lived and acted in a time that still affects our own. Raoul Wallenberg’s realness is a most essential component to this hero story. In the emergence of Wallenberg’s story, the classic concept of the hero becomes valid again simply because this man really existed. Today Wallenberg serves as an example for moral guidance in contemporary pluralistic societies in several ways and acts as a means to gauge social responsibility and good leadership (Schult 2009: 47).

Historians may not know exactly how many people Wallenberg saved in Hungary; they may question, on factual grounds, his being credited with the rescue of 100 000 Jews in Budapest. Based on what we know today however, there is no doubt that Wallenberg took the decision to leave his secure homeland to go to Budapest during World War II, or that he there contributed to saving lives and was captured by the Soviets. His fate too, it is agreed, remains unknown.

At the time of writing it seems rather unlikely that anyone in the future will reveal such information about Wallenberg which would imply that his story has to be completely rewritten. And even if it is doubtful that academic studies, however valuable they may be, are suitable to replace the mythic narrative, more research is nevertheless needed and eagerly anticipated. Despite the dozens of books and thousands of articles already existing, there is indeed still much research left to do; on Wallenberg’s upbringing, his years in the United States, his business years in Stockholm between 1938–44, and, of course, especially his time in Budapest and in Soviet captivity.

The approaching centenary in 2012 of Wallenberg’s birthday seems to have accelerated developments in this field. Several researchers are currently working to shed new light on Wallenberg, his mission and his fate, approaching their subject from a series of different angles. This is promising. Given that there as yet exists no comprehensive scholarly biography of Wallenberg, it is welcomed that the two researchers Ingrid Carlberg and Bengt Jangfeldt are presently working on this challenge. Two other scholars, Géllert Kovacs and Georg Sessler, are investigating Wallenberg’s period in Budapest. Kovacs focuses mainly on Wallenberg’s social network, thereby highlighting the role that other helpers played in the operation. Sessler investigates how the members of the Swedish Legation – together with the Red Cross and a number of individuals – could be so successful. He does so by embedding their actions in the distinctiveness of the Hungarian context as well as by exploring the role of Wallenberg’s superior Kálmán Lauer in more detail. Susanne Berger, one of the consultants to the Swedish-Russian Working Group on the fate of Raoul Wallenberg, continues the research on Wallenberg’s time in prison by studying Russian Archives (Berger 2010). Furthermore, she is
working on a book in which she explores the question why the Wallenberg case could not be solved during the last 65 years.

Given our in many ways incomplete knowledge of Wallenberg it would be exciting and important to learn more about the man behind the myth – even if such increased knowledge might dispel some of the magic. So again we have to ask the rhetorical question: whose Wallenberg is it, if not the historians’? Have they not only the right but also the obligation to research this historical figure and retell his story based on existing documents?

According to historian Paul A. Levine, it is in fact the “trained historian” who is most suitable to mediate the moral value of Wallenberg to society. In his eyes, it is the historian who “should write and interpret Wallenberg’s place in Holocaust history and memory, and in social memory more broadly.” (Levine 2010: 20) Be this as it may, given the fact that there during all these years there simply did not exist a scholarly historic study by a scholarly trained historian which focused on the context in which Wallenberg was active, Levine’s statement seems somehow dispensable.

Indeed, the two most recent studies on Wallenberg’s time in Budapest, the above mentioned Raoul Wallenberg in Budapest. Myth, History and Holocaust (2010) by Levine himself and Attila Lajos’ Hjälten och offren. Raoul Wallenberg och judarna i Budapest (The Hero and the victims. Raoul Wallenberg and the Jews of Budapest) (2004) do in fact not prove that the trained historian is the most suited for mediating Wallenberg to society. Rather, these works demonstrate the predominance of the myth even in the work of academic historians. Both authors wish to contextualize Wallenberg and to analyze his role in relation to the preconditions of Budapest of 1944–45. Both scholars locate and analyze relevant sources which are suited to provide a more detailed picture of the rescue mission during World War II; Lajos using documents found in Hungarian archives, and Levine documents from the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. So for sure, they both have made important contributions to our knowledge of Wallenberg.

However, both studies have their difficulties, for different reasons (Cp reviews by Zander 2006; Wahlbäck 2007; Carlberg 2010; Schult 2010a and 2010b on which the following passages are based). For my line of argument, it is most important to understand that the myth’s predominance acted as a hindrance to these historians in their ambition to present persuasive studies based on factual arguments and written documents. When it comes to identifying the man behind the myth, and attempting to once and for all identify what Wallenberg actually did or did not do in Budapest, it seems that the hero-concept causes problems. The concept is quite helpful when studying the after-images created around Wallenberg, but apparently rather misleading when one wants to analyze what the historic Wallenberg did or could do in the specific historic context.

Lajos’ study is influenced by a Christian martyr-hero image which leads to a rather unfair devaluation of Wallenberg and which stands in contrast to the much
more beneficial narrative which in fact can be found implicitly in Lajos’ narrative and in the facts presented in his footnotes. Apparently Wallenberg, the businessman from an upper-class family with unconventional methods and a love of wining and dining, is in Lajos’ eyes not worthy of being regarded a hero. As becomes apparent, in his understanding a hero should rather resemble a Saint Francis of Assisi; a saint who gave up a life of luxury to serve God in austere poverty. It is possible to accuse Wallenberg of all kinds of things depending on one’s own perception of what makes a hero, but it is difficult to come to a nuanced analysis of the historic person when one is not even aware of what kind of hero-understanding one’s own analysis is based upon.

Levine too finds the prominent role that Wallenberg occupies in popular memory problematic. However, as a result of his eagerness to dispel the exaggerations and oversimplifications of the Wallenberg myth, he ends up in a self-contradictory line of argument – a tendency which is characteristic of his study as a whole. As a result Wallenberg’s integrity is questioned, even if this is not Levine’s intention; for paradoxically this happens in direct opposition to his stated intention not to minimize Wallenberg’s deeds. This seems to be due to his own moral expectations on both the historian and the historic hero. Levine cannot free himself from the myths, the reason seemingly being that he is aware that also the hero of history needs mediation. Levine wants to retain Wallenberg as a hero, but according to him, Wallenberg is a misunderstood hero whose “acknowledged moral value” could have a much stronger effect on society if his deeds are contextualized and understood correctly. According to the latter, one is willing to concede Levine a point.

From a historian’s perspective it must of course be legitimate, even perhaps a responsibility, to separate the historic person from the myth, and to come closer to the man behind it. For the historian it is a valid question where history ends and myth begins (following Lévi-Strauss: 38). However, over the last 65 years the Wallenberg myth has become established, and this has happened without – or maybe because – there was no academic historic study for it to relate to. The dilemma that a historian has to face today is the power of the myth, which as argued fulfils other needs than does the work of a historian. Whatever one thinks about the mythic narratives, they have today a given place in collective memory. What becomes anachronistic, especially in Levine’s book, is when the historian who explicitly seeks to refute myth ends up presenting Wallenberg in quite a similar fashion to the popular literature which he simultaneously criticizes. Indeed, to the reader familiar with the Wallenberg literature, Levine’s study rather confirms the established image of an extraordinary man who turned out to be a most suitable choice for the mission. So in a way, it is a mystery of its own why Levine distances himself from his own earlier articles (quoted at the beginning of this passage) where he presents Wallenberg as a “real-life hero”, in particular from the catalogue of the Wallenberg exhibition that the Jewish museum in Stockholm
organized in 2004 (Levine 2004; cp also Schult 2004a and 2004b). His articles in the catalogue are not even listed in the bibliography of his own book from 2010.

History as an academic discipline should be characterized by its openness. (Lévi-Strauss 1978: 40). But the predominance of such a myth as Wallenberg’s illustrates that it is not easy for any academic to approach the subject with a completely open mind. On top of that, the myth is also dangerous; seductive in the sense that anybody who succeeds in revealing what really happened to Raoul Wallenberg, or who could dispel crucial elements of the myth, will certainly gain attention worldwide.

Although unlikely, it is still possible that future research may show that the established image of the historic Raoul Wallenberg has to be revised. So far however, we can state that despite all the skepticism towards the hero concept, and despite its misuse in an indeed very unheroic 20th century,13 it may be equally possible to regard Raoul Wallenberg as an opportunity to retain the hero concept; a concept which apparently is still much wanted and needed in popular memory. As Lévi-Strauss formulated it, there is a “gap which exists in our mind to some extent between mythology and history” but, he continues, this gap “can probably be breached by studying histories which are conceived as not at all separated from but as a continuation of mythology” (Lévi-Strauss 1978: 43). If we realize that even the most critical historian ultimately holds on to Raoul Wallenberg as an ideal, not because of what he became in popular memory, but because of what he did in the historic circumstances in which he acted, we may understand that Wallenberg can act as a link between historians and a broader public, and show the way for a better understanding of mythical narratives based on historic men and women. Raoul Wallenberg is indeed one of the historical persons from a time in history that still reverberates in our day, in whom the classical hero concept once again becomes valid. Raoul Wallenberg offers an opportunity to hold on to the particularly misused category of the hero – even in democratic societies in a globalized age (Cp Schult 2007/2010).

Raoul Wallenberg Remix

Historians, survivors and authors of popular literature have contributed to the repository from which journalists, artists, curators, filmmakers, composers and playwrights draw when they construct their narratives. By doing so they contribute to the commemoration of Wallenberg. Sometimes they add new layers or facets to the Wallenberg epic, but first and foremost they nourish and keep the Wallenberg story alive.

As the following examples demonstrate, popular images of Wallenberg are far less one-sided, stereotypical and homogeneous than they are often portrayed. In fact, if they were not, the myth would hardly have the resilience to survive. Part of the success of a mythic tale is that it offers many possible variations, thus being
adaptable to questions relevant in society at a given time and place and to the requirements of the media in which the story is being retold. The various adaptations of the basic narrative depend first and foremost on the interpreter’s agenda.

The following examples would each deserve in-depth analyses, not least due to their media-specificity. However, this cannot be carried out here. The examples are foremost chosen to provide an idea of the diversity of the existing Wallenberg images and to illustrate some of the many possible interpretations and recent uses of the narrative. Although it is perhaps self-evident, it is still worth emphasising that artists, curators etc are driven by entirely different agendas than academics or documentary filmmakers. Even if they too at times conduct a great deal of research before they begin their work, they of course are not bound to academic scrutiny but have their artistic freedom. Rather, they are bound to their media and their public. So while they in many ways might be less confined to historic facts, they do have to reduce the story to what they regard as most essential. This is a challenge in and of itself.

Cover of the 2002 brochure of Michigan’s Holocaust Memorial Center.
(Raoul’s name is however misspelled)

Raoul Wallenberg has fascinated a growing public for more than 65 years. Today, he has indeed become a “role model of altruism and compassion”, as is stated on the cover of the 2002 brochure of Michigan’s Holocaust Memorial Center. The cover shows an image of Wallenberg along with one of Adolf Hitler, the “epitome of evil and destruction”. This example clearly demonstrates the status Wallenberg has been attributed with during the last six decades in popular imagination: he provides an example by being represented as the antagonist of evil itself. Wallen-
berg’s role as the representative of good is directly based on the perception that the Holocaust was a benchmark in history. The Holocaust is considered to be the ultimate crime committed by human beings, something that by the 1990s became a matter of consensus in most Western societies (Schult 2009: 73ff). Given the importance that Holocaust remembrance has today, it is no wonder that Wallenberg receives such attention.

However, even if the remembrance of the Holocaust in future were to be regarded less relevant – which at the time of writing seems rather unlikely – the Wallenberg story would nonetheless continue to be retold, albeit with a different focus. It is clear that the myth of this famous prisoner of the Cold War has already lived on after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989. Although the man himself did not survive Soviet communism, his unresolved fate assured that his myth would. So while the Wallenberg case for decades was synonymous with the fate of millions of victims of the Stalinist era, and served as a symbol for the Cold War, this changed to some extent after 1989.

“Wallenberg” today functions foremost as the archetype of the innocent political prisoner whose symbolic value remains salient. This becomes apparent in the play *Endgame in the Lubjanka (Endspiel in der Lubjanka)* from 2008, written by Austrian Ernst Pichler. The play will be performed in 2011/12 in the German-speaking theatre in Szekszárd, in a Swabian-populated part of Hungary. It is projected to subsequently be performed in Sweden. Pichler takes up several aspects of the Wallenberg story that during the years have received much attention; the Wallenberg family’s double role during the war (doing business both with Nazi-Germany and the Allies), its indifference towards Raoul Wallenberg, and particularly the Swedish government’s reluctant handling of the Wallenberg case (something which Wallenberg’s family, above all his mother and stepfather, were the repeated victims of). The playwright regards it his duty to remind us of all the unanswered questions that the Wallenberg case still raises, well aware that the answers would come too late for Wallenberg himself. The play’s central theme is that no enigma is so cryptic that time won’t reveal its resolution. But with its lack of answers, Wallenberg’s disappearance reminds us above all of the millions of people who share a similar fate. Still anchored in the context of the Soviet state prison system, the play has a more general message too. In Wallenberg the unknown political prisoner received a face and a prominent name. His fate represents the many unknown innocent political prisoners, whether of Soviet tyranny or of other dictatorships, whose names we do not even know.
Consequently, Wallenberg’s symbolic value is used to attract public attention to cases that display similarities to his. This has been so in the case of Dawit Isaak. Isaak is a Swedish-Eritrean journalist who has been kept without trial in isolation in an Eritrean prison since September 2001. Researcher Susanne Berger and journalist Arne Ruth, both of whom have been much engaged in the Wallenberg case over the years, have drawn parallels between the two prisoners in an article in 2009 (Berger & Ruth 2009). Isaak’s case has attracted considerable attention in the Swedish media, which has urged the government and the Swedish Ministry for
Foreign Affairs to be more active on Isaak’s behalf. At least, it has been argued, the government should go public with what it actually has been doing for Isaak. Berger and Ruth underlined the similarities between the cases of Wallenberg and Isaak, especially with regard to the (in)action of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. They revealed a discrepancy between programmatic words on the one hand, and an insufficient course of action on the other. The parallel between the two cases demonstrates that once again Swedish “quiet diplomacy” was very ineffective. The life of an individual, it seems, is not worth much despite all the assertions about the universality of the human rights (Cp. Berger & Borgoloni 2007). Most often cases regarding an individual citizen are first of all a matter of state sovereignty, only in exceptional cases do they become the subject of international trials. Thus even if the media – supposedly democracy’s “fourth estate” – dedicates substantial attention to them, the chances of placing an individual case on the international agenda are slim. Prior to Berger and Ruth, historian Mattias Hessérus had already pointed to the similarities between the two cases (Hessérus 2009). Also his article is a tragic reminder that the Wallenberg case seems to repeat itself in the case of Dawit Isaak. Hessérus’ focus lay on the media strategy and the relation between state power and the media. He concluded that the example of Raoul Wallenberg paradoxically shows both the growing influence of the media in the 20th century as well as the media’s limitations. While the media’s potential source of power is words, these remain ineffective if the people responsible for political action are passive, or refuse to communicate their own actions. While the media has not given up on Dawit Isaak and honours him regularly with many prizes – latest the **Golden Pen of Freedom Award** (DN 28/10 2010) – the wide public attention that the case has received does unfortunately neither seem to have benefited Isaak.15

Wallenberg’s unresolved fate has doubtlessly had significance for his continued societal presence. It has led to the case appearing on the political agenda time and time again. Interest in what really happened to him is still strong, and even the slightest bit of new evidence makes the headlines. The Swedish magazine *Fokus* for instance announced a “breakthrough in the Wallenberg case” on its cover in April 2010 (Bergman 2010). The interview with researcher Susanne Berger reveals that a change in attitude of the Russian authorities had been signalled – for the first time they stated that Wallenberg was possibly alive after 1947. But while the journalists gave the case attention, Russian and Swedish official quarters once again remained silent, and a resolution to the case – which had been announced in innumerable articles over the decades – was still out of sight.

The fate of Wallenberg tends to be used politically, and a closer investigation of the motives of the politicians and organizations referring to it would make an interesting study of its own. While Wallenberg’s fate seems to secure the myth’s longevity, it is still not the most crucial ingredient in this hero narrative. Most characteristic for the commemoration of Wallenberg is the way in which he is
regarded an ideal for moral guidance. Thus it is not because he suffered an undeserved fate, but because he contributed to the survival of the persecuted, that he most often is referred to.

This common interpretation of Wallenberg as a role model, however, does not mean that there is only one interpretation as to which aspect of the Wallenberg story that is most suitable for the mediation of Wallenberg as an example. If we take the monument genre, it becomes apparent that existing memorials illustrate the many faces of Raoul Wallenberg in popular imagination: as a classical hero, as the man of action, as a fighter, as a giant in terms of physical or intellectual strength. Some stress Wallenberg’s role as a Swedish diplomat, others depict Wallenberg as a victim, a prisoner, a hero without a grave, as a martyr. Several memorials focus on the legacy of Wallenberg’s mission, thereby expressing universal values such as freedom or the principle of hope. But Wallenberg is also honoured for being an unconventional hero, a trouble maker. What the focus is on depends on the interpreter’s choice and his or her interpretation of heroes; when it comes to monuments, this choice becomes all the more obvious as the genre by its very nature does not lend itself to expressing complex events (cp Schult 2009).

In contrast, the film medium allows decidedly more multifaceted portraits. At the same time, however, it too follows the imperatives of its own media specificity; film, for instance, has its own inherent dramaturgical logic. In the exhibition Raoul Wallenberg Images two cinematic versions of Wallenberg were showed in relation to each other: one provided by Richard Chamberlain in the American TV-series Wallenberg – A Hero’s Story from 1985;16 the other by Stellan Skarsgård in the Swedish-Hungarian co-production from 1990 (written and directed by Swedish filmmaker Kjell Grede) God afton, herr Wallenberg. En passionshistoria från verkligheten (the English title is simply: Good evening, Mr. Wallenberg). In the exhibition, similar scenes from the two films – depicting Wallenberg’s selection for the mission; his first confrontation with the fate of the Jews; his handling of dangerous rescue actions – were chosen and shown one after the other. Thereby it became clear that despite the similarities in narrative, the directors’ respective interpretations of Wallenberg differed markedly from one another.

Richard Chamberlain’s Wallenberg in many ways resembles a classic Hollywood-hero: we are encountered with a man of action, a handsome womanizer; he is charming, elegant, and self-confident. He enjoys the good life as well as a life of adventure and danger. This Wallenberg confronts Eichmann face to face and threatens him with punishment after the war. He believes in his mission, and above all in justice. Although he might miss the carefree times in Stockholm, it is in wartime Budapest that he finds his real purpose in life. When he meets the Russians, their rude behaviour immediately indicates that this encounter will not turn out well for Wallenberg. Despite all the dangers and the suffering, this one man consistently makes a difference – with one exception: although he succeeds in fighting the Nazis he ends up a victim of the arbitrary tyranny of the Soviets.
Grede’s Wallenberg, played by Stellan Skarsgård, is in many ways Chamberlain’s opposite – even though both display similar methods, using a combination of bluffs and authoritativeness; of acting out and threatening Nazis with the prospect of postwar reckoning. But in many ways Skarsgård’s Wallenberg is more of an anti-hero. Unobtrusive to his outer appearance, he is sceptical about his own position in an upper-class life which seems meaningless to him. He feels emotionally devoted to the fate of the Jews, partly feeling connected to their tragic fate through his own painful personal experiences (such as his father’s death), but above all because he has witnessed what the Germans have done to the Jews. During his time in Budapest, he becomes more and more overpowered by the cruelty and inhumanity of both the Nazis and their Hungarian counterpart, the Arrow Cross. Despite feeling powerless in the face of the killings and rapes, the sensitive, caring diplomat nevertheless overcomes his own passivity. But all too often his efforts are in vain. By the end, when he encounters the Russians, he ignores the warnings he is given about accompanying them; almost naive and seemingly in good faith, he agrees to go with them. There is nothing else in his life waiting for him. It seems as if, from the moment he had decided to leave Stockholm, his fate was sealed. Sharing the suffering of the Jews, rescuing at least some of them made his life meaningful. He must follow this given path, although the viewer realizes that this will lead him into captivity. This film is a melancholic reflection, a close portrait of a sensitive humanist who faced random violence and finally fell victim to tyranny’s madness.

Both films were broadcasted several times, not only on Swedish television, and used as classroom tools in the context of teaching pupils about Wallenberg and the Holocaust. All the same, critical voices were heard in response to the two productions, some disliking one or both versions of the portrayed Wallenbergs. Here however, I will not go further in this analysis – the mere outlining of the two examples will suffice to illustrate the crucial importance of the narrator’s interpretation, as well as the diversity of Wallenberg’s faces in popular narratives.

If the Romanist Dietmar Rieger is right, every kind of reference to a historical figure, however insubstantial it may appear, secures the stability and vitality of existing myths (Rieger 2005: 192). Even intentions to minimize the magical dimension of the myth through rational explanations for the seemingly inexplicable – such as how the rescue actions took place or how, according to existing documents, they in fact could not happen – can serve to secure the myth’s popularity and resilience. So while it might be the historian’s goal to subject the myths surrounding the rescue actions of 1944–45 to critical analysis, he or she may in fact ultimately accomplish the opposite (Rieger 2005: 190).

This insight, that every kind of reference to the historical figure secures the myth’s stability, may be a comforting one. Those who regard all academic research based on documents as a potential attack on their hero Wallenberg can relax; time is on their side, new research will follow as well as new adaptations in
other media. Those who feel that their Wallenberg is insulted by Swedish crooner Carola’s *Raoul – hjälte för vårt land* (*Raoul – Hero for our country*), sung at the Livets ord (Word of Life) church in Uppsala in 1993, or cannot find comfort in the fact that troubadour and guitar-hero Ben Olander travels in Sweden and abroad with his Wallenberg-alleluias, 17 might at least find some relief in the fact that – so far – Wallenberg’s image does not show up on beer-coasters and cheeses as does his hero-colleague Jeanne D’Arc. Neither does there so far exist a Wallenberg Action Hero figure, and although there are some children’s books, there is no comic or computer game which features him as protagonist. The closest one gets to this is the Swedish Institute’s Raoul Wallenberg exhibition in the virtual online world Second Life, in the official virtual Swedish Embassy the Second House of Sweden. 18 It thus still seems inappropriate to describe Wallenberg as a “celebrity” (Levine 2010: 3), because celebrities are made up and made famous, 19 while heroes are self-made. However, tendencies to exploit the commercial potential of the Wallenberg narrative are nonetheless recognizable, e.g. when musicals of his story were performed on Broadway. Moreover, the free newspaper *Metro* has pointed to Wallenberg’s fashion potential and praised him for his elegant and timeless dress style (*Metro* 2007; see Schult 2007/2010). So who knows what the future holds?

Raoul Wallenberg as a fashion icon in the newspaper *Metro*. 
Furthermore, many unexploited themes remain – consider only that Barack Obama and Raoul Wallenberg were born on the same date (not in the same year of course), and what it would mean for the commemorations of Wallenberg if once again a President of the United States (after Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan), this time an African-American, proclaimed Wallenberg to be his role model. Obama aims to be reelected in 2012 – the year of Wallenberg’s 100th anniversary. It seems certain that the vast potential of the Raoul Wallenberg myth will guarantee its continued remix also in the future, appearing in different shapes in all kinds of media.

So Whose Raoul Wallenberg is it After All?

This article has explored the interdependence between man and myth. Of course neither Raoul Wallenberg as historic person nor as myth can be owned – neither by historians nor by anyone else. Filmmakers, curators, sculptors, painters, and novelists, politicians, teachers and preachers, journalists and troubadours across cultural boundaries all present their image of Wallenberg. Some support the existing narrative, some contribute to the myth with new facets; others may question it. All the same, a mythic tale cannot be owned.

Long ago the Wallenberg story got a life of its own. And its independence from its historical roots will only become increasingly apparent when the last survivors and closest family members – who so far have acted as authorities on Wallenberg – have passed away. Raoul Wallenberg’s closest family may have their own image of their relative which they treasure in private, but it seems that they are aware that the image or myth of Raoul Wallenberg is not owned by any one person.

The storytellers have adjusted their narratives according to their own time and place, to their professions or to the media in question. And however different these narratives may at first appear, they all emanate from the same basic narrative. Interestingly, this basic narrative along, with the purposes for why the story is retold and researched, have much in common. The storytellers’ aim is nearly always that prosperity remembers the man considered extraordinary, a man believed to provide orientation and moral guidance in the present. How such commemoration of Wallenberg in fact should be expressed so as to be most effective, is of course a subject of dispute.

I would argue that the Wallenberg story even in the future will not be heavily exploited for entirely improper purposes, nor will it be forgotten. The core narrative depicts Raoul Wallenberg as an archetype of moral good. This will be illustrated with a final example, however odd it may seem at first. It is taken from Woody Allen’s motion picture *Deconstruction Harry* from 1997 (Cp Schult 2007/2010).

The confused protagonist Harry is obsessed with sex and suffers from writer’s block. He is in desperate need of moral guidance. But who can guide him when
even the President of the United States is a bad example? Here, Raoul Wallenberg, like a hero *ex machina*, comes to his salvation: “Look, take Raoul Wallenberg. Did he want to bang every cocktail waitress in Europe? Probably not!” These are the words of Allen’s cynical alter-ego Harry in the 17th minute of the movie. For Harry, Wallenberg embodies morality and selflessness. While everybody else is no good, this man does not let him down. Despite Harry’s cynicism and confusion, it becomes clear that Wallenberg acts as a kind of role model for Harry. It is due to Wallenberg’s popularity in the States that his example can function in this way even in the fast medium of a movie; within seconds, the audience associates Wallenberg with moral good, with values which seem to be lost but nevertheless longed for. Wallenberg represents the person who is genuinely engaged in the fate of others, uncorrupted by private escapades or hidden motives.

In all likelihood, Wallenberg’s life was brutally ended prematurely. But there will be no end to the Wallenberg story. There cannot be an end to a myth of such dimensions. This type of Raoul Wallenberg remix will continue and find new expressions. It is not only for Harry that Raoul Wallenberg is a hero to hold on to even after the inglorious 20th century.
Tanja Schult is a researcher and teacher at Stockholm University. Educated in the History of Art, Scandinavian Studies and Theatre- and Media Studies in Erlangen, Lund and Berlin, she completed her PhD in 2007 at Humboldt University, Berlin. She was the curator of the Stockholm exhibition RaoulWallenbergImages (2008) and is the author of A Hero's Many Faces. Raoul Wallenberg in Contemporary Monuments (Palgrave Macmillan 2009). Her current research project focuses on how the Holocaust influenced Swedish art.
E-Mail: tanja.schult@historia.su.se

Notes
1 The summary of Wallenberg’s life as well as other parts of this article rest on my book *A Hero's Many Faces. Raoul Wallenberg in Contemporary Monuments* from 2009. These extracts are reproduced with the permission of Palgrave Macmillan. Furthermore I would like to thank the Birgit and Gad Rausing Foundation for the fellowship which enabled me to write this article.
2 See the letter by Raoul’s maternal grandmother, Sophie Wising, from 9 August 1912 to his paternal grandmother Annie Wallenberg, in Maj von Dardel, *Raoul* (Stockholm, 1984: 30). The book contains correspondence predominately concerning Wallenberg’s childhood. For Wallenberg’s childhood see also the unpublished folder *Raoul Wallenberg – en karaktär, en livsnjaktering* compiled in 2002 by Louise Schlyter, formerly Curator of Culture at the Cultural Activities and Recreation Department at the City of Lidingô.
3 There are, however, many possible uses. For the history of the term “myth” and its changing meanings (see Müller 2002: 309–346).
4 Of course there are many more uses and genres not taken up in this article.
5 Compare my disputation lecture at Humboldt University Berlin “Heldenbilder am Ende eines unheroischen Jahrhunderts. Über die kulturgeschichtliche Wirkung Raoul Wallenbergs.”, October 2007 (Schult 2007/2010)
6 For the brief history of the first Wallenberg monument, see Schult 2009: 88ff.
7 The translation of the Hungarian text into German and English can be found at the Raoul Wallenberg-föreningens arkiv (F 4:3) in Riksarkivet, Stockholm.
8 This passage as well as the next passages are based on the survivors’ and colleagues’ testimonies which we presented in the exhibition *RaoulWallenbergImages*. They were taken from the documentaries by Küng, Klabunde, Bierman, and SVT’s *Ramp*, if no other reference is given. See e.g. the homepage of the IRWF (www.raoulwallenberg.net; last entered 27 October 2010). Furthermore there exist several Raoul Wallenberg Prizes which in their turn draw attention to important accomplishments by others.
9 In the press cuttings’ archive of the Sigtuna Foundation one can find more than 1000 articles written on Raoul Wallenberg between 1945 and the late 1990s, predominately from Swedish newspapers. Although that even this extensive collection does not hold all the articles ever published in Swedish newspapers, it can nonetheless give an idea of the media’s and the public’s interest. I want to thank the Harald and Louise Ekman Foundation for the fellowship which made it possible for me to study the Wallenberg articles at the Sigtuna Foundation in October 2010. See the committee’s homepage www.raoulwallenberg.org/awards.htm (last entered 27 October 2010).
10 Except for maybe Mária Ember’s Wallenberg book, *Wallenberg Budapesten* (Budapest: Városháza) which was however published in Hungarian; those who could read German could at least read an article of Ember in András Masát, Márton Méhes och Wolfgang Rackebrandt
(2002). But even Ember was not an employed academic, but an educated historian, working in a publishing house and as a journalist. I thank Georg Sessler and Gábor Forgács for information according to Ember’s professional background.

13 In my book I elaborate these issues in detail, cp Schult 2009: 41–50.

14 The play was published in 2008 by the Hungarian publishing house Kolor Optika. The publisher’s (Katalin Forgács) husband, Gábor Forgács, was working at the Swedish Legation in autumn 1944 and also his father Vilmós had worked together with Wallenberg.

15 Every day, all major Swedish newspapers have a notice with Dawit’s portrait and the number of days he is imprisoned. See also the homepage www.freedawit.com (last entered 27 October 2010) For the most recent attempt of the media to draw attention to the case see the article editorial “Vi ger oss inte”, Dagens Nyheter 1/10 2010.

16 Directed by Lamont Johnson, manuscript by Gerald Green (who also wrote the manuscript for the much recognized series Holocaust). As mentioned above, the film was based on the book Lost hero: The Mystery of Raoul Wallenberg written by Frederick E. Werbell och Thurston B. Clarke from 1982.

17 Ben Olander’s songs can be listen to on the singer’s homepage www.ben-olander.com/

18 For Raoul Wallenberg’s Office in Second Life see http://www.osaarchivum.org/secondlife/ See also the short clip on YouTube http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2ipTTZtg2w (both sites were last entered 27 October 2010).


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**Documentary and Feature Films**

Deconstructing Harry (1997), Woody Allen, USA.

God afton, herr Wallenberg. En passionshistoria från verkligheten (1990), Kjell Grede, Sweden/Hungary.


Ramp om historia 2: Raoul Wallenberg i Budapest (2004), Sweden.


Wallenberg – A Hero's Story (1985), directed by Lamont Johnson, manuscript by Gerald Green, USA.
Foodscapes and Children’s Bodies

By Helene Brembeck & Barbro Johansson

Abstract

This article addresses children, food and body, and introduces a Deleuzian and Childhood Studies-inspired use of the concept of foodscape. The data draws on a transdisciplinary project on children as co-researchers of foodscape. In this article we do not discuss the method or the children’s research results, which we have done elsewhere. Instead, our aim is to present a theoretically inspired analysis of our own fieldwork observations during this project in order to discuss the performance of children’s bodies, food and eating. Departing from the concept of foodscape, we present an analysis of some food events that illustrate the complexity of children’s foodscape concerning the interaction between spaces, bodies, foodstuffs, values and rules.

In encountering food and eating at various places, different child become emergem. We distinguish three powerful performances of what Stuart Aitken (2008) calls “I-dos”: First, the seemingly obedient pupil, who pretends to do what he or she is told, but who more or less imperceptibly escapes from adult supervision. Second, the child who makes use of the stereotyped and possibly cute “food monster” designation, and turns it into a threatening subject, who disturbs the order and challenges adults’ power. Third, the knowledgeable scientist who, with the help of a research project, adult experts, nutritional calculation programs and ingredients, seizes the definition of the body as a site for growing stronger, healthier and more capable. The foodscape we met held many “striated spaces” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987), where the children had few alternatives to adhering to the adults’ designated “I-ams”. But we also entered smooth spots where children had the opportunity to experiment with “I-dos” that would not have occurred to us had we not followed them, and there are certainly many more that appear in the children’s everyday encounters with food.

Keywords: Children, food, foodscape, becoming, performance, I-am, I-do, striated spaces, smooth spaces.
Introduction

This article connects to the field of health and the body. It is also informed by the Nordic research project “Beauty comes from within: looking good as a challenge in health promotion”. The project concerns the way women and men deal with the demands of “appearance management” in relation to patriarchal authority, subjectivizing gazes, agency and empowerment, and bodily practices as space for reflexion. In this article we approach this field from somewhat different angles, empirically as well as theoretically. Firstly it is about children, and the focus is not primarily on looking good, but on food, although, for this purpose, we highlight the relationship between food and the body. Secondly it tackles the power-agency issue by introducing a Deleuzian, and also Childhood Studies-inspired use of the concept of foodscape.

From a Foucauldian standpoint, different disciplinary practices in schools, for example, produce “docile bodies” governing themselves in regard to, for example, “proper” body size and diet (Rysst 2010). Other post structuralists, like Judith Butler, have argued that “body work” can be understood both as an illustration of gendered beauty ideals and as empowerment (Butler 1993; Petersson McIntyre 2010). From a phenomenological perspective “body work” is also seen as an ambivalent phenomenon: on the one hand very regulated - exercisers are for example expected to behave in certain ways – and on the other a space for reflection (Engelsrud 2006; see also Berggren Torell 2011). Inspired by Foucault, the feminist and media researcher Angela McRobbie argues that body regimes today are upheld not only by institutions, such as school or health care, but by the commercial domain’s entanglement with the fashion-beauty complex, which can be witnessed, for example, in magazines on beauty and health (McRobbie 2009). One of the starting points for the Beauty project was therefore depictions of ideal bodies in magazines and their resonance in how people described ideal bodies, and their own body in particular (Rysst 2010).

When, as part of the Beauty project, we browse through some issues of a magazine for parents (Föräldrar & Barn (Parents and Children) 2 May 2008), it is obvious that children’s bodies are the targets of adults’ concerns and worries at many different levels. There are advertisements for organic baby food, unscented washing powder and dietary supplements, including omega-3 and omega-6. There is an article about the unhealthy and unhygienic pick’n’mix, knitting instructions for “trendy baby shoes” and a suggestion to buy second-hand baby clothes. In the magazine we read criticism of “weight mania”, among mothers who have recently given birth, and a letter from a reader who is worried about her daughter being too fat. It is obvious that there are numerous examples in the media of attempts to govern children’s bodies with the aid of their parents, many of which are successful, as shown by the last example of the letter-to-the-editor. From our own research, as well as others, it is evident that children too are well aware of dis-
courses of right and wrong, healthy and unhealthy in regard to food, they know of
the effects of overeating, such as obesity, and they relate fat bodies to junk food
and slim bodies to a healthy diet (Johansson et. al. 2009; Ludvigsen & Scott 2009;
Johansson & Ossiansson, forthcoming). This can be regarded as the successful
production of “docile bodies”.

Judging from an ongoing project about children as co-researchers of foods-
capes, however, it is hard to uphold a strict Foucauldian perspective that leaves
little room for evading disciplining gazes, since the children we met often be-
haved in unexpected ways not prescribed by adults. The Children as Co-
researchers of Foodscape project (in Swedish Barn som medforskare av mat-
landskap, BAMM) was conducted at Centre for Consumer Science at the Univer-
sity of Gothenburg over the period 2008-2010, and was carried out with 45 ten-
year-old students in two classes at a school in the west of Sweden during one
school year. The overall purpose of this project was to see if, together with the
children, we could highlight the healthy aspects of their food environments in a
way that was attractive to them. In the BAMM project we used the concept of
“foodscape” in a very concrete way, signifying all the places where one comes
into contact with food and eating. (In Swedish we used the term “matlandskap”.)
The concept thus served to direct the children’s attention to places of food and
eating in their everyday lives. It was the door-opener that allowed the children to
control the data collection as far as possible, and gave us a unique insight into the
reasoning and behaviour of children. The nine researchers from four different dis-
ciplines took the role of tutors, endeavouring to refrain from an authoritative posi-
tion, instead letting the children lead us in the research.

We have discussed the co-researching methodology and the results extensively
in several reports and articles (Bergström et. al. 2009; Brembeck et. al. 2010 a, b;
Johansson et. al. 2010; Johansson and Ossiansson forthcoming). Our ambition in
this article is to contribute to the discussion of children’s agency and non-agency
in relation to food and the body by the use of a meta-perspective on our own
fieldwork observations as adult researchers. This article is thus concerned not with
“children’s voices” but with the performances of bodies, food and eating in part-
striated, part-smooth spaces. From our data we can see how different meal events
are performed and how food as well as children’s bodies come into being in dif-
ferent contexts, in school, at the after-school club, in the shop etc. Here values
concerning food and nutrition, childhood and adulthood are negotiated. Right and
wrong, good and bad, healthy and unhealthy are obviously present, not necessarily
as dichotomies, but as more of a continuum. To be able to study this assemblage
of agency and structure in regard to food and eating in children’s lives, and sub-
vert the agency structure dualism, we use the concept of foodscape in another and
theoretically inspired way as defined by the Dutch philosopher Rick Dolphijn.
Foodscape

The concept “scape” has been found useful by a number of researchers in the social sciences and humanities for the study of phenomena that are unevenly distributed in space and appear in a variety of shapes and contexts, drawing on Arjun Appadurai’s definition of “scapes”, such as financescapes, technoscapes and mediascapes as fluid, irregular shapes of landscapes (Appadurai 1996: 33ff). Appadurai uses the concept to show how people, materiality, ideas, countries and economies are connected situationally at a global scale independent of distance. A Swedish example is ethnologist Tom O’Dell’s use of the term experiencescape to draw attention to the strategically designed spaces of pleasures, enjoyment and entertainment for example at museums, sporting arenas, shopping centres and tourist attractions (O’Dell 2005: 15-19). The term foodscape has also been used to distinguish the dispersed and fluid aspects of food and eating. The ethnologist Torbjörn Bildtgård uses the term “mental foodscape” to discuss his respondent’s answers to the question where they would go to eat well, and, to the same end, which places they would avoid. The results reveal an imaginary geography of food, where the Mediterranean region together with South-East Asia and Japan appear as favourite destinations, while the United States and Eastern Europe stand out as destinations that Swedes would avoid if they wanted to eat well (Bildtgård 2009). Sociologists have used foodscape from a perspective informed by political science to highlight the occupying of retail space by large international food companies (Winston 2003), and how a corporate-organic foodscape has interacted and evolved alongside competing counter-movements of food democracy (Johnston, Biro & MacKendrick 2009). Another use closer to our own is Jakob Wenzer’s work on the foodscape of eating out practices among Swedish youth (Wenzer 2010).

In our project we have used the term basically to pinpoint the local everyday spaces of food and eating in the lives of our co-researchers. From this perspective, foodscape is the sum of all the places where food and eating are actualised in one way or another: at home, in school, at restaurants and cafés, in shops, in advertising, on TV and the Internet etc. But more importantly, we use the concept of foodscape from a more cultural perspective to discuss different events where food, eating and bodies are generated. The inspiration is Rick Dolphijn (2004) and his definition of foodscape as processes, where elements relate to each other and generate relationships and affect. A foodscape is not something that is lying out there, waiting to be discovered: it comes into being in events, and is always in a process of change (ibid.). A similar definition is used in Wenzer 2010.

We are, however, also inspired by our involvement with Childhood Studies, dating back some twenty years. We therefore find the concept of “becoming”, which is part of both Deleuzian and Childhood Studies theory, of particular interest, and especially so in regard to children, food and body. The concept has long been used in childhood research to point to the fact that, compared to adults, chil-
Children are more rarely regarded and appreciated as active subjects here and now. Instead, they are often interpreted and valued in relation to what they will some time become. Children as becomings are subjects of learning and upbringing, they are conceived as weak and in need of adults’ protection, guidance and care. Directed by their predetermined developing process, they are also seen less as individuals and more as parts of a collective, on which it is possible to express general statements. The definition of children as becomings is part of a generational order where there is a hierarchy between different ages and where adults have greater physical, economic and structural power as well as interpretation priority in relation to children (James & Prout 1990; Alanen 1992; Qvortrup 1994; Brembeck, Johansson & Kampmann 2004).

In this article we combine this definition of becoming with the becoming concept used by Gilles Deleuze (Deleuze & Guattari 1987). Becoming in the Deleuzian sense does not imply a transition towards a future goal of completeness, which was criticized by researchers in Childhood Studies. Instead it deals with the “becoming”-character of individuals, constantly being constructed and reconstructed in different events. Deleuze distinguishes between becoming-the-same and becoming-other, which should be understood as re-establishing and escaping from the present respectively. On the part of children, becoming-the-same might be reproducing traditional ideas about “what children are like” and becoming-other might be finding “lines of flight” which lead away from stable categorizations. Territorialization, de- and reterritorialization are other Deleuzian concepts describing the same process, which is on the one hand to confirm the existing conditions and on the other to dissolve the existing conditions and instead create something new.

In the 1990s the sociology of childhood sited children as becomings against children as beings – active, competent subjects, whose lives are situated in time and place. We have engaged in this debate elsewhere (Brembeck, Johansson & Kampmann 2004; Johansson 2005). Here we confine ourselves to using the concept of becoming and instead depart from the two aspects contained in the concept: on the one hand incompleteness, vulnerability and dependence, and on the other hand the potential to become something other than what is immediately manifested, the movement and the trajectory out from the present (Deleuze 1998; Lee 2001; Prout 2005; Johansson 2005, 2010). In our material we embark on this task by studying how bodies and space relate to each other; which spaces are created; which power relations are generated; which different kinds of becomings appear.

To date only a few researchers have applied Deleuze’s theories on Childhood studies. Nick Lee (2001) questions the idea that adults and children are different kinds of persons. He asserts that there are no complete, self-sufficient individuals, but that everybody, independent of age, depends on supplements and extensions for our agency, and that everybody is engaged in constant becoming. In another
interesting attempt at combining Deleuzian thinking and Childhood Studies, Stuart Aitken (2008) distinguishes between “I-am” and “I-do”. “I-am” is the very categorization that keeps children in certain identities, such as growing, immature, incomplete and in need of adult supervision and guidance. In accordance with that designation, children are expected to be socialized and to perform the childhood assigned to them by the generational order. However, change is possible within the doing, “I-do”, which opens the way to children’s way of knowing themselves through their activities, claiming identity through their material actions, Aitken argues (2008: 113-129). This is an empowering activity that opens up to children becoming-other.

In situations that occurred during our research at the school we could see that different events provided more or less space for children to “flee” from the given preconditions. The space could, in Deleuze’s words, be more or less “striated” or “smooth” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987). “Striated” signifies the strict, structured space, “I-am”, which allows limited scope for people’s own initiatives, while the “smooth space” constitutes its opposite, the possibility of “I-do”. From a Childhood Studies perspective, Allison and Adrian L. James show how childhood experiences are shaped and controlled by adults across many key social arenas of their everyday life, and they see the mechanisms and processes by which this is happening as a politics of childhood (James & James 2004: 3-4). Of course, children often do what they wish, even if it goes against what they have been told or taught to do. In this case childhood appears less constrained and becomes a social space in which children learn to explore their environment and to experiment with their agency, they argue (ibid.). James and James regard childhood as a social space, whereas Aitken’s space is more physical. There are, however, clear resemblances between James and James’ less contained social spaces and Aitken’s smooth spaces: the designations are fewer and more diffuse, and leave more scope for children’s agency (see also Brembeck 2009).

Three Examples

As a start-up exercise, we invited the children to draw maps of their local foodscapes, which would later on be the starting point for their research. They solved the task in different ways. One girl pictured her breakfast, another included a nice cafe where she wanted to work when she grew up, some boys drew farms, poultry production units, spinach growing in the fields and fishing at the pier etc. In almost all scapes, however, home and school were included: kitchens and the school canteen appeared, as well as the local grocery store and the pizzeria. These were also the main spaces for the research.

In the following we present our analysis of some food events from our own observations during the fieldwork process that illustrate the complexity of the children’s foodscapes concerning the interaction between spaces, bodies, foodstuffs,
values and rules. The examples show that the possibility of “becoming-the-same” and “becoming-other” depends on many different matters and that the preconditions can differ not just between sites, but within the same situation and the same site. In the first example, we discuss children’s ways of handling adults’ attempts at creating docile, healthy bodies in striated spaces, with vegetables as the symbol of healthy food, and show how bodies, space, eatables and school organisation all play important roles in the dramas. In the second example we turn to the less striated commercial spaces, where children can perform “I-dos” in the shape of what we call the “food monster”. This is a categorization which takes its point of departure in the sensual pleasures of the body and which, at least in adults’ minds, tends to overshadow other ways of being a child food consumer. While the food monster could be characterized as a childish performance, the third example deals with a more adult performance, namely what we have chosen to call “the fuel ball body identity”. This is a children’s line of flight from authoritative discourses on body and food, by creating a space for a knowledgeable, responsible performance of becoming-other. Here the body stands out as a field of knowledge and as a space for possible improvement and transformation.

Vegetables + Body = Problematic

In the School Canteen

When the children in our study enter the school canteen they encounter a strictly structured and principally adult defined space, an obviously striated space, where there is little room for deterritorialization. They are let in by the teacher, they are organized into a queue up to the serving table, under the supervision of the canteen staff; they take plates which they fill with food, and glasses which they fill with water; they move on to the salad table where they take fresh vegetables and after that they go to their set places at the tables. There they have twenty minutes to eat before it is time for the next group of students to be let into the canteen. At the school meal the children’s bodies are directed in certain ways by the room, the objects and the adults, at the same time as the children and their bodies are agents who, in different ways, handle the situations that occur. In the queue up to the serving table they can talk, joke and lark about. When they load and carry their plates and glasses they risk spilling food and drink, which, in turn, might result in messy socks, since wearing shoes is not allowed in the canteen. At the table the children are expected to divide the time they have at their disposal between socializing with their friends, eating and possibly refilling their plates. Furthermore, as a non-present site, the playground and the activities in it provide an attraction.

The routines of the school canteen can be said to have both disciplining and democratic purposes (Johansson et. al. 2009). Arranging people in queues and within certain frames of behaviour where they are easy to supervise is a common
strategy when authorities want to handle groups of people, such as schoolchildren (Foucault 1991; Thorne 1993), and it is also an expression of a generational order, where adults dominate children. In the meal situation, whether it is in school or in the family, adults are constructed as rearing subjects and children are constructed as subjects who should be trained, disciplined and supervised (Coveney 2006). At the same time everybody, regardless of family background and personal economics, is offered the same food in the same amounts, and there can be no discussions or comparisons between the student’s different lunch packs (Johansson et. al. 2006).

On our first visit to the school, the two of us had lunch with the pupils. We served ourselves food and sat down and chatted with them. A girl noticed that we had put a lot of vegetables on our plates, and concluded that we knew what is healthy. “My mother tells me that vegetables are healthy,” she said. Although she said that she liked almost everything on the salad table, we understood that vegetables were defined as healthy and something that you should eat. From the plates of the other children we suspected that this was a common view among the children. There were no piles of vegetables on most of them. These observations directed our thoughts towards the meanings of vegetables in the interaction between adults and children. In this interaction, it seems that the main characteristic of a vegetable is being healthy, it is through its nutritious content that it obtains its value. In other parts of the project we noticed that “healthy” is quite often contrasted with “tasty”; things that are tasty are not healthy and vice-versa. In an exercise where our co-researchers were asked to judge different packs of cereals, the pack that achieved the lowest score received comments like “they look healthy” and “they look like adult’s cereals”. The vegetables on the salad table are thus by definition placed in a field where foodstuffs are classified as healthy or unhealthy, but do not perhaps even occur in a field where foodstuffs are arranged as tasty or untasty, something that is confirmed by other research on European children. Gun Roos (2002) writes from a Norwegian perspective that children tend to classify their food according to binary principles, such as healthy/junk food and like/dislike. Anna Ludvigsen and Sara Scott, in their study of British children, noted that each of these opposites had its own specific site. Healthy food was linked to the home and family meals and junk food was associated with friends and pleasure (Ludvigsen & Scott 2009: 421). The children in their study even went so far as to state that “Kids don’t usually want to eat healthy food” (ibid: 427).

The salad table is one of the agents in the school canteen with which the child and its body interact. In the school there is a rule that you should take at least three different kinds of vegetables. We noticed that some children solved this by taking one piece of lettuce, one slice of cucumber and one pea. Following the same logic, many of them did not take any vegetables with their second portion of food; it was not necessary since they had already filled their quota.
Here, different definitions of vegetables are made in relation to children’s bodies which give rise to certain distributions of responsibility and power relations. By providing children with vegetables, adults fulfil their adult responsibility for the children’s development, but their responsibility reaches even further. Obviously, the children do not automatically choose to eat vegetables just because they are served, on the contrary, adults have experienced that children omit the vegetables when they are allowed to choose freely. Perhaps teachers, in their school education, have taught children about the benefit of eating vegetables, that is, have tried to motivate and persuade. Perhaps the canteen staff have laid the table nicely and tried to present the vegetables as attractively as possible in order to entice the children to eat them. But if the children still do not eat the vegetables, and since the adults think it is crucially important that they do so, the adults have to resort to more compelling methods, to use available means of coercion, that is to say inaugurate a rule.

The different situations the child faces are thus in the first case being exposed to (moral) pressure – being informed about the vegetables being nutritious, something that you “should” eat. One possibility here is that the child performs an “I-am”, a child who has been brought up and is being taken care of and who listens to and complies with what adults tell her or him to do. But it may also be that children eat vegetables because they like doing so or because they want to eat whatever is good. Furthermore, there is also the option of completely abstaining. All these ways of acting are examples of the child performing an “I-do” and finding his/her own trajectory which leads out of the adults’ control area.

When the rule is introduced, a partly new situation arises. The children can still choose to eat vegetables for the above reasons, but they can no longer refrain, and may therefore develop new strategies, such as the strategy mentioned above, taking a shred of lettuce, a slice of cucumber and a pea. This can be understood as a deterritorialization process, where the adults’ set of values is disconnected from the child’s ethics and the rule can be treated as value-neutral and amenable to being taken literally. But there are many other values which are mediated during this process: that vegetables are not an obvious choice for children – they have to be forced to eat them; that you eat vegetables because they are nutritious and not because they taste good; and that adults and children have different interests when it comes to what children should eat. There are age-specific expectations that categorize children as a certain species positioning them as becomings and as fundamentally different from adults.

At the After-school Club

School is over for the day and the kids arrive at the after-school club, where a snack is served. The queue grows quickly, but the children wait patiently. When the after-school club leader allows them to, they start taking food. On the table there are two types of brown bread, cheese, two kinds of sausage, mackerel in tomato sauce, cucumber, tomato, carrot sticks and sweet pepper. There is also canned fruit salad, ice-
cream and two kinds of juice (yellow and red), as it is the leader's birthday. Most children take mackerel for their sandwiches and a boy cries out loud: “I love mackerel on a sandwich!”

The leader declares that everyone has to take at least a spoonful of the fruit salad to be allowed to have ice cream. It is a sweet stewed fruit in syrup. He serves a click of the fruit salad to each child on blue plastic plates. It goes very quickly and he somehow manages it all at the same time. One girl says that she is allergic to bread. The leader tells her that if she is allergic her parents need to give him a certificate. Then he tells her he thinks she says so because she does not like brown bread. The girl takes a piece of bread and gives the leader a distraught look, but accepts the situation. We note that there is no water as an alternative to juice. Maybe everybody wants a sweet drink and we do not hear anyone asking for water (Fieldnotes)

In the school there is yet another place where children are served food, and that is in the after-school club, which most children attend from the age of 10. Here the children eat a snack immediately after the end of the school-day and the children can engage in various activities until it is time to go home. The space in the after-school club is not less striated than in the school canteen, but it is striated in a different way. Unlike the school canteen staff, the after-school club leader has the opportunity to go to the market and buy fresh products, he can bake and make snacks by himself, and he is neither directed by the supply from central kitchens nor by policy rules as to what meals have to contain. “The kids come here because of the food,” he says proudly. His trick to make the children eat vegetables, fruit and fibre is to test different models and ways of serving vegetables, to mix wholegrain into the bread, make semolina pudding mixed with graham grains, etc. Afterwards he is able to judge how well he has succeeded in his strategy, from the children’s comments, how much of what he serves has been eaten and how much goes into the compost bin.

The character of the striated space of the after-school club makes certain performances of “I-am” and “I-do” possible. Broadly speaking, the same values apply to foodstuffs at the after-school club and in school meals, but the after-school club leader has a somewhat different strategy to make children eat nutritiously. He knows that the children like home-baked bread and semolina pudding and he uses trial and error to find out the amount of wholemeal flour or grain he can mix into the bread without them stopping eating it. He engages in empirical research to explore how the vegetables should be cut up for the children to eat them. Moreover, he has the opportunity to choose particularly good-quality fruit and vegetables from the market, to bake his own bread, which spreads its fragrance in the corridor outside and to serve tasty items such as semolina pudding, ice-cream and sweetened beverages. These can be understood as strategies to get the children to enjoy eating at the after-school club, and to feel that the food there is something different than school meals.

In this understanding the children's bodies are co-players in the after-school club leader’s project. He explicitly presents the after-school club as a different kind of place than the classrooms and the school canteen, a more exclusive, personal space. The children’s bodies answer to this appeal by being attracted by the
smell of freshly baked bread as they approach the after-school club, and by taking
the various vegetable shapes and putting together a colourful food plate. But
maybe, in the end, it is only the mackerel in tomato sauce and the sweet juice that
ultimately appeal to them in taste and that they actually consume. The after-school
club is not compulsory, the children attend it voluntarily and there are no activities
which they are forced to do there. The after-school club arena offers different
ways of “I-dos” than the school canteen, but it is still possible for the children to
escape the adult agenda.

In these cases, children's eating takes place in arenas and on terms that are de-

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for us to relate to. We noted that when the children were let loose in the super-
market, or left in the classroom, without adults other than the researchers (who
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could create trajectories for different performances than those usually possible in
the school's striated space. Often, in these performances the body and its appetite
were accentuated, as the children suddenly revealed a seemingly non-negotiable
appetite for bodily pleasures. When we went on visits to the supermarket or the
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The Unmanageable Food Monsters

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given sweets, pizza, soft drinks or other tasty things. One boy threatened to opt
out of the research unless the researcher bought something for him in the grocery
store. Another researcher in the grocery store had given the pupils the task of looking for healthy food that does not contain sugar, but saw all the children rush to the confectionery shelf as soon as they entered the store. The researcher who took a group of students to the pizzeria was kept busy dealing with their disappointment at not having a pizza, a soft drink or lollipop, as they were accustomed to. After the first tasting at the school, which consisted of an apple test, the children suggested what they should taste on other occasions, and the proposals were sweets, chocolate, crisps, bananas, chocolate pudding and pizza. When the first part of the project was completed the co-researchers organized a presentation for the children’s parents in the form of various stations, where the parents could carry out tasks similar to the ones the children had done. One of the stations, on the initiative of the co-researchers responsible, included crisps and cheese tasting. After the final meeting one of the researchers told the children that there was cheese and crisps left over for those who wanted them, which led to a number of children rushing out to the room where the test was carried out.

These observations led us to associate to a childhood representation that frequently occurs in particular in advertising, that could be termed “the food monster”. The food monster is characterized by being directed by its gluttony and its desires for pleasurable eating experiences. In advertising and other media, the child with ice-cream or chocolate all around its mouth is a popular image, conveying a view of children as natural, cute and joyfully helping themselves to pleasure-filled experiences. “The food monster” is thus a well-known child designation, which can be useful both for children and for adults. It is a stereotype, a common “I-am”, and adults more or less expect children to become food monsters in certain situations. From children’s point of view, the food monster offers a way of asserting specific “childish” interests, and of exercising some power in relation to adults, in a way that is acceptable, as long as the performance is done with a humorous twinkle. From adults’ point of view, though, the food monster might also be a threatening designation since the possibly cute food monster might slip out of the adults’ control and actually become an evil monster, jeopardizing the adult’s authority. An example of that is the classic scene with the stressed, sweaty parent in the supermarket queue with a fully loaded trolley, and with one or two children yelling and wriggling on the floor, demanding sweets immediately. The children that appear here have an insatiable appetite for sweets, solely guided by their desire for pleasure and willing to put adults in embarrassing situations to get their way (Roos 2002; Johansson 2005; Stewart et. al. 2006). This performance is made possible by the labelling “food monster” together with the smooth spaces of shops and restaurants, that equip children with tools for performing an “I-do” that exercises power over adults. Children, by acting, can transform the cute food monster into a new dangerous performance, and they can do so through notions of children as being more physical, more impulse-driven and closer to nature than adults are. The strength of the food monster is thus that, by definition, it is based on differ-
ence – that children are a different type of people than adults, and therefore more difficult to understand and potentially more intractable. The food monster is a childish performance of “I-do”.

The “problem” with the “food monster”, and probably why it is so scary, is that it is not simply a designation: it is very much embodied. It is a well known fact that learning about food is a tactile, oral and gustatory experience for the small child (Haden 2006). Taste plays a vital role in this process of learning who you are and about the world, to the extent that we argue elsewhere that a “tastescape” can be discerned as a pivotal part of the foodscape (Bergström, Brembeck, Jonsson & Shanahan, forthcoming). When asked to rank different factors (friends, family, advertising, teachers, money and taste) in Ludvigsen and Scott’s British study of children aged 9-10, half of the group ranked “taste” as the single most important factor when choosing what to eat (Ludvigsen & Scott 2009). Taste is not a problem as such. It becomes an issue depending on what type of food children like and in what amounts they consume food.

Adults express concern when children choose sweet, fatty or salty food, food defined as “unhealthy”, and children themselves have to address the fact that much of what they regard as tasty is also unhealthy. In Ludvigsen and Scott’s study, only a few children saw the need to apply their dietary knowledge to their own food choices. Eating healthy food was simply not a priority for the children, partly because it was not seen as their responsibility (Ludvigsen & Scott 2009: 427). In a Nordic study (Johansson et. al. 2006, 2009) including children aged 10–11 from Copenhagen, Gothenburg, Helsinki and Oslo, the picture was more nuanced. The children were well aware of which eatables were deemed healthy and unhealthy, and most of them had favourites in the unhealthy category. But the same applied to food in the healthy category, where they listed a number of favourite dishes. A key finding of the Nordic study was that the children categorized food in yet another way, namely in everyday, healthy food and festive, unhealthy food, designating each kind of food in its own context (ibid.). In BAMM, the issue of healthy and unhealthy was present during the whole research process, and resulted in children asking research questions such as “Why is there so much bad fat in the food?” “Which is more healthy, blueberries or broccoli?” “Why are things that taste good often unhealthy?”

Taste becomes even more problematic when those unhealthy things that children often prefer are consumed in large amounts. This is at the core of the threat of the “obesity epidemic”, a concept that has become part of our vocabulary and relates to people in the western world having adopted a diet and a lifestyle with such serious consequences that one can speak of a disease of an epidemic nature. The WHO “European Charter on Counteracting Obesity” from 2006 states that: “The epidemic of obesity poses one of the most serious public health challenges in the WHO European Region. The trend is particularly alarming in children and adolescents.” (http://www.euro.who.int/document/E89567.pdf) Turning to the
Nordic countries, the Nordic Council of Ministers specifically identifies the problem of children and food in the action plan for health, food and physical activity, and the same applies at local level in the Nordic countries. “The obesity epidemic” is thus a line of thought that is extremely distressing, and it has attracted medical and dietary efforts, debate, books, research grants and funds for local projects in order to tackle the problem. The greedy, insatiable food monster who requires immediate physical satisfaction takes concrete, physical shape here in a grotesquely swollen, monstrous body. This poses a problem for both adults and children in terms of failure, lack of control or deficient discipline. In BAMM, some of the children were overweight, and one of the boys expressed a problematic relationship towards food. When the children had taken photos of their food-scenes and were about to discuss them with each other, the boy said: “I think about food when I see the pictures; that’s why I don’t want to join BAMM”.

How, then, do adults respond to their fears of the food monster? One strategy, of course, is to limit the children’s space of agency by means of power, to force, discipline and regulate, thereby establishing a generational order with distinct and contrary roles for adults and children. Another strategy, which is perhaps more common, is to cooperate with the food monster, but on the adult’s terms. In the school where we conducted our research there was, as in most primary schools, a rule that says you are not allowed to bring confectionery to school, and the intake of sweets has been greatly restricted in Swedish schools and nursery schools after the “sugar debate” which began in Sweden in the early 2000s (Johansson 2005). When some coveted products are highly regulated, adults can use them to mark the festive exceptions or to create good relationships with children (ibid.). For instance, we saw that a class teacher created a cosy occasion by showing movies and offering chewing gum; that the leader offered the after-school children ice on his birthday, that parents gave the children sweetened yoghurt and chocolate milk to take with them on school excursions. In another study, dealing with parents and children’s attitudes and habits concerning food and eating (Johansson & Ossiansson forthcoming), both parents and children talked about how they organized “Cosy Friday” and “Saturday Sweets”, where they feasted on confectionery, soft drinks, crisps, popcorn etc. as a contrast to everyday healthy eating. In family rituals such as Cosy Friday parents and children cooperate in creating a free zone for pleasure and abundance, where children are allowed to indulge in unhealthy eatables, and where the important thing is togetherness and affinity in the family (ibid. Brembeck, forthcoming). It is conceived of as a “compensatory event”, a time of the week for the parents to relax from all their obligations of upbringing and instead have a good time, give each other love and affection and compensate for their hectic everyday lives (Brembeck, forthcoming).

Food and eating is a highly moral area. There are clear perceptions of right and wrong, good and bad, healthy and unhealthy, and adults have taken the responsibility for children’s eating. School staff and parents govern, control and judge
what children eat, how much, how often and in what way. A built-in ingredient in this drama, as both an implicit and an embodied figure, is “the food monster”. This food monster might be a recalcitrant and unruly “I-do”, which threatens to deterritorialize the generational order, or a monstrous body growing out of both adults’ and children’s control. But it can also co-operate with the adults by being a happy recipient of gifts (“I-am”) or by allowing itself to be limited, brought up and maybe even be regarded as a problem, and thus help maintain the generational order which defines adults as wise and trustworthy, and children as unrestrained and in need of control. The important thing, however, is that the food monster is not an inherent characteristic of every child, but just a possible performance that is actualised under certain conditions. In the next section we present another, quite contrary, performance.

“Build the Body” with Fuel Balls and Sports Drinks

At the beginning of the project we visited the Health Adventure, a regional activity centre where the children, in an enjoyable way, can learn about body and health. Our intention was that the visit would correspond to the study of facts at the beginning of a research process. We wanted our co-researchers to have some “background information”, in the same way as we adult researchers had and the relationship between us, therefore, to be more equal. At the Health Adventure we took part in the “Good Fuel” activity, which focused on breakfast. The aim was for the children to learn the importance of putting together a nutritious breakfast. However, the teacher at the centre did not use the words “wholesome” and “un-wholesome”, “healthy” and “unhealthy” or “right” and “wrong”. Instead, she spoke about “fuel”. She said that when your body wakes up in the morning the fuel stores are empty and must be refilled with the correct type of fuel for you to be able to cope with the day. These were well-known facts to the children, who were well aware of the importance of having a good breakfast after a long night’s sleep. One boy talked of his grandmother, who did not bother about a nutritious breakfast, but “drinks coffee in the morning and several times every day”.

In the activities at the Health Adventure the children were also to learn about nutrients and vitamins and the food circle and they were to find huge fabric models of different eatables and carry them to the right place in the food circle. But it was the fuel balls that made the biggest impression. The fuel balls were on the back of the laminated pictures of the common breakfast ingredients, a slice of bread, a dollop of butter, a piece of cheese, a glass of juice, etc. The task was to put together one’s breakfast and count the fuel balls. You should have 15-20 balls to eat a good fuel breakfast and manage until lunch, we were told. You could also easily add more fuel to your breakfast, by picking some more eatables with fuel balls if you did not reach the desired limit.
The fuel balls were easy to relate to for the children. The children obviously had a great interest in the body and the need for the body to cope with everything they wanted to use it for: long hours in school, having fun and playing, hobbies and various sports activities. They apparently all had experience of the body not coping, of not working the way they wanted it to or achieving what they wanted. In the life of a ten-year-old, the body is naturally of great interest, the body which is now developing from that of a small child to that of a young person. Puberty is still a little further into the future, but it is an autonomous body, which is increasingly beginning to go somewhere in the world on its own and is getting to know its functions, capabilities and values of attractiveness. Instead of talking about calories, fats and sugar, obese and thin, the children could use fuel balls to add a positive value, together with their ability to experiment and to create bodies that cope.

The children’s answers to the teacher’s question “Why do we eat?” also showed their engagement with the growing body. “Because it’s good” was as an obvious first answer, but then they listed a number of other reasons, which all concerned the growing body: “getting energy”, “in order to cope”, “the body needs it to be strong, to grow, to feel good”. Growing, becoming big and strong, is obviously a central and essential value to the children in their “body-becoming”, perhaps even what “body-becoming” mainly aims for at this age before puberty. It should be noted, however, that as the children grow older, they will enter into a discursive field where designations of beauty and body size are highly gendered. While young men will still be addressed by the call to become larger and more muscular, the ideal body of a young woman is lean and tight (Dworkin & Wachs 2009). We do not argue that the children were unaware of these differences, but in the same way that their knowledge of healthy and unhealthy had little bearing on their food choice, and something that was more for adults to take care of, the rights and wrongs of body size did not seem to matter very much to most of them. Both girls and boys alike were interested in energetic bodies that could achieve what they wanted, run fast, jump high, play for long hours and listen to the teacher the whole day without getting tired. Large or lean muscles were not an issue yet. Rather, the “fuel ball body” was a “free zone” for experimenting and pleasure, and the basis for the performance of “I-dos”. Bodies were not yet trapped in male and female stereotypes, but led the way for becoming-others.

The Body as Knowledge Site

In many ways, the children expressed a strong physicality during the course of the project. But the achievements of the body were also manifested as an intellectual interest: they counted fuel balls, they were interested in energy content and nutrients, they studied the declarations of content and worried about additives and contaminants in food. This was thus in many ways a “mature” interest; mature in the sense of sensible, rational, dispassionate, analytical; all characteristics commonly
attributed to adults. It was about getting to know the growing body, mastering one’s body in a certain environment with certain agents.

The fuel balls occurred as a central research question in a group of boys and girls interested in sport. Luckily we had a nutritionist in the project team who undertook to help the children learn more about fuel balls. The question of how and what to eat in order to cope with sports training after school was of particular interest. When our nutritionist on one occasion was unable to attend the school, and was replaced by a colleague, one of the boys became very upset about having to wait a whole week until he could get the website address where he could find out what to eat before training. For the next meeting our colleague had installed a nutritional calculation program on the classroom computers and the children got started quickly and understood easily how it worked. New research questions emerged: not only what to eat before the workout, but also during it; in addition what is good food for girls who play soccer and if you can make your own sports drink. On the next occasion the children mixed and tasted three sports drinks, equivalent in nutritional content: two versions, which they made themselves, based on fruit syrup and fruit juice and a purchased version, which according to the children had extra “cool” packaging. The drinks were given the anonymous designations A, B and C. The tasting was conducted individually according to a protocol and the result, which came as a surprise to the children, showed that the tastiest (and cheapest) drink was the one they had mixed themselves from fruit juice.

The children’s interest in the fuel ball body is an example of the mistake of the division between body and soul, where children are supposed to be more physical than intellectual. These children were rational, literate, curious, and knowledgeable, thus subverting the dualistic categorization of the child eater as either in need of nutrients and fuel or desiring pleasure and satisfaction – notably, once the adults had provided the tools consisting of fuel balls, the nutritional calculation program on the computer and the ingredients for making a sports drink. The children’s rational approach assumed an equal relationship between child and adult, with respect for children as becomings in their own right. Here one might say that the children deterritorialized the innocent, incomplete child, resulting in an active “becoming-other”, challenging common definitions of children in need of adult guidance and care. On the other hand, they can also be said to reterritorialize another familiar view of children as competent learning subjects, which suits just as well in a traditional generational order, and which poses no threat to power relations between generations. The interest in the fuel-ball identity served as lines of flight in a concrete way, both as a fugitive from an adult world’s attempt to capture children's bodies as problematic and as a way to fly, try your wings, to see how well your body carries you.

Of course the interest in the body and the fuel balls could easily have been made harmless by being interpreted in a traditional discourse, such as: “How ter-
rible that children are so affected by today’s achievement and beauty ideals that they already want to be able to calculate their nutritional intake at this stage – Ban all nutrient calculation programs for children!” But we argue that the children’s primary interest was about their way of getting to know their bodies and their bodies’ functions, it was about children’s “body-becoming” today.

**Summing-up and Conclusion**

With regard to the Beauty project, we see various discourses and possible ways of interpreting crop up in our material, such as Foucauldian practices of disciplining in the ways children’s bodies are ordered in the school canteen and subjected to various rules. Closer to our perspective is Judith Butler’s version of performance (Butler 1991). Like her, we see childhood and “childness” emerge performatively; not as an expression of inner essence, but constituted in various acts, postures and gestures. We also feel confident in the phenomenological standpoint, voiced by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2000), that bodies are sensing and knowing entities, and that we “take in” the world and experience ourselves as subjects through our bodies. None of these theorists have, however, studied children, food or eating. Although Merleau-Ponty, for example, sees the body as neuro-muscular, it sees, hears, moves around and senses its bodily positions from within, it does not eat. An interesting approach, close to our own, is Elsbeth Probyn’s suggestion of “alimentary identities” (2000). Inspired by Deleuze, she argues that we are “alimentary assemblages, mouth machines that ingest and regurgitate, articulate what we are, what we eat and what eats us”, and in doing so, rework the categories that define us (Probyn 2000: 32) She, does not, however, discuss children.

In this article we have made an attempt to add to the work of Nick Lee and Stuart Aitken in bringing Childhood Studies and Deleuzian theory together. Our material uncovers the two aspects of the designation “becoming”. On the one hand, we could see how a generational order positions children as certain kinds of “I-am”, for example as learning subjects, growing and incomplete humans or greedy food monsters. On the other hand, the material reveals how assemblages, consisting of bodies, space, rules, information, fuel balls and foodstuffs of various taste, shape, texture and nutritional content, produce smooth spaces where children are able to de-territorialize the adult-defined “I-ams”, and through their doings create powerful “I-dos”.

We have distinguished three performances of “I-dos”: First, there is the seemingly obedient pupil, who pretends to do what he or she is told, but who finds the loopholes in the set of rules and more or less imperceptibly escapes from adult supervision. Second, there is the child who makes use of the stereotyped and possibly cute “food monster” designation, and turns it into a threatening subject, who disturbs the order and challenges adults’ power. Third, we have met the knowledgeable scientist who, with the help of a research project, adult experts, nutrition
calculation programs and ingredients for making sports drinks, seizes the definition of the body as a site for growing stronger, healthier and more capable. We have found the concept of foodscape rewarding in studying children’s bodily becoming through food and eating. In our study, the foodscape held many striated spaces, where the children had few alternatives to adhering to the adults’ designated “I-ams”, leading to them becoming-the-same. But following the children in their foodsapes, we also entered smooth spots where children had the opportunity to experiment with “I-dos”, that would not have occurred to us had we not followed them, and there are certainly many more that appear in the children’s everyday encounters with food. After all, foodsapes emerge as you move around to where food and eating is. Encountering food and eating at various places, different child performances emerged. Eaters do not observe from a distance, but are mixed up with their surroundings. Eating is a physical activity. Eaters get to know the world by tasting it, chewing on it, even partially absorbing it. As Elisabeth Grosz explains (1998: 42), “…bodies reinscribe and project themselves onto their socio-cultural environment so that this environment both produces and reflects the form and interest of the body”. The body is what is acted on in foodsapes, but also what acts and acts back. Through the body, body movements and body work, the children find lines of flight, ways of becoming-other, with the children’s interests in the fuel-ball identity as a prominent example. These lines of flight enable the children to flee from an adult world’s attempt to capture them in pre-designated “I-ams”, but also to fly and try their wings, both being possibilities for becoming-other. On a metaphorical level the interest in fuel balls implies a vision of the body as a machine in need of fuel (food) to perform well (for example Wilk 2004), a machine that the children can learn to control. Taking charge of the body can also be regarded as a refusal to submit to adultist moral discourses of children’s bodies in relation to appearance (cuteness, beauty) or problematic size (too fat, too thin), discourses that adults to a larger degree are controlling.

Helene Brembeck is Professor of Ethnology and a co-director and researcher at the Centre for Consumer Science (CFK), at the University of Gothenburg. Her research interests include issues of parenthood, childhood, food and eating in consumer culture. E-mail: helene.brembeck@cfk.gu.se

Barbro Johansson is Associate Professor of Ethnology and a researcher at the Centre for Consumer Science (CFK), at the University of Gothenburg. Her research interests include childhood, generation, participation, food and eating, E-mail: barbro.johansson@cfk.gu.se
Notes

1 The project is interdisciplinary and in collaboration with the University of Oslo and Centre for Consumer Science, CFK at the University of Gothenburg, but led from National Institute of Consumer research in Oslo. The project is funded by the Norwegian Research Council and will be completed in December 2010. The aim of the Beauty project is to develop knowledge of how discourses on health, consumption and well-being use, interpret and attach importance to appearance and looking good.

2 The *Barn som medforskare av matlandskap* project (BAMM) was supported by the Swedish Research Council Formas 2008-2010. Our adult co-researchers were Helena Shanahan, Lena Jonsson and Kerstin Bergström from the Department of Food, Health and Environment, University of Gothenburg, Eva Ossiansson from the Department of Business Administration (Marketing), School of Business, Economics and Law at the University of Gothenburg, MariAnne Karlsson and Pontus Engelbrektsson, Division of Design and Human Factors at Chalmers University of Technology, and Sandra Hillén from Centre for Consumer Science. We are of course deeply indebted to our colleagues and their many observations in writing this article.

3 Deleuze uses the term in its double meaning of "to fly" and "to flee" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987)

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Half the Right People: Network Density and Creativity

By Katherine Giuffre

Abstract
Social scientists investigating the attributes associated with creativity have for the most part confined their research to the study only of creative people. This research attempts to compare creativity with non-creativity by comparing creative with non-creative periods in the lives of three famously isolated creators (Emily Dickinson, Paul Gauguin, and Charlotte Brontë) to argue that the social networks of the individuals are different during creative periods than during non-creative periods. By using the correspondence of each of the artists to construct social networks, it is possible to analyze the artist’s relationships with regard to density and betweenness and to compare those across creative and non-creative time periods. The average network density of the first order zone network around each of the artists was 0.475 during periods of creativity. There was no correlation with a particular betweenness score.

Keywords: Creativity, social networks, density, Emily Dickinson, Paul Gauguin, Charlotte Brontë
Introduction

In the social sciences, there have been three main conceptions of creativity – as an attribute, as an action, and as an outcome. In the first conception, creativity is a component of individual psyches, much like IQ, which may be affected by social factors, a product of some combination of nature and nurture, but which is nevertheless an attribute of the individual and which varies from person to person. This way of conceptualizing creativity is largely pursued by psychologists, who have looked to the individual psyche as the place from which creativity flows (e.g. Albert 1990; Csikszentmihaly 1996; Gedo 1990; Sandblom 1999.) A large part of this approach has been to try to determine which personality characteristics are necessary for the individual to be a creative person.

In the second conception, creativity is an action. The bricoleur, for example, makes innovative use of the materials at hand in reaction to unexpected circumstances in order to respond to the world in creative ways (Levi-Strauss 1966). This perspective falls along the lines of Liep’s definition of “creativity as activity that produces something new through the recombination and transformation of existing cultural practices and forms” (2001: 2). Social scientists working with this conception of creativity often argue that it is social structure, rather than individual psyche, that plays the most important role in fostering creativity. Borofsky (2001) argues that creativity is a response to the unexpected occurrences, the disruptions, the challenges to tradition, habit, and routine that emerge to unsettle us. Creators are those who respond to these unexpected occurrences with unexpected solutions. These solutions may be at variance to traditional norms. They may even be highly antagonistic to those understood and agreed upon precepts. Indeed, they probably are. Creators break social rules.

In the third conception, creativity is an outcome, a change in the social or cultural formations, understandings, conventions, relations, etc., that had previously existed. One way of expressing this is that creativity is the stretching of the boundaries of the discursive formation (as in Foucault 1972). Something, an act or an object perhaps, is recognized as creative to the extent that it realigns relations or understandings. For example, White (1993) writes that, “Artworks can be so charged with importance because in expressing various identities, artworks may also be announcing ways in which identities are subject to reshaping and manipulation.” (1993: 9) As another example of this conception, subversive strategies in the field (Bourdieu 1985) are creative when they re-order the relations of the actors.

All of these conceptions rely to a greater or lesser extent on social relations and social forces, whether as part of the “nurture” aspect of the development of the individual psyche, the social structure and support that facilitates deviant actions that are creative, or the social reception that recognizes and legitimates the creative outcomes. This paper explores one particular type of social relation – the in-
dividual social networks of the creative person – to look at the correlates with creativity. As such, it extends the thinking of creativity as an individual psychological attribute to ask about creativity as a social attribute of individuals. Specifically, what is the connection between social networks and creativity?

**Previous Literature**

In his study of highly successful creative people in many fields, Csikszentmihalyi (1996) has attempted to catalogue the psychological attributes that these people possess, looking for patterns. He (1996: 10) finds, as an example of the characteristics that separate the creative individual from others, that “In fact, creative people are neither single-minded, specialized, nor selfish. Indeed, they seem to be the opposite: they love to make connections with adjacent areas of knowledge. They tend to be – in principle – caring and sensitive.” One important difficulty of this work is that by excluding “non-creative” people from his study, Csikszentmihaly undermines his ability to argue that the attributes he finds among creative people are different from those of non-creative people. With regard to specific attributes, moreover, Ng (2001), in his study of 344 university students in Singapore and Australia found, as his title states so succinctly, that “Creators are dogmatic people, 'nice' people are not creative, and creative people are not 'nice'”. Albert (1990: 23) takes a third tack and argues that “The eminent seem to protect themselves from distractions and intrusions that social and work involvement, and, for many, intimacy, may bring into their life work by psychologically distancing themselves.” [emphasis in the original] Although in disagreement with each other about the specifics, each of these studies seems to indicate that social relations with others may be in some way correlated with creativity.

Amabile (1996) documents the impact of social and environmental influences on creativity, emphasizing the importance of social-psychological factors present during childhood, such as family structure (especially the role that birth order might play) and educational environments. However, especially pertinent for this paper is her discussion of Simonton’s work: “Although several social factors during the creator’s developmental period (childhood, adolescence and early adulthood) influence later creativity, virtually no social factors during the actual productive period have an impact.” (Amabile 1996: 217) This paper will argue that social factors during the productive period do have an effect on the creator.

Using what he calls the “ecosystem perspective”, Harrington addresses the role of social forces in the development of creativity by imagining those external variables which might prevent a person from being able to write a book and therefore be considered “creative”:

What might the story of our missing writer include? It might well be a story of talents never recognized, of books never read, of mentorships never crystallized, of older writers never known, of travels never possible, of energies drained, of others to
care for, of mouths to feed, of rents to pay, of rooms to share, of silences, and of invisible men. It might well be a story of ecosystem failure. (1990: 151)

By the term “ecosystem”, Harrington seems to be referring to society, social relations and social forces.

The idea of “kaleidoscope thinking” as put forward by McLeod et al. (1996), is also interestingly social. McLeod et al. argue that persons who are socially positioned to take advantage of differing viewpoints, differing subcultures, differing norms, and differing expectations and ways of thinking, are more likely to be creative. In more sociological terms, these people might be characterized as those with numerous bridge ties among different small worlds (Granovetter 1973; Uzzi & Spiro 2005) or those in brokerage positions surrounded by structural holes (Burt 1992, 2004). Nemeth and Nemeth-Brown (2003), Milliken et al. (2003) and Strasser and Birchmeier (2003) all similarly argue for the value of dissent and diversity as stimulators for creative thought in group settings, especially because diversity acts as a preventative to “groupthink”. Again, the idea is that it is the pattern of relations with others that is critical for fostering creativity.

Other researchers (e.g. Dennis 1966; Simonton 1988, 1991, 2007; Over 1989) have taken a life course approach to creativity. In looking at academics, scientists, and those in various fields in the arts, Dennis (1966: 3) finds that “[f]or almost all groups, the period [age] 40–49 was either the most productive decade or else its record was only slightly below that of the peak decade.” In later work, Simonton (2007) finds that the timing of the productive peak varies somewhat with the particular field (poets earlier than novelists, for example), but notes that a finding from the life course literature is “especially robust”:

…the output of creative products tends to change over time, rising relatively quickly to a career maximum and then declining somewhat gradually thereafter. Typically, the peak occurs sometime in the late 30s or early 40s, and the productivity toward the end of the career is about half that at the career maximum. (2007: 133)

Simonton also argues for a “constant-probability-of-success model” (1988) where “creativity is a probabilistic consequence of productivity, a relationship that holds both within and across careers” (1988: 254). “Success” here is defined as “high-quality” work, such as scholarly articles which are cited very frequently by other authors. Productivity, therefore, might be reasonably used as a proxy for creativity.

Further, Galenson and Weinberg (2000) find that there has been a shift in the creators’ average peak age of creativity over time, with painters born later in the 20th century (between 1921–1940) reaching their creative peak earlier than did painters from the previous generation (born between 1900-1920.) Galenson and Weinberg attribute this to shifts in the demand structure of the mid-century art market – that is, to larger social forces outside of the individual artists.

Similarly, Accominotti (2009) argues that the decrease in peak age of creativity that Galenson observes is linked to participation in artistic movements, the social dynamics of which play an important role in generating artistic creativity. Farrell
(2001), in his work on collaborative circles, argues from specific historical case studies that the social form that fosters creativity is a group of creators that consciously stands in opposition to the mainstream norms, has enough members to support each other in the ideological deviance, is not so tightly-knit as to impel group-think or too loosely-knit to support each other, and where members break sometimes into pairs for purposes of refining and fleshing out ideas. He argues that having the right type of social structure is a spur to creativity – that the creative ideas themselves would not arise without the particular interaction with a circle of others. Sawyer (2007) finds that improvising groups are able to attain a state of “group flow”, an extension of Csikszentmihaly’s conception of “flow” for the individual, where members can spontaneously engage in creative action. Not all groups are able to achieve this state, however. Sawyer argues, for example, that groups are most successful when there is a clear goal for the group, but the goal is not so restrictive as to leave no options for creative problem-finding.

Collins (1998), arguing in a similar vein, takes a broader historical view, positing a “law of small numbers” which states that great creativity in philosophy occurs when there are between three and six competing philosophical schools extant simultaneously and when the trajectory of these schools of thought is in the process of either contracting (from a large number being winnowed down) or expanding (from a smaller number diversifying). It is these situations, Collins argues, that produce innovative ideas with lasting impact through the ages. It is the interaction among these groups that is so conducive to the production of creative ideas. Innovative ideas and schools of philosophy are the outcomes. Farrell, Collins, and Sawyer all focus on the development of creative groups and the interactions within and among those groups as well as the interactions of the groups with the larger society surrounding them. Simonton (1984) further examines the specific types of relationships (e.g., master-apprentice) that artists have and how those relationships correlate with eminence. By coding the existence or not of 11 different types of relationships in each artist’s life, Simonton finds that five different types of relationships – paragons, rivals, associates, apprentices, and admirers – are correlated with artistic eminence.

This paper extends this thinking to look at the complete (as far as possible) social networks of specific individuals. The literature seems to indicate that we should expect to see creativity flourish when 1.) the individual’s social network is dense enough to be supportive but not so dense as to demand groupthink, 2.) when the individual has ready access to a wide-ranging set of others (including others involved in artistic movements), and 3.) when the individual is the link between disparate small worlds. These are network attributes.

Is there a difference between the social networks of “creative” versus “non-creative” people? The methodological considerations of this problem are a stumbling block. We run up against problems in trying to distinguish creative from non-creative people in order to make the comparison necessary to test our hypothesis. Johnson (2008), for example, looks at networks of people who have re-
ceived patents, by definition innovators. Although he finds that patent holders have fairly dense networks of ties among themselves (based on shared authorships of the patents), this does not tell us much unless we can compare those networks with the networks of non-creative people who nevertheless share similar attributes with the patent holders. Since Johnson is looking at biotechnology inventors, we need to see the networks of collaboration (the data source for which is unclear) among people working in biotechnology who have not had innovative ideas. The comparison between the network structures of the two groups would theoretically give us the intellectual traction that we need to make statements about the social structures correlated with creativity, but the problems of defining people who are not creative are even more intractable than defining those who are and the network data would necessarily be of a different type, given that the networks for the patent holders are derived from shared authorship of the patents themselves.

Part of the difficulty with conceptualizing a solution to this problem lies in the conception that creative people have “creativity” as a permanent personal attribute. If we instead look at products as being creative (ideas that fall outside the boundaries of the established field, say) then we see that over the course of a person’s lifetime, there are some moments of creativity (the production of creative products, ideas, etc.) and other periods where that same person is not as creative, as the life course researchers all document. If we then trace the pattern of social relations over the course of a lifetime, comparing periods of much creative production with periods of no or very little creative production, we have a way of examining the correlation between a person’s social relations and his or her creative output that avoids the pitfalls of trying to find non-creative people who share enough attributes with the creative ones to form a useful contrast. We can define “non-creative” as those periods in a person’s life when, compared to other more fertile periods, his or her creative output is relatively less marked. Creativity, then, is seen here not so much an attribute as it is an action. Moreover, these actions are facilitated by some social structures more than by others. Creativity as an action is correlated, that is, with individual attributes, albeit social rather than psychological ones.

Given the contention that creativity is the product not of lonely recluses locked away in their garrets, but of individuals enmeshed in social structures, the most compelling cases to examine will be those of precisely the loneliest of recluses because they are the cases most unfavorable to the hypothesis. This paper examines the social networks of three famously reclusive creators – Emily Dickinson, Paul Gauguin, and Charlotte Brontë – to argue that periods of major creative production are correlated with a particular density of the surrounding social networks and that periods of little to no creativity are correlated with periods in the artists lives of either too much or too little density in their social networks.
Background

Emily Dickinson was born in Amherst, Massachusetts, in 1830 and died there in 1886. (For sources on Dickinson’s life, see Habegger 2001 and Sewell 1980.) Along with Walt Whitman, she is considered the very best of 19th century American poets. Her innovative approach to poetic form presaged the rise of Modernism in the early 20th century and profoundly affected generations of American poets who came after her. She is perhaps equally well known, however, for the legend of her withdrawal from society and the decades that she spent secluded in her family’s home, hidden from the world writing hundreds of poems in secret, publishing only an anonymous handful during her lifetime. If any artist seems to epitomize the romantic ideal of isolated genius, it is surely Emily Dickinson.

Yet Dickinson was not quite so isolated as legend portrays. She lived in the house with her father and her mother (who died only four years before the poet) and with her sister. Next door lived her brother Austin’s family, including his wife, Susan Gilbert Dickinson, Emily’s dear friend and poetic collaborator, with whom she had almost daily communication (Smith 1992). Perhaps more importantly, Dickinson kept up an abundant correspondence with friends, relatives, and acquaintances far and wide. She wrote to the whole gamut from her young nieces and nephews next door to luminaries such as sculptor Daniel Chester French, writer Helen Hunt Jackson (both of whom she had known in her teens and twenties), and Josiah Gilbert, founder of Scribner’s Monthly, who along with his wife, was friendly with the entire Dickinson family. Over 1000 of these letters survive (Dickinson 1958; Sewell 1980; Habegger 2001).

Dickinson probably began writing poetry at a young age and the earliest extant example dates from 1850 when she was 19 years old. Although she wrote throughout her life, the period from 1858 through 1865 was especially productive. (Dickinson 1960) Over half of the poems that she wrote during her lifetime were produced during these eight years, including most of her very finest, such as “Wild Nights – Wild Nights!” (c. 1861), “I heard a Fly buzz – when I died – …” (c. 1862), and “A narrow Fellow in the Grass” (c. 1865). The years 1858-65 were the high point of her writing and it is during this time that she developed her unique and innovative poetic style. (Dickinson 1961) The earliest publishers of her work felt it necessary, in fact, to edit and amend her idiosyncratic punctuation, capitalization, rhyme schemes, and meter so as to fit her poetry more closely into the expectations of the day. Only decades later was it published as written. An example of a negative review from 1891, however, inadvertently praised her innovative style:

It is a sad pity when the substance of true poetry is put at a disadvantage by the writer’s recklessness in respect to form ... Her verses are fragmentary in thought and often clumsy in expression and they pay small heed to rhyme or meter. Yet they are poetry. (Buckingham 1989: 281)
Although in many ways far removed from a quiet New England spinster poet, the painter Paul Gauguin shares some important characteristics with Dickinson: periods of startlingly innovative creativity, long stretches of relative seclusion, and a decided penchant for letter writing (Danielsson 1964; Cachin 1992). Gauguin was born in 1848 in Paris. He married when he was 25 years old and began painting the following year. Within two years, he had shown his first painting in the Salon and three years after that first participated in the annual Impressionist Exhibition, producing rather imitative paintings that fit in well with the prevailing Impressionist aesthetic. In 1883 he finally abandoned his work as a stockbroker to devote himself to painting. His life after this was peripatetic, including stints in Copenhagen (1884-85), Pont Aven (1886), Panama and Martinique (1887), Pont Aven again (1888), the infamous nine weeks with Vincent van Gogh in Arles (1888), Pont Aven a third time and Le Pouldu in Brittany (1889) before leaving for Tahiti in April 1891. He stayed on Tahiti until mid-1893 and then returned to France. He went to Pont Aven for a final stay in 1894 and then left again for Tahiti in 1895. In 1901, he went from Tahiti to the island of Hiva-Oa in the Marquesas. His health declined precipitously in the last years of his life and he died on Hiva-Oa in 1903. During all of these wanderings, Gauguin kept up a steady correspondence with dealers, patrons, friends, fellow artists and even, for many years, with his abandoned wife and family.

Like Dickinson, Gauguin had distinct periods of artistic innovation. The first was the period 1887-89, during which Gauguin stylistically broke with Impressionism and, along with his friends Meyer de Haan, Charles Laval and Emile Bernard, formed new ideas about painting which were the basis for Syntheticism and Cloisonnism. In 1888, Gauguin painted the arresting “Vision after the Sermon: Jacob Wrestling the Angel” and also had his first one person show in Paris. In 1889, he painted his startling masterpiece, “The Yellow Christ”, which brought together many of the innovative ideas with which Gauguin himself had been wrestling.

The second phase of creativity occurred from June 1891, when he first arrived in Tahiti through mid-1893, during which time Gauguin found his definitive style and subject matter and executed the stunning “Manao tupapau” as well as “Ia Orana Maria”, a daring reworking of the theme of the Virgin Mary with the baby Jesus. There was also a smaller burst of creativity in 1896–97, when Gauguin painted the masterpieces “Nevermore” and “Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?” However, although these paintings are among Gauguin’s finest, they are more a summing up of his life’s work rather than truly new and innovative approaches to painting. It is a matter of debate, therefore, whether this period can be classed with the other two. Following this final burst, Gauguin became increasingly entangled in local politics, his own legal and financial woes, and in his declining health. His output diminished considerably before his death.
As with Dickinson and Gauguin, Charlotte Brontë has also been the object of considerable myth-making, especially with regard to the isolation that she shared with her talented siblings. Brontë was born in 1816. (For sources on Brontë’s life, see Hanson & Hanson 1949; Barker 1994; Gordon 1994 and Miller 2001.) Raised in relative isolation in the Yorkshire moors, Brontë lived most of her short life at home in the Haworth parsonage with her widowed father and three surviving siblings, her sisters Emily and Anne and her brother Branwell. She received only a smattering of formal education, making her few friends during those times when she was away at school – one year at the Clergy Daughter’s School in Lancashire when she was eight and 18 months at Miss Wooler’s school in Roe Head, Yorkshire when she was 14. At Miss Wooler’s, Charlotte made friends with fellow students Ellen Nussey and Mary Taylor who would be her chief correspondents throughout the rest of her life. Charlotte returned as a teacher three years later, staying from June 1835 until December 1838. That would be the longest that she would ever be away from home.

In February 1842, Charlotte and Emily travelled to Brussels to become students at the school of M. Constantin Heger. She left on January 1, 1844. From then on, her father’s increasing blindness and ill health made it difficult for Charlotte to ever leave him.

In 1846, the sisters self-published a book of poetry under the names Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell. Only two copies sold. Nevertheless, Emily producing Wuthering Heights in 1847, Anne producing Agnes Grey in 1847 and The Tenant of Wildfell Hall in 1848, and Charlotte publishing her masterpiece, Jane Eyre, in December 1847. The novel attracted a fair share of disapproval from many critics who failed to grasp the innovative genius of “the New Gothic” (Heilman 1958). As one critic wrote at the time, “It is a very remarkable book: we have no remembrance of another combining such genuine power with such horrid taste.” (Rigby 1848/1971: 450) Nevertheless, by January 1848 a second edition of Jane Eyre was required and a third edition by mid-April of that same year.

Following the success of Jane Eyre, Charlotte Brontë’s social world enlarged considerably as she began to visit London occasionally and became friends with others in the literary circles there. But her pleasure in her accomplishments and new acquaintances were overshadowed by the deaths from tuberculosis of all of her remaining siblings: Branwell in September 1848, Emily in December 1848, and Anne in May 1849. For the next several years, Brontë lived at Haworth with her father. She wrote two more novels during this period, Shirley in 1848–49 and Villette in 1850-53. In June 1854, Brontë married her father’s curate, Arthur Bell Nicholls, but she died in March 1855, nine months after her marriage, at age 38.

Methodology

Dickinson’s complete extant letters are collected in Dickinson (1958 – three volumes). These are the letters that Dickinson wrote, with only a very few of the
letters that she received included. Almost all of the letters that she had received and kept during her life were burned by her sister after Dickinson’s death. For this analysis, the letters are divided into three periods: 1850 (the date of her first surviving poem) to 1857, 1858 to 1865 (the period of greatest innovation and productivity in her poetry), and 1866 to 1886 (the year of her death). For each period, the letters were used to build a first-order zone network – that is, not only was Dickinson connected to the recipients of the letters, but those recipients were connected to each other if 1.) there are extant letters between the two recipients (these are relatively rare, but do exist), 2.) it could be assumed that the two recipients knew each other (for example, her brother Austin was assumed to know his daughter Martha), 3.) biographies make clear that two recipients knew each other (for example, Austin’s long term extra-marital affair with Mabel Loomis Todd is well documented) or 4.) Dickinson mentions one recipient to another within the body of a letter in a way that indicates the two know each other. For example, in a letter to her friend Abiah Root in 1850, she mentions her other friend Abby Wood, indicating that Root knew her, as would be expected from their girlhood days. “Abby has not come home yet – and I hav’n’t [sic] written her. She must be very sad, and need all comfort from us. She will be left alone – won’t [sic] she?” (Dickinson 1958: 89). Owing to Dickinson’s frequent mention of having received letters from her recipients, despite the absence of these letters, the ties are considered directionless. These ties, then, form three matrices (one for each period) that represent the immediate network of Dickinson and her correspondents, with Dickinson at the center.

Dickinson’s withdrawal began in her twenties and she maintained her previous friendships by letter. Owing to brief trips away from home taken by her family members as well as the preservation of notes and letters sent to her brother’s house next door, the letter networks also include even her closest family members. Because of her withdrawal from face-to-face society and her attention to maintaining her relationships through letter writing, the correspondence network provides a very good picture of the social interactions in which Dickinson engaged. We can have a more complete picture of her social network precisely because so little of it happened via personal contact – letters leave traces that conversations do not.

Paul Gauguin’s retreat from society was not nearly so complete, of course, and his correspondence network cannot be seen as encompassing his social life to the same extent as Dickinson’s can. Nevertheless, his long periods of exile away from Paris and the corresponding necessity for letter writing (to handle his artistic business affairs with dealers, critics, and patrons as well as to maintain his relationships with friends and family far away) mean that his social networks are more fully represented in his letters than would be the case of an artist who was seldom far from the cafes and salons at the center of the art world in Paris (Guerin 1978; Gauguin 1984, 1992, 2003; Denvir 1992; Thomson 2001).
The same methodology was used to construct networks for Gauguin, although in his case, networks were constructed for seven periods: 1872 (the date of his oldest extant letter) to mid-1886\(^3\) (when he left for his first trip to Pont Aven in Brittany), mid-1886 through 1889 (the period during which he developed the ideas of Cloisonnism and Syntheticism), 1890 to mid-1891 (when he landed in Tahiti for the first time), mid-1891 to mid-1893 (his first Tahitian period), mid-1893 to mid-1895 (when he arrived in Tahiti for the second time), mid-1895 through 1897 (the period when he painted “Nevermore” and “Where do we come from?”), and 1898 to early 1903 (when he died). Gauguin’s letters are not compiled in the way that Dickinson’s have been, so multiple sources were used to amass them (Danielsson 1964; Guerin 1978; Gauguin 1984, 1992, 2003; Cachin 1992; Denvir 1992 and Thomson 2001).

Brontë’s letters, including a fair number of the letters that she received and also many letters between others in her circle, are collected in Smith (2004 – three volumes.) Unlike with Dickinson, whose main correspondent – her sister-in-law Susan Gilbert Dickinson – was also her closest poetic collaborator (Hart & Smith 1998), however, missing from the Brontë correspondence record is the close collaboration with her sisters Emily and Anne. The sisters’ co-residence in the Haworth parsonage during the critical years of 1846-47 obviated the need for any letters, although the importance of the sisters’ communication with each other is undeniable. Brontë wrote to George Smith in 1852 (years after her sisters’ deaths):

> You must notify honesty what you think of ‘Villette’ when you have read it. I can hardly tell you how much I hunger to have some opinion besides my own, and how I have sometimes desponded and almost despaired because there was no one to whom to read a line – or of whom to ask a counsel. ‘Jane Eyre’ was not written under such circumstances, nor were two-thirds of ‘Shirley’. (Smith 2004 vol. III: 74)

The other Brontë family members, therefore, have been included in the matrices for Charlotte Brontë up until the time of their deaths. Matrices were constructed otherwise in the same manner as for Dickinson and Gauguin. The time periods for Brontë are: 1829–39 (first extant letter through two stints at Miss Wooler’s school), 1839–44 (two governess jobs and her time in Brussels), 1844–45 (home at Haworth), 1846–47 (from the date she began composing *Jane Eyre* until she finished writing it), 1847–49 (the deaths of her three remaining siblings and the composition of *Shirley*), and 1849–55 (the period of her fame, the slow composition of *Villette*, her marriage, and her death.)

Figure 1 shows the sociogram of the 1872–86 period for Gauguin as a typical example of the correspondence networks created in this way. Nodes in the network have been grouped together by structural equivalence, where actors are structurally equivalent if they have the same types of ties to the same others.
Using UCINET (Borgatti et al. 2002), the matrices of correspondence were analyzed in terms of their overall density, as well as betweenness centrality. Density is the proportion of actual ties made to the number of ties that could possibly have been made in the network. The higher the density score, the higher the proportion of actual to possible ties.

Betweenness centrality is a measure of the number of shortest paths (geodesics) between any two nodes in the network that pass through a particular actor (in this case, Dickinson, Gauguin, or Brontë.) The higher the betweenness score, the greater the number of geodesics that pass through the individual in question. The matrices were also broken into blocks of structurally equivalent actors using the CONCOR algorithm and the density matrix of the blockmodel was used to produce the sociograms in Figures 1, 8, 9, and 10.

**Findings**

The ideas expressed by Farrell (2001) imply that the social structure most conducive to creativity is the group that is tight enough to be cohesive but not so tight as to induce group-think. Translated into network analytic terms, this means that the density of the network should be somehow “moderate”. “Density” is, however, a somewhat relative term. The formula to calculate the density of a network (the actual number of ties divided by the possible number of ties) gives a percentage of possible ties actualized, but just whether this percentage should be considered high, low, or in between depends on the context of the network. It is relative and its power comes from comparing across situations. With Dickinson, Gauguin, and
Brontë, the comparison is among periods in each of their lives – comparing the density of the highly creative periods with that of the less innovative and productive ones.

Looking at the network densities for each of them across time reveals striking similarities, as seen in Figures 2, 3 and 4. Note that network density is almost ex-
actly the same for each of them during their creative periods – 1858–65 for Dickinson (density 0.4737), 1846–47 for Bronte (density 0.4744), and 1887–89 (density 0.4848) and 1892–93 (density 0.4762) for Gauguin. (The period 1896–97 [density 0.3030] for Gauguin is problematic – the period of two masterpieces, but not great innovation – and this period displays network characteristics more in line with non-creative periods than with creative ones. There is a difference between innovation and mastery.) This means that just under half of the ties possible in the first order zone around the artists were actualized.

It is possible to apply a chi-square to these findings using the null hypothesis that whether a particular time period in an artist’s life is “creative” or not (is one of the four periods – one each for Dickinson and Brontë, two for Gauguin – where significantly innovative work was produced) is independent of network density. The median value for the average network density over the 17 time periods (seven each for Gauguin and Bronte and three for Dickinson) in the artists’ lives is 0.38. The average for the “creative” periods is 0.475. There is evidence (p=0.0006) that the creativity or not of the period is correlated with whether or not the average network density is close (within 0.015) of the median value of 0.475. Because of the small n involved, we should not make too much of these scores, but they do indicate the possibility that the network density of 0.475 is significant.

The second interesting point to note is the pattern across time of the degree of density. For both Dickinson and Gauguin, the creative periods are high points of density rising out of valleys of very low density – as low as 0.2687 for Dickinson (about one in four possible ties actualized) and 0.2095 for Gauguin (about one in five.) The periods of creativity are periods of a drawing together of the network following periods of very low density – extreme fragmentation. Collins argues that periods of innovation occur during times of either consolidation or fragmentation. For Dickinson and Gauguin, periods of innovation are periods when the network is consolidating after becoming very loose and before fragmenting again. For Brontë, however, the density of the innovative period of composing Jane Eyre follows two periods totalling about two years when the density of her correspondence network was quite high – 0.5619 and 0.5604, significantly higher than the 0.4744 density of 1846-47. This pattern fits in well with Collins’ theory that creative periods come when the number of philosophical schools is either expanding or contracting. While Dickinson and Gauguin had creative periods when their social networks were becoming more dense (contracting), Brontë had her creative period while her social network was becoming less dense (expanding.) This seems to indicate that there is an optimum point for density of these networks. The second interesting conjecture that arises from the Brontë pattern is that the correlation between density and creativity is indeed a correlation with a particular density and not with a relative density – not, that is, with a pattern. Looking at the Dickinson and Gauguin graphs in Figures 2 and 3, it is reasonable to speculate that periods of higher density might be an outcome of creativity – that artists are excited and enlivened by their creations and that this causes a “buzz” within their
circles that shows up as increased density within the first order zone. The Brontë pattern, however, indicates that the observed density during the creative periods is not merely relatively high, but is a particular value.

One question that arises in relation to these results is to what degree the individual members of the network differ during the different time periods and whether or not those possibly different memberships matter. Wellman and Wortley (1990) show that individuals receive different types of support (emotional aide, financial aid, etc.) from different types of members of their social networks (people who share age similarity, extended kin, etc.) A second question is whether or not the strength of the ties themselves changes over time and is correlated with changes in creativity. In this dataset, ties are coded simply as either present or absent. There is no variation coded with regard to intensity of the contact. Given the nature of the dataset (missing letters, deducing relationships from external or third-party evidence), imputing tie strength would be tenuous. Nevertheless, the question of the correlation of tie strength with creativity is an interesting one. Further research beyond the beyond the basic structural analysis presented here should investigate the memberships of the networks with regard to these two questions.

The implication here is that creative production is correlated with the shape of the first order zone network surrounding the creator. Not only does the general network around the artists matter, but as individuals, Dickinson, Brontë, and Gauguin all experience changes in their network resources during these times. The degree to which they can reach others in the network, the number of others they can reach and their position as the sole bridge between different factions in the network changes over time.

Bridges between cliques give some actors (i.e., those part of the bridge) easier access to social goods and other prizes, such as information and ideas. Granovetter (1973, 1974) gives strong evidence of the usefulness of these weak ties in his studies of job seekers. Weak ties that bridge cliques are helpful – powerfully so – in gaining the goal. The changing structure of the overall network and the changing nature of ego’s position within that network can be seen by looking at betweenness centrality scores.
Recall that betweenness centrality is a measure of the number of geodesics (shortest pathways between any two nodes) that pass through each node in the network. When a network member is the bridge between otherwise separated cliques (when they are, in Burt’s [1992] terms, surrounded by “structural holes”), they tend to have high betweenness centrality scores because they are more likely to be on the
unique pathway that more geodesics follow. As Burt and others (e.g., Hannerz 1980; Uzzi & Spiro 2005) have pointed out, this position as the link between cliques has important advantages. The “brokers”, Burt argues (2004: 349), “are at higher risk of having good ideas” because they have access to a more widely divergent array of information and of ways of thinking than do those who have access to only one small world or group. In theories of creativity, this position is implicitly esteemed. “Kaleidoscope thinking” (MacLeod et al. 1996) has an implication of betweenness in it and Csikszentmihaly (1996) also implies betweenness when he asserts that creativity is more likely to happen in places where many different groups collide. Although all three of the artists are central to their networks and are directly tied to everyone in them (an artifact of the data collection), their individual betweenness centrality scores are sometimes lower during periods of creativity, as Figures 5, 6, and 7 show. But during times of intensely creative innovation, both Dickinson and Gauguin had lower individual betweenness centrality scores than at any other times in their careers. This pattern did not hold for Brontë, however, whose betweenness score for the period 1846–47 was the second highest of any time in her life. The chi-square test showed no significance for any target interval of betweenness scores and the creativity or not of the time period in the artists’ lives.

Podolny (2001) offers an interesting way to think about betweenness in this context. He argues that in situations of egocentric uncertainty, where “a focal actor’s uncertainty regarding the best way to convert a set of inputs to an output desired by a potential exchange partner” (2001: 33), structural holes (and, therefore, the possibility of high betweenness scores) are highly valuable. Where egocentric uncertainty is low, structural holes have less value to ego. We could plausibly argue that it is possible to reverse the logic of Podolny’s argument and say instead that in situations of relatively few structural holes, there is less egocentric uncertainty and that, although a period of egocentric uncertainty may precede periods of creative productivity (as in the cases of Dickinson and Gauguin but not of Brontë), periods of creativity are times of clarity of vision or of intellectual certainty. (There is some evidence of this in Csikszentmihaly’s [1996] arguments about “flow.”) Structural holes are not valuable in situations of egocentric certainty when the focal actor is sure of the best way to produce an appropriate output or, more importantly for this context, the focal actor, feeling sure of his or her process, does not check the suitability of the output against a wide-ranging (rich in structural holes) set of alters and, therefore, does not fall into the trap of restraining creative, innovative, and deviant ideas. During periods of creativity and innovation, creative producers are either sure of acceptance or, more likely, unconcerned that their product might be unacceptable to potential alters.

Another possibility is that the betweenness centrality measures are not adequately capturing the existence of the salient structural holes. Because these networks attempt to present (as closely as possible) the totality of the creator’s social network, mundane and possibly unimportant contacts are included along with
more artistic and literary contacts, mixing together the relevant with the irrelevant. Given the ineffable nature of artistic inspiration, it is difficult to know, however, precisely which contacts should be excluded from the networks as unimportant. “Groupthink” theories, for example, imply that contact with others who are not particularly creative (in the rule-breaking way) will have the effect of dampening innovative thinking. The inclusion, therefore, of non-creative people in the network is necessary for fully understanding the processes at play. Similarly, Burt argues that the contact between divergent small worlds is the key to innovation. It is possible and even probable that connections to small worlds that are not explicitly concerned with artistic endeavor are useful in generating innovative ideas when their ideas and norms come into contact with other ideas and norms from other small worlds, explicitly artistic or not. When looking at an individual’s complete social network, deciding which small worlds are irrelevant is probably an impossible task. One way to possibly attack this issue would be through the lens of Bourdieu’s ideas about the field (1985). Looking at the field as a network of relationships, the question might be one of determining where the various blocks to which an artist is tied are placed within the field. Not all positions in the field are equal when it comes to generating innovative ideas.

Based on the different network properties, we can conjecture that it was not when the artists were alone, linking wildly different ideological worlds, that they were most creative, but when they were attached to others in a more moderate way and when those others were close to each other, although, again, not so close as to form one cohesive group. The sociograms of Dickinson for each of the three time periods illustrate this.

![Figure 8: Emily Dickinson 1850–1857](image-url)
Figure 9: Emily Dickinson, 1858–65

Figure 10: Emily Dickinson, 1866–86
As Figures 8, 9, and 10 show, Dickinson’s network evolved and spread out over time. At first, during the 1850–57 period, she was so closely tied to her brother and sister, Austin and Lavinia Dickinson, that the three are structurally equivalent. In the 1858–65 period, when her poetic innovativeness flowered, she is structurally distinguishable and has ties to many groups, which are not completely segregated from each other, for the most part. But by the third period, 1866–86, her networks have dispersed to a great extent and she has many ties that are not connected to the rest of her network at all. There are, for example, 12 mostly isolated individuals in the block marked “unrelated individuals outside Amherst” on the model. She has been pulled into too many directions – the structural stability necessary for creative innovation is gone.

Underlying this reasoning is an assumption that the letters written by each of these creators are important parts of their social networks and that because of the isolation that each experienced, the letters are substitutes for much face-to-face interaction. It is important, therefore, to examine the letters themselves with regard to the content of those interactions.

The Letters

The letters used to construct the correspondence networks also show how the content flowing among the network members contributed to the formation of creative ideas. Looking at the letters themselves, we can see that the artists actively solicited support and critical feedback for their endeavors from others in their networks.

The vast majority of information contained in the letters is relatively mundane. For example, Gauguin, the most impoverished of these artists, constantly implores his contacts to send him more money. As a typical example, he wrote to his friend Emile Shuffenecker from Martinique on August 15, 1887 (Gauguin 2003: 86)

> to do all that is possible to send me 250 or 300 francs immediately. Sell 40 of my pictures at 50 francs each, everything I possess, at any price; but I must get out of here, otherwise I shall die like a dog.

Brontë, who kept the composition of *Jane Eyre* a secret from everyone except her two sisters, wrote On December 13, 1846, to her friend Ellen Nussey, for example, of the weather and her family’s illnesses (Barker 1997: 157).  

> I hope you are not frozen up in Northamptonshire – the cold here is dreadful I do not remember such a series of North-Pole-days … I cannot keep myself warm – We have all had severe colds and coughs in consequence of severe weather – Poor Anne has suffered greatly from asthma – but is now I am glad to say rather better …

Dickinson wrote frequently to friends and relations to shore up personal relationships, as in her letter to Samuel Bowles from early April 1862 (Dickinson 1958 vol. II: 402) expressing her regret that a planned visit by him had been delayed:

> Dear friend. The Hearts in Amherst – ache – tonight – You could not know how hard – They thought they could not wait – last night – until the Engine – sang – a
pleasant tune – that time – because that you were coming – The flowers waited – in the Vase – and love got peevish, watching…

But each of the three artists also explicitly asked others in their networks of correspondents for serious critique of their work. In an often-cited letter to the writer and editor Thomas Wentworth Higginson written on April 15, 1862, Dickinson wrote (Dickinson 1958 vol. II: 403):

Are you too deeply occupied to say if my Verse is alive? The Mind is so near itself – it cannot see, distinctly – and I have none to ask – Should you think it breathed – and had you the leisure to tell me, I should feel quick gratitude – If I make the mistake – that you dared to tell me – would give me sincerer honor – toward you…

Higginson replied (the letter itself is now, however, lost or destroyed) evidently giving critical feedback on the poems she had enclosed and Dickinson answered him ten days after her initial letter, sending him more poems for his critique (Dickinson 1958 vol. II: 404): “Thank you for the surgery – it was not so painful as I supposed. I bring you others – as you ask – though they may not differ…”

Thus began a literary correspondence that lasted until Dickinson’s death and was of enormous importance to them both (Wineapple 2008). Although almost all of his letters to her are missing, it is clear from her letters to him that Higginson gave frequent and extensive feedback on the poems that Dickinson sent him, for example (Dickinson 1958 vol. II: 408–9):

Your letter gave no Drunkenness, because I tasted Rum before – Domingo comes but once – yet I have had few pleasures so deep as your opinion, and if I tried to thank you, my tears would block my tongue – …I smile when you suggest that I delay “to publish” – that being foreign to my thought, as Firmament to Fin – … You think my gait “spasmodic” – I am in danger – Sir – … But, will you be my Preceptor, Mr Higginson?

Later in August 1962, she wrote to him about two poems (Dickinson 1958 vol. II: 414): “Are these more orderly? I thank you for the Truth –” and continued to ask his opinions for the next 24 years.

When Dickinson told Higginson in her first letter that she had “none to ask” other than him about her poetry, she was not being quite honest. Perhaps even more important to Dickinson than her correspondence with Higginson was her relationship with Susan Gilbert Dickinson, her sister-in-law and next door neighbor to whom she sent more correspondence than any other person (Smith 1992; Hart & Smith 1998). Smith (1992) argues that Emily and Susan corresponded over the poems, refining and reworking them in what amounted to a “poetry workshop”. As an example, Smith notes the exchange between the two women regarding Dickinson’s poem “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers” (Smith 1998: 180-2). Having sent Susan a first version of the poem in summer 1861 (well before she began her correspondence with Higginson) and having received critical comments regarding the second stanza, Emily rewrote the poem and sent it to Susan with a note reading “Perhaps this verse would please you better – Sue –” (Dickinson 1958 vol. II: 379). Sue responded (Dickinson 1958 vol. II: 379–80):
I am not suited dear Emily with the second verse – It is remarkable as the chain lightening that blinds us hot nights in the Southern sky but it does not go with the ghostly shimmer of the first verse as well as the other one – It just occurs to me that the first verse is complete in itself it needs no other, and can’t be coupled…

Although he never would have asked anyone to be his “preceptor,” Gauguin also spent considerable time in his letters discussing his own and other painters’ art works, including sketches in the letters and even sending paintings through the mails. During his first creative period, on July 8, 1888, Gauguin wrote to his friend Emile Shuffenecker (Gauguin 2003: 99):

Also I have done some nudes, which ought to please you. And not at all in the Degas style. The last is a fight between two boys near the river, quite Japanese, by a Peruvian Indian. Very little finished, the lawn green and upper part white.

Six weeks later, he again wrote to Shuffenecker, continuing an epistolary discussion on art technique and theory and including a piece of artwork (Gauguin 2003: 100):

You are now in your element since you need disputatious struggle to encourage you. A hint – don’t paint too much direct from nature. Art is an abstraction! Study nature then brood on it and treasure the creation which will result, which is the only way to ascend towards God – to create like our Divine Master.

Gauguin also discussed his artistic theories with the painter Emile Bernard, with whom (along with de Haan and Laval) he developed the ideas that were the basis for Syntheticism and Cloisonnism. For example, in a November 1888 letter from Arles, Gauguin wrote (Gauguin 2003: 112):

You discuss shadows with Laval and ask me if I am in accord. So far as regards the analysis of light, yes. Look at the Japanese who are certainly excellent draughtsmen, and you will see life depicted in the open air and in the sunshine without shadows, colour being used only as a combination of tones, diverse harmonies, giving the impression of warmth, etc.

Gauguin’s most infamous artistic relationship, of course, was with Vincent van Gogh. Even before their disastrous nine weeks in Provence, Gauguin and van Gogh were in correspondence with each other, discussing their work in great detail and exchanging paintings through the mail. Van Gogh wrote to Gauguin (Gauguin 2003: 106–08):

… your general idea of the impressionist, of which your portrait is the symbol, is striking. … I have a self-portrait all ash-coloured. The ash colour comes from mixing veronese with orange mineral on a pale veronese background, and dun-coloured clothes. But in exaggerating my personality I sought rather the character of a simple adorer of the eternal Buddha. It has given me a lot of trouble, but I shall have to do it all over again if I want to succeed in expressing the idea. I must get myself still further cured of the conventional brutishness of our so-called civilization, in order to have a better model for a better picture.

Discussions of her work are much less extensive in Brontë’s letters because, unlike Dickinson and Gauguin, Brontë was in constant face-to-face contact with her literary circle, her sisters Emily and Anne. Barker (1994: 500) writes that, “…the sisters wrote their books in close collaboration, reading passages aloud to each
other and discussing the handling of their plots and their characters as they walked round and round the dining-room table each evening.” The correspondence networks for Gauguin and Dickinson work so well as proxies for their social networks because they were both so cut off from any other form of communication with their peers. Isolated in Haworth Parsonage, Charlotte Brontë also substituted correspondence for other forms of social interaction, with the important exception of her two sisters. Unlike Dickinson, who sent poems in letters to her sister-in-law next door, or Gauguin, who discussed ideas about the use of color from across oceans, Brontë had her chief supporters and critics living in the same house.

Nevertheless, like Dickinson with Higginson, even Brontë appealed by letter to an eminent person, asking his opinion of her work. In 1837, she sent a letter containing some of her poems to Robert Southey, the Poet Laureate of England. Her letter to him is missing, but she saved his reply to her in which, although he admitted (Barker 2002: 47) that “You evidently possess & in no inconsiderate degree what Wordsworth calls ‘the faculty of Verse’”, he nevertheless advised her that “Literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life: & it ought not to be.” Brontë wrote back to him, thanking him for his advice but, fortunately, ignoring it. Other communications about her work are sparse. Only after her sisters’ deaths did Brontë solicit serious critique from anyone else.

While the contents of the letters are interesting and indicate how the artists were sharing ideas about their work with others in their networks, I emphasize that for Dickinson, Gauguin and Brontë, the letters were an important substitute for many face-to-face interactions. The letters are a record of interactions – both the content and the pattern. That record would not have existed if the artists had been in positions to have more casual connections to their networks. The conversations that Gauguin had with Bernard, for example, about theories of painting in all probability would have happened in the cafes of Paris had Gauguin been there. The isolation of Dickinson, Gauguin, and Brontë, however, give us a mechanism by which to trace the content and pattern of those conversations. This bare bones analysis of the letters can be pushed further in future research to investigate the content of the letters in order to see if it changes over the course of time and, if so, in what ways. Is there a difference, for example, in the content of the letters during creative periods than at other times? If so, how does that difference manifest itself? Do we ever see evidence of “flow”, of “kaleidoscope thinking”, of “group think”, of “bricolage”, etc? And, if so, when does that evidence appear? That analysis is beyond the scope of the present paper.

**Conclusion**

Some social scientists researching creativity have searched for individual attributes that correlate with creativity. By confining their research to only those people who are considered creative, however, researchers have undermined their ability to argue that the attributes of creative people differ from the attributes of
non-creative people. This research attempts to overcome that problem by comparing across periods in the lives of individuals. By thinking of outcomes, rather than individuals, as creative, this paper argues that it is possible to compare creative with non-creative time periods in the individual’s life in order to make a case that there are indeed attributes that correlate with creativity. These attributes, however, are social rather than individual. Creativity is correlated with a social attribute, but is also conceived of as an action that has an outcome. The correlation with particular network patterns suggests an explanation for the life-course findings about changing creativity over time: social network patterns are changing over the life course. The changes in the shape of the networks may also be tied to external changes, from the changing nature of the art market to the possibilities or pressures to join an artistic movement (as in Accominotti 2009.)

The findings here are in line with some earlier research. Farrell (2001) provides evidence and cogently argues that creativity flourishes when individuals receive social support from a group but are not so tightly embedded in that group that their individuality is suffocated. This may be the explanation for the current finding of an average density of 0.475 as the optimum point for creative output. This is perhaps the “moderate” density that we are led to expect by not only Farrell, but also by Collins (1998) and by McLeod et al. (1996).

Second, the findings are in line with research indicating that creativity will flourish when the individual has ready access to a wide-ranging set of others (including perhaps other involved in artistic movements), but again, as the case of Charlotte Brontë reminds us, when the network is not so dense as to be stifling. The finding that this relatively dense web of connections is correlated with creativity fits well with findings and arguments from Becker (1982) about the importance of an individual being attached to an art world in order to be productive and from Accominotti (2009) regarding the importance of membership in artistic movements.

The finding that betweenness scores do not seem to be correlated with periods of creativity does not fit the previous literature (Burt 1992, 2004; Uzzi & Spiro 2005) as well. There are several possible reasons for this, including that the complete individual network of ties is not the appropriate network to investigate with regard to this question.

This study has looked for social network attributes that are correlated with periods of creativity. I put forward no specific arguments about causation, but the findings do lend themselves to speculation which further research may resolve. There are still unanswered questions. In line with Wellman and Wortley (1990), we must ask whether or not the different memberships of the networks at different time periods have an important effect on creativity. Do the types of others to whom the artists are connected differ across time? To what degree? Are there similarities across all the artists studied? If so, how might those similarities be important? The strength or weakness of the ties may also, as Granovetter (1973) suggests, play an important role in understanding the dynamics of creativity. Does
Tie strength with others vary over time? How so? Are there similarities across the artists? If so, what does this tell us about the strength of weak ties, for example, when it comes to creative endeavors? Finally, the content of the letters themselves has yet to be systematically analyzed, especially with regard to the theories of “flow”, “kaleidoscope thinking”, “bricolage”, and “group think”. Does the content of communication change over time? Is it different during periods of peak creativity? By looking more deeply at the correspondence of isolated artists over periods of greater and lesser creativity, we may be able to see not only correlation, but causation, in the processes at work.

Katherine Giuffre is Associate Professor of Sociology at Colorado College in the USA. She is the author of Collective Creativity: Art and Society in the South Pacific (Ashgate, 2009). Her interests include the sociology of art, social network analysis, and Polynesian studies. E-mail: KGiuffre@ColoradoCollege.edu

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Notes
1 For the sake of brevity, this period is labeled “1892-93” in the analysis that follows.
2 Burning journals, letters and other personal writing after a person’s death was commonplace during the 18th and 19th centuries. Jane Austin, for example, would have been an obvious candidate for this study, but only a very tiny fraction of her letters escaped incineration after her death (Austin 1997).
3 Gauguin’s changes of location and periods of creativity do not, of course, exactly match calendar years. Letter networks for each period were based on the actual dates of the period (such as his first arrival in Tahiti in June 1891), but for the sake of brevity were labeled in five two-year periods, which roughly approximate the actual dates, from 1887 through 1897.
4 Note that Dickinson is grouped into the same structurally equivalent block with her siblings Austin and Lavinia in Figure 8 (the earliest period), but not in Figures 9 and 10 (the later periods.) Actors are structurally equivalent when they have ties to the same others. In the first period, Dickinson shared with her siblings almost exactly the same pattern of ties to others. In later periods, she made connections to others that her siblings did not share and, therefore, made herself structurally distinct from them.
5 All spelling, grammar, and punctuation from letters are [sic].
6 Their brother Branwell, already deep in alcoholism, was kept in the dark about his sisters’ collaboration and his own literary and artistic ambitions languished and came to nothing other than a handful of poems published in local papers.
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Orange Houses and Tape Babies: Temporary and Nebulous Art in Urban Spaces

By Carmen L. McClish

Abstract
This essay argues that the disruption of the routine ways we engage with our cities is necessary for democratic activity and public participation. Building on research that examines the relationship between public spaces and democratic action, I explore temporary forms of creative street installation as interrupting the marketing pleas that have become the only authorized forms of visual art in our cities. I argue that tactics in urban spaces that are temporary and provide nebulous meanings are necessary to grab our attention and make us linger. I propose that these forms of engagement act in the same way as people performing or playing in public spaces. I specifically employ Yi-Fu Tuan’s theoretical notions of space and movement and Margaret Kohn’s discussion of the significance of presence in public spaces to examine the creative ways we engage with and experience our cities. I examine two activist/artist projects: Mark Jenkins’ tape installations and Detroit Demolition. My analysis of these two sites demonstrates the importance of citizens engaging in their urban spaces. By creating temporary artwork that is nebulous in meaning, activists/artists are interrupting the routine ways we experience our cities.

Keywords: Public space, nebulous, urban, street art, temporality, novelty
Introduction

From hundreds of cyclists crowding the streets to flash mob antics, engagement in urban public spaces has become central to participating in, and modeling, open democratic activity. Cities have notably altered in recent decades, with public space becoming progressively more privatized and controlled. Public spaces are now defined by the corporate, determined by those who pay to persuade, while those who create unauthorized street art or interrupt the flow of the market are increasingly subject to fines and arrest. Given this, those who create public art are required to disappear from the scene. Confronted with a lack of creative alternatives, inspired individuals, or playful gatherings, the options in our day-to-day life are limited to the forty-hour workweek, sanctioned leisure (including shopping), and other capitalist freedoms “of choice.” This isn’t new information. Scholars, activists and artists have been speaking out about advertising clutter, restrictions on public spaces, and civic engagement for many years. What I contribute to this research is further consideration on the relationship between public spaces, novelty and street art. Although there has been discussion on performance and play in public spaces and how it is tied to democratic action, specifically flash mobs or social protest (Perucci 2009; Shepard 2010) there remains less research about citizens taking back public spaces to express themselves through street art.

Photograph 1 – From Mark Jenkins’ “Storker Project.” Author has permission to reprint.
As we travel through urban centers defined by marketing, we have grown accustomed to not seeing these spaces in new or imaginative ways. Everyday life involves routine, and as we move through our cities, we have expectations and our public spaces often conform to those assumptions. We expect billboards and advertisements, public installations of historical figures, graffiti tagging and chain stores. We don’t expect to be walking down a sidewalk in Washington D.C. and see a baby caste in scotch tape holding a plastic ball, casually sitting on a street corner (Photograph 1). Nor do we expect to be driving through Detroit and glimpse a dilapidated house painted in a cheery orange (Photograph 2). This type of engagement is not only unusual, it is also nebulous, temporary, and doesn’t require artistic talent to create.

This essay examines the relationship between nebulous public “art,” those moments that may startle us or force us to reengage in our urban spaces, and the participation it may invoke. By being creative in our city streets, we are practicing democracy and this is central to both our happiness and health as individuals as well as issues of cultural change. By “art,” I do assume that not necessarily would these types of engagement be read as art in the traditional sense, however, this creativity provides something interesting in our urban spaces. I analyze two different forms of democratic engagement—the tape installations of Mark Jenkins and the Detroit Demolition project. Jenkins’ tape installations involve casting objects in transparent tape, and placing them in urban settings with the goal to surprise passersby, inviting reflection, conversation, and occasionally copycat antics.
Marc Schiller of the Wooster Collective claims Jenkins’ art will “pull you out of that zombielike experience that all of us have in our cities” (Quinlan 2006: par. 7). The group, Object Orange’s project Detroit Demolition Disneyland began as a commentary on the lack of attention by the city of Detroit to the decaying architecture that is scattered around the city (Photograph 3). The tactic of painting these crumbling buildings bright orange has resulted in the city tearing them down more hastily, something that the group had not predicted when they began this project. Stephen Zacks asserts, “If nothing else Object Orange has produced a new typology for site-specific art installations: art as a possible agent of demolition” (2006: par. 5). Jenkins’ installations have been photographed across and outside the U.S. and Object Orange’s project Detroit Demolition has been discussed as providing a model for other cities dealing with urban decay. These sites are not only temporary and nebulous but are simple, not requiring artistic talent to create and thus encouraging public participation. I specifically chose Object Orange’s project and Mark Jenkins installations as neither requires artistic skill, most of us can paint, or cast an object in scotch tape. Thus, whether other citizens chose to copy cat these projects or are inspired to create their own street art, public participation is encouraged.

Photograph 3 – Object Orange’s Detroit Demolition Project. Courtesy Paul Kotula Projects, Ferndale, MI. Author has permission to reprint
The interruption of routine in our everyday lives is significant. David Pinder argues that these forms of engagement include, “telling stories about cities … ways of sensing, feeling, and experiencing [these] spaces differently … contesting ‘proper’ orderings of space to allow for something ‘other’ to emerge” (2005: 386-387). Tony Perucci contends that moments that require meaning making “enact interruption, event, confrontation, and bafflement as a form of direct action” (2009: 1). He posits that these types of “ruptural performances” disrupt the habitual ways we engage in everyday life. I argue that forms of public installations that are nebulous in meaning act in the same way as startling public performances. That is, a flash mob activity in Grand Central Station provides a similar break from our routine as a giraffe constructed entirely out of scotch tape precariously eating trash out of a tree on a Washington D.C. corner (Photograph 4).
Temporary public art grabs our attention, if these artworks invoke curiosity we may then linger, questioning what we see. This provides the opportunity to envision our everyday environment in new ways. This is not inconsequential; there is a direct relationship between aesthetics and democracy. I understand that our participation in culture is centered in our freedom to be creative, if the only form of public art is advertising, and if we are limited in what we can create in our cities, our civic participation is being restricted. That is, the consequence of “a polity that degrades or ignores the aesthetic” is not a “degradation of the concept of freedom, but also a reduction in actual freedom” (Docherty 2006: x). By examining Jenkins’ tape installations and Detroit Demolition, I demonstrate the significance of urban art as temporary, nebulous, and accessible to the general public.

Before discussing Pinder and Perucci’s analysis in terms of my own, a more thorough overview of space, place, time, and public space is necessary. Through the argument posed by Margaret Kohn that public spaces require presence and the notion of the relationship between space and movement as outlined by Yi-Fu Tuan, I analyze two different sites of temporary nebulous public street art.

**Presence in Public Spaces**

Until recently public space has often been discussed in terms of argument. Margaret Kohn contends that democratic theorists have specifically focused on “the value of speech rather than the importance of space” resulting in the public sphere as “an abstraction” (2004: 80). A good example of this is the notion of Deliberative Democracy, which is built on Jürgen Habermas’s Ideal Speech Situation. Deliberative Democracy understands the public sphere as based in arguments that are sincere, truthful, and based in the desire for mutual understanding. Kohn posits public space as not about argument but about presence. She employs the example of a homeless person: “They do not convince us by their arguments. Rather, their presence conveys a powerful message. They reveal the rough edges of our shiny surfaces” (2004: 81). The presence of something new disrupts city spaces that are restricted and structured around calls to consume. The presence of anything unfamiliar within increasingly controlled public spaces provides a valuable way to reevaluate the possibilities of engaging in the public. The homeless as a presence in public spaces is significant not only in “revealing the rough edges” but also in the fact the homeless occupy space as a place. The meaning the homeless have of where they “live” creates what we consider space as place, according to Yi-Fu Tuan.

Tuan’s research on the differences between space, place and time is helpful in identifying why public spaces are significant to us as individuals and as a culture, specifically through his focus on space, place and movement. Given my interest here in how these projects may interrupt routine ways we experience our cities, the idea of movement is central. These ideas are not only important in understand-
ing the relationship between how we move between the familiar places of our lives to the potentially more open-ended possibilities of public spaces but also demonstrates our relationship with novelty and routine. Space is understood by Tuan as “a common symbol of freedom in the Western world” (1977: 54). We have a sense of space because we can move; place however is a “pause in movement” (138). Thus, “space is transformed into place as it acquires definition and meaning” (136). Tuan argues, “human beings require both space and place” (54) in that we want to move from the security of our homes to the uncertainty of public spaces. Thus, to return to the example of the homeless person, public spaces then act as both space and place for them. The line becomes blurred, as the security of place is often lost as the homeless person is chased by law enforcement from one public space to the next.

The relationship between aesthetics and democracy is reflected in freedom and space, specifically “having the power and enough room to act” (Tuan 1977: 52). Tuan’s analysis frames space as freedom, place as “a calm center of established values,” and time as “recurrent phases of tension and ease” (118). Space does suggest the future, and uncertainty and surprise are characteristics of the future. He suggests that what will provoke us to reflect on experiences we have are those events that are “untoward” (131). The pull between tension and ease is “the movement that gives us a sense of space is itself the resolution of tension. When we stretch our limbs we experience space and time simultaneously – space as the sphere of freedom from physical constraint and time as duration in which tension is followed by ease” (118). Routine is not celebrated. Our significant experiences lie in the “potential for surprise” that are “characteristics of the future and contribute to a sense of the future” (127). Both Jenkins and Object Orange can be read as commenting on the future, as being “untoward” or surprising, and as having that uncertainty and creativity that should center urban spaces. I am not assuming that the interruption of routine by either Jenkins or Object Orange is always pleasant (Jenkins’ tape creatures could be read as more trash along the cityscape. Detroit Demolition could be seen as drawing more negative attention to an embarrassing issue for the citizens of Detroit). Whether the response is positive or negative, though, it does interrupt the routine ways we experience our cities, and whether the reception is positive or negative, both of the projects are “nebulous.”

Object Orange paints decaying abandoned houses bright orange to create something interesting out of something ugly. Jenkins’ has stated that his tape casting work is a reaction to the only visual content of cities being “updated” with any frequency – advertising. He, however, also positions his tape creatures on public monuments, as he understands that “authorized” public installations are also “dead” or static. I understand both of these projects, with diverse agendas and aesthetics, as “strangeness in the commonplace” (Thrift 2004: 53) and “producing some degree of free play in apparently rigid social systems” (43), as Nigel Thrift argues are the basis for Michel de Certeau’s tactics. For Jenkins, hanging a tape
installation involves being a disappearing rebel, which is also a tactic of the group, Object Orange. Given the prevailing philosophy that all public spaces are bought and sold, those who engage in their cities must use the tactic of getting in and out quickly to avoid the possibility of citations and arrest. I am generally employing the term tactic as that which, “is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized ‘on the wing.’ Whatever it wins, it does not keep” (de Certeau 1984: xix). Jenkins and Object Orange don’t keep what they win but what is central to both of these activities is their impermanence and nebulous.

**Tape Babies**

To create tape installations, Jenkins casts baby dolls, stuffed giraffes, ducks and other objects in transparent packing tape. He provides directions on how to make your own tape sculptures by wrapping an item in cling wrap, covering the cling-wrapped object in packing tape, releasing the object inside by using a box knife or scissors, and then finally taping the shell back together (Jenkins 2008). Jenkins started creating his tape art with the goal to surprise urban dwellers and to offer a critique of static public spaces, both in terms of advertising but also as a commentary on permanent public installations. His project has inspired copycat works by teenagers and graduate students, as well as art teachers in Kansas and Long Island who have employed tape casting in their classes (Quinlan 2006). Jenkins states that the value of street art is to stimulate the environment, noting:

> The only visual content that’s updated with any real frequency is commercial advertising spaces. This is why the ephemeral nature of street art is so essential – because it creates a visual heartbeat in the city by people who are living in it, rather than just marketing to it. But what does the city do with these works? They remove them as quickly as possible and threaten to put the people who make them in jail. (Sudban-thad 2006: par. 19)

Jenkins' tape pranks “come at you out of nowhere one day when you’re walking down the street” (par. 18). The impact of this moment can be seen in the many photos revealing passersby reactions to his tape art – reactions ranging from curiosity and reaching out to touch the object, to laughter and conversation (Photograph 5). Jenkins understands his street art as more about “anarchy in the collective sense” than democratic action per se. He states that the goal of his installations are to play with “social conventions” (Jenkins 2010).
On an excursion to hang a couple of tape babies in Franklin Park in Washington, Jenkins recalls a confrontation he had with a homeless man. At first this man was angry with Jenkins being in “his space,” as this area is often a camping ground for the homeless, later the conversation turned to the tape sculptures. After an extended conversation, the man determined that Jenkins must want a wife and family (and this is why he chose to make and hang these tape babies). At this juncture, Jenkins offered the installation up for critique, and the homeless man proposed that they needed to be facing each other, like brothers. Jenkins states of the experience: “we ended up leaving on good terms, handshakes and even a hug. I offered him a couple bucks but he refused, and leaving, he said, ‘let no man scare you from what you love,’ and he pointed to the babies” (Sudbanthad 2006: par. 12-
13). Whether or not this homeless man’s interpretation of why Jenkins was creating and hanging tape babies was accurate (Jenkins states it is not), the more interesting point is that the nebulous nature of these installations allowed this conversation to occur, which provided both an unexpected moment for the homeless man and for Jenkins. However, if the homeless man had encountered the tape babies after Jenkins had left the scene, he would be left to contemplate this on his own. Either way this would be a meaning-making opportunity. 6 Tuan’s discussion of space and place is important here. Most of us wouldn’t be outraged if we found someone hanging a sculpture in a public area. However, if we came home and Jenkins’ was winding a tape baby around the front door of our house, our reaction would probably be quite different. We expect our “places,” such as home to be stable, well defined and routine. The importance of public spaces is that they don’t have these characteristics. We need to move between the routine and the novel. Of course, when you are homeless and the street is your place and space, your security and sense of entitlement shifts.

The implication of unauthorized public art is the possibility of “being nudged slightly more awake” (Pinder 2005: 393), which may cause “initial bewilderment” and then “enjoying the moment” or not enjoying the public art, either reaction is still an interruption of habitual experiences of our cities (383). Jenkins’ tape installations, such as his tape babies or his “meter pops” do this, they require passersby question these activities and provide a moment of possibly seeing Washington D.C. in new ways. Jenkins argues that living in Washington is the perfect environment for tape interference because the city is “sterile – dead.” Jenkins contrasts his pieces to institutionally authorized public art, stating:

I think memorials, monuments, and other publicly commissioned sculptures, for the most part, just sit there. It seems to me their purpose is to last and last, forcing the city with them into the past instead of the present or future. I sometimes interface my pieces with these types of sculptures just to sort of rejuvenate them back to the present. (Sudbanthad 2006: par. 18)

Jenkins claims that after the unveiling of authorized art it soon becomes “familiar and loses the punch” (par. 18). Tape installations have appeared in all sorts of urban and rural settings, from West Virginia to New York City to Rio de Janiero, gracing billboards, hanging from old buildings, or adorning sanctioned public sculptures. They cling to traffic signs and old statues, play with trash in alleys, and have even been seen riding atop taxis. Recently Jenkins’ street art has appeared in museums, he states that moving his installations into a gallery is,

just a place to sell stuff or show it off like butterflies dead and pinned. Of course you could buy the work and put it on the street yourself, so it still does have that same potential energy. But whereas putting something on the street that takes me three days to make is much different than paying five or ten thousand dollars a piece and doing the same. (Jenkins 2010)

Jenkins’ photographs some of the reactions to his installations and these recordings show moments of meaning making. In urban environments that are in the
service of commerce, to be jostled by something as odd as a tape baby holding onto a street sign is a reason to stop and question: Why? Who would create a tape baby? What’s the point?

**Orange Houses**

While tape installations provide unusual moments of interruption, Object Orange’s project disturbs the visual horizon of decaying architecture with an almost comical, almost beautiful bright orange house. Detroit Demolition, like Jenkins’ installations, presents that moment of “initial bewilderment,” which provides a disruption of our routine as we move through our cities.

Detroit Demolition is an urban renewal project aimed at bringing attention to the many abandoned, decaying houses in Detroit – a shrinking city long marked by “white flight,” urban sprawl, and consequently abandoned buildings in various states of decay. Jerry Herron describes the relationship to Detroit as the humiliation of history: “The most historically representative city in America: the one place that everybody can agree on by agreeing they no longer want any part of it” (1993: 13). But not everyone has abandoned Detroit. Object Orange’s project demonstrates that citizens in Detroit are demanding more of their politicians and are involved in rebuilding their city.

In Detroit, city workers mark abandoned houses scattered throughout the city with an orange “D” for demolition. But despite these markings, many of these houses have sat in their deteriorating states for many years. Activists have addressed this situation by painting these homes “Tiggeriffic Orange,” a color from the Home Depot Mickey Mouse series. Every square inch of the exterior is covered in the bright orange paint. After two of four houses that were painted were quickly torn down, an anonymous Object Orange participant wrote an article posted on *The Detroiter*:

> From one perspective, our actions have created a direct cause and effect relationship with the city. As in, if we paint the house orange, the city will demolish it. In this relationship, where do the city’s motivations lie? Do they want to stop drawing attention to these houses? Are the workers simply confused and think this is the city’s new mark for demolition? Or is this a genuine response to beautify the city? (2006: par. 6)

Object Orange also contends that this is not a simple gesture of merely identifying the decaying houses to urge the city to tear them down. The bright orange paint “highlights within the context of depression; every detail is accentuated through the unification of color. Broken windows become jagged lines. Peeling paint becomes texture. Such features are artworks in themselves” (par. 9). Detroit Demolition follows other trends of art as architecture. For instance, Gordon Matta-Clark in the 1970s focused on architecture and decay and is best known for his radical physical cuts through architectural forms (such as splitting a house in half, entitled “Splitting,” 1974) (Metropolitan Museum of Art 1992). Another example is Kate
Ericson and Mel Ziegler’s exhibition entitled “Camouflaged History.” These artists painted a house in South Carolina in camouflage, giving specific names for each color: “names such as ‘Moorish maroon red’ and ‘Confederate uniform grey’ evoked venerated and at times problematic chapters in the city’s history” (Tang at Skidmore 1991).

However, unlike these previous projects that were celebrated as art in the traditional sense, the Detroit Demolition project is centered on bringing direct attention to urban decay in Detroit while creating a temporary colorful mosaic that is outside of the formal structure of the art world. Tuan’s notions of the relationship between space and place are helpful here. When we think of place, and in Tuan’s discussion of it, we understand place as this well-defined part of our lives and our home is often what this invokes. Place is routine. Place is also where we express ourselves. Our homes are an extension of who we are, from the furniture, and the interior to the exterior: Do we have plants outside? Wind chimes? Are their tables and chairs? A barbeque? Flower gardens? Place is important and our homes are central to how we understand ourselves and who we are. To see abandoned houses, collapsing and worn, along the streets of Detroit has a ghostly quality to it. Who lived in these houses? Where are they now? To paint this crumbling architecture bright orange adds another layers onto this. If we are used to seeing these homes falling apart, now we must ask, why paint them orange? What is the point?

Detroit Demolition is not the first project to tackle the issue of urban blight in Detroit. In the 1980s, Tyree Guyton decorated dilapidated houses in the East side of Detroit. Using painted polka dots, old dolls, toilets, tires, and other found objects; Guyton brought enough public attention and traffic to these houses that the drug dealers and prostitutes who frequented Heidelberg Street were initially frightened off. However, despite these early positive results, Guyton has been ticketed for littering and many of his projects have been torn down because they were deemed eyesores by the city (Guyton 2007). Herron argues that Guyton’s projects are “not so much reassuring as they are disturbing. It is impossible to look at the Heidelberg Project and not imagine that something terrible has happened to cause this explosion of physical deformity” (1993: 199). The key difference between the Heidelberg Project and Detroit Demolition is that Guyton’s mission centers on keeping his public art standing as a comment on urban decay, while activists participating in Object Orange were thrilled to have their painted works torn down. Detroit Demolition is creating a stir in other cities that have similar problems of decaying houses littering their landscape. A blog entry from a citizen in Maine, excitedly asks, “Could Portland be next” (agent-orange.blogspot)?
Temporary and Nebulous

Tape art is temporary because curious passersby will take the installation or city-cleaning crews will discard. Abandoned houses painted by Object Orange are often torn down. Whether it be to break up the city spaces with temporary tape installations, or to clean up urban decay with temporary orange art, the impermanent is necessary; if we see it every day unchanging, we tend not to “see it.” The quick response in removing public art requires that the activist or artist begin to understand their work as impermanent. Within de Certeau’s notion of tactics, we should recognize these moments as centered in our use of time. The significance of de Certeau’s notion of tactics is tied to presence and how presence involves transforming public spaces, biding your time to strike, and getting out quickly and anonymously. He argues that tactics are “victories of the ‘weak’ over the ‘strong’ … clever tricks [or] knowing how to get away with things” and are, by their very nature temporary in that “what they win they do not keep” (1984: xix).

The importance of the temporary can be demonstrated by comparing Tyree Guyton’s mission in Detroit to that of the Object Orange project. Although they both are involved in bringing attention to the urban blight of Detroit, their works evoke different responses. My contrast of the two is not intended to discourage Guyton’s project but simply to compare his more stable works with temporary art. The major difference between these two projects is Guyton’s desire that his colorful transformations of these dilapidated houses remain permanent while Detroit Demolition hopes that by painting these decaying homes orange they will bring attention to this problem. As a permanent piece of colorful abstraction, Guyton’s work begs the question of whether or not his work will become, or has become, part of the urban clutter. Maybe Jenkins will hang a tape baby on one of Guyton’s projects to revive it, as he has done on other permanent art installations?

Those who wish to create city spaces that encourage community involvement and creativity, also recognize the need for novelty. Pinder discusses this phenomenon in terms of “initial bewilderment” brought about by something surprising in public spaces. He argues, “through street art and other interventions, its members seek to exploit opportunities for play and subversion as they interact with the city’s spaces” (Pinder 2005: 385). The activist group, Swoon Union, claim that they were attempting to create play in New York City by staging a pirate radio broadcast, street events, and birthday parties on the subway. Swoon Union don’t consider their activities political. However, after harassment by law enforcement about their public activities, they state “we do not consider ourselves a political group but when you do the kind of work that we have been doing, you discover pretty quickly that you are working in direct opposition to American capitalism, and that has a politics all its own” (Pinder 2005: 399). These tactics, or these “creative forms of productive mischief” (385), contests what are “proper orderings of space” and by doing this something novel emerges (387). This is telling another story of the city.
The idea that modern life is “boring, and therefore wrong” (Marcus 2002: 2 emphasis author’s) and as citizens we must create our own moments of play and creativity to combat capitalist culture has influenced culture jamming, flash mobs, and street art. The creativity we bring to our urban centers is telling another story of the city. These notions are based in the writing and art of the Situationist International. The Situationist movement was established in 1957, was declared dead by 1972, never held more than twenty members at any given time (mostly young students), with their subversive activities not extending beyond Paris, Amsterdam and Brussels (Ford 2005; Merrifield 2000). However, despite the Situationist movement’s short life, limited participation, and restricted geography, the ideas expressed have been widely influential. Their criticism centered on “modern life as boring,” due to the “spectacle” which has “colonized” not just media, architecture, but everyday life (Merrifield 2000). Pinder and Perucci both borrow from the Situationists for their analysis. Specifically, Perucci argues that ruptural performances “obverse” Debord’s “spectacle” (2009: 2). That is, these moments are outside the spectacle created by consumer culture and capitalism, thus they act as an interruption of this dominant ideology, where “the commodity completes its colonization of everyday life” (2). Pinder employs Debord’s notions of psychogeography, arguing that “geographic environment” alters the “emotions and behavior of individuals” (2005: 386). Central to this is the playful qualities of a city or the “exploring or experiencing the physical landscape in new ways” (391), which can lead to more permanent social changes. Pinder argues the significance of novelty in public spaces is that they offer “awareness, being nudged slightly more awake, [this is] the first step towards changing our culture” (393). Comparable to Perucci’s analysis, Pinder offers moments of public performances as this interruption. Perucci compliments Pinder’s analysis and goes further to argue that these novel moments are “ruptural performances.”

Ruptural performances are interruptive; they “halt, impede, or delay the habitual practices of everyday life” (Perucci 2009: 5). These moments make us “present to the present” (9) and are often “baffling and confounding” in that they do not demonstrate a clear purpose, political or otherwise (14). Both tape installations and Detroit Demolition interrupt the habitual ways we engage in public spaces. They do this by being new and unfamiliar in a city environment we may have begun to experience in mundane ways. A tape giraffe strategically placed or an orange house on the horizon is unexpected and new, this gives us pause and with this we are “present in the present.” The nebulous nature of both of these projects is why they are “startling” or “baffling and confounding.” They do not clearly offer a message. Given this, the passersby must linger and make meaning of what they have just seen. For example, Jenkins’ confrontation and conversation with a homeless man about his tape babies demonstrate how nebulous art can provide meaning making opportunities. The confrontation, conversation, and reconciliation in regards to the homeless man’s understanding of Jenkins’ work is sig-
significant. The homeless man stopped, first became confrontational about what Jenkins was doing, then he made his own meaning out of the nebulous tape baby by seeing Jenkins artwork as reflecting his desire for a family. Jenkins, in turn, did not contradict this interpretation of his work and welcomed the man’s advice on how to hang the tape babies facing each other “like brothers.” This moment interrupted the habitual space of this man who frequented this area of the city; it forced him to engage with the present because the artwork was new and not easily definable. However, this moment could have also taken place if the homeless man encountered the tape babies and Jenkins wasn’t there, only rather than conversation he would have been forced to make sense of it on his own. What is important is that we are compelled to make meaning of moments in which the intention is unclear.

For a passerby, who is walking or driving through their city to stop and touch a tape “meter pop,” or to glimpse an orange house along the horizon in Detroit, the potential lies in the questions: Why? Who? What for? With these questions arises an opportunity – perhaps simply to rethink public spaces, to contemplate the freedom that was practiced by the activist, or to consider a newfound motivation to take part in an ongoing artistic project or create one of our own; the opportunity to engage in our cities. The significance of “strangeness in the commonplace” is that we are offered the possibility to understand our freedom as citizens (Thrift 2004: 3).

Conclusion

Unexpected street art disrupts the conventional spaces of commerce, which have come to define public spaces. Urban spaces that encourage community sentiments have become increasingly limited, and with this, the predictability of our cities as defined by marketing often results in us moving through these spaces habitually. Encounters with novelty in public spaces that have become static, commercial, and unimaginative offer the opportunity of bringing about a moment of reflection. Such moments hold the potential for change. They may startle or rattle us, moving us momentarily away from our routines by suggesting possibilities for other ways of living. The potential to engage in beautifying one’s community is part of the freedom of being a citizen, simply creating a silly statement or something interesting is a disruption of the landscape that is swathed with marketing pleas, or scarred by urban blight, or stoic and uncompromising against community involvement.

The act of having to determine the meaning of street art presents possibilities to experience cities in new ways, to realize one’s own freedom or lack of it by those who have created an unpredictable artwork. Obviously if the public art is decisively ambiguous to concretely define the meaning of the moment becomes antithetical. This can be discussed in lieu of Christine Harold’s research on pranks. She defines pranks as a “stylistic exaggeration [that] interrupts conventional pat-
terns” (2004: 196), stating that it is imperative that we investigate more elusive forms of playful protest despite the problems of direct or rational translation. In examining the role of nebulous moments as interrupting the expected we should consider the slippery proposition of less politically obvious forms of activism, despite their difficult translation. Harold contends, "One might even argue that such translations dilute the rhetorical power pranks have to confuse and provoke. Thus, attaching an explicit argument, that is making a prank make sense, may undermine what is unique about phraking's signifying rhetoric in the first place" (207). Harold's contention is significant to the potential and limitations of my analysis. Thus, although my examination of Jenkins' installations, and Object Orange's Detroit Demolition project requires specific determinations of the significance of their tactics, I am cautious about attempting to explicitly define these public artworks that are powerful because they are nebulous. The presence of Jenkins' tape installations and Detroit Demolition create moments that are significant in that they are temporary – thus gain the attention of the public, and offer ambiguous messages – thus require contemplation from the passerby. This provides moments that “reveal the rough edges of our shiny surfaces,” interrupt our habitual interactions with others and our urban environment, and require us to engage with our cities (Kohn 2004: 81). Although these tactics are centered in public space these installations do not occupy this space for a definitive amount of time.

The importance of creating disorder, of unsettling the routines of our lives, is vital for our growth as individuals and as a society. Activists and artists that create temporary street art undermine the authority of the behavioral habits and social conventions that have begun to define public spaces as simply canvases for advertisements. Their creations are innovative, sometimes funny or odd; they command our attention, even more so if they can also offer direct participation from the public, with the assumption that anyone can create.

Democracy requires creative reinvestment, and this includes the understanding that public spaces need to be compelling, entertaining, and open to participation. A visual field composed of marketing, urban decay, and lack of community spaces limits how we understand our communities and ourselves. As Jenkins contends our engagement with our urban spaces is essential because our cities are “sterile-dead” (Sudbanthad 2006: par. 18). Cities should invoke community participation and one significant way that we can begin to transform urban spaces is through street art that provides ambiguous and temporary moments for citizens to witness and participate in a cultural event. The meaning making that centers nebulous forms of public art is necessary in creating new opportunities to rethink our freedom as citizens. Artists and activists today are offering playful tactics – be it tape babies or orange houses – these public artworks create the “visual heartbeat” of the city.
**Dr. Carmen L. McClish** is an Independent Scholar, and graduate from the University of Massachusetts-Amherst with a degree in Communication. Her area of research is cultural studies – specifically "performance studies, new media and visual culture. Dr. McClish is currently writing a book about play in public and corporate spaces. E-mail: cmcclish@gmail.com

**Notes**

1. A short list of the more popular scholars on this issue: David Harvey, Naomi Klein, Robert McChesney, Mark Crispin Miller, Steve Pile, and Michael Sorkin. Artists and activists who have spoken out on issues of democratic action, public space and advertising clutter are too numerous to name.

2. I am purposely using the terms of walking and driving here. Nigel Thrift’s “Driving the City” problematizes de Certeau’s discussion of “Walking in the City” in The Practice of Everyday Life. Thrift argues against de Certeau’s “romantic” and limited view of experiencing the city through walking. He argues that “the world of driving [is] as rich and convoluted as that of walking” (45). Thrift claims that “driving (and passengering) [as] both profoundly embodied and sensory experiences” (46). Building on the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Thrift centers his argument on the technological changes that have created a “humanized car” alongside an “auto-mobilized person” (47). In this essay, I am assuming our routine ways of experiencing our cities can be considered through walking, driving, public transit, bicycling, or whatever our mode of transportation in which we experience our cities.

3. I am basing this statement on research given: 1) The over-consumption of many Americans and how that is making us both unhealthy and unhappy, this is based in the research of Peter Whybrow in his book *American Mania: When More is Not Enough*. And a large random survey of Americans distributed in 2004 that found that fifty percent more people felt more isolated and alone than the previous survey done in 1985. Published by Shankar Vedantam, for the *Washington Post*, and Henry Fountain for *The New York Times*. 3) Celebrated scholars, such as Erich Fromm, Henry Marcuse, and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who have argued for decades that capitalist culture does not lend itself to democratic action and that our engagement as citizens is significant to freedom and happiness. Erich Fromm’s 1941 analysis of the relationship between modern culture and happiness, or “Automaton Conformity,” in which he argues that we become absorbed within mass culture and capitalism and assume that because we know what we need to wear, eat, and buy to fit in that we are “happy.” Herbert Marcuse in 1964 argued that alienation in modern culture is “so pervasive that the sense of alienation as an ongoing process has vanished” and now “people realize themselves in their commodities” (Sagi: 21). Csikszentmihalyi stated in 1975 that Western civilization in its current manifestation is not about happiness but about consumption. He sees happiness, as presented to Americans, as being equivalent to what we own. Our very limited free time is structured as leisure that "reflects patterns of consumption and has nothing to say about personal satisfaction” (197). In research that Csikszentmihalyi conducted in 1975, he asked participants to avoid any engagement in an activity that was outside of the practical, means-to-an-end events that we are all required to engage in (this included individual “unpractical activities” such as daydreaming). The results of this research were that participants felt more depressed, exhausted, and otherwise unhealthy. Most play theorists argue that play is not only necessary for a creative and healthy democracy but also a healthy individual. Aside from Csikszentmihalyi, Victor Turner in *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, D.W. Winnicott in *Playing and Reality*, and other anthropologists and psychologists who have studied play have discussed this at length.

4. Throughout this essay I will use “street art”, “public art”, or the term “artworks” to describe the engagement of Object Orange and Mark Jenkins. I am using the term art loosely. Because
Jenkins creates installation pieces for public forums, and given that Object Orange transforms decaying houses into bright orange installations, I am employing the term to separate this type of “engagement” from those who interrupt the routines of our urban centers by performing. Albeit temporary, both of the activist/artists I analyze are creating an actual form of “public art”.

5 There are critiques of the dichotomy between time/space/place. Most notably by Doreen Massey. In *For Space* Massey argues that Tuan’s research proposes that “space is more abstract than place” (183). She is also critical of de Certeau’s notions of tactics/strategies. Given that Massey’s research centers on the relationship of space (and time) in terms of globalization and shifting identities, her critique of Tuan and de Certeau is understandable as neither of these scholars provide trajectories that are easily transcribed to discussing issues of globalization, shifting borders, social inequalities, specifically in terms of how we understand our individual identity. However, for the purposes of studying public spaces as material spaces that we occupy, usually in terms of physical movement (moving through space from place to place), and given that these public spaces are becoming increasingly regulated and static, Tuan’s notion of movement alongside Kohn’s focus on presence provide an important and interesting approach to examine how nebulous and temporary artworks interrupt our routine experiences of public spaces. In terms of the application of Massey’s research to understanding the relationship of space to identity and globalization, see Sanae Elmoudden’s “Crossing and Passing: Discursive Borders in Off shoring.” Elmoudden ethnographic based research is a fascinating analysis of the intersection of physical borders and “discursive borders” in terms of “metaphorical space.” Her research demonstrates the “diverse and creative ways that members, forced by collapsing borders of globalization, negotiate their spaces and hence their identities” (67).

6 Throughout this essay, I am using the term “meaning making” in terms of the research of Stuart Hall. That is, I understand meaning making as a process, meaning as not fixed, nor centered in the sender of the message, and the audience is not passive in their reception. I assume that messages “sent” are not transparent or obvious and can be read in multiple ways. See Stuart Hall’s article “Encoding and Decoding” in *Culture, Media, Language*.


References


Tuan, Yi-Fu (1977): *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.


